***The Goal of Local Church - PH10-01

Advanced Bible Doctrine - Philippians 1:1***

Learning the Word of God is a matter of personal vested interest to you. The Bible indicates to us that people who understand divine principles will even be able to survive when a nation is in the midst of national disaster. The United States of America is increasingly moving toward national disaster. You and I and our children are faced with preparation for that kind of a situation. ... The trouble with Americans is that not too many of us have been able to stand in a position to view the sort of atrocities that is the order of the day in the treatment of human beings in countries like Russia and China. The communist ideology was spawned in hell, and it is Satan's system from start to finish. One of the things that Satan has done in order to counteract the understanding of believers toward what he is doing in this world today is to get us all confused concerning the local church.

**The Law System**

We are looking at the church in its physical form, and this is the second segment. We have pointed out that the failure to distinguish between Israel and the church, and between Judaism and Christianity, has imposed certain features of the law system on Christians today. Consequently, we have churches that are engaged in ritual for worship. That went out with the law system. We have churches that have altars for sacrifices of various kinds, and that went out with the law system and should not be imposed upon Christians. We have holy days for special worship occasions, and that went out. We don't have any holy Easter and holy Christmas days or holy mackerel days or holy anything else.

All of that was gone once the system of the law was dead. We have vestments that the preachers wear--fine robes and garments and tinkling bells. All of that was part of the Old Testament, and it went out with the law system. We have priests who stand before God as mediators for the people rather than the people approaching God directly themselves, and that went out with the law. We have plurality of elders in the local worship assembly. That was true of the Old Testament, and it went out with the Old Testament. It is no longer true. We have tithing as a system of giving imposed upon believers today. This went out with the Old Testament system. You could go on and on and on with the corruption; the distortion; and, the delusion of our grace way of life with legalisms that we picked up from the Old Testament system.

**Church**

So we looked at the word "church" as it was used in the local sense. The use of the word "church" in the local sense was used first in the singular, simply "church." It is used of an individual congregation which meets in some place. In Colossians 4:15, we read about a church which is "in his house." This is a congregation of believers such as you gather in on Sunday morning, and you are called a "church" in this visible form in a particular place.

Secondly, the word was used in the singular of a visible church, but on a worldwide basis viewed as a unit. 1 Corinthians 12:28 speaks about the fact that the Lord has "set some in the church." Then he lists the spiritual gifts. These spiritual gifts have been set in the visible church, and it refers to the setting on a worldwide basis. Local believers everywhere possess these particular spiritual gifts.

A third use, which again was in the singular, is many churches in a large geographic area. In 1 Corinthians 1:2, we have "the church of God which is at Corinth." Yet, later in the book of 1 Corinthians, we have indicated, that in Corinth there were many local churches. Yet, this territory is addressed as the church which is at Corinth, and this is the singular use for a large geographic area.

Then the word "church" is used in the plural; this is, "churches." It is used in two ways. It is used of many individual local churches which are in one geographic area but they treat it as a single unit. In Galatians 1:2, we have the phrase, "unto the churches of Galatia." Many churches in the area of Galatia are treated as a single unit. We also have it used in the plural sense of local churches in different geographic areas, but they are treated as a unit. In Acts 9:31, we have the phrase, "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria." All of these different areas were churches used in the plural, but treating them all as a single unit.

It's important that we get these distinctions because the word "church" can be used in the singular to mean many individual local assemblies. That's my point. The word "church" is used in the singular in the Scriptures, but is used, as it was with the church at Corinth, to mean many churches located in that big metropolitan center.

**The Nature of the Local Church**

Alright, there are certain things about the local church that we want to consider. The nature of the local church, and its course in this present age. In Matthew 13, we have a description of the church in its mystery form. That is, the church was not revealed in the Old Testament. There was an era when God would not be functioning with Judaism and the Old Testament system, but He would be functioning in something else that He did not reveal until after Christ was rejected, and the crucifixion. In Acts 13, we have this kingdom period in its mystery form in which the church is functioning. This is the mystery which had not been revealed. Here, certain aspects about this era which is the church age are revealed."

1. It is to be a mixture of **true and false professors**. So we have the parables concerning the wheat and the tears to illustrate this. We have the parable of the dragnet which brings in good and bad fish. This indicates that in the local church during this age there will be genuine believers, but there will also be times when false professors will sneak into the local church membership, and that is bad. When a church is careless about how it brings members in, it does not verify that a person is a believer. It brings in unbelievers, and when you get enough unbelievers, you have distorted the direction and the thrust of that particular ministry.
2. It is also to be a time of growth of **monstrous ecclesiastical organizations**. This is indicated by the parable of the mustard seed which has a small beginning and results in a monstrous growth into a monstrous tree.
3. We have the movement toward **apostasy** characterizing this age. This is illustrated by the parable about the leaven hidden in the meal and how it permeates the whole thing.
4. We have **Israel hidden in the world** until her restoration. During this age, Israel is still a treasure to the Lord. We have the parable of the hidden treasure. Israel is God's hidden treasure. He will yet assume His dealings with her.
5. Finally, we have **the church as being bought and built during this age by Jesus Christ** for His own. It's described under the parable of the Pearl of Great Price.

When we want to study what the local church is all about, and that's what we want to do, we can only go to one place to get the information. Obviously, we get a lot of bum information from the fact that we grew up in a certain kind of church structure. We get a lot of bad information from other churches and the structures that they have assumed and under which they operate. We get a lot of misinformation from serious and sincere Christians who have not been instructed or who themselves have not studied the Word or who have not been able to have the tools to examine the Word to learn what really is going on relative to what God intends for the local church.

So, if we're going to study about the local church today, we have to go to the only source that can give us that information, and that's the Word of God. This is just like with any other practice. For example, we cannot talk about tongues relative to experience--that it's a good thing; that it has some value; that it's nice for some people; or, that some people enjoy it. All of that is beside the point. As to whether tongues is a reality; whether it exists; and, whether it is functioning in this day has to be determined on the basis of what the Bible teaches. Doctrine determines these issues--not what we think that our experience may demonstrate.

Whatever your experience may have been in the past, it would be well at this point to temporarily at least forget it. We should come into the Word of God and say, "Now what does the Bible teach about the local church?" The first thing we discover concerning the local church, and that we want to remind ourselves relative to the Bible, is that the Bible was not all written in one day. The Bible did not float down from heaven on a cloud with a group of angels singing, "Holy, holy, holy" as they brought it down. The Bible progressed from Pentecost to Patmos. Over a period of those years, the books were gradually written, and the church gradually went from the day of Pentecost; established a local organization; and, that organization evolved and progressed through various stages.

**Progressive Revelation about the Church**

We can see this progression as we look into the Word of God. As we look to the order in which the New Testament books were written, we see a progression of the local church. As you view this progression, it is a signpost that's telling you that God is going here--to His final arrangement with the local church. We began with apostles, and the question is: what happens when the apostles are gone, and we no longer have these authorities to guide the church? Then how are we going to function? From the time that the apostles were on the scene at Pentecost to the time that the last one, John, died at Patmos, we have in Scripture indicated the trend and the direction in which they knew that God intended the local church to go. The revelation of Scripture points us in that direction. The Scriptures were written, and as the local church life matured, so did the revelation about this organization. The divine plan evolved in stages. It was not revealed in the first book written, nor in the earliest books which were written of the New Testament. There is a general order of progression here.

We may begin with the early Pauline epistles. Among the first epistles which were written were Galatians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Corinthians, and Romans. In these epistles, there is little detailed instruction concerning either the church universal or the church local. In either case, there is very little information. As you read through these books, which were the earliest books written in the New Testament era, there is very little on either the universal or the local church.

Then we have a second stage of epistles which are the prison epistles of Paul written during his first imprisonment. In these, we have Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon. In this set of writings, there is a stress primarily upon the universal aspect of the church. Now the church is evolving in its life together on the local scene in its doctrinal understanding. These prison officials of Paul, during this time when he had a lot of time on his hands to sit; to think; to consult with God; and, to record what had been revealed, out of these epistles came the information concerning the body of Christ, the church universal, the invisible Church.

Then later, the apostle Paul writes another set of letters which we call the Pastoral Epistles. These include 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus. These now stress the local church. At this point, coming down near the end of his ministry, Paul begins to stress the local church organization, and gives considerable detail about that and the officers of that local church. When we come to the general epistles, which come later--after these of Paul, we find 1 & 2 Peter, and Hebrews, ... these had detailed references again to the local church. You can see that gradually God the Holy Spirit, as He is having these books written, is leading from the condition at Pentecost onward.

At Pentecost, they had these super authorities with the apostolic gift on the scene who had direct communication with God and supreme authority over all the churches under their care. Then we see a moving from that apostolic condition to the time when they were all dead. You can't pass on the gift of apostle, and we don't have the gift of apostle today. It was a temporary gift existing until the Scriptures were written and until the church was established. They were the foundation of it. After they were gone, there had to be something to take their place. They knew what that something was. Their letters (their writings), under the guidance of the Holy Spirit reflect the direction in which they were to move. They were signposts pointing to where we should be today.

We also had the writings of the apostle John, the last one to die: 1, 2, & 3 John, and Revelation. The Johannine writings stress again the local church structure and the condition after the apostles are all gone.

We have these stages of revelation about the local church organization. First, we have very little about either universal or local church. Then we find in the prison officials that Paul begins for the first time to use the word "elder." Though he is still stressing in the prison officers the universal church, these local church officer names begin to come into his writings. We find that in Ephesians 4:1ff and Philippians 1:1. Then in the Pastoral Epistles, he gives a great deal of instruction. He indicates that there is an elder bishop pastor and deacons who constitute the officers of the local church.

This pattern indicates, in the later officials of Paul, the kind of structure that was to exist after the apostles and the apostolic delegates like Titus and Timothy were all dead. The general epistles give detailed revelation concerning the organization. It indicates that the local church is God's unit for equipping the saints for service after the apostles die off.

In the Old Testament, Israel was responsible for the truth of the Word of God, and she was responsible for spreading that truth and pointing the way to salvation of the living God. In this age, that responsibility has been transferred to the local church and to the members of it. The universal church is not related to time or place, but the local church is related to the activity of believers on earth in time. There is a difference between them. While the local church reflects what is true of the universal church, the local church has been definitely and progressively revealed in the New Testament. We know what it should be. We know what its officers should be. We know what its business is.

So, that raises the question of what is the main objective of the local church today? Exactly what should we here at the corner of Sixth and Nursery be doing, here in close proximity to one of the largest airports in the world? What are we supposed to be doing at this point of time on this planet? This is a very significant question. There are some people who don't like what we are doing at this location on the planet at this point of time, and they're no longer with us. There are a lot of you like very much what we are doing at this point in time on this planet at this particular location, and you are strongly with us. You need to be confirmed that what we are doing is what God plans for us to do.

**The Goal of the Local Church Ministry**

So what's the plan and purpose for this age? What is the goal of the local church ministry? Some people say it is the Christianization of the world. It is the goal of the church, we are told, to make everybody in the world a Christian. They quote 2 Peter 3:9 which tells us that God does not want anyone to perish or to go to hell. 200 years ago, about 25% of the people in the world could be classified as born again believers. The statistics we have now tell us that only about 2% of the people in the world can be classified as genuine biblical believers, and thus as born again people. So it seems obvious that if this is God's purpose in the world that everybody should become a believer, it has been a monstrous failure. I think it is indicative that that is not God's purpose.

A second purpose, we are told, is the evangelization of the world. The reference is made to Matthew 28:19-20, which indeed is one of the great commission verses declaring the mission of the local church. From that passage is drawn the conclusion that it is the purpose of the local church to evangelize the world. That is, that it is our business as a local ministry to tell the gospel to every person in the world. Somehow we need to get every individual in the world confronted with the gospel. As we look back on the historical scene again, we see that from about the year 32 A.D to 64 A.D., which was the time of the Emperor Nero, there was a great spreading of the gospel in the ancient world, and the multiple establishment of local churches. From 64 A.D. to 313 A.D., however, the Christians went underground under the persecution of the Roman Empire. They were underground until the time of the Emperor Constantine when he forced Christianity upon the nation as an accepted religion, and as the state religion.

From 313 A.D. to 476 A.D., the church was spread in the Roman Empire, but now not as faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It was now spread as religion. It was now spread as a mixture of elements of Christianity with the old Babylonian pagan concepts, many of which we have to this very day, and which are incorporated in many church practices. These come directly out of Babylonian heathenism and the religious systems of the Babylonian cults. From 476 A.D. to the 16th century (that is, the time of the Protestant Reformation), there was very little evangelization. These were the Dark Ages. The Word of God and the teaching of the Word of God was a non-existent entity. Christians were in total darkness concerning the mind of Christ. It has only been during the last 200 years that the modern missionary movement has been in operation seeking to evangelize the world.

We have certain movements today such as Campus Crusade who believe that this is what God has called us to do--to evangelize the world. They believe this is the primary thing. I myself personally have heard the leader of Campus Crusade publicly belittle teaching of the Word of God because he believes that teaching is not the important thing, but evangelizing. That is the important thing. This is based upon the concept that what's the worst thing that could happen to a person? The worst thing is that he could spend eternity in hell. Therefore, the main thing we should do is get people so they escape hell. So Campus Crusade has the goal that every person in the world will hear the gospel by their program. This is in order to fulfill what God has called the church to do--the evangelization of the world. They're not the only organization. Even groups such as the Wycliffe Translators, which do a very admirable work and a very needed work, have as their goal the evangelization of the world. ...

The problem with this concept is that those who are out to save people from hell do not realize that the only way you save people from hell is by getting a mass of individual believers who can warn people about what's ahead of them out on the other side, and how they may escape it through the acceptance of the gospel. What they don't understand is that you cannot get a mass of people who are capable of being witnesses and ambassadors for Jesus Christ unless that same mass has been thoroughly grounded in the Word of God. Unless they have been grounded in doctrine as a sustaining base, they will never be evangelists. They will never be able to explain the gospel to anybody.

You just talk to the average church member. It would be a very amusing experience for you, to say the least, to talk to the average church member. And find a big church with a big personality. Don't go to these rinky-dink little churches that pull in a few hundred a week or something like that. I mean really big-time churches. Then you ask that member and say, "How would I go to heaven?" It would be very revealing to you what the problem is with the church today--why we are not reaching people with the gospel. You get the most ludicrous answers, and worse than that, you'll get exactly the answers that people should never give. You will get confusing answers. You will get answers that will send people straight to hell rather than to heaven if they follow the course of the information they're given. You just check it out for yourself. If people are not taught, they will not evangelize on any long term basis, nor with any effectiveness, nor with any accuracy. God the Holy Spirit works with His Word--not with our inaccuracies and distortions of that Word.

So, what is the goal of the church? *The goal of the church is specifically the building up of the church as the body of Christ*. This is the plan which Jesus declared He had in Matthew 16:18 when he said, "I will build my church." In Matthew 28:18-20, you have this goal spelled out from the same Great Commission passage, from which some people conclude that the main goal of the church is evangelism. If this passage is executed properly, you will discover that the main goal of the local church is to teach Christians the Word of God, and to prepare them to be able to do the work of evangelism. In other words, to build, spiritually, the body of Christ.

Matthew 20:18 says, "And Jesus came and spoke unto them saying, 'All authority is given unto me in heaven on earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always. Even unto the end of the age.'" Here's what we have in this verse. There is no direct command in the Greek language for "to go." You have heard sermons where the preachers wax very eloquent on these two words, "Go ye." They have made great emphasis and thrust, and people have stormed out the doors; stepped all over each other; roared out in their cars; and, left car tracks all over one another as they got stomped over as they were going out under that challenge.

However, in the Greek, there is no "Go ye." What we have instead (what is translated as "Go ye") is an aorist active participle. An aorist active participle is not the primary thought of a sentence. The thing that is the main thought here, the main action verb, is the word "teach," and this is an aorist active imperative. Aorist means at any single point that you are confronted with an unbeliever. Active means you yourself as an individual believer are doing it. Don't give me that stuff that I told you about the church member who, when asked how to be saved, said, "If you'll come to church Sunday, my pastor will explain it to you." It is you who are actively to do this, and imperative means that it's a command. You do not have an option. God is not asking you whether you are will witness; whether you will be His ambassador; whether you will instruct in the Word of God; or, whether you will explain to people divine viewpoint. He is telling you that this is your job. This is the only reason you're going to take your next breath. Most of us are ill-prepared to do it. You're lucky to get the breath.

What we have here is that "teach" is the main verb. In the Greek, the aorist participle is an action that comes before the main verb. So the translation should be, "As you go," meaning "in the process of your going." At any point in your movement through your day in your experience, you actively are to make disciples. That's what the verse says. Making disciples is explained to you in verse 20 which is "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded unto you." The Lord Jesus Christ is standing by us to do this. The first way He stands by us is by providing us with a local church with a teaching ministry agency in order to instruct us in the Word of God from a pastor-teacher on down through many teachers; through many techniques; and, through many avenues of approach and of instruction. "As you go, make disciples." That's a command to deliver a divine viewpoint.

This commission tells us what we're to be doing as we go about the Lord's service. It is the instruction of believers in Bible doctrine. Evangelism is only a part of this commission, and it is a very vital part. We're not seeking to discredit that part. That is the beginning point. Making disciples begins with the birth message of the gospel, but it requires the growth message of doctrine for that disciple to come to the place where he can pass the word along. A Christian cannot pass the word along to any degree, nor will he have the motivation nor the sustaining drive nor the base of operation unless he is taught in the Word of God. It takes quite a while to get the teaching to do the work. This is God's plan for this age. It is God's plan for ourselves. It is God's plan for our children. It is the divine objective for the local church. This plan is to be executed through this local church organization, and it includes (incidentally, dear friends) Christian schools and youth ministries as part of this instruction program because the home is top priority in the outreach of making disciples.

This is the call--that we are to be making disciples. Our call is not the betterment of man's life now. Social reforms that the liberals talk to us about are not the calling of the local church. Neo-orthodoxy, modernism, and even those in our own conservative camp as neo-evangelicals are all wet when it comes to stressing social programs as being the call and the expression of the local church ministry. The social gospel itself is an idea that is picked up from the evolution concept. The social gospel gives you and me the impression that things can be improved in society and that we can improve human relationships. We can improve our technology--that is true. We can keep creating new laws to try to control the old sin nature. However, we can never ultimately bring under control our society and the old sin natures of people that exist within it.

It is not true that things evolve to a better level. This is not true relative to the natural sciences through life in general. Things do not grow from disorder to order. They go from an orderly to a disorderly thing. A top does not gain speed as it spins after it leaves the boy's hand. Instead, it reduces gradually its speed, and it loses out. The first and second laws of thermodynamics are true in social matters, so to speak, as well as they are in science. Things go from good to worse--not the other way around. So all of society will never be saved. All of society will never resolve its social ills because all of society will never become Christians, and that's what it takes.

Francis Schaeffer in his book, The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century, has an interesting statement when he says, "There is no such thing as a Christian community church unless it is made up of individuals who are already Christian, who have come through the work of Christ. One can talk about Christian community until one is green, but there will be no Christian community except on the basis of a personal relationship with a personal God through Christ."

When we get to the millennium we are going to have a Christian community. It's going to be enforced from the top by the personal rulership of the Lord Jesus Christ. However, today you and I as the local church are not called to run around improving social conditions. You as an individual believer, in the course of your life, will come into situations socially that you should improve. It is your responsibility in the area of the world in which you move to make things better, and to improve within the sphere of society that you move in to make things better and more conformable to God's point of view to the extent that that's open to you. Society is only bettered through individual regeneration.

The local church is primarily a feeding and training station. In John 21:15 and 1 Peter 5:1-2, we have the declaration that it is a feeding point. It is to feed you the Word of God. In Ephesians 4:11-16, we have the stress laid upon training. It is to equip you for spiritual warfare. It is to equip you to do the work of soldiering. On the realm of a military in this world, anybody who goes through basic training as a dope and who is fooling around and does not learn is going to find himself squashed on the battlefield.

The same thing is true concerning the Christian who never gets around to getting himself trained in the Word of God. Every day that you walk out of your house to go to work, with every breath you take, you walk right smack out there into the furor of the angelic warfare that is swirling all around us. Satan is in a frenzy trying to cut God down and to delay the ultimate doom that has already been proclaimed upon him at the cross. If you are not a Christian who is prepared with the Word of God to meet that kind of attack which is directed towards you because you belong to the family of God, you will be a casualty. If you do not pursue what is God's goal for the local church, which is a training and feeding of believers, you open yourself and your home to great disaster.

**Features of the Local Church**

Just to conclude, there are certain basic features that make up the local church:

1. One is the element of **faith**. Church is primarily a group of believers (Acts 2:44). Our trust in God is the basis of salvation, and is the basis of serving the Lord. We call that faith rest. Flesh works (walk by sight) are all foreign to a local church which is led by the Holy Spirit. Faith requires respecting of grace as the motivating force, so it calls for grace orientation.
2. We are also a place of **fellowship** on this local scene. We share in common a spiritual experience as members of God's family. We are on good terms with our brethren because we are on good terms with our Father. That means having a relaxed mental attitude which means having a mind filled with "agape" love and free of bitterness and mental sins. You cannot be on good terms with your brethren without a relaxed mental attitude. Because we are in fellowship, we get involved in the business here that we are conducting in behalf of the Lord in executing this purpose of building up the body of Christ to which we have been called. We get involved with our personal service and the exercise of our various gifts of ministry. We get involved with our money; we get involved with our prayer; and, above all, we certainly get involved with our attendance. If you do not, you are destroying and hindering the fellowship of this local church.

We also have a certain level of social camaraderie that's involved in that fellowship, as that falls together. As the early believers gathered for social times and the sharing of meals, so it is legitimate for you to do so as you find people in the circle of that assembly with whom you are compatible.

1. We also are characterized by **unity**. This is created by God the Holy Spirit. Because we are all joined to Christ, this is the only true unity that exists in the world. This is not a matter of an organization as the liberals teach. It is a matter of union with Christ. Many of you have your own ideas and you have your own ambitions. We find that early in the New Testament church there were people within the local fellowship who were disruptive of the unity because they were negative (Acts 20:30, 3 John 9, 1 John 2:19).

Unity does not mean that you have to agree with everything you hear from the pulpit. You may have to hold in abeyance and wait. It may take some time for you to catch on that what you heard was right on the beam. In any case, you can be very relaxed about it. You can maintain an attitude of affection, in the "agape" sense, toward the speaker and toward what you hear. You can just maintain the unity of the local assembly because God in time is going to straighten it all out. In fact, God is so good at straightening things out that I'm going to tell you a little later why a pastor-teacher can never be a dictator in a local church. Anybody who ever says you have to worry about a pastor-teacher being a dictator is blaspheming. I'm going to show you why that's blasphemy. So the next time one of your friends says, "Well we believe in many good Christian businessmen ruling and being in authority of our church and telling the pastor where he can go so we don't get a dictator," you just recognize that that is blasphemy of the highest kind. I'll show you why in the next session.

1. Every Christian is a **priest** in his own right in the local church with a service to perform. He has spiritual sacrifices of his lips; of himself; of his substance; and, of his service to offer. He has direct responsibility as his own priest to God. Therefore, we maintain each other's privacy so that you can maintain your relationship and your life as unto the Lord for it is your responsibility and it is your business.
2. Finally, we have the element of **authority** within the local church. This includes the powers of supervision and of discipline of members. The Lord Jesus Christ is the head of this local church; God the Holy Spirit is the power of this local church; and, you are His agents. The authority of spiritual leadership from the pastor-teacher on down exists as a divine arrangement.

It is our responsibility and our duty to learn that, as a local church, we are to be characterized by the elements of faith; fellowship; unity; priesthood; and, authority. God will not hold you unaccountable if you destroy and ignore these elements.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1973

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