***The Local Church - PH09-02

Advanced Bible Doctrine - Philippians 1:1***

We started with the book of Philippians some time ago, and we are continuing currently still in verse number one. This verse has declared to us, "Paul and Timothy, the Servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus, who are at Philippi with the bishops and the deacons." We began some time ago with an explanation of what we call the HICEE technique of the analysis of scripture. HICEE stood for Hermeneutics, which are the principles of interpretation; Isagogics, which deals with the background of the times and circumstances in which the book was written; Categories, which stands for doctrinal summarization, bringing together all that the Scripture says upon a particular point; Etymology, which deals with the meaning of the original words that were used in the original language in Scripture (That's how we have to determine what God the Holy Spirit says to us. We cannot determine this from the English translation or from some other translation. It has to be determined from the original languages); and, Exegesis, which is the explanation of the grammatical structures of the meaning of what God has placed in His book.

We looked at the expressions, "Saints in Christ Jesus" which referred to the church universal--that position that all believers in the age of grace hold of being in union with Christ. We've looked at that in some detail. All of this has been in some way preparation and background for the strategic and very vital thing that we are going to look at now, the first of the series on the church visible; that is, the local church. This is referred to us in the expression, "Saints who are at Philippi, a particular local place. This is a place on the face of the earth where a group of believers have gathered. The local church today is under fire and there is considerable confusion about it. However, the saints on the earth are gathered in these local assemblies.

**Saints**

The words "saints" in the Greek is the word "hagios." "Hagios" simply means "those who are set apart." This is not a reference to super holy people, but simply the people who have been set apart by their faith in Jesus Christ. They are set apart into salvation. If you have been saved (that is, if you have received Christ as your personal Savior), you are a saint. You may be the greatest stinker saint this side of heaven, but you are a saint, whatever your conduct and whatever your performance may be. This is positional truth that we are dealing with. This is the union of all Christians in Christ Jesus.

As we have told you before, you may go around calling each other "saint," if you'd like to, and it would be perfectly in order no matter what the condition of your lives are. You can call one another "Saint Calvin," or "Saint Lawrence," or "Saint Bernard" (if you're talking to Bernard Rouch), or whatever it is. The point is you are set apart unto the Lord. That's what this word means. We are dealing here with saints who are at Philippi. They are people who are in Christ; they're believers; they're going to heaven; they're in various stages of spiritual maturity; and, they're in a local church organization in a city on the face of the earth.

This word "saints" tells us something very important right off the bat about local churches. That is that local churches should not be made up of anything, as far as voting privileges are concerned, except believers. Unbelievers do not have a place in the local church voting situation. Unbelievers do not have a place in being able to have a voice concerning the work. They may attend; they may listen; and, their first need is to receive the gospel and to get saved so they can make progress in their relationship to God. However, the word "saint" indicates that only believers should be received as voting members in a local church.

It also indicates the idea of a congregation--a group of people who are gathered together. So the local church is God's working unit today on earth. The local church, of course, is based upon all of these things that we have considered relative to the universal church. The two are a unity. The universal church emphasizes the Christian's position. The local church emphasizes experience or walk with the Lord.

The church invisible began, as you know, on the day of Pentecost as a body called out from Jews and gentiles. This was in contrast to the national group, the people of Israel. They were called forth to show the grace of God. It is devastating to be ignorant concerning the church universal and what the Bible teaches concerning the body of Christ. However, it is equally disastrous to neglect the instruction in the local church.

Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer wrote a systematic theology, the one systematic theology which is pre-millennial and dispensational throughout in its viewpoint. It is an excellent theology, and one that could be improved now by someone who is capable who could revise it. However, Dr. Chafer, who really knew his stuff when it came to doctrine, interestingly enough, as you look through his eight volumes of theology, you will discover that out of hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of pages in that theology, guess how many are devoted to the local church. Ten. Only ten pages out of hundreds and hundreds and thousands of pages written are devoted to the local church.

This, interestingly enough, was a man who had the right concept concerning the local church ministry. He understood what the church was all about as a teaching agency and as a feeding agency to the souls of people. He understood that God had provided pastor-teachers to perform that job, and that they were crucial, and they couldn't do this job unless they were taught how to do it, and they were given the tools of languages with which to do it. Dr. Chafer, who knew this well and who brought into being a seminary that is devoted to those principles, yet, even in his theology, passed by the local church with a minimum of emphasis.

This is reflected in our day that people just don't understand what the local church is all about. As we talk about this subject, one of the problems that we are going to have is that you and I come to this with a lot of preconceived notions. As much as possible, I'm going to ask you in the next few sessions to be just as objective as you can. I want you to pretend that you have just walked in here; you are a new convert; you don't know up from down; and, you want to be taught. Furthermore, the place you want to be taught from is what God's Word has to say about the church ministry; its organization; its structure; its lines of authority; and, so on.

It's devastating to be ignorant about the church universal. It is equally so in its local application. It is especially important that we distinguish between Israel and the church when we come to an examination of the local church. This is because it is in the local church scene that distorted misunderstandings on the body of Christ become visible. It is in the local church that you will see legalisms imposed upon people from the Old Testament system. It is on the local church scene that you will see religious holy days being propagated. You will see rituals being imposed upon people as a way of approaching God and being spiritual. It is in the local church that you will have all of the misconceptions and all of the works system that was in the Old Testament imposed upon the believer.

**Israel and the Church**

When you come to study the local church, here is one point at which you must make it very clear that Israel was one thing, and Christianity and the church is totally separated. So for a moment, to begin with, let's take a look at some of these distinctions between Israel and the church.

1. It is evident that there is a difference, within **Scripture** itself, concerning that which is directed to Israel, and that which is directed to the church. About four-fifths of the Bible deals with the nation of Israel. About one-fifth of it deals with the church, and is distinctively different from anything that deals with Israel.
2. Every covenant and every promise and every provision for Israel is earth-centered. It continues as a nation in the new earth forever. A Jew is always earth-centered. His blessings are always on this earth. When God deals with the Jew in eternity, his heaven will be heaven upon this new earth. This is where the Jew is going to spend eternity. You as a Christian are not going to spend eternity on this earth. You will be here for a certain portion during the millennium, and you'll be ruling with Christ. However, your destiny is heaven. Your **destiny** is a totally different scene. Your citizenship is not on this earth as the Jews' clearly is. Your citizenship is in heaven. It's a contrast.
3. Abraham had **a twofold seed** (descendants)--physical, and spiritual, so to speak. His physical seed was described by the illustration of the dust of the earth. His spiritual seed was referred to as the stars of the heavens. Here is the contrast, again, between an earthly people and heavenly people.
4. An Israelite held his position by physical birth, but a Christian holds his position by **spiritual birth**. Some people were born a Jew, but nobody can be born a Christian.
5. Abraham is the **head** of the Jewish race while Christ is the head of the church.
6. Israel is made up of one **nation** on earth while the church is drawn from all nations. In the Old Testament, if you wanted to be saved, you had to be a proselyte. You had to come into the Jewish nation. You had to come under the Jewish system. Israel was made up of one nation. Christianity is made up of all nations.
7. Israel is present on **earth** in all ages from Abraham on, while the church is on earth only during this dispensation--during the age of grace. Israel is here all the time. The church was a mystery, as you know, here now, but to be taken away. It was not here before.
8. Israel faced inward to its own worship and to its own service. There was very limited outreach toward the world, though they were made the depository of God's knowledge, and they were responsible for getting out the gospel. They were a failure in this, but they basically, in their religious life, faced inward. However, the Christian and his spiritual outreach is **facing outward** to the world.
9. God was not known as **Father** to the individual Israelites, but he is known as such to the individual believers.
10. Another contrast is that to Israel, **Christ** was Messiah, Emmanuel, and King, but to the church, He is Savior, Lord, Bridegroom, and Head. We do not call Jesus Christ our King, and we are not trying to bring in a kingdom. Christ is our Lord. He is our head. He is our bridegroom, but to the Jew, he was King, Messiah, and Emmanuel.
11. The Israelite was not permanently indwelt by **the Holy Spirit**, but the Christian is. This is a very vast contrast. Every one of you who is a believer is completely indwelt by God the Holy Spirit. There is not a moment when He is not immediately present within you.
12. Israel functioned under the **law** as a way of life, but the Christian is free from the law system. You and I are not under a works system to try to appeal to God.
13. Israel under the law had no divine enablement for keeping the law. However, the Christian has the **supernatural** power of the Holy Spirit for obeying God. The Jew was told what to do, but he had no way to do it. All he could do was by his own human effort. You as a Christian are also told what to do, and then God says, "Now I'll do it for you." You have the Spirit of God enabling you.
14. We're talking about **two totally different groups**. Israel had a farewell message. When Jesus Christ left his earthly people, He sat on the Mount of Olives and He declared the Olive Discourse that you find in Matthew 24-25. When he left the church in the upper room, He gave a farewell message to them. This indicated that they were totally different groups.
15. Christ returns as King to regather Israel from every part of the earth into her own land. However, He returns as **Lord** to gather the Christians to heaven's glory.
16. The Israelites were servants of Jehovah while Christians in the church are **members** of the family of God--not servants.
17. The Israelites will be subjects of the King in his earthly kingdom. The Christian is going to **reign with Christ**. This is a very great difference.
18. Israel had a **priesthood**, but the church is a priesthood. Every one of you believers is your own priest.
19. Israel will be the restored wife to Jehovah. She is now the unfaithful wife to Jehovah. The church is the promised virgin **bride** of Christ. This is a very distinct difference.
20. Israel will pass through the **tribulation**. The Jews will suffer the tribulation time, but the church will be removed in the rapture before the tribulation.
21. Finally, the Israelites in the New Jerusalem are called just men made perfect, while the Christians in the New Jerusalem are called the **church** of the firstborn.

These are important distinctions of identification.

When we come to the local church, all of these differences between Israel and the church must now be brought into play within the local church, and we must not do anything in this organization that violates this distinction between Israel and the church. We must not bring anything in here that is of the Old Testament. Consequently, you don't see an altar at the front of our church. This is because an altar is for sacrificing, and that's Old Testament stuff. You don't see any animals being brought in here to have their throats cut. You don't see a priest up here standing and interceding for you before God as if you could not approach God. That's Old Testament stuff. You don't see a minister standing with robes and bells on. You don't see holy water being sprinkled around or incense burning because that's Old Testament order, and that is not for the local church. There is no ritual in here because that's Old Testament. We have the realities now of the Lord who has risen, and of His Word.

**Church**

So this word "church" means the same thing on the local scene as it did on the universal scene. It means a local visible group of called out believers. This local church began on the day of Pentecost, and it has certain important uses as a local assembly in contrast to the body of Christ. This is an important factor that we see how the word "church" is used relative to the local groups. For one thing, the word "church" is used of an individual congregation. For example, in Romans 16:5, in 1 Corinthians 16:19, in Colossians 4:15, and Philemon 2, we see churches which met in somebody's home which are referred to by this word "ekklesia," the Greek word for "church."

This is an individual congregation, and that's one use of the word "church"--for just a congregation. I want to remind you that the early Christians did not have buildings to meet in. The early Christians, when they met, met only in homes, or if they did not have homes, they met out in fields, or they met in hiding in someplace like the catacombs under the city of Rome. They did not have buildings in which they gathered. Church buildings, as we know them did not come into existence until after the year 300 A.D. when Constantine made Christianity an accepted legal religion in the Roman Empire. Then Christians could come out into the open and start building churches. I hope you got that. That is a very important factor. There was no place for the early Christians to meet when it came to a building.

Immediately, your mind is putting two things together. You're saying, "Well, wait a minute. In these great metropolitan centers like Corinth, Ephesus, Jerusalem, and Antioch, there were hundreds and thousands of believers." That's right. There were thousands of believers in one city. "And you say they met in homes?" That's right. "You said they didn't meet in a church building?" That's right. Well, how would thousands of people get in somebody's house? Look what happens when you invite a few of your friends over, and most of you live in palaces. It gets pretty crowded, pretty fast. There is an answer to that, and we're going to come to that. That is a major problem that has been overlooked. The Bible uses the word "church" relative to these groups which met in homes which is the only kind of church gatherings that there were in New Testament times.

It is also used in another way. The word "church" is also used of the church as a unit of regenerated people worldwide. In 1 Corinthians 12:28, we have the local church viewed as a whole all over the world as a group of regenerated people. 1 Corinthians 12:28 speaks about the gifts which are given, "And God has set some in the church: first apostles; second prophets; third teachers; after that miracles;" and, so on. He is speaking about the local visible Church as a whole worldwide. This is one use: somebody's home; an individual congregation; a group of people that always meet under this apple tree; and, they hold a service at certain times. That is one use of the word "church."

Secondly, the word "church" is used for all believers everywhere all over the world in the visible aspect. For example, something is being said about them like the fact that they had spiritual gifts given to them.

There is a third use, and that is where the word "churches" is used in the plural. This refers to many individual local churches in a certain territory, but where they are viewed as a unit. For example, in Galatians 1:2, its says, "And the brethren who are with me unto the churches of Galatia." Galatia was an extensive Roman province, and there were many churches in Galatia. However, Paul wrote a letter to the Galatian church. He wrote a letter to the Galatians, but these Galatians were not in one single church. They were in many churches scattered all over the territory of Galatia. Here we have the word "churches" used in the plural, meaning all of these churches in this territory.

You also have local churches in different geographic areas, but which are viewed as one body because something happened to all of them. You have this in Acts 9:31, for example: "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria and were edified," and so on. Here you have distinctive geographic areas mentioned, and something happened to all of them, and they are spoken of as being one united group--many churches, yet treated as if they were one group. You have this in Acts 16:4-5 again. Here is the same idea: "And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees to keep that were ordained of the apostles and elders who were at Jerusalem." This is that church council in Acts 15. "And so, verse 5 says, "where are the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily," and so on. The churches were established in the faith in this area that Paul was visiting on his missionary tours--many churches viewed as one in what was happening to them described as a group.

Then we also have the word "church" used in the singular. This refers to churches in a specific geographic area. There were obviously too many Christians to meet in one house. Notice something 1 Corinthians 1:2 says, "Unto the Church of God which is at Corinth." Here is the word "church" is used in the singular in reference to the city of Corinth. To whom is he addressing this letter? Was there one huge gathering of thousands of people in the major commercial center of Corinth who were gathering together in worship? Where would they have met? Who's got a house big enough for them to meet? There were no church buildings. The only thing they could meet in would be a field, and you couldn't get too many people together in a field and still be heard. When you have thousands of people, you can see how that would be obviously impractical, if not impossible.

1 Corinthians 1:2 says, "Unto the church of God (singular) which is at Corinth." However, you notice 1 Corinthians 14:34, where it's giving some instruction concerning how ladies are supposed to act in church. Notice that he says to this same group that he is speaking to, which was addressed in verse 1 Corinthians 1:2 as "the church of God which is at Corinth." In 1 Corinthians 14:34, he says, "Let your women keep silence in the churches." This is plural, which is a very strategic key telling us that when Paul, at the beginning of this letter, addressed the church of God which is at Corinth, he was doing this.

Here was the city of Corinth, and in the city of Corinth was the church of God; that is, visible local assemblies of believers that he is describing. Believers who are on this earth are called the church of God. But how were they the church of God? They were not the church of God in only one unit and in only one congregation. Rather, here was a congregation, and here was a congregation, and here was one, and here was one, and, so on. All of these are addressed by Paul under the single title "the church of God." When he is telling them how their ladies should act, he said, "Let your women keep silence in the churches," meaning all of these churches, however many homes and many congregations there were.

This is an important factor for you to grasp right off the bat. A great deal of misconception concerning local church authority stems from this right here--the idea which is really ludicrous, when you stop and think about it, that Paul was addressing one single group of believers with a letter to Corinth, all of whom met in one local church assembly. They did not.

I'm going to leapfrog a little bit ahead just to prepare your thinking, because you can see that something is coming up here. You can see that every one of these churches has to have something. It has to have saints. That's the congregation. We will also see shortly that it has to have elders, and it also has to have deacons. These are the basics within the church. Within each one of these local churches, what we had was this: We had saints here. We had an elder (singular) as you will find in 1 Timothy. We had deacons (plural). Each church had saints; an elder bishop leader; and, deacons to assist that elder bishop in the administration of that local assembly.

When Paul spoke to a church, for example, as we have here at Philippi, and he said "the elders" (plural), he was talking about all the pastors from each of these churches all gathered together in one group. When he met at Miletus with the pastors from the church at Ephesus, we have the same condition. The church at Ephesus was one local assembly, as Paul addressed them, but he was talking to all of the many local assemblies which met it all the different homes of believers; each home formed a congregation; and, each had its own administration of a pastor leader and deacons to administer.

So, we have this use of the word "church" many times as meaning a geographic area, but which indicates individual congregations within it. We have this in Jerusalem in Acts 1:8. We have this at the church in Antioch in Acts 131:1, and in Thessalonica in 1 Thessalonians 1:1. None of these places could possibly have had a place where all the Christians could meet together.

Now let's review the word "church" in the New Testament. We have it, first, for the universal (the invisible) body of Christ. We have it used secondly for the visible expression of the body of Christ in a specific geographic area. This is viewing all of them as regenerated local believers. However, we also have it used of a specific local church congregation--an organization with definitive purpose. Not all of these are regenerated. All the believers are positionally in Christ, and in their experience they are supposed to obey God as they understand His will through the Word of God.

For this reason, God established all these local church organizations, and each of them was given a teacher who had the pastor-teacher gift, and who was recognized as God's appointed elder bishop for that particular church. His job was to explain the Word of God so that the people of God could learn the Word; could store it; could respond to it; could mature in the knowledge of doctrine; and, could practice effectively their representation, or their ambassadorship, for Jesus Christ in the circle of their contacts. The local church is God's provision for this age, and it enables believers everywhere to carry on His work. The details of this you will find in Ephesians 4:11-14.

This is the picture in the New Testament. This picture fits everywhere in the New Testament. There is no place where this picture does not fit, and everything else falls into place and makes sense once you understand that Paul wrote the letter to Corinth, but he spoke to the churches (plural) in Corinth, because they met in many many different homes.

So, the local aspect began on Pentecost, just like the Body of Christ did. On the day of Pentecost, the local church and the invisible church were identical. Both had only genuine believers. Paul, therefore, when he was persecuting the visible church, was actually told in reality that he was persecuting Christ Himself. This was because the body of Christ and the visible believers were identical. The visible church today has false elements in it. We have professors who are not really born again. Churches and preachers have sort of been forced to this, often by their congregations. The pastors are called upon to be successful. The Word of God says, "I want my under shepherd to be faithful." To be faithful, he has to learn something about the Word of God that he can explain to the people of God to sustain them in their lives. However, the carnal church member says, "I want success. I want to see chairs filled; I want to see money pouring in; and, I want to see buildings going up." Consequently, the church leadership is tempted to come up with gimmicks and devices in order to bring people into the local church.

So, they give people a chance to emote. One of the greatest emotional devices ever invented was the emotional device of standing up and being counted. There is something inspirational about a guy standing up and being counted. If you just give him a chance to stand up and be counted, he'll stand up and be counted for almost anything. Consequently, it was easy for the professional industry to say, "Let's ask people to walk down the aisle. Then we will give them a chance to have a public confession and demonstration for Christ." So, the professional preacher gets up. He has not talked about the gospel, but he comes to the end of the service, and now it's success time. He knows that the deacons, the committee who's in charge of him in contrast to the Word of God, are standing there watching him now. They have their pencils sharpened. They're going to match the offering up against the results and the public moves that were made.

So he tells a story: "You who have so long drifted away. You remember your mother. Dear, Mother. Do you remember how she sat there peeling those apples for the apple pie that you used to love. And by her side, as the breeze would come through the window, the American flag was gently waving over her shoulder. Mother sat there making those apple pies because she loved you. She loved her country. She wanted to give a fine son." You see the handkerchiefs coming out all over the place. "And now you have drifted. And today your mother is calling you to return to her bosom. She is calling her wandering son. Every night she puts the candle in the window. She has this light for you to come home to. Why don't you come back to mother today? Will you stand up and be a man and walk this aisle?" Then three or four fools stand up and say, "Yes, I will. Here I come, Mother," and they're returning.

Now I'm not very good at that. I haven't had much practice in that. I am fascinated by the pros who do this real smoothly. I can see that the emotions are triggered, and the mentality is put out of kilter and out of gear, and Satan's sucks us right in on the basis of emotions, as he always works on our emotions.

We have, in place of the reality of the Word of God, false appeals made, and this brings in false professions. People come forward, and then, because the success is the name of the game, the preacher has to get them in right then. They bring him right into the church right them. They don't know whether they understand it or whether they don't understand it, but the point is that they have so many noses to count. I used to move in a certain circle of the ministry, and there was a Monday morning pastors' meeting. I remember, from time to time, when I would be involved in those, how often the question would be asked of one another, "Did you roll them in the aisles last night?" They meant, "How many did you get to move? How successful of a Sunday did you have?" It used to revolt me to the ends of my brain cells, and that's why I got out of meeting with pastors. I found it a bad influence, and you pick up a lot of bad ideas. The whole thing was structured on this public move.

People think that they're related to the Lord but they're not. Acts 20:28-29 tell us about that, as well as 1 John 2:8-19 and Jude 3-4. All of these describe how we have a contaminated local church ministry with people who think they are saved. They think that they're headed for heaven, and they're headed for hell just as fast as they can go because somebody misdirected them from the Lord Jesus Christ who has died to pay for your sins, and whom you must only receive as personal Savior, right there in your heart at this moment where you sit, and you're in, and that's it, friend. There is nothing that you can do to be saved. You don't have to get up and tell us about it, or anybody else. You receive the person of Jesus Christ recognizing yourself as a sinner, and that He died for you as the Word of God says. You receive him. You believe this fact, and you accept Him into your life. You are born again, and you immediately enter the family of God. You don't feel any different. You will find that differences begin to express themselves in your life as you go along with this new life that's in you. However, it is simply a matter of the decision of your mind in behalf of the truth of the gospel.

So, the local church exists on earth. It's made up of professed believers in Jesus Christ who live in one locality. These people come together for worship. They come together for prayer; for instruction in the Word; to remember the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper; for discipline, as it is to be applied and necessary; and, for the testimony that they are to present. You can read about this in Galatians 1:1, Corinthians 14:34, Romans 16:5, 1 Corinthians 16:19, Colossians 4:15, Philemon 2.

**Teamwork**

In denominations we often recognize that there are procedures and techniques and devices which are contrary to the church universal. These are traditions of men, and they are unfounded in the Word of God. As an organization, a local church has members; it has officers; it has facilities; and, it has a ministry. This ministry will be expressed in a variety of ways. One of the facts that is primarily true of the ministry of the local church is that it is a team operation. It is a team operation for this reason: The Lord Jesus Christ is now absent from the earth. He is seated in heaven. Every member on this earth now represents Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20). Every believer is a part of the body of Christ. He's in union with the Lord. You do not have to pray for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. You already have it (1 Corinthians 12:13).

Because we Christians are in union with Christ, the Holy Spirit has sovereignty bestowed upon each one of you at least one spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 12:11). This is an ability with which to serve the Lord. The different parts of the human body are compared to the spiritual gifts in the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12. The spiritual guests will determine what your services and what your responsibilities are in the local church to which God sends you. You have a right local church for you, and that local church has you in it because you have a spiritual gift that that local church needs. What your gift is determines what you should be doing within the context of that ministry, and beyond it, as you go through the week. All spiritual gifts depend upon the filling of the Holy Spirit for them to operate in the production of divine good. The filling of the Holy Spirit, therefore, is more important than your spiritual gift itself. 1 Corinthians 13 is the great filling of the Holy Spirit chapter in the Bible. It tells you what happens, and in that context, particularly in reference to the tongues gift when you are filled with the Spirit.

The maximum divine production of your spiritual gift then is dependent upon the filling of the Holy Spirit and of your knowledge of the Word of God. So it is up to the local church to provide you with the knowledge of the Word of God. Without it you cannot effectively exercise that gift. Therefore, you cannot play your part on this team. When we have believers who are not functioning on the team in the local church, then we know there is something wrong either with them spiritually relative to their relationship to the Holy Spirit, or we have not trained them sufficiently that they are prepared to go into the spiritual combat to which God has called us. It is an advantage to the body of Christ today to have all these spiritual gifts, and to have them operating.

One of the factors in the local church is the consistent functioning of believers in the fellowship of service through their spiritual gifts. If the local church is not doing this, the believers are not producing divine good. Your service, along with whatever techniques are suitable for that service, is part of the Christian life. Do not make the mistake of thinking that all you have to do is learn doctrine. That is not true. The thing you have to do is learn doctrine and go positive toward it, and then to see your spiritual gifts becoming fruitful in the hands of God the Holy Spirit. If your spiritual gift is not functioning, and it is not fruitful, it is because something is short-circuited along the line. Do not comfort yourself that you're forever going to boot camp and basic training. After a while, the time comes to get out into the field and to do the job that the Lord prepared you to do and equipped you to do.

We all have the same position in Christ. Every believer in this study is a chief relative to position. However, on this earth, we have different spiritual gifts. Therefore on the team of the local church not everyone is a chief. Some of you are sub-chiefs, and some of you are just plain Indians. However, without the Indians, you cannot attack the wagon train. Satan's wagon trains are going to get through every time without the Indians there. However, the Indians are going to run all over every place, killing each other and people who shouldn't be killed and everything else, unless the sub-chiefs and the chiefs are giving adequate direction to the team. We are a team in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are a team because we are a local church organization. If you do not understand the team concept, you will miss the whole point of the local church ministry. Then you will be tempted to try to be a chief in an area that God has not appointed you by gifts or by recognition of the assembly to be a chief.

The distinction in our gifts does not make one of us inferior and another one superior. Each gift determines your responsibilities, and each gift is equally rewarded. Do not make the mistake of thinking that the Chiefs get more reward in heaven than the Indians. That is not true. You will be rewarded to the extent that you have exercised your gifts.

You can see what's going to happen to us. If we have some of you who are going to be sitting on the sidelines; reading your Bible; and, cheering us who are in the combat, our strength will be depleted just that much. You should read your Bible, and you should learn doctrine, but you should also be engaged in the exercise of your gifts and in the combat that this local church has been called to do.

Somebody recently said to me, "I have begun using my spiritual gifts around the church in several areas. When I did, I was thrown in with other believers who had been doing this, and I have suddenly become aware that I have been here for many years completely oblivious to the stream of blessing that was flowing to me because these people were exercising their gifts while I was sitting on the sidelines." It's an exhilarating experience to be in with them and to realize that I am part of that stream of blessings. "However," she said, "I also recognize that there are people who are still sitting on the sidelines as I once did." That is exactly the summary of the local church as a team. That's what we are, and you should be part of the team in action.

Don't distort what I said, and don't go out of here and say that I'm badmouthing learning doctrine or studying the Word. You know very well that I have in two decades never allowed a novice to come in here because he was a hot shot of some kind, and to take over some administrative direction of the work because he was a star or because he could talk good. I have had combat many times, and I bear spiritually the scars of many ambitious pushy people because we do not look to heroes to conduct the Lord's work. People here are not told to get on to spiritual growth by getting into doing something. This is because we know that all they will do is collapse and injure the ministry. We expect you to learn. We expect you to be prepared, However, God expects you to get out there in the combat when you're equipped. You do not spend forever getting equipped. There is a limited time for that, and it doesn't take a whole lot of equipping to know how to start functioning in some degree with your gifts.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1973

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