




THE
CHURCH

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HER
AUTHORITY
& MISSION



W.E. BEST

THE CHURCH— HER AUTHORITY AND MISSION

**by
W. E. Best**

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

After further study over the years, the author has come to the conclusion that the preferred translation of the Greek word *ekklesia* is “assembly” rather than “church”. Therefore, as companion volumes to this book, **THE CHURCH—HER AUTHORITY AND MISSION**, we recommend the pamphlet **NO PROPER NAME GIVEN TO CHRIST’S ASSEMBLY** and the book **CHRIST’S KINGDOM IS FUTURE—VOL. III (FORMATION OF THE KING’S BRIDE)**. These two publications will reflect the refinements in interpretation which are the result of the later studies of the author on the subject of Christ’s assembly.

INTRODUCTION

The word church means different things to different people. Some of the most common ideas are: (1) a building for public worship; (2) all of some particular denomination; (3) a congregation of people; (4) the clerical profession; and (5) an ecclesiastical organization. None of these opinions, however, can be attributed to the Greek word *ekklesia* in the New Testament.

When discussing the subject of the church, one will say this is the correct view; the second person will state it differently and say that is the right concept; and the third person, after much human reasoning, will say that all beliefs are good if sincerely embraced. One of the consistencies of human nature is that man is always wrong when he is not right with God. Intelligence is not required to see that three different men with three different concepts of the church could not be correct. The Holy Spirit does not teach three persons three different views concerning the church. This should prove that the Spirit of God is charged with many things of which He is not guilty. He leads God's people into truth, not into divergent opinions about truth.

The true understanding of Jesus Christ and His church is obtained from the New Testament and not from church creeds. Church creeds build spiritual pride and arrogance. But the person who looks at Jesus Christ and His church in the light of Holy Scripture is humbled.

The tendency in the religious community of our day is to despise laborious research of God's gold mine of Biblical truth and substitute ear tingling figures of speech to please depraved minds. People are shocked over the criticism of denominations and churches for apostatizing from the faith once delivered to the saints, but they are not alarmed over the fact of apostasy. One cannot deny that there is a real revival of idolatry in our day. Religious people are modifying "their" doctrines—not God's—to conform to the requirements and demands of the religious mind and taste of our day. Paul warned Timothy of this very thing in II Timothy 4:1-5. If Timothy needed such warning in his day, how much more do we need it in the twentieth century.

Truth always involves more than what appears on the surface. For instance, the savage looks into the heavens that are lighted by the moon; but the moon does not have the same meaning to him that it has to the astronaut who has been there. Now, will all who shall consider the subject of the church be willing to go to the only source of information, the Scripture of truth which was settled in heaven before the foundation of the world? The Bible does not "contain" the truth; it "is" the truth.

Every Bible subject must be viewed from a Biblical, not a denominational, perspective. Any subject presented from a denominational perspective is prejudicial. Undue reverence for any man or any institution is a sure precipice to destruction. Biblical data on any given subject should be gathered before ideas and opinions are formed. It should not be made to conform to preconceived ideas or opinions. Truth is not found in error, and knowledge is never found in ignorance.

The statement "church and many churches" does not indicate a dual actuality. There is no such thing as dualism in "church and churches." One must believe in both aspects of the church in order

to be Scripturally correct. The one church has two aspects—invisible and visible, or universal and local. Spiritual authority in the local aspect of the church has been committed to elders. Physical authority in the local aspect of the church has been assigned to deacons. The mission of the church is to proclaim the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to all nations and teach the converted to observe all things for their edification.

There is no personal light or revelation given above that which is written. Individual revelation is without a standard. Therefore, the Holy Spirit guides a person in harmony with the Scripture of truth, not in formulating doctrine which might be superimposed upon the eternal word of God.

Jesus Christ, who is the Head of the church which is His body, never identified Himself with professing Christendom. He did, however, identify Himself with the church. Hence, He gave Himself for the church (Eph. 5:25). He is now gathering unto Himself the church (Acts 15:14; John 11:52; Eph. 2:11-17; II Pet. 3:9). In the future, the church will be perfected (Eph. 5:27; I John 3:1-3).

Christian distinctives are clearly demonstrated in ecclesiology—the science of the church. We must be aware, however, that many Christians in their confessions often emphasize their distinctives to the exclusion of some aspects of ecclesiology. Some have emphasized the local aspect of the church to the exclusion of the universal aspect, and others have stressed the universal aspect to the minimizing of the local.

When believers assemble locally, they should always bear in mind that their being in the universal aspect of the church by regeneration qualifies them to gather in a local sense. Furthermore, union with Christ in a spiritual sense does not lessen the responsibility of the saints in regard to membership in a local church. There are not two kinds of Christians: those whose interest is in the universal aspect of the church and those who are concerned for the local aspect of the church (Acts 2:41-47; 4:32, 33).

The word “church” is used in the sense of the totality of God’s elect (Eph. 5:25). It is also used in a purely geographical sense (I Cor. 1:1, 2).

THE UNIVERSAL ASPECT OF THE CHURCH

There is only one church, including its universal and local aspects. The Lord Jesus said, “I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18). He did not say He would build churches. This is the first occurrence of the Greek word *ekklesia*—church—in the New Testament. This word is used primarily in a universal sense. Note the tense of the verb “I will build.” The Lord Jesus spoke to a local assembly of disciples about the universal assembly He would build. This assembly includes all the redeemed of God during the dispensation of grace. This new people of God consists of the redeemed and regenerated who are called by the gospel (Matt. 20:28; 26:28; John 3:8; II Thess. 2:13, 14).

Divine interpretation of the universal aspect of the church is recorded in Matthew 16:18. The apostle Peter, to whom the Lord spoke, verified this truth (I Pet. 2:5-10). Peter’s epistles were not sent to local churches. They were general epistles. Jesus Christ loved the people chosen for the universal aspect of the church and died for them. This is the church that has been purchased with Christ’s blood.

A Biblical concept of the universal aspect of the church serves as a bulwark against salvation through local church membership. It protects the basic doctrine that salvation is of God (John 1:12, 13). It guards against institutional idolatry. Where church tends to precede, Christ tends to recede; where the local church is stressed as a depository of grace, Christ is neglected as the source of grace.

In The Process Of Building

The universal aspect of the church is built upon Christ (Matt. 16:18). Christ Jesus is the massive, living rock. The Lord stated the foundation of the church when He said, “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.” This statement was in response to Peter’s confession that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). The apostle’s knowledge that the Lord is Israel’s Christ—the anointed One of Israel of Psalm 2:6-8—and the church’s Savior—the Son of the living God—was gained by Divine revelation (Matt. 16:17).

The Greek word for Peter is *petros*. It means stone, rock, ledge, or cliff. It is used metaphorically of an unyielding person, resembling a rock. The Greek word for rock is *petra*. It means a ledge of a cliff, a rock like that upon which the wise man built his house. The former word is usually a smaller detachment of the massive ledge. The word “rock” is used symbolically of God in both Old and New Testaments (Deut. 32:4; I Cor. 10:4). *Petros* was derived from *petra*, not conversely. The foundation of the church is not derived from man. Peter was derived from the massive, living rock. The living stone is Jesus Christ. The living stones are recipients of the grace of God, and they are connected by the Holy Spirit upon the foundation of Jesus Christ.

From the negative point of view, the foundation of the church is not Peter. Peter was only a mortal, sinful man (Acts 10:26; Matt. 26:74). Peter interpreted and expounded Isaiah’s prophecy

concerning the church (Is. 28:16; I Pet. 2:4-6). Jesus Christ alone could be the object of Isaiah's prophecy: "Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste" (Is. 28:16). He is the chosen one of the Father to be our Redeemer and the foundation of this spiritual edifice made up of born-again individuals. He was eternally decreed by the Father to be the foundation of the church. Isaiah had spoken of Jehovah as a stone of stumbling (Is. 8:14). The Lord Jesus applied the symbol of the stone to Himself; He is the living stone (Matt. 21:42). There is no reference to the church being built upon Peter. He could not be an unwavering foundation against Satan's attacks. Jesus Christ alone could withstand Satanic attacks.

From the positive point of view, Jesus Christ is the only unshakable foundation of the church. God the Father selected no other (I Pet. 2:4-8; I Cor. 3:11). Jesus Christ asserted no other. He is the rock, the one upon whom Peter and all other children of God would be built. The Holy Spirit added Peter to that foundation. The church is built upon the God-Man slain (Acts 20:28; I Pet. 1:18-20). The God-Man slain was the foundation of God's thoughts for the church.

The apostles and prophets did not constitute the foundation of the church. They were simply representatives centered in Jesus Christ, the chief cornerstone. The apostles represent New Testament truth of the foundation, Jesus Christ. The prophets represent Old Testament truth concerning this same foundation. Both apostolic and prophetic teaching center in the cornerstone. One is historical and the other is prophetic. The Lord Jesus is the essence of His work. "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner" (Ps. 118:22; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; I Pet. 2:6, 7).

The Lord Jesus introduced His church after the Divine revelation by the Father to Peter that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:16, 17). The Father had revealed who Jesus Christ is; likewise, Jesus Christ would reveal the church of which Peter would be a member. The Father had revealed one truth to Peter, and Jesus Christ would reveal another: "And I say also unto thee" (Matt. 16:18).

In Relation To The Kingdom

The Lord's promise "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven" of Matthew 16:19 does not refer to authority given to a local church. This promise followed the revelation of the Son and the truth of the church to Peter. The one thing Peter had in mind after this statement was that Jesus Christ, according to all the Old Testament predictions, will establish a kingdom. He was thinking only of a theocratic kingdom to be established at that point in time and did not realize that some things must take place between the first and second advents of Jesus Christ.

The Lord charged His disciples that they should tell no man that He was the Christ (Matt. 16:20). Christ's injunction to secrecy should be understood. That was not the time to reveal His office as King. Peter could not understand that the Lord would not then set up His kingdom; therefore, the Lord Jesus gave Peter, James, and John a foretaste of the coming kingdom (Matt. 16:27-17:13). Peter's own exposition of this foretaste of the kingdom is recorded in II Peter 1:16-18. This injunction to secrecy was given because the kingship of Jesus Christ was to be attested after His death and resurrection: "And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead" (Matt. 17:9). The

transfiguration was a miniature picture of the kingdom which is to come. In the midst of the transfiguration scene, the Lord Jesus charged the disciples to tell no man until He was risen from the dead. If the title “the Christ” bears no more than the one whom God anointed to save sinners, Why tell the disciples to tell the vision to no man?

Although the Divine Sonship is essential to His being called the Christ, neither the Divine Sonship nor the Davidic Sonship constitute Him the Christ. But the union of the two constituted Him the Christ. This union would never be laid aside. He would ever be the Son of Man, the Christ, and the Mediator. He died, was buried, was raised, and will come again as the Son of Man (Matt. 16:27). This union constituted Him the Christ who is the Savior and the one who will rule and reign as King and Lord.

The Lord Jesus foretold His suffering, death, and resurrection. The purpose of His first advent was not to establish the kingdom but to suffer, die, be buried, and rise again from the dead. His suffering, dying, being buried, and rising from the dead became the foundation of the church, because He purchased the church with His own blood. Those purchased by His blood are now being prepared for the kingdom which is yet to come.

The relation of the universal aspect of the church to the kingdom is taught in Matthew 16:19. The authority indicated in the Lord’s statement, “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven,” is eschatological. The context proves that such authority is given to the whole church inclusively and not to a local church exclusively. The verse is related to the coming kingdom. The context teaches that the Lord began showing His disciples that He would be crucified and raised again the third day (Matt. 16:21). He explained that He would later come in the glory of His Father; at which time, He will reward every man according to his works (Matt. 16:27).

The only two references to the *ekklesia* in all the gospels are Matthew 16:18 and Matthew 18:17. The former refers to the perfected church; whereas, the latter refers to the local aspect of the church. Matthew 17 reveals that the kingdom has not yet come.

The context of Matthew 18:18 limits the authority spoken of there: (1) It is obviously conferred on the local aspect of the church. (2) It delegates authority only to the members of each local assembly; therefore, the authority is limited to its own affairs (vv. 15-17). (3) There is no reference to the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

The kingdom mentioned in the first part of Matthew 18 in its preparatory measure calls for repentance because of sin (Matt. 3:2), conversion from sin (Matt. 18:3), self-denial of sin by the children of God (Matt. 16:24, 25; 18:1-9), and perseverance against sin (Matt. 26:41). All four are the fruit of the revelation of Jesus Christ to the heart of the individual in regeneration.

The authority of Matthew 16:19 is kingdom authority that will be exercised by the perfected church. The standard is the same in Matthew 18, but the executors are different. God’s standard was settled in heaven before the foundation of the world. The authority that imperfect Christians are exercising is the same kind that will be exercised by the perfected church in the kingdom, because the authority was settled in heaven before the foundation of the world. The time element does not

change the perfection of the authority. The binding and loosing is simply the exercise of judgment in the realm of conduct in the local aspect of the church in Matthew 18:18 and in the perfected aspect of the church in the kingdom in Matthew 16:19.

The kingdom is eschatological (Matt. 16:19, 27, 28). Christ will establish it at His second advent. It is that for which the members of Christ's church are being prepared. The Lord told His disciples that some of them would not taste of death until they had a foretaste of that kingdom for which they were being prepared (Matt. 16:27, 28). They did experience a foretaste of it (Matt. 17:1-3). Peter, James, and John did not die before they had a foretaste of the kingdom in the transfiguration scene. The Lord Jesus personally appeared in His kingly glory. The dead saints—Moses and Elias—were personally present in their glorified bodies. The living saints—Peter, James, and John—personally beheld the personal appearing of Jesus Christ, Moses, and Elias. This preview of the kingdom cannot apply to the church. The church is the result of Christ's first advent, and the kingdom is associated with His second advent.

The language of Matthew 16:19 is authoritative. This authority will be administered by the perfected church that becomes the legal administrative assembly in the kingdom (I Cor. 6:2, 3). The Lord promised the overcomers in the church at Thyatira that He would give them power over the nations (Rev. 2:26). This authority will be given in the kingdom. Christians do not now have authority over the nations. This authority will be exercised with, not separated from, the Lord Jesus Christ when He comes as King of kings and Lord of lords. The kingdom and the reign of the saints are future, and both will be on the earth (Rev. 5:10; Luke 19:12, 17, 19). The power and judgment of the Son of Man will be executed visibly and universally in the future; whereas, they are now executed invisibly in providence and are seen only by faith.

The error of identifying the church with the kingdom has been the source of much evil. Such authority as described in Matthew 16:19 could never be committed to imperfect men—though redeemed. The church must be perfected to reign with Christ over the nations (Rom. 8:17-23). The church and the kingdom are easily distinguished. The two words “church” and “kingdom” are distinct. The Greek word *ekklesia*—church—is a compound word meaning called out. The Greek word *basileia*—kingdom—means rule, reign, or have dominion over. The church is incomplete. It is being built. There are some for whom Christ died who are not yet in the ark of safety.

The following things show the difference between the church and the kingdom:

1.

The church is never called the kingdom. Christ is called “KING OF THE JEWS” and “King of kings” (Matt. 27:37; I Tim. 6:15). But He is never called “King of the church.”

2.

Christians are “subjects” of the church but “heirs” of the kingdom (James 2:5). As an heir, the Christian does not yet possess the kingdom. However, every born-again person is presently a member of the body of Christ. An heir is one to whom something has been assigned. The inheritance is sure to all believers whether they are in heaven or on earth, but the experiential realization must await the coming of Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:11).

One of Paul's charges to Timothy was "I CHARGE thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom" (II Tim. 4:1). The Lord's promise to those who love Him is "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

Inheriting the kingdom means more than entering and enjoying it. It denotes participating in its government (I Cor. 6:2). Christians presently possess the earnest—down payment—of their inheritance (Eph. 1:12-14). The earnest is the present possession of the Holy Spirit who guarantees and assures us that we will literally come into possession of our inheritance which God has promised us in the kingdom (James 2:5). A literal promise spiritualized is exegetical fraud. As a present subject of the church, the believer is being prepared for the kingdom. The Christian's natural picture is portrayed in Romans 3:10-18, but his spiritual picture is incomplete until the kingdom.

3.

The kingdom will not come until the universal aspect of the church is completed and perfected (II Pet. 3:9; Eph. 5:27).

4.

Prophecy does not predict a kingdom between the first and second advents of Jesus Christ.

5.

If the church were the kingdom, the saints would presently reign (I Cor. 4:8).

6.

Flesh and blood are in the church, but flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom (I Cor. 15:50).

7.

Elders are appointed to edify the church now, but they are not appointed to build up the kingdom (Eph. 4:1-16).

8.

The hope of the church is the reign of Christ in the kingdom, not in the church (I Cor. 4:8).

9.

The church is being built on the foundation—Jesus Christ. The kingdom will be established by Jesus Christ at His coming. The former is a process; whereas, the latter is an act.

10.

Jesus Christ is Head of the church. He will be King of the kingdom.

11.

The church includes only redeemed mankind, but the kingdom will include unredeemed heavenly creatures and redeemed earthly beings. Heavenly creatures are not members of the church. They were not redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ.

12.

The church's relation to the kingdom is subordinate and preparatory.

13.

The kingdom is not given to the elect as they are regenerated one by one, but it will be given to the saints when they are gathered together perfected in one as one (Heb. 11:39, 40).

14.

Saints in the church await the kingdom which is their hope (I Thess. 1:5-10; Rom. 8:23).

15.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit did not have its fulfillment on the day of Pentecost. It does not have its fulfillment in the church today. It shall have its fulfillment in the kingdom when it is established (Joel 2; 3).

16.

The baptism of fire does not have its fulfillment in the church, but it will be fulfilled just preceding the establishment of the kingdom, when the earth shall be renovated by fire (II Pet. 3:10, 11).

17.

The great shaking will take place in the kingdom. It is not taking place in the church.

18.

The kingdom, not the church, will embrace the conversion of the world.

19.

The Christian's hope is the reign of Jesus Christ in the kingdom, not His reign in the church. It is true that Jesus Christ is the sovereign Lord and that He rules, but His reigning in the human heart and His reigning in the kingdom differ. In the latter, every eye shall see Him.

If the kingdom were symbolical, repentance, faith, and all connected truths would also be symbolical. A literal promise cannot be spiritualized. Jesus Christ lives by faith in the human heart, and He will literally come to the earth to establish His kingdom.

Belongs To Christ

The universal aspect of the church is Christ's by the Father's election (Eph. 1:3-6). The Father gives men to Christ in time because He gave them in eternity (John 6:37). The universal aspect of the church is Christ's by the redemption He made on the cross (Eph. 1:7-12). Jesus Christ redeemed all the Father elected.

Jesus Christ is building His church. He died for the church (Eph. 5:25). The church He is building is one by Divine life. It is not merely a human organization but the creation of God by the Holy Spirit; therefore, there is an invisible aspect of the church. A person cannot be on the side of Christianity without being on the side of the *ekklesia* of Matthew 16:18.

The universal aspect of the church is Christ's by the Holy Spirit's regeneration (John 3:8; Eph. 1:19). Faith in Christ and assurance of salvation are fruits of regeneration (Eph. 1:13, 14).

The universal aspect of the church is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22, 23; 4:4; Col. 1:24). An irrefutable truth is that this aspect of the church, which is Christ's body, is the fullness of Christ. Is a local church that consists of a few of the saints of God the fullness of Christ? Would several local churches with hundreds of Christians constitute the fullness of Christ? The church that is Christ's fullness is the universal aspect of the church, consisting of all for whom Christ died. Christ's glorified humanity is incomplete without His fullness. Christ as God absolutely considered is complete and perfect, so He cannot receive any fullness in that respect (John 17:2). As man is incomplete without the woman, Christ as Mediator/Savior/God-Man is incomplete until His body that He loved and gave Himself for is added to Himself (Eph. 5:25-27).

The three thousand saved on the day of Pentecost were added to the universal aspect of the church before they were added to the local church at Jerusalem. The apostle Paul was a member of the body of Christ before he requested membership with the church at Jerusalem (Acts 9:26).

The Body Of Christ

The Greek word *soma*—body—is the body as a whole. It is used metaphorically of the universal aspect of the church, the whole family of God (Col. 1:18-24). The word for body is never used in the plural to refer to the church in the New Testament. "There is one body" (Eph. 4:4). Christ's body is one, but it consists of many members.

Scripture sets the church forth in Ephesians under the three metaphors of body (Eph. 1:22, 23), building (Eph. 2:20-22), and bride (Eph. 5:22-32). These metaphors serve as revelation to open one's eyes to a deep and fascinating reality. The message written to the Ephesian saints was to extend beyond them to all the faithful in Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:1, 19). The Lord Jesus is the sovereign

Lord (v. 21). The Father had put all things under His feet and has given Him to be Head over all things to the church (v. 22). Jesus Christ rules over all things, but He does so for His church.

The Lord Jesus has two bodies. He has the body the Holy Spirit prepared for Him (Heb. 10:5). This is His physical body. It was necessary for Christ to assume a physical body because in it He went to the cross and died. God absolutely considered cannot die. The second body is His spiritual, or mystical, body which is His church. Every person saved by the grace of God is a part of this spiritual body of which Jesus Christ is its Head. Conclusively, Christ assumed the first body in His incarnation for the purpose of redemption. The second body is the fruit of His death on the cross. The Lord Jesus Christ is now incarnated on earth in His body which is His church (Eph. 1:22, 23).

Jesus Christ is the Savior of the body (Eph. 5:23). He is not the Savior of Judas and Simon Magus. The church is one body (Eph. 5:29-32). It is presented under the metaphor of marriage. This metaphor furnishes us with a more adequate image of the relationship of the church to Christ than the body and its Head or the building and its foundation. The similes go from the biological—the body—to the inanimate—the building—to the most intimate of all earthly relationships—the bride.

Through Jesus Christ, saints—both Jews and Gentiles set apart by the grace of God—are the household of God. They are built upon the foundation of the prophets and apostles. Jesus Christ Himself is the cornerstone. He holds all things together. In Him, the building is fitly framed together. In Him, each separate piece of the building grows unto a holy temple in the Lord.

As there was a difference between Solomon's temple as a whole and a part of the temple, there is a difference between the institutional church and the body of Christ. There are unsaved church members in every institutional church. Those unsaved church members do not constitute the habitation of God. Only the redeemed constitute the habitation of God. The gates of hell have prevailed against many institutional churches, and they no longer exist. But the gates of hell have not, do not now, and never shall prevail against the temple that constitutes the habitation of God.

The Lord spoke of the temple of His body when He said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). The physical temple of Jesus Christ was the habitation of God (John 1:14; Col. 2:9). As the physical body of Jesus Christ was the habitation of God, the redeemed of the Lord constitute the habitation of God now.

There will be no need in the kingdom for an institutional church. The church will then be the general assembly and church of the firstborn (Heb. 12:23). It will bring glory to God throughout eternity (Eph. 3:21). This body will have no unsaved members. It will not be made up of an aggregation of local churches but an aggregation of people redeemed by the grace of God.

There is unity of the body (Eph. 4:4). The foundation of unity is one body, one Spirit, and one hope. These three features constitute the inner circle of blessing. The metaphor of the body is a striking illustration of Jesus Christ and His church. The human body is the visible manifestation of the unseen. The only thing known about an individual's soul and spirit is revealed in his body. The incarnation of Jesus Christ in a physical body was the visible manifestation of the invisible God (Heb. 10:5; John 1:18). The thoughts and feelings of the unseen spirit are manifested in the body, and the thoughts and feelings of the unseen God were revealed in the Son. He declared the Father

and the unseen Spirit. As the thoughts and feelings of God were revealed in Christ's physical body, the same is true in the church of Jesus Christ which is His body.

Unity is diversity operating with one common goal in view. The one Spirit is the life of the body (Rom. 8:9). The one hope is the glorious future in view for the church of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:24, 25).

The term "pluriformity" implies that at its deepest level there is one church. However, multiplicity is not disregarded. It is discussed in connection with the many forms, or revelations, of the one church. Pluriformity protects the outlook of the one flock and the one shepherd (John 10:16). On the other hand, it keeps us from closing our eyes to the actual multiplicity. It is the disclosure of the one essence in many forms (I Cor. 12). The manifold ways in which God's wisdom and grace are manifested illustrate the one essence in many forms (Eph. 3:10; I Pet. 4:10). All the varied, imperfect manifestations of the one body of Jesus Christ do not alter the perfection of its essence.

The love of Jesus Christ, which surpasses our knowledge, has pluriform dimensions (Eph. 3:14-19). Nevertheless, its breadth, length, depth, and height do not hinder the fellowship of that love any more than the different manifestations of the body of Christ hinder the essence of that body.

Christ's church has been compared with a circle. Every particle of the circumference is held in relation to all the other particles in the common relation of each to the center. Man cannot create the unity of the church, and he cannot destroy it. Heresy itself cannot destroy this unity. It is indestructible. Therefore, the church is one—not should strive to be one, but is one. The church is not one because there happens not to be more than one but because the church cannot but be one. It is essentially one even as God is one.

The foundation of the church's unity is the nature of the church itself. God is one; Jesus Christ the Mediator is one; the Holy Spirit who unites us to Jesus Christ is one; therefore, the church is one body. It is the one body of which Jesus Christ is the Head, the one building of which Jesus Christ is the foundation, and the one bride of which Jesus Christ is the bridegroom.

The words "body" and "church" are synonymous in Colossians 1:24. The idea rises above the level of visibility and external organization, and it has direct reference to spiritual relations between Christ and His sheep. The Scriptures are replete with illustrations of such relationships: Sheep are united to the shepherd (John 10). Branches are connected with the vine (John 15:1-5). Stones of the building are linked to the cornerstone (Eph. 2:19-22). The body with its many members is joined to the Head (Col. 1:18-24). The new creation is related to the last Adam (Rom. 5:16-21; I Cor. 15:45-47; II Cor. 5:14-21).

The Lord's sovereignty over all things is different from His headship over the church. There is no real intimacy in Christ's rulership over all things; whereas, there is intimacy between the headship of Jesus Christ over His body.

Jesus Christ is the Head of the church. He is the one to whom others are subordinate. The subordinate person will not be satisfied with being only a member of the invisible body of Christ. He will become affiliated with the visible manifestation of the body of Jesus Christ. Through the manifestation of the body of Christ, the purpose of Christ is wrought in the world.

The church is not a collection of believers by chance or accident. It is a people whom God elected and gave to Jesus Christ that they might be conformed to Him. Although the members of this body are many, the Head and the members are one. All the members are marked out and curiously wrought with symmetry and grace to serve one purpose. The Head is one; whereas, the members are many. They are united in life, mind, and power. The life of the church flows from union with Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. In union of the mind, the purpose of the Head is wrought out by members of the body. The union of power is the spiritual power they have in Jesus Christ to move in a manner pleasing to the Head.

God gave Jesus Christ to be Head over all things to the church for her peace, prosperity, and perpetuity. This is similar to the Father first electing Jesus Christ and then electing us in Him. As the Father gave Jesus Christ to the church, He has given the church to Jesus Christ.

The ideas of importance, indispensableness, and identity cannot be overemphasized. As one's physical head is everything to his physical body, Jesus Christ is everything to His people. As a human body cannot survive the loss of its head, the body of Christ cannot survive the loss of its Head. Every organized, human religion exists in some manner even though its head is dead. But Jesus Christ went through death and is now at the right hand of the Father. He is the living Head of the church. The head is identified with the body. The same life that flows through the head flows through the body.

Adam and Eve typify the truth that the church was given to Jesus Christ. Adam was a type of Jesus Christ who was to come (Rom. 5:14). The woman God gave Adam is a type of the church (Gen. 3:12). As God gave the woman to the man, He gave the church to Jesus Christ (Eph. 5:23, 32).

Three important things to represent Christ and His church are recorded in Genesis 2—(1) the Divine declaration that it was not good that man dwell alone, (2) the Divine operation of taking one of Adam's ribs and making woman, and (3) the Divine presentation of the woman to the man. These three truths also occur in relation to Jesus Christ and the church (Matt. 16). As soon as Jesus Christ announced the church, He gave the foundation upon which it would be built. The presentation of that church is yet future. Adam was to be the inclusive head of the human race. All were to be derived from him; hence, he is the federal head of the old creation. Therefore, it was necessary that woman should not have an independent but a derived existence. Her existence was derived from the head of the human race. As this was true of Eve in a physical sense, it is true of the body of Jesus Christ in a spiritual sense. Since Christ is the Head of the church, it is necessary that believers should not have an independent but a derived existence. Their existence is derived from Jesus Christ, the Head of the new creation. God put Adam to sleep in the garden of Eden, took from him a rib to make woman, and gave her to Adam. At Calvary, God the Father put His Son to a far deeper sleep—the sleep of death—than that experienced by Adam. From Jesus Christ He has produced the church which He shall give His Son.

Jesus Christ is the spiritual Head of the church which is His spiritual body. He does not rule as head of a civil government by external laws. He rules us by an inward impulse, by the Holy Spirit. He is the life of the church. The glory of God is reflected more in the head than in the body (II Cor. 4:6). He is the Head over all things in order that He might bring the members of the body together to fit them into a holy temple of the Lord (Eph. 2:21).

As all the members of David's body were written in a book before they came into existence, all the members of the body of Christ were written in the Lamb's book of life before they existed (Ps. 139:13-16; Rev. 13:8).

A Living Organism

The universal church is a living organism. "Organism" is a term which indicates that the thing specified is permeated throughout all its parts with one common life. The life is the same in its roots and in all the structure. Hence, the universal church is one in the sense that it is an organism indwelt by one life principle. This could never be true, in the absolute sense, of the local aspect of the church.

The body of Jesus Christ is a living, vitalized organism, and it cannot be reduced to a mere humanly organized society of men. Unlike human organizations, the body of Jesus Christ is operated from within and not from without. Every human body is not only organized by but it is sustained by outward influences, regulations, rules, etc. But the body of Jesus Christ is the living, vitalized spiritual body of the Lord. To view the body of Christ as a mere human organization is to place her on the level with all other human organizations.

The body of Jesus Christ is a centralized organism. Unity among believers is secured by a centralized authority. That authority is not in Rome, Salt Lake City, Nashville, Dallas, or some other headquarters. The centralized authority is not in some given place on earth, but it is in Jesus Christ who sits at the right hand of the Father.

The body of Jesus Christ is a functionized organism. The assigned business of the church is to manifest the living Christ. Man-made religions may survive the loss of their founders, but the church of Jesus Christ could not exist without Him who is her living Head and sustainer.

A person cannot view the church, which is Christ's body, in the abstract any more than he can place monotheism in the abstract above polytheism. The local aspect of the church with her organization, appointed officers, and ordinances does not constitute the church's essence. The organization of members and appointed officers of elders and deacons belong only to her earthly manifestation (Phil. 1:1). The two aspects of the church do not fully correspond on earth any more than what we are in Christ positionally and conditionally correspond. The Lord Jesus Himself exemplifies the invisible and visible aspects of the church. He is one Person with two natures. His invisible nature cannot be merged into His visible nature, or conversely. The same is true of the one church.

The invisible aspect of the church is the life principle, but the church has a visible function in the world. The grace of God has been deposited in earthen vessels. God's grace is not dead capital laid up in a napkin, but it is a living possession and blessing. The church is visibly manifested, but she is not absolutely visible. The Lord Jesus was visibly manifested, but He was not absolutely visible. Christians are visibly manifested, but they are not absolutely visible. The church's visibility is only a sign directing us to its invisible aspect. The same is true with the individual Christian. His external life points to his internal life.

The church is neither visible nor invisible only. She is both. To say the church is wholly visible would be like saying Jesus Christ is purely human. As the human nature of Christ is the only

manifestation of God, the local aspect of the church is the only manifestation of the invisible principle of life. The church is one, but there are two aspects—invisible and visible.

Membership in the universal aspect of the church is coterminous with salvation (Col. 1:19-29). The body would be impossible without the Holy Spirit, who unites in regeneration the elect members to their common Head.

A serious error results from reducing the universal aspect of the church of Christ to an organization containing both saved and lost persons. Distinction must be made between the invisible and visible aspects of the church. If membership in the local church assures membership in Christ's body, then no distinction is necessary. But the distinction is necessary. The church must be viewed from God's and man's perspectives. God alone knows who are absolutely His (II Tim. 2:19; John 10:14, 27). Man cannot know, because some of the body of Jesus Christ are already in glory and some are on earth.

There is no way a person can know and be assured that every member of a local church is a child of God. An unsaved member in a local church indicates that there is a church within a church. The Lord Jesus called twelve men to establish the local church. One out of the twelve was not a Christian; therefore, there was a church within a church.

Neither the invisible nor the visible aspect of the church should be emphasized over the other. Overstatement of the visible aspect leads to institutional salvation, and overstatement of the invisible leads to excessive individualism. Overstatement will be found on neither side from the Biblical perspective. There is harmony and balance of truth in the statements. Those who stress the invisible above the visible aspect neglect their responsibility to the local church. Those obsessed with the visible, institutional aspect of the church are blinded to its Biblical meaning of union with Jesus Christ.

Primary Meaning Of The Word Church

The primary meaning of the word "church" is understood by the law of first mention. Matthew 16:18 is the first reference to the Greek word *ekklesia*. The word "church" in this verse is used in the same sense in Ephesians 1:22 and 23. It refers to all for whom Christ died. The Lord was referring to His flesh, His sheep, the branches, the many stones of one temple, etc. Although this Greek word is used more times in a local sense in the New Testament, the dominant meaning is the church as the body—the inclusive sense. The spiritual character of the church bears this out. The word is used in the singular, and it is also used in the plural. The local aspect of the church is a manifestation in principle, to the best of her ability, to what the universal aspect of the church is in reality.

The word *ekklesia* means to call out. It is first used in Matthew 16:18. It emphasizes being called out from, and *soma*—body—emphasizes unity with Christ. One stresses the calling out, and the other emphasizes the uniting of called out ones to the Lord. The context determines the use of the word "church" in Matthew 16:18, and not the word the use of the context. The context of this verse proves that the word is used here in its universal sense.

Its Perpetuity

The perpetuity of the universal aspect of the church is set forth in the words, "...the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). "The gates of Hades shall not overpower it" (NASB). The teaching is that Jesus Christ—the living stone—and all the saints of God—living stones—shall not be captives in the mansion of death. Death was unable to hold the Lord Jesus Christ, the captain of our salvation. Likewise, it will be unable to hold any person regenerated by the Spirit of God (I Cor. 15:51-54).

Jesus Christ came into the world to build a habitation for God which shall never cease to be that habitation. Sectarians have made various claims upon the promise that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"; but like the rest of the text, it has nothing to do with any humanly organized religious system. Therefore, no denomination can get any support for its dogma.

The plain meaning of Matthew 16:18 is the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose. The security of the universal aspect of the church and the ultimate triumph of the truth for which she stands are the culminating thoughts of this text. The cause of the stability and triumph of the universal aspect of the church is the *petra*, the massive, living rock. The universal church originated in God's eternal purpose, was taken out of time, and is for the Lord's eternal glory.

THE LOCAL ASPECT OF THE CHURCH

The secondary significance of the word *ekklesia* is the local aspect of the church. The local aspect is the subject of several epistles called “church epistles.” It had its beginning with the ministry of Jesus Christ on earth, plus the foundational work of the apostles, prophets, and evangelists.

The word *ekklesia* is used various ways: (1) It is used in the sense of an assembly of people convened at a public place for the purpose of deliberating (Acts 19:32, 39, 41). Those called for this deliberation were Gentiles but not Christians. (2) It is used in the sense of the elect assembly for which Christ died (Eph. 5:25). The church has been purchased by Jesus Christ. He did not die for unsaved members of an institutional church. (3) It is used in the sense of Christians gathering for worship in a local assembly (I Cor. 11:18; 14:19, 35). The churches at Corinth, Ephesus, Colossae, Galatia, etc., were purely geographical. (4) It is used in the sense of membership in a local institution (Acts 9:26). After Saul’s conversion, he tried to join the disciples at Jerusalem.

Every local aspect of the church represents the universal aspect of the church. Is a church required to be in perpetual session to be a church? Are ten unassembled, providentially hindered members a part of that assembly, or does the church consist of only the assembled members? How could the assembly discipline one of the absent members? How could a person be excommunicated if he were not a member of the assembly? Are the absent members on the church roll? Is the church roll changed with every service? An unassembled assembly is called a church in Acts 8:3. Before his regeneration, Saul entered into every house—the home of every member—and made havoc of the church. One must admit that the absent members are invisible; so there is a sense in which some of the members of a local church are invisible.

What should an unassembled assembly be called? When a worship service is concluded and the members go their separate ways, is the church nonexistent until the members reassemble? The unassembled members are invisible from one another until they reassemble; hence, there is a sense even here on earth that there is an invisible church. Is perpetual assembly necessary for an institution to be called a church? Those who have already lived on earth and are with the Lord are invisible to us, but they are members of the body of Christ. Moreover, many of God’s people are scattered all over the world, and the members do not see all of them.

The local aspect of the church is not an end in itself (Eph. 3:21). The church has a threefold ministry: (1) to the powers in the heavenlies, (2) to men on earth, and (3) to bring glory to God throughout eternity. The local, institutional church will have fulfilled her mission on earth when Jesus Christ comes to receive His own unto Himself. Every redeemed person will be presented as a chaste virgin to Jesus Christ.

Established By Christ

Christ accomplished three things during His earthly ministry in the establishment of the local aspect of the church. He called and trained the twelve disciples (Matt. 10:1-6; Mark 3:14). By His death,

Jesus Christ established a new covenant under which the disciples would work (Matt. 26:28; Heb. 9:12). After His resurrection, Christ carefully instructed and commissioned His disciples. His first commission, before His death, was to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 10:6). The expansion of the commission to all nations came after Christ's death (Matt. 28:18-20).

Continued Through The Disciples

The disciples continued Christ's work with the local aspect of the church. What Christ did in the flesh, the disciples continued by the power of the Holy Spirit during the "transitional period." The apostles were to announce that the Messianic King was alive from the dead. They worked under the new covenant.

Redemption was provided at Calvary. Until the death of Christ, the church had no legal standing. Jesus Christ and the disciples attended the temple and the synagogue. Legally, at Calvary, the church became the congregation of God; and the apostles—not the priests—became her lawful leaders. The church then had authority under the new covenant.

The disciples were given the post-resurrection commission. The various elements of the commission are presented in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts. (1) The disciples were commanded to bear witness concerning the Messianic King: "...Ye shall be witnesses unto me..." (Acts 1:8). This witness would include the facts of death and resurrection (Luke 24:46). In Christ's name, they were commissioned to preach "...repentance and remission of sins...among all nations..." (Luke 24:47; Mark 16:15; Matt. 28:19). (2) The disciples should follow a definite order of procedure to accomplish this work: first, to Jerusalem, then to Judea, Samaria, and finally to the uttermost parts of the world (Acts 1:8). (3) They were exhorted that believers must be fed, baptized, and taught to observe all things (Matt. 28:19, 20; John 21:15-17); and unbelievers must be warned of Divine judgment (Mark 16:16). (4) They would be empowered by the Holy Spirit, and the spiritual presence of Christ would be with them to the end of the age in the accomplishment of this work (Acts 1:8; Matt. 28:20). (5) Their witnessing would be accompanied by miraculous signs to confirm the message (Mark 16:17-20).

The extension of the church was through the ministry of the disciples. Its actual realization was at Pentecost. Although the disciples were gathered, instructed, and prepared, it was not until Pentecost that the Holy Spirit baptized the infant church to empower her for her mission. Its Divine attestation was through signs and wonders.

The church at Jerusalem, which was the first New Testament church, is a type of the universal aspect of the church. This local church grew from the 11 true disciples, to the 120 who met in the upper room, to 3,000 added to them at Pentecost. Later, 5,000 were added; then a multitude, multitudes, multiplied, and multiplied greatly (Acts 2:41; 4:4, 32; 5:14; 6:1, 7). These were first added to the universal aspect of the church by regeneration before they were added to the local aspect of the church at Jerusalem.

The great extension was from Jerusalem to surrounding regions. There were devout men out of every nation under heaven dwelling at Jerusalem (Acts 2:5). All the number saved and added to the church in Jerusalem did not remain there. They had come from other places to Jerusalem. They had

dwellings at Jerusalem and also elsewhere. The Ethiopian eunuch was one of them. The extension of the local church at Jerusalem was from that place to surrounding regions (Acts 2:1-20:38).

Organization Simple

The organization of the local church was simple. Her officers were elders and deacons (Acts 14:23; I Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:7, 17; I Tim. 3:8-13; Phil. 1:1; Acts 6:1-6). This is quite different from the complex organization of the so-called church of our day.

The independence of the local church must be maintained. Increase of the number of churches in Acts reveals that each newly organized church was left to stand directly responsible to Jesus Christ as the Head of the church. Before leaving a newly organized church, the apostles commended the people to the Lord on whom they had believed (Acts 14:23).

The autonomous character of each local church is a Divine principle. Church federations, unions, and denominations are all unscriptural. There was no federating of local churches into one large group or into smaller groups. They were not divided into national churches. Each local church developed and maintained its own administration under the headship of Jesus Christ. In a world which more and more seeks centralization of power in industry, civil government, and religion, we must be aware of the danger of totalitarian trends which threaten the autonomy of the local assembly of God under the direction and leadership of Jesus Christ, the Head of the church.

Independency preserves the character of the local church. Each church must be governed by local elders; then there is no place for false teachers.

There is value in local churches, but circumstances vary from church to church. A review of the letters given to the seven churches in Asia will reveal the variation of circumstances from church to church. The Ephesian church had declined from first love. The church in Pergamos had those who held the doctrine of Balaam and the Nicolaitanes. The church in Thyatira tolerated the teaching and immorality of Jezebel. The church in Sardis had a name that she lived, but Christ said she was dead. The church in Laodicea was neither cold nor hot, and the Lord was ready to spue her out of His mouth. These circumstances reveal that all local churches are imperfect.

Spiritually, the church is one and cannot be divided; but physically, its members are scattered throughout the world. Any division of believers other than geographical implies not a division of sphere but a division of nature. The names of the places where saints assemble vary; but they remain churches in every place whether at Corinth, Ephesus, Antioch, or Houston.

The New Testament church is not a human organization, such as the church at Rome, the church of England, the church of Scotland, or a denominational institution. The material of which it is composed is regenerated and converted people. The center around which these regenerated and converted people are gathered is the Person of Jesus Christ. The power by which they are gathered is the Holy Spirit. The authority by which they are kept in order is the word of God.

In the early churches, there were no denominational divisions. All were baptized believers, but there were no Baptists. They had presbyters—elders—but there were no Presbyterians. They had methods

in their assembly meetings, but there were no Methodists. They had bishops, but there were no Episcopalians. There were congregations of saints, but there were no Congregationalists.

The early churches were known by their geographical locations, not by the names of men, doctrines, or denominations. If men love doctrines more than Christ, they are rationalists. If they love ceremonies more than Christ, they are ritualists. If they love their works more than Christ, they are legalists. If they love the local church more than Christ, they are sectarians. Churches represent localities, not doctrines. When any leader, doctrine, creed, or organization becomes the center for drawing people together, then its center is something other than the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The names which God applies to His people include the whole body of Christ: believers (Acts 5:14), saints (Phil. 1:1), brethren (II Thess. 1:3), disciples (Acts 20:7), children of God (John 11:52), and Christians (Acts 11:26). The Holy Spirit, through Paul, rebuked the Corinthians for using names of men (I Cor. 1:10-17). Christianity's first name was called "this way" (Acts 9:2; 22:4), "that way" (Acts 19:9, 23; 24:22), or "the way" (Acts 24:14). The prophets of the Old Testament foretold the purpose of God which Christ would fulfill as "the way of the Lord" (Is. 40:3; Mal. 3:1). John the Baptist proclaimed himself a voice commissioned to prepare "the way of the Lord" (Matt. 3:3). Christ said, "I am the way" (John 14:6), and "narrow is the way" (Matt. 7:14). Paul spoke of "the way" before Felix (Acts 24:14). Christianity is the way of life, peace, and truth (Luke 1:79; Acts 16:17; II Pet. 2:2).

Authorized To Observe Ordinances

The local aspect of the church has been given the authority to observe ordinances. The early churches were strict in their observance of God's appointed ordinances.

Baptism is the ordinance of God, and it is not administered by the local church. It is executed by gifted men. Saul, when regenerated and converted, was baptized by Ananias without the consent of the church at Jerusalem (Acts 9:17, 18). The Ethiopian eunuch, who was converted by the preaching of Philip, was baptized without the consent of either the saints in Jerusalem or those in Samaria (Acts 8:38).

The Lord's Supper is an ordinance of God to be administered by the local church (I Cor. 11:17-34; 5:9-13). The bread is a symbol of Christ's life, not of His death. Bread, therefore, precedes the wine. The body was prepared for Christ in which He could fulfill God's will for man. The unleavened bread typifies His impeccable Person. The wine typifies Christ's shed blood. The cup of I Corinthians 11 refers not to the containing vessel, but to the wine contained. Discipline in the local church is connected, in a very real way, with the observance of the Supper (I Cor. 5:11; 11:27-33).

Public teaching of the word by a God-appointed, church-appointed elder is an ordinance of God to be administered in the local church (Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11; I Tim. 5:17). There are private teachings, such as parents teaching their children (Deut. 6:6, 7; Eph. 6:4), masters instructing their servants (Eph. 6:9), and older women teaching the younger women how to be good wives and mothers (Titus 2:3-5). Public teaching is to be done by men of God who are specially gifted for this work.

Singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs is an ordinance of God to be administered by all the saints in the local church (I Cor. 14:15; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). This ordinance is to be rendered by all the saints in unison (Ex. 15:1; Matt. 26:30; Acts 16:25). This eliminates professional performers and performances. It is to be performed with grace in the heart (Col. 3:16), whether or not one has skill in his voice. It must be discharged with the renewed spirit (I Cor. 14:15). It must be executed with understanding (I Cor. 14:15). It must be accomplished with God in view because true singing is “to the Lord” (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). This eliminates showmanship performances to attract people.

The time and place for the observance of God’s ordinances are set. The time is the Lord’s day (I Cor. 16:2; Acts 20:7). Christians do not keep the seventh day as the Jews did. The sabbath was observed before, during, and after the law was fulfilled. We have authority for keeping the first day of the week. It consists of the seventh part of our time and must not be desecrated. Souls, as well as bodies, need feeding and dressing. The place is either the building erected for this purpose or some place appointed by the saints. A church gathered in the home of Philemon (Philem. 2). The saints in Troas assembled on the third floor of a building (Acts 20:6, 7). Bethel, the house of God, is an Old Testament type of the place where God meets with His people (Gen. 28:10-22).

Its Purpose

The purpose of local churches is to carry out the commission of Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:18-20). Local churches are to proclaim the gospel. This is God’s appointed means of calling out the elect (II Thess. 2:13, 14; II Tim. 1:9-11). They are to teach believers to observe all things (Matt. 28:19). They are to edify and equip the saints (Eph. 4:11-16).

The commission is to be continued until the end of the age (Matt. 28:20). This age will end when the “fullness of the Gentiles be come in” (Rom. 11:25). God is now visiting the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name (Acts 15:14). After the elect Gentiles have been saved, Christ will return to deal with the elect remnant from among the Jews (Is. 6:13; Acts 15:16; Rom. 11:26). The mission of the local churches will be completed at the end of this age.

Exists For The Universal Aspect Of The Church

Local churches exist for the sake of the universal aspect of the church. They are the visible manifestations of the universal aspect. The church at Jerusalem is called “the whole church.” Persecution arose in Jerusalem, and Christians who were members of that church were scattered. They went everywhere preaching the word. Many local churches were organized in various localities from the one church at Jerusalem.

Scripture refers to a particular church in a particular location, but it also refers to churches in Galatia and various places. The church at Corinth is called the body of Christ (I Cor. 12:27). She is also called the whole church (I Cor. 14:23). The church at Corinth is not called “the” church at Corinth. This church was a local body of saints, though the local body was not the whole universal body of Christ, which is His fullness composed of all the members of Christ.

Membership is twofold: (1) In a spiritual sense, the Christian is united to the body of Christ by the Spirit of regeneration. (2) In the physical sense, the person united to the body of Christ joins a local, institutional church to carry out Christ's commission. The spiritual sense is solely the work of God. The physical sense is the responsibility of the Christian. Union with Jesus Christ does not lessen one's responsibility in regard to membership in the local church. It qualifies one for such membership (Acts 2:41-47; 4:32; I Cor. 6:9-11; 16:1, 2; II Cor. 2:9; 8; Eph. 4:11-16).

God works out in time His eternal purpose through local churches. The universal aspect of the church finds expression in local churches. Local churches desire to be practically what the universal church is actually. Failure to reach perfection does not deter the desire for it (Phil. 3:12-16).

Membership in the heavenly organism does not cause Christians to neglect their earthly duties (II Tim. 4:1-8). Every person called by the grace of God is responsible to commit himself to other called-out persons in a specific locality. The 3,000 saved on the day of Pentecost committed themselves to the local church at Jerusalem (Acts 2:41-47). A person who has been called out of the world by God's grace will seek out a church where the truth is proclaimed and commit himself to that congregation. He will give support to the ministry through that local church, which has been commissioned to carry out the great commission. The child of God is first committed to fellowship with the Lord and then to fellow Christians in a local church.

Local churches are here for testimony (I Tim. 3:15). The universal aspect of the church is the vital principle, which is invisible, except as it is manifested through local churches. You see the house which is like a clock: it shows the time of day, but the clock would be useless without its works. Jesus Christ is the Head of the church, and born-again believers are members of Christ's body (I Cor. 12:12-27). The only thing known about Jesus Christ, who is invisible, is made known through local churches by the grace of Jesus Christ reflected in our lives. The work of the brain is made visible by the works of the human body, and the invisible aspect of the church is seen only as the Holy Spirit works in and through His people.

The human body is useless without the spirit—the life principle (James 2:26). Furthermore, local churches are useless without the principle of life that comes from union with the universal aspect of the church. They are not related to the universal church as hands to the body, but as a microcosm to a macrocosm. The church is one (I Cor. 12); even though, by its increase, it is enlarged to include all the elect of God. As the rays of the sun, though many, are one luminary, as the branches of a tree, though many, are all connected to one trunk, so the church, though she extends her rays throughout the world, is one body.

CHURCH AUTHORITY

Jesus Christ, as Head of the church, has the sole right to give law and institute ordinances for observance by the church. The will of the sovereign God is the guide for His people. His word is their only system of laws. His glory is their ultimate end.

Authority In The Universal Aspect Of The Church

The universal aspect of the church shall have authority. This authority shall be executed by the perfected church who will become the “legal administrative assembly” of the kingdom. The kingdom is the object of the covenants. The eschatological aspects of the Abrahamic covenant concern the seed and the land (Gen. 17). The patriarchs all died in faith, not having received the promises (Heb. 11:13-40). They passed from time into eternity before the promises concerning the seed and the land were fulfilled. But their deaths did not deprive them of the fulfillment of those promises. The Mosaic covenant was only an outgrowth of the Abrahamic to make the Jews more aware of sin. This covenant was made faulty because the Jews turned that which was meant to be an aid to a redeemed people into a means of salvation. God’s covenant with Israel was to promote a longing for the promised Deliverer (Ex. 19). He, the Mediator of the new covenant, will bring the promises to their completion (Heb. 8:8-13).

The Davidic covenant foretold who would sit on the throne. The land promises were enlarged and confirmed in the Palestinian covenant (Deut. 30:1-10). Now, the seed promises are made the center of the Davidic covenant (II Sam. 7:1-20). Three things were made sure to David: (1) The house was a symbol of posterity. (2) The throne was a type of authority. (3) The kingdom foreshadowed the sphere of rule (Luke 1:31-33).

The kingdom was one of the great themes of Biblical prophecy. It is to be understood in its literal, covenanted aspect as predicted by the prophets. This kingdom is not so indefinite in its meaning that we are unable to tell when it shall begin. It will be introduced at the second coming of Jesus Christ (II Tim. 4:1).

The kingdom was one of the leading subjects proclaimed by John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, and the disciples. John the Baptist, a martyr, was an appropriate forerunner of the crucified King (Matt. 3:2). Christ continued to proclaim: “...Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:17). The disciples’ messages were adapted to confirm the belief in a coming kingdom (Acts 2:14-36; 3:12-26; 15:13-17; II Tim. 4:1; James 2:5; II Pet. 3:1-14; Rev. 19). The rejected King must be honored in heaven before He will be honored on the earth,

Local churches are operating in this age for the purpose of calling the elect to become heirs of the kingdom. The “keys of the kingdom” must be viewed as authority to be executed by the perfected body in the kingdom (Matt. 16:18-17:12). The kingdom must be interpreted eschatologically, rather

than soteriologically. In the kingdom, Christ will openly exercise His power, outwardly manifest His exaltation, and visibly bring all things into subjection to His Divine will.

Authority In The Local Aspect Of The Church

A local church is not complete in order without duly appointed officers. A church incomplete in order cannot be thorough in administration. Local church government, therefore, is absolutely necessary for the development and protection of the saints. Since the perfected church of eternity will be under government, how much more important it is for imperfect saints on earth to be under government. No society, civil or ecclesiastical, can survive without authority.

The simplicity of the organization in the local aspect of the church is set forth in Philippians 1:1—“PAUL and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.” There were the saints of God as a whole at Philippi, the bishops, and the deacons. Any authority added to this goes beyond the Scriptures.

Scripture does not condone the addition of educational directors, music directors, counselors, etc. Pragmatism—whatever works is right whether or not it is Scriptural—has taken over professing Christendom. This is the reason religionists are turning to psychiatrists and psychologists. They also seek help from this professional organization and that professional organization to teach them new methods whereby they might be successful in the eyes of the world. They ordain ministers of education, music, youth, etc., to carry on the work. These religionists say, “But it works and we will use those methods that work.” The word of God is falling on deaf ears of professing believers because they are part of the statistics rather than being a part of the family of God. Their being a part of statistics causes them to embrace the statistics. They do not have the grace of God to analyze the truth, if it is given.

The functions of government in the local church are entrusted to God-ordained men. Church officers are under the authority of Jesus Christ; hence, to either go beyond or fall short of Christ’s rules is to incur guilt. Government that was instituted in the local churches during the days of the apostles was patterned, to a great extent, after the former economy.

The Levitical system had rulers. Rulers, under the name of elders, existed during the time of Moses (Ex. 17:5; 18:12; 24:1, 9; Num. 11:16; Deut. 25:7-9; 29:10; 31:9, 28). There were elders during the time of Joshua (Josh. 7:6; 8:10; 20:4). In the time of Judges, when men did that which was right in their own eyes, there were elders (Judg. 2:7; 8:1-14; 21:16). The time of the Kings was also a period in which there were elders (I Kings 8:1, 3; 20:7, 8). The institution of the synagogue service used elders as its leading officers (Matt. 16:21; Mark 8:31; 14:43; 15:1; Acts 4:5; 23:14; 25:15).

Elders were ordained in every local church to watch over the sheep (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). The officers of the New Testament church were designed after the synagogue, rather than the temple. The first converts to Christianity were Jews; therefore, they saw the relevance of the synagogue system of government. The moral, not the ceremonial, system was consistent with the spiritual nature of the New Testament church.

In the synagogue, there was a system established for the promotion of its work. This system included weekly instruction, discipline, and the care of the poor. In the local church, a similar work was carried on by Christians. The gifted men of the churches were to feed, discipline, and guide the sheep.

The Greek word *diakonos* means one who renders service to another, executes a commission, a deputy, a minister, a devoted follower of Christ, or a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. This word is used five ways in the New Testament: (1) It is used in the sense of a devoted follower of the Lord Jesus (John 12:26). (2) It refers to a minister of the gospel in a special sense (Eph. 3:7). (3) The word is used in connection with persons who serve in the capacity of deacons (Acts 6:2). In this sense, it refers to a specialized ministry but not on the same level with those who minister to souls. Serving souls is more important than serving tables. (4) It is used in the sense of the enforcement of law—a minister of civil authority (Rom. 13:4). (5) It is used in connection with women who serve in their capacity within the church (Rom. 16:1). Conclusively, the word *diakonos* is used more generally of one who lived and worked in the service of Jesus Christ, but it is also used in a particular sense. Its use in a particular sense applies to elders.

Further definition of the Greek word *diakonos* is given in Matthew 20:26—“...whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister.” The law of first mention will explain the meaning of minister. The Lord Jesus ordered His disciples not to conduct their relationships in the manner of the Romans. The way to achieve greatness is to take the place of a lowly servant. One does not achieve greatness by aspiring authority without taking a lowly place. God will take that person He has chosen who takes the lowly place and give him a greater opportunity. The Lord used His ministry as an example of the truth He spoke concerning lowliness and greatness. He came not to be ministered unto

but to minister and give His life as a ransom for many. Greatness is not achieved in fame or fortune. True greatness is found in the way of the Lord.

Extraordinary Officers—

The authority in local churches is divided between extraordinary and ordinary officers. These officers are recognized by their extraordinary and ordinary gifts.

There is a distinction between extraordinary servants, such as apostles, prophets, and evangelists, and ordinary servants in the church today, called elders/bishops/pastors. The chief characteristic of the apostles was that they were not affiliated with a local church and did not remain in a particular one. The apostles had an extraordinary gift. They had the care of all the churches (II Cor. 11:28). The extraordinary officers were given for the foundational work of the churches (Eph. 2:19-22). There have been no apostles since the death of the apostle John. A prophet was an extraordinary servant. He had been given an extraordinary gift for the establishment of the church and for giving us the Scriptures. The evangelist was also an extraordinary servant who went along with either an apostle or a prophet as his helper. The work of extraordinary servants was not strictly with a local church. They had the care of all the churches for the establishment of churches. After the churches had been established by the extraordinary servants, ordinary servants were set in each local church.

The apostles were foundation builders, or church planters (I Cor. 3:6, 10; Eph. 2:20). The word apostle is used three different ways in the New Testament. It is used of the twelve who, throughout the New Testament, held a special and distinct position (Matt. 10:1-6; I Cor. 15:5; Rev. 21:14). There were apostles other than the twelve (I Cor. 15:7, 8; Acts 14:14; Gal. 1:19; I Thess. 2:6). Matthias was chosen to fill the vacancy left by Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:15-26). Paul saw Christ, but there is no record of his accompanying with the Lord Jesus. Paul was the one especially chosen to carry the message of Christ to the Gentiles (Acts 26:16-20). The word apostle is used in the sense of a messenger in Philippians 2:25. The apostles all had some things in common. They saw Christ (I Cor. 9:1). They were called immediately by Christ (Gal. 1:1). Their guidance in giving the Scriptures was infallible—led into all truth (John 16:13). They were able to impart gifts (Acts 8:17; 19:6; II Tim. 1:6). They had the power to deliver an individual to Satan (I Cor. 5:5).

The prophets were closely associated with the apostles in the foundational work of the churches (Eph. 2:20; 3:5). They were men of inspired utterance; therefore, their work was of great importance in the early days of the churches. They were able to foretell the future; but like Old Testament prophets, their chief work was to tell forth God's message. The prophets brought a particular message from God to meet a particular situation. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the prophets were used to give us the oracles of God.

The evangelists were assistants of the apostles who had the care of all the churches. They have been referred to as missionaries of the church. There are only three references to evangelists (Acts 21:8; Eph. 4:11; II Tim. 4:5).

The three extraordinary gifts of apostles, prophets, and evangelists ceased from the churches with the passing of the first generation Christians. Moses was God's chosen officer to give the law to Israel, but he had no successor. As Moses had no successor to his gift because there was no further need for a law-giver, there were no successors to these extraordinarily gifted men because the foundational work was completed with their passing. Are men continuing to erect what has already been finished? Are men continuing to add to the perfect law of liberty? False prophets and teachers are trying to add to God's perfect work for His own, but they are only adding to their just condemnation.

Paul the extraordinary servant and Apollos the ordinary servant illustrate the distinction between extraordinary and ordinary gifts (I Cor. 3:6). Paul planted and Apollos watered. Paul laid the foundation and Apollos erected the superstructure.

Ordinary Officers—

Ordinary officers are given for the superstructural work of the churches. These officers are selected from within the churches. Their chief concern is the sheep in those assemblies where they are appointed (Acts 6:1-6; 14:23; 20:28; Titus 1:5-7). The ordinary servants are deacons and elders. The chief characteristic of an ordinary servant is that he is appointed from within the local church of which he is a member. His service is restricted to that church, and he must remain in it. There is no Scripture for professional preachers who go from church to church.

DEACONS: Ministers of the physical needs of saints are referred to as helps (I Cor. 12:28). These ministers are sometimes called deacons (I Tim. 3:8; Phil. 1:1), but the Greek word is the same as

ministers. They are not called deacons in Acts 6. The function of ruling is never represented as belonging to them. Scripture speaks of ruling elders, but never mentions ruling deacons. Deacons are not helps in government. Helps and governments are presented as two different offices (I Cor. 12:28).

Elders and deacons constitute the two offices in the local aspect of the church. Deacons take care of the physical needs in the church. The need for these ministers arose in the Jerusalem church when controversy occurred between the Jews and Gentiles over the aid given to their widows (Acts 6:1-6). This first church had persecution from without and disorders within among its members. The problems within must be solved. The church's first responsibility is a spiritual ministry, and her second is to care for the physical needs of those within the congregation.

The Jerusalem church had grown from the eleven disciples to a multitudinous number. Contrary to the custom in the majority of churches today of selecting a great number of men, they selected only seven men to care for the qualified, needy widows of the church. It seems that most of the seven chosen as servants to deal with the problem in the Jerusalem church were Greek. They had been observed by the church as a whole and had proved themselves to the congregation. Their manner of life was above reproach, and they manifested an interest in helping people. Their selection by the people pleased the apostles who then appointed them to relieve the physical burden of the church, that the apostles might give themselves to the spiritual ministry.

Neither elders nor deacons need to strive for recognition in a church. Qualified men will prove themselves by their lives. There will be no question in the minds of those already in leadership capacity that these should be the ones appointed.

The appointment of deacons preceded that of elders. The deacons were selected to serve tables that the apostles could give more time to serving souls. Any institution that is interested more in the physical than the spiritual is not a New Testament church. It is an organization, not an organism.

Deacons are not appointed to rule. Nevertheless, their work must not be taken lightly. Their qualifications are similar to those for elders (I Tim. 3:8-13). However, deacons are not required to be apt to teach. The deacons will be going from house to house; hence, they must be grave. Due to the nature of their work, they must not be doubletongued. They must not be addicted to wine. Since they handle and distribute money, the deacons must not be greedy of filthy lucre. If a deacon robs God or misappropriates funds in any manner, he cannot hold the mystery of the faith in a good conscience.

Deacons must first be proved before they are set aside. Men are not selected to be set aside in the office for approval. They are first proved and then selected.

The deacon's wife must have special qualifications due to the nature of her husband's work. Most problems in a church arise over physical rather than spiritual things. Hence, a deacon's wife could easily disqualify him. She must not repeat what her husband has told her. Like the elders, a deacon must be the husband of only one wife. He must also rule his house well.

Those who use the office of deacon well acquire for themselves a high standard of confidence. They gain a noble standing in the church. A large measure of faithfulness is a high measure of spiritual health.

Stephen, who began as a deacon (minister in a menial capacity), later publicly taught (Acts 6:8-7:60). Philip, who began as a deacon, became an evangelist (Acts 21:8; 8:5-40). Therefore, he preached and baptized as an evangelist, not as a deacon. There is no record of the other five deacons serving in any capacity other than deacons.

ELDERS: There must be rulers in every orderly society. Scripture does not render rulers unnecessary in the churches. Since Jesus Christ is not the author of confusion, He gives elders to rule the churches. These elders possess no arbitrary authority, because they themselves are under authority. They have authority only to announce what Christ has said. They have no right to enact laws of their own. Therefore, the authority administered by these Divinely appointed men is performed ministerially.

The saints of God are obligated to follow elders only as they follow the Lord. Two serious errors must be corrected in the thinking of most believers. The first deviation has to do with men who unscripturally go beyond their Divinely appointed authority; they lord it over God's heritage. The second mistake concerns an unscriptural disregard for authority that is properly executed.

The local church is not complete in order without duly appointed elders who are called leaders, rulers, and guides in the local church. If she is incomplete in order, she cannot be complete in administration. The two Greek words *hegeomai* and *proistemi* should be understood in relation to rulers in the local church. The former word means to lead, go before, be a leader, rule, command, and have authority over. It is closely related with *hegemon* which means chief or the chief leader. This word is translated by the words princes, rulers, governors, etc. The word is used in relationship with the local aspect of the church (Acts 15:22; I Thess. 5:12, 13; Heb. 13:7, 17, 24).

The second Greek word in relation to rulers in the local aspect of the church is *proistemi*. It means to set before, set over, appoint with authority, preside, govern, be a protector of, be a guardian, give aid, care for, and give attention to. This speaks of one who stands in front of or before, a leader, a protector, a champion, or a patron. The ruler is one who rules with diligence—one who leads (Rom. 12:8). The leader will never ask the people he is seeking to lead to do anything he himself is unwilling to do or makes no effort to accomplish. The bishop must rule his own house well, leading, guarding, caring for, and guiding the members of his own household (I Tim. 3:4). The elders that rule well should be counted worthy of double honor (I Tim. 5:17). Rulers maintain, or engage in, a good work (Titus 3:8, 14).

Known By Various Titles: The word "elder" primarily means an older man; but it is also used when speaking of those who preside over the churches. Elder denotes the dignity and mature, spiritual experience and understanding of the office that is held. This does not indicate an elderly man but a man of mature thinking and spiritual experience.

The word "pastor" represents the care and rule of the work to which one has been appointed. He shepherds the flock. Metaphorically, he is the presiding officer of an assembly. Jesus Christ is called the chief Shepherd (I Pet. 5:4). He is the Head under whom the undershepherd operates.

The word “bishop” comes from the Greek word *episcopo* which means inspection, oversight, and visitation. This word is used four times (Luke 19:44; Acts 1:20; I Tim. 3:1; I Pet. 2:12). The noun form is translated by the word “overseer” (Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1; I Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:7). A bishop is one who oversees the sheep under his watchcare. The verb form of the word means to look upon, inspect, oversee, look after, and care for. The word is used only twice (Heb. 12:15; I Pet. 5:2). Jesus Christ is the chief Shepherd, and God’s appointed men are undershepherds who inspect the sheep under their care. The person in this position is not one who merely occupies the pulpit. The works of inspection, oversight, and visitation go together. The three must be fulfilled to properly administer the office of bishop.

“Bishop” is a term that speaks of relationship. When people and overseers alike understand that there are no professional preachers, that pulpit committees are only talent scouts, and that elders are appointed from within and remain and serve in their local church, there is correct church polity. These men are there by God’s appointment. However, there are many man-called, man-hired preachers who have never been appointed by God. Ordaining someone to the office of bishop without relationship to a church is like making someone a husband without a wife or making him a father without any children. There is no such thing as a bishop over other bishops.

The titles of “elder,” “bishop,” and “pastor” are synonymous. Men filling this office are called elders in Titus 1:5 and bishop in Titus 1:7. Paul addressed those gathered at Miletus as elders, bishops, and pastors (Acts 20:17, 28). These ordinary servants would carry on after the extraordinary servants had fulfilled their service and had been called home to be with the Lord. The Greek word for overseer comes from the same word as bishop. The elders were admonished to feed the flock. The word feed comes from the same Greek word which is translated pastor. It means a shepherd. The purpose of the shepherd is to feed, guide, and direct the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made him the overseer.

“Pastors” and “teachers” are found in the same gift (Eph. 4:11). The prophets and teachers of Acts 13:1 are not synonymous with the pastors and teachers of Ephesians 4:11. Prophets and teachers denote two separate and distinct offices in Acts 13:1. But pastors and teachers of Ephesians 4:11 are two aspects of the one office. The Greek word for some precedes pastors, but it does not precede teachers. The Greek construction is entirely different from Acts 13:1. Pastors are not only shepherds to care for the flock of sheep but they must also be qualified to teach. There is a parallel to Ephesians 4:11 in I Timothy 5:17—“Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in word and doctrine.”

In the first deviation in the church from the primitive institution, sundry offices that were not of Divine institution were introduced. Professing religion is filled with such unscriptural offices today. Some who suppose that teacher is a distinct office in the church from elder/pastor/bishop use three arguments to try to prove their supposition: (1) Teachers are joined with pastors (Eph. 4:11). (2) They are joined with prophets (Acts 13:1). (3) Teachers are set in the church (I Cor. 12:28).

An examination of the Scriptures used by those who suppose that teachers are distinct from elders/pastors/bishops will prove that they are synonymous terms. Acts 13:1 and 2 record the history of that which took place before elders were appointed in the churches. The time element must be considered. There were apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teachers—distinct offices—before the appointment of elders in every church (Acts 14:23). The elders were appointed in every

church on Paul's second, not his first, missionary tour. After two years of spiritual growth and development, elders were appointed.

Plurality: God's will is that a plurality of elders be appointed in each local church. Titus was to ordain elders in every city. The elders in Ephesus were called to Miletus. The first New Testament reference to the appointment of a plurality of elders is Acts 14:23.

One among the elders is in charge. Each of the letters to the seven churches in Asia was addressed to the messenger in charge of each particular church. The letter to each church was written to the angel of the church. The Greek word used for angel means messenger, as well as a heavenly creature. The letters were not given to a heavenly creature but to the messenger of each local church. The word is singular. The angel is not a bishop in the sense of someone being over a diocese. Some believe the angel refers to a heavenly creature that received the message from the Lord and delivered it to the messenger of the church. However, it is not a messenger "by" whom the letter was sent to the preachers but a letter sent to the preacher at each place. The Old Testament angel, or messenger, was used to denote either a prophet or a priest of God—God's representative. The New Testament angel, or messenger, refers to the minister.

The letters of Revelation were not sent to the churches per se but to the messenger in charge of each church. The Lord sent the message to the presiding messenger; and in turn, the messenger was responsible to deliver the message to the people. Like Aaron the high priest who was responsible for the sanctuary of Numbers 18:1-7, God held this messenger responsible for the other elders and the people within each particular church. Hence, there was a presiding messenger over each of the seven churches.

The priestly family of the Old Testament was responsible for the sanctuary and the services thereof. Aaron and his sons were responsible for any irregularity in worship. The same is true of the elders in the New Testament church. The priestly family must judge every irregular thing within the precincts of the tabernacle. The priestly family was a gift to the people of Israel, and elders are God's gift to the church. The priestly family was God's gift for Israel's spiritual welfare (Num. 18:6). The same principle is taught concerning elders (Eph. 4:11-16). God has given His ministers to the church for her edification.

The minister's responsibility is the spiritual service. It is a "service of gift"—a bestowed service. Neither Aaron nor his sons could be lifted up with pride because of his office. It was bestowed by God, and their failure to assume the responsibility of the office would be punished with the judgment of God. Theirs was an awesome position.

Elders are to labor in word and doctrine (I Tim. 5:17). It is not necessary that all the elders in the presbyterate have the same degree of qualifications for preaching and teaching. The word especially of I Timothy 5:17 suggests a special class of elders within the presbyterate. All elders rule and must be capable of teaching. Some labor in word and doctrine. They who labor manage the affairs of the local church excellently. Therefore, priority is given to those who labor in preaching and teaching. They are worthy of double honor because of their labor. They who give themselves wholly to the ministry deserve more support than the qualified, needy widows in the church (I Tim. 5:9, 10). As the ox that treads the corn is worthy of eating, the laborer in the work of the Lord is worthy of his reward (I Tim. 5:18). Care should be shown by God's people for the elders who care for their souls.

Elders are concerned with the conduct, divisions, and discipline of the saints (I Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:7, 17; I Thess. 5:12, 13). Their ruling is an act of office and has a special relation to the saints. Elders are over believers in the Lord (I Thess. 5:12). This authority is of a spiritual nature and is to be spiritually executed—“...they watch for your souls...” (Heb. 13:17).

God-appointed: Qualifications for ordinary officers are God’s gifts to the churches (Eph. 4:11; Rom. 12:6-8; I Cor. 12:28). The gift of teaching is given to elders (Eph. 4:11). A bishop must be apt to teach (I Tim. 3:2). “Apt to teach” means skillful teaching, which includes positive and negative teaching. Only those who are teachable are qualified to teach.

The gift of teaching is the gift of authority given to the person God has called to publicly proclaim the truth. Public teaching is a God-appointed office. Paul was appointed a teacher of the Gentiles. The Greek word for teacher means one fitted to teach. The word is equivalent to “Rabbi” (John 1:38; 3:2) and “Rabboni” (John 20:16), which means one having authority over another as a servant. This word is used in the sense of leadership in the church (I Cor. 12:28, 29; Eph. 4:11). The Jews called themselves teachers (Rom. 2:20). There are also false teachers (II Tim. 4:3).

Paul stated that God would set gifts, among which teachers were included, in the church (I Cor. 12:28, 29). “Pastors and teachers” is the title given them in Ephesians 4:11. Teacher is an appointed office (II Tim. 1:11). A non-appointed teacher may be a false teacher (Rom. 2:20; II Tim. 4:3). The office of teacher must not be coveted. Without God’s appointment, a person will come into greater judgment (James 3:1).

The Greek word *didaskolos* is used only for a teacher with authority for public teaching. Teachers were first set apart unto this office and not made teachers because they had talent to speak (I Cor. 12:28). They had been set apart by the Spirit of God for this particular work; therefore, they were given unto it and set in the church. Their setting aside in the church was not being set aside to teach a Sunday School class. There was no such thing at that time. All Christians are equal as the result of the work of grace, but all in Christ have not been called to be apostles. All are not prophets, and all are not teachers in the sense of having the authority to teach. A teacher is one to whom God has given the authority to publicly teach, or proclaim the word of God (Eph. 4:11).

The gift of teaching is the distinguishing characteristic between public and private teaching. Lawful things must be done lawfully. Those who teach without the gift, which is God’s appointment, usurp the office, as the unsent prophets of Jeremiah 14:14—“Then the LORD said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart.” “I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied” (Jer. 23:21).

There is a difference between witnessing and preaching. This is illustrated in the appearance of the word “preaching” of Acts 8:4 and the word “preached” of Acts 8:5. The former comes from the Greek word which could be translated gossiping the gospel, address with good tidings, or announce good tidings in conversation. Every child of God should be able to give a reason for the hope within him and be able to defend the faith. The result of persecution that arose in Jerusalem was that the members of the first church were scattered, and they went everywhere preaching—gossiping in a conversational manner—the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. The word “preached” of Acts 8:5

means a herald, a proclaimer of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Every believer is responsible to witness to the grace of God in a conversational manner. But God has called some to herald the gospel of Jesus Christ. Conclusively, there is a difference between private witness and the public proclamation of the word. The Bible does not authorize public lay preaching.

The gift which God gives to His chosen servants is to be exercised: "...stir up the gift of God..." (II Tim. 1:6). The word "stir" is used in the sense of keeping full flame. The gift can be neglected by failure to give attendance to reading, exhortation, and doctrine (I Tim. 4:13-16).

The apostle Paul was sovereignly called. The principle in Paul's call was the same as it is in the call of every minister. I was not called in the same manner as Paul, but the reality of my call is just as real as his. God sovereignly calls men to proclaim the gospel. There are no negotiations. There is no waiting for the man's consent. God made Paul willing, and He makes every God-appointed man willing. Necessity was laid upon him to proclaim the gospel.

Saul's call to conversion included his call to the ministry. His call to the ministry was included in his experience on the road to Damascus. They were not two distinct calls. God did not first call him to discipleship and then call him to herald the gospel of Jesus Christ: "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus" (Gal. 1:15-17). Someone may ask if there was not a delay between the conversion and the call to the ministry of Philip and Stephen. But that poses no problem. Stephen and Philip were among the six men chosen to take care of the physical need of the widows in the church at Jerusalem. But both were elevated above that responsibility to become preachers. There was not necessarily a delay. We do not know what had taken place in their hearts and minds.

The record in Acts 6 is not the sovereign call of God but the call of the "local church" to an office. There is a difference between the sovereign call of God and the call of the local church. (1) The call of God is in essence. The call of the church is to operation. There is a time of special preparation between God's call and the time for a local church to call the man to the office of elder/bishop/overseer/undershepherd/pastor-teacher for operation in that office. One is to the title of the office and the other is to operation by the individual in that office. There is not one call to salvation and another to service. The call to the ministry is not a delayed aspect of the call to salvation. Saul's question was, what will you have me to do? Every Christian is called to service when he is called to discipleship. Every call to salvation is at the same time a call to service. (2) God's call is inward. The church's call is outward. (3) God's call is from Jesus Christ directly. The church's call comes indirectly. The call of the church is still of the Lord, but it comes indirectly through the church to the individual God has called. (4) Both are derived from Jesus Christ. The first is necessary to the discharge of the office in the latter.

If some young man in the church should go to his pastor and say, "Preacher, I believe God has called me to be a herald of the gospel of Jesus Christ," the pastor should not argue with him. The preacher does not know his heart. He may not appear to have many qualifications. Saul of Tarsus did not have many either, but God sovereignly called him. He was a man who had been persecuting the church of God. Barnabas had to bear witness to his salvation that he might be received by the church in Jerusalem. If a young man says God has called him, that is fine; however, that does not

mean that he will be called or recognized as an elder by the church. It is a tragedy for a church to call a man who has never been called by God to preach. Many who claim to be called to preach are not open to instruction.

Every one God calls will find a place in God's service, because God does not make mistakes. He does not call more than He needs. This does not mean that God has not called someone who is being prepared, and the local church recognizes that gift. He is being prepared to occupy that position at a later date—at God's appointed time.

Paul was a chosen vessel to bear Christ's name. (1) He bore the name of Christ in his intellect. This is where the knowledge of the Lord begins—hear and understand. His capacious mind had no room for anything else. He counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord. (2) He bore the name of Jesus Christ in his heart. He had a treasure in an earthen vessel. (3) He bore the name of Jesus Christ in his ministry. Immediately he preached Jesus Christ. Paul was obedient to the heavenly vision. When God sovereignly calls a person and makes that person willing, that individual will be obedient to the call of God. There will be no delayed action.

Paul was a minister according to the dispensation of God: "Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God" (Col. 1:25). In this instance, he does not say, "I have been made a minister by the grace of God," but that is assumed. The word dispensation comes from a Greek word meaning the management of a household, a steward, a manager, or a trustee. What had taken place in the life of the apostle Paul was because of the dispensation—the stewardship—of God. This ministry was given to Paul by God in His stewardship to fulfill the word of God. The word fulfil comes from the Greek verb which means to fulfill, accomplish, or proclaim fully.

The apostle Paul vividly explained his feeling about the ministry in I Thessalonians 3:1—
"WHEREFORE when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone." The Greek word for "forbear" is translated cover, silence, and conceal, but it also means to endure and to put up with. By the grace of God, Paul was willing to endure all things for the elect's sakes (II Tim. 2:10). Neither Jeremiah nor Paul could conceal what God had committed to them. They were willing to endure all things for the purpose of proclaiming that which had been committed to their trust. Some of Jeremiah's afflictions are recorded in Jeremiah 20 and 23. Some of Paul's are recorded in II Corinthians 11:23-33.

The remembrance of past sins was not a source of sorrow but of thanksgiving to the apostle. He acknowledged that God enabled him—invigorated and strengthened him (I Tim. 1:12). The Greek verb used here is used in Philippians 4:13 in the sense that He is my present enabler. Paul was admitting that God gave him strength to enter this ministry and God sustained him as he continued therein. God counted him faithful before He counted him trustworthy and before He put him into the ministry. Observe the order. God enabled Paul, strengthened him, found him trustworthy, and put him into the ministry. God did not first put him into the office and then watch to see if he would prove trustworthy. These qualifications are "prerequisites" to the office and not something to be proved "in" the office. This verse is not the boastful exaltation of an untried soldier but the calm, joyful expression of the gratitude of a veteran. Paul was a veteran minister when he gave this advice to young Timothy.

The pleasure of God precedes all else in the call to minister in a special sense. Paul was protected until Christ was revealed in him for the purpose of proclaiming the grace of God to the heathen: “But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus” (Gal. 1:15-17). These verses in the Greek show that “God” is the subject and “was pleased” is the predicate. Everything else in the verses is subordinate to this subject and verb. “To reveal His Son in me” is the object. The purpose clause is “that I might preach Christ among the nations.” “Having separated” and “having called” are verbal adjectives, or participles, that describe the main verb “was pleased.” God was pleased to separate Paul, and God was pleased to call him.

The Greek word for “pleased” used by Paul in Galatians 1:15 is also used to describe the Father’s good pleasure at the baptism of the Lord Jesus and at His transfiguration (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). God is also pleased to save them that believe by the foolishness of preaching (I Cor. 1:21). The same word is used to describe Paul’s pleasure in his infirmities (II Cor. 12:10). It is used of God’s pleasure in all fullness dwelling in Jesus Christ (Col. 1:19).

The eternal purpose of God is His pleasure. God’s purpose is accomplished when and as it pleases Him, not when and as it pleases men. The purpose of God was manifested in the life of the apostle Paul. As Saul of Tarsus, he was a persecutor of the church. While rising to a height in the Jews’ religion, he persecuted God’s people. God in His providence was protecting and preparing him. In his education at the feet of Gamaliel, he was being prepared for the job to which he was later separated after the grace of God came into his heart.

God was pleased to reveal His Son in Paul (Gal. 1:16). “To reveal” is the direct object of God’s pleasure. The revelation of God in Paul is a subjective, not an objective, revelation. The subjective revelation of God’s grace was in Saul of Tarsus who became Paul the apostle that he might preach the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ to the heathen. The epistle to the Galatians emphasizes this subjective revelation: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). “My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you” (Gal. 4:19). It is true that the message received by Paul was not from men, but it was a direct revelation from God. Before that message was revealed objectively to Paul, the grace of God was subjectively revealed to him. He could not have appreciated or received the objective message until he was subjectively right with God.

God separated Paul from his mother’s womb. The Greek word for “separate” means to separate, sever from the rest, set apart, and select. This is a participle which modifies God. The significance of Paul being separated from his mother’s womb was that he was “sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called” (Jude 1). The word “sanctified” of Jude 1 should be translated “having been loved.” Having been loved and having been kept by God the Father in Jesus Christ, Paul was preserved by God’s providence until God revealed His grace subjectively to Paul in regeneration and conversion.

Paul was called by God’s grace to participate in the privileges of the gospel. Saul of Tarsus was preserved from his physical birth to his new birth, and then he was called by God to participate in

proclaiming the glorious gospel that God committed to his trust. The origin of the call is the electing love of God. Nothing can survive to eternity but that which comes from eternity. The means of the call is the efficacious grace of God. Without the effectual working of God's grace, Paul would never have been called. The manner of the call was by a revelation of Jesus Christ to his soul. Paul did not first call upon the Lord, but the Lord called Paul. Paul did not express a desire for this ministry and then the Lord called him, but God called him and he responded to the call.

Paul was called to be a minister that he might preach Jesus Christ among the heathen. Paul was to become a showcase for Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. He was sent by God to the Gentiles to preach the good news. The man God uses is not the respectable, selfish, average religionist. He is not the mere teacher of doctrine, whose teaching is not a part of himself, who studies how little he can give and yet be safe. He is not a coward but a person who is willing to endure all things for the elect's sake (II Tim. 2:10). God's men are men of the Book. During his imprisonment, Paul requested that Timothy bring his cloak, the books, and the parchments (II Tim. 4:13). He wanted his coat to keep himself warm, some books to feed his mind, but most of all the parchments to feed his soul. Paul was inspired, but he wanted books. He preached thirty years, but he desired books. He had been caught up to heaven and heard and seen things that were not lawful for him to utter, yet he wanted books. He had written the major part of the New Testament epistles, but he wanted books. Books, however, are nothing unless they are read, marked, learned, and practiced. The difference between knowledge and wisdom is that knowledge puffs up but wisdom edifies. Knowledge is something learned. Wisdom teaches how to put into practice what has been learned.

Paul did not confer with flesh and blood. He received his message directly from God, not even from the other apostles. There is a practical application in this for us. It is valuable to be taught by men, because God has given men to the church for her edification (Eph. 4:11, 12). But a Christian must not rest, satisfied with mere human teachers. He has the Holy Spirit within to teach him (I John 2:20, 27). There are some who refuse to be taught by men. They want to be taught only by God. This is a spirit of independence which is the spirit of pride. But there is an independence which is a spirit of humility. It is an independence which is conscious of the inadequacy of everything human to satisfy the longings of the soul.

With Paul, there was no opportunity for counterinfluence. He needed to counsel with neither himself nor others. Promptness of action upon the known will of God is important. In matters of prudence, second thoughts are best; but in matters of conscience, first thoughts are best. When the will of God is not known, second thoughts are better. Second thoughts in matters of conscience will lead to worldliness either without or within. God uses obedient Christians who act upon the known will of God without counting the cost.

Qualifications: There are three categories in the qualifications for bishops listed in I Timothy 3:2-7—(1) The bishop must be blameless in his personal life. (2) He must be blameless in his family life. (3) He must be blameless in his public life. The word "blameless" comes from the Greek word which means not open to censure and above reproach. It is used three times in the New Testament (I Tim. 3:2; 5:7; 6:14). Blamelessness is not sinlessness. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Person who ever walked this earth as a sinless human being. Therefore, a bishop is not absolutely perfect; but his personal life, family life, and public life should be above reproach. Blamelessness heads the list of qualifications. Therefore, he must be blameless in all the qualifications enumerated.

The bishop should be the husband of one wife. The three principle views of this statement are that he may have one at the time; he should be once married; and he must be married. Those who adopt the first view say that one wife at the time opposes polygamy. The second view is Scripturally true. Some say you cannot say the bishop must be married because that would forbid a bachelor and a widower from being a bishop. There are things to consider on this point of view. How can a bachelor be an elder in the Biblical sense when he has no way of manifesting his ability to rule well his own home? If he cannot rule his own house, how can he rule the house of God? There are some things involved in leadership that would disqualify a bachelor or a young man from being an active bishop within the church family. Hence, there is an element of truth in the latter view.

The literal translation of “the husband of one wife” is “one wife husband.” The reason the bishop must be a “one wife husband” is that he is in a unique place and must set the proper example. The bishop is the undershepherd of Jesus Christ, and he must represent Jesus Christ in a manner that will honor Christ and His church at the same time.

Paul did not contradict himself when he spoke of marriage generally and stated that the person whose mate has died has the right to remarry. But when he discussed service in I Timothy 3:2 and 12 and I Timothy 5:9, he did not speak of one wife at the time. The bishop, deacon, and qualified widow must have been “once married.”

The bishop must be blameless in his vigilance. He will be at peace if he keeps his mind stayed on the Lord (Is. 26:3). The bishop must be blameless in his sobriety. God gives the man of God a sound mind so that he may overcome the spirit of timidity (II Tim. 1:7). The man of God should be fearless, bold, and courageous as he stands for the truth of God that has been committed to his trust. The elder must be blameless in his good behavior. Soundness of thinking must be accompanied with sound judgement and a well-ordered life. The elder must be blameless in his hospitality. This kind of hospitality was evidenced by Lydia when she opened her house to God’s servants after the Lord opened her heart (Acts 16:14, 15).

The overseer must be blameless in his aptness to teach. The teachable elder will become a skillful teacher who is unwilling to commit the truth of God to other elders unless they have the capability of being teachers (II Tim. 2:2). The elder must not be given to wine or be a striker. There is only a short step between excessive wine and eagerness for combat. The bishop must not be covetous (I Tim. 3:3). A person overly concerned about money is disqualified (I Pet. 5:2). He must be blameless in patience. The man of God should be a peacemaker, but he must not make peace at any price. The Lord Himself did not come to send peace but a sword and to set relatives and so-called friends at variance with one another (Matt. 10:34-36).

An elder must be blameless in his home life. If he cannot rule his own house, how can he rule the house of God? The Greek word for ruling in one’s home is the same word used in connection with ruling in the church. He must have his children in subjection, and they must be found faithful (Titus 1:6). The faithfulness of the elder’s children means the elder rules his house so that his children are not unruly or riotous.

Faithful elders espouse the people of God under their care to Christ (II Cor. 11:2). There is no spiritual adultery committed between overseer and sheep. Faithful elders do not deceive the sheep. They declare unto them the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). They are diligent in their work.

Their vocation is serving the Lord (I Tim. 4:12-16). In the instance of elders who cannot serve full time, their avocation is only to assist them in their vocation. On one occasion, it was necessary for Paul to work at the trade of tentmaking to support himself (Acts 18:1-6).

Faithful elders take heed to all the flock (Acts 20:28). They manifest neither prejudice nor partiality (I Tim. 5:21). They love the people to whom they minister more than they love their positions and prospective opportunities. This eliminates personal and denominational ambitions. Recognition of the Holy Spirit's leadership removes the desire to move to "greener pastures" (Acts 20:28). Faithful elders will not forsake the sheep when the wolves make their appearance (Acts 20:29, 30; John 10:12, 13). Faithful elders possess power, love, and sound minds (II Tim. 1:7). Power is regulated by love, and love is strengthened by power. A sound mind is added to regulate power and love. Faithful men of God do not decline duty because of threatened danger. They love Christ and His people so much that they are willing to lay down their lives for them.

Ability to expound the basic truths of God's word is absolutely necessary for elders (Acts 20:27; Matt. 28:20; Eph. 4:15). The desire of elders is that believers live in a settled state (I Pet. 5:10). To preach and not instruct is to build without a foundation. Unsettled saints do not grow. In order to properly instruct Christians, elders must be sound in doctrine (Titus 1:9). There can be no sound speech without sound doctrine (Titus 2:8). The consequence of sound doctrine and sound speech is a sound mind (II Tim. 1:7). Discipline must be understood as consisting of both instructive and corrective teaching. Proper instruction in the whole counsel makes ruling less difficult.

Elders must be willing to spend and be spent for the cause of Christ (II Cor. 12:15). Without being equipped by the spirit of self-sacrifice, the arduous labor of studying, instructing, correcting, disciplining, and visiting will soon become an exasperating task.

Paul was ready not only to preach but to suffer. Agabus the prophet demonstrated to Paul what awaited him in Jerusalem. Paul's companions wept and pleaded with him not to go to Jerusalem because of the persecution he would encounter upon his arrival there. The apostle rebuked them for trying to convince him not to go. He would not be convinced because it was the will of God for him to go. He was ready not only to be bound but to die at Jerusalem for the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 21:8-14). Suffering precedes glory (I Pet. 4:13; 5:4).

Paul was ready to be offered. His life was being poured out as a drink offering (II Tim. 4:6). The apostle looked at his present when he said: "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand" (II Tim. 4:6). He looked at his past: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (II Tim. 4:7). He looked at his future: "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (II Tim. 4:8).

Paul was actually already being offered. The same Greek word for offered is used hypothetically in Philippians 2:17—"Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all." But it was actual in II Timothy 4:6. Paul was being poured out as a drink offering. Before the sacrifice under the Levitical system was offered by the priest, wine was poured upon it. This was called the drink offering. The pouring of the wine indicated that the only thing remaining was the stroke of death itself. This is exactly what Paul was saying. His departure was at hand. The only thing remaining for him was the stroke of death. Paul's life had been a living

sacrifice, but now the drink offering was the final seal upon his sacrificial life. If a man is not ready to die, he is not ready to live.

A number of Paul's characteristics are listed in Acts 20:17-35. He was obedient—serving the Lord. He was constant—with them in all seasons. He was humble—serving the Lord with all humility of mind. He was tender—with many tears. He was faithful to the word of God—he kept back nothing that was profitable. He was tested—served the Lord with trials. He was thorough—taught not only publicly but gave private instruction from house to house. He was evangelical—spoke to both Jews and Gentiles. He was determined—bound to go to Jerusalem. He was clean, or innocent, from the blood of all men—pure from the blood of all. He was instructive—declaring the whole counsel of God. He was firm—charged the disciples. He was a watchman—clear in his warning as to what would take place after he left them. He was free from covetousness—coveted no man's silver nor gold.

Paul's fourfold look is stressed in Acts 20:17-35—(1) his backward look (vv. 18-21), (2) his forward look (vv. 22-24), (3) his inward look (vv. 26, 27), and (4) his upward look (v. 32).

In his backward look, Paul reminded the elders from Ephesus that they knew he had been with them at all seasons. His purpose was not to call attention to himself but to what the grace of God had made him. Paul had previously told the Ephesian church that grace had been given him who was the least of all saints to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (Eph. 3:8). He was willing to have his record scrutinized. False accusations against the apostle caused Paul a great deal of trouble. The greatest burden of any true minister is not just standing in the pulpit and delivering a message. It is not witnessing to lost people. The greatest burden is dealing with the foolish things that God's people believe and practice.

God has special claim on the service of those He has called to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ. They must serve the Lord with all humility of mind, with tears, and with trials (Acts 20:19). Paul's attitude was the Lord first, others second, and himself third. That is always the true order that should characterize the servant of the Lord. Fidelity to the Lord is sure fidelity to others. Individual Christians often misunderstand the minister when they become backslidden and begin to think God's servant should give them more time. They fail to understand that the promotion of God should come first.

Three fidelities of a minister are fidelity to the Lord (Acts 20:19), fidelity to truth (Acts 20:20), and fidelity to men (Acts 20:26). Christ without truth is an illusion. Truth without Christ is a body without a soul. Emphasis on duty to men without Christ or truth is to point men only to the things of this earth which are fast passing away and are incapable of lifting them and their sights to those things that are eternal.

The apostle Paul's manner of service should be emulated by elders. He served the Lord with all humility. The word "humility" comes from the Greek word meaning lowliness of mind and deportment and modesty. Paul also served the people with humility of mind. He did not assume an air of superiority, even though he was an apostle. He spoke often as a man, and he never exercised his authority unless it was absolutely necessary.

Paul's service with tears was an example to overseers (Acts 20:19). True manliness is tender as well as firm. During the performance of unpleasant things, the minister must be severe and at the same time tender. The tenderness may not be manifested at that given point in time; nevertheless, it is there. The Lord Jesus Christ wept in the garden of Gethsemane, and He wept at the grave of Lazarus. Among the four references to Paul's weeping, two applied to himself and two applied to those who had real concern, love, and appreciation for what this man was doing for the cause of God as a whole and for them as individuals in giving them the warning of Acts 20:19, 31, 37, 38.

Paul's service with trials showed bishops that they must serve the Lord in spite of their trials. The word "temptations" is the Greek word for trials. It is the same word used in I Corinthians 10:13 and James 1:2. Paul was tried many different ways, but in the midst of his trials he never gave up. When someone feels the urge to preach out of persuasion or out of being moved emotionally, he might think God has called him to do something when in reality he has only been called to serve the Lord. A young man went to his pastor and said, "Pastor, I feel God has called me to His special service." The pastor asked how long he had been a Christian. He answered, "Three years." The pastor then asked whose service he had been in for those three years. Paul endured many trials and persecutions, even to being forsaken by those closest to him, but this did not cause him to give up.

Elders must serve the Lord faithfully and keep back nothing that is profitable to the spiritual life of the flock over which the Lord has made them the overseers. Paul had no reticence or reservation concerning the truths of God's word. How many people refuse to give the whole counsel of God in particular situations because they do not want to have to suffer for their stand on certain things? They foolishly call it tactfulness. Actually, it is cowardice and compromise. Every true man of God will let people know what he believes the Book of God has to say, regardless of where he is or what are the circumstances. He will not withhold truth whether the people hear or whether they forbear. Paul served untiringly, publicly, and from house to house. He preached publicly because he was a proclaimer. When it was necessary, he was willing to go from home to home and deal with those persons more minutely concerning the things he was proclaiming publicly.

A retrospective view on service to the Lord with all humility, in tears, trials, faithfulness, and untiredness will help the minister to be prepared for a prospective view. Paul was facing the future, and he knew what the future held for him. The Lord had told him when He called him to preach that He would show him what great things he must suffer for His sake. Paul wanted to go forward and not backward. He was not perplexed by the uncertainties of the future, not knowing what would befall him upon his arrival at Jerusalem. Although he knew he would suffer persecution for the cause of Christ, Paul wanted to go on. Some of us would like to look back and repair the mistakes we have made, but that is impossible. We must redeem the time by making the most of the opportunities that lie ahead, as well as that time we are now facing.

Paul's life was one of faithful determination (Acts 20:24). He had firmness of purpose in the midst of trials—"none of these things move me." It is the gift of God to think deliberately, speak distinctly, and act wisely. When Paul said, "none of these things move me," he was elevated. He was looking down on circumstances.

The minister's life must be one of self-sacrifice—"neither count I my life dear unto myself." If life is not dear to one, all circumstances of life cannot be very great to him. The only way a person can say what Paul did is by having a life that supersedes physical life. Spiritual life enables one to look

down upon circumstances and say that none of these things move me, and I count not my life dear unto myself. This is a life of self-sacrifice.

Paul's life was one of perseverance—"that I might finish my course." The Greek word for "course" of Acts 20:24 means the course of life or the office to which one has been called. At this point, Paul's course was unfinished. He must still go to Jerusalem and suffer for the cause of Christ. In II Timothy 4:6 and 7, his course was finished. He had completed the work to which he had been called. There is a solemnity about finishing anything. Paul persevered until his course was completed, and by the grace of God every God-called minister will persevere until his race is run. Paul desired to finish his race with joy. Joy is the great thing for which the heart always craves. This joy is not the transitory gratification of the moment, but it is the eternal joy of heaven. The apostle did not mind facing death (Phil. 1:19-23). To Paul it was wonderful to preach but more wonderful to enjoy the presence of Christ.

Paul's introspective view revealed to him that he was innocent, or clean, from the blood of all men (Acts 20:26). The reason he was innocent from the blood of all men was because he shunned not to declare to all men the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). You might get the impression that in giving counsel Paul was talking about advice, but he was not. "Counsel" comes from the Greek word meaning purpose or intention and not mere advice.

Paul's upward look is recognized in his farewell address to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:32). He had come to the place in the fulfillment of his office of apostleship that he could no longer bear their burdens. He knew that death was eminent to him, and he knew this was his final message to the Ephesian elders. Therefore, he commended them to God and to the word of His grace. The commendation was not in the sense of praising them. A literal translation of the Greek word used here is "I lay you down beside the sovereign God." He was committing them to God and to the word of His grace. The apostle's faithfulness in giving the truth to men, as they are, enabled him to lay the Ephesian elders down beside the sovereign God and the word of His grace.

Human Response: There is balance in the appointment of elders. There is a human response to the Divine call: "THIS is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work" (I Tim. 3:1). The balance is found in the Divine inauguration by the Holy Spirit: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost [Spirit] hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28).

How can we know when the human response and the human appointment are what they should be and then say that both have been the fruit of Divine inauguration? These three elements are in perfect harmony when the will of God is being accomplished in the life of the local aspect of the church. Only the person who has the qualifications discussed in I Timothy 3:2-7 will have the desire for eldership from correct principles. Desire separate from these qualifications is improper. The Holy Spirit makes no mistakes. A novice is disqualified for this office (I Tim. 3:6).

He who has been called of God will desire the office not for secular dignity, a post of honor, or an easy life. He desires a good work. This is not a work to which one volunteers. It is not a call to human need. But it is response to a Divine call. No person has the right to be a public teacher unless he is occupying the office of pastor. Human intention must not be substituted for Divine initiation.

Every man called of God to preach becomes so consumed with his work and so dedicated to the study of Scripture that he never has any difficulty finding something to preach. He does not come to the very last moment without something from the Lord to give the people over whom the Holy Spirit has made him the overseer.

The sense of compulsion to preach literally consumes the man God has called to preach. His ministry is not a profession but a possession. It is not chosen as one would choose a profession. When a man has been called of God, necessity is laid upon him to preach the gospel. He does not care what he is doing, how much money he is making, or what kind of recognition he is getting. He is willing to surrender all because the necessity to preach the gospel is laid upon him so heavily that he cannot do anything but preach.

The Greek word for “necessity” of I Corinthians 9:16 also means constraint, compulsion imposed neither by external conditions of things or from a law to duty. The Greek word for “laid,” in Paul’s declaration that necessity was laid upon him to preach, means to lie upon, to be placed upon, to press or urge upon, to be imposed by law, to be imposed by necessity. Paul’s statement that necessity was laid upon him to preach conveys the idea that none should enter the ministry who can keep from it. A person should never be encouraged to pursue the ministry. The man called of God can be neither encouraged to nor discouraged from preaching. Preaching is the consuming thing in his life. God-called ministers are not men who may or will preach, but they “must” preach the gospel.

Although Paul differs from ministers today in his direct, supernatural commission, he does not differ in the reality of obligation. It is true that he was called in a supernatural manner, but the reality of one’s call is just as real as it was with Paul. The Divine call is not an external label that may be worn but a living movement in a living man. The Divinely called man is controlled by a compulsion that drives him on to the fulfillment of his commission. As with Paul, the God-called man is under necessity to preach, and woe to him if he does not.

The fulfillment of the obligation to the Divine call is without glory—“For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of” (I Cor. 9:16). The person called of God to preach is conscious of three things: (1) He has imperfections; (2) the gift to preach is from God; and (3) he is totally dependent on the Holy Spirit. The one called to preach disclaims all praise in the discharge of his mission. Everything in the nature of the gospel prevents self-glory. No one ever discovered the glorious truth of the gospel by his own reason. The gospel is declaratory of human depravity. The gospel is demonstrative of infinite condescension. Everything in the nature of the work of the ministry prevents self-glory. The man called of God to preach feels his unworthiness of such high honor (Eph. 3:8). He feels his incompetence for such work (II Cor. 2:16). He feels his inability to bring about success (I Cor. 3:6). Necessity is laid upon the individual by God. The love of Christ constrains him. The response is not optional with the one God calls. The one called is under bond of absolute necessity, and ability is given him by God.

There is a sense of judgment—serious consequences—if the call is disobeyed: “Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel” (I Cor. 9:16). A man called of God to preach cannot be disobedient to the call. A disobedient life is a miserable one. Preaching because of compulsion is not preaching because of expediency. Preaching because of expediency would be running without being sent. But preaching because of necessity is running because one has been sent. Jeremiah warned us about

those who run without being sent by God (Jer. 23:21). Some denominations and “evangelists” plead with young people to dedicate themselves to “special service.” This appeal leads to many running without being sent. Many times a young man can be moved to a conversion experience and feel he should do something for the Lord. He mistakes this feeling for a call to preach. He later learns that he was not called of God.

Paul was a pressed man. He was not a volunteer. He was laid hold of (Phil. 3:12). He entered the ministry as a captive. His was the determination of the Divine Sovereign. His preaching was not optional. If it were, he could have boasted. These same things are true of every God-called man.

The man God calls to eldership has a sense of debtorship. Life begins with a debt. Paul’s debtorship prepared him to be ready to preach the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The debtorship of Romans 1:14 is not indebtedness to God but to mankind. The Greek word translated “debtor” is used three ways in the New Testament: (1) one who owes another (Matt. 18:24), (2) one who is held by some obligation or responsibility to perform a duty (Rom. 1:14), and (3) the sinner of whom God can demand punishment as something due him (Luke 13:4). The way to determine how the word is used is to study it in the light of its immediate context.

Every descendent of Adam comes into this world with a debt to God that he cannot pay. He is a sinner by nature, conceived in sin, born in iniquity, and later becomes a sinner by choice. What hope then is there for the person so indebted? The Lord Jesus has borne the debt for the sins of the elect. Since He paid the debt in full, the sinner who is regenerated and converted is released from that debt which he could never pay. God is the righteous Judge, and the sinner is the unrighteous person. Recipients of grace have the Daysman who stands between the holy God and themselves (Job 9:33). They are no longer under the penalty and condemnation of sin.

The forgiven sinner is clear in the book of God’s judgment, but he is deeply indebted. He is not indebted to God but to others to proclaim the message that God has committed to his trust. The most devoted Christian might as well understand that it is as impossible to repay his Redeemer for what he has received after the forgiveness of sin as it was as a sinner to pay for his crime before he received that forgiveness. His indebtedness to others can never be liquidated. The debt of the forgiven sinner to others is a debt of gratitude to God for what He has done for him. The indebtedness of gratitude results in the realization of indebtedness to others to proclaim the message that God has committed to His own.

The God-called man does not look to the time the debt to others should be paid. He delights in the act of paying it. Like Paul, he is ready—prepared—to preach the gospel (Rom. 1:14, 15). This applies primarily to Paul, but a principle is established that applies to every child of God. In one sense, Paul did not owe the Gentiles anything. He surely did not owe them gratitude. He had been mistreated and maligned, and he suffered at the hands of the Gentiles. His gratitude was to God, but the expression of that gratitude was to be made known to those who were in need of the gospel of Jesus Christ. His indebtedness to the Gentiles was solely on the ground that he had received blessings from God that made it imperative that he proclaim those blessings to the Gentiles. They were in the same condition that he had been before the grace of God came into his heart.

The minister, as well as every child of God, has been blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:3). On the other side, men outside of Jesus Christ stand in need. This

may be illustrated in the following manner: If “A” gives me property to be used to help “B”, my indebtedness is not to “All but to ”B”. God has given us spiritual blessings in Christ. Our indebtedness then is not to God but that which has been given to us should be given to those in need.

There is an intimate connection between indebtedness to God and indebtedness to others. The first was one we could not pay, but Jesus Christ paid it for us. The second is to others. God committed His truth to Christians. Can we really estimate the value of the truth of God that has been committed to our trust? The magnitude of our debt is immense. Its justice is absolutely indisputable. Its charge is urgent. Failure to discharge our duty will bring the same consequences as those brought upon the disobedient Israelites. The truth that has been committed to us will become as stale to us as the God-given manna did to the Israelites. We will then have a tendency to misinterpret truth and in some cases it becomes poison to our spiritual influence. Manna was provided daily for the Israelites until they came to the day before the sabbath when they gathered enough for that day and the sabbath. Any manna that was hoarded became stale and corrupted. This shows that Christians cannot study God’s word thinking they have gained all truth concerning a certain subject. We should rejoice in the word of God at each hearing, and the word of God should give us a sense of urgency to witness for Christ.

There is no statute of limitations canceling the debt to preach or to witness. There is a statute of limitations in our laws upon which many people rely. They long for the day when a particular indebtedness will no longer be held over their heads, when they will not be obligated to make payments because they finally weathered out the statute of limitations. Preaching the word must be in season and out of season (II Tim. 4:2). This principle is primarily for the preacher, but it also applies to the witnessing of every Christian. The minister heralds the gospel, but individual Christians gossip the gospel in a conversational manner (Acts 8:4, 5). In Christianity, there is no particular time in which we should proclaim the message of God. It is always in season and always applicable.

The man who desires the office of bishop desires a good work. Desire may be actuated by a variety of motives. There is a difference between lawful and unlawful desires. A different Greek word for “desire” is used in I Timothy 1:7 than in I Timothy 3:1. Those who had turned aside from true faith desired to be teachers of the law, but they did not understand what they said. Therefore, their wishing to be teachers was from an incorrect motive. Contrarily, the correct desire for the office of overseeing leads the God-called man to aspire oversight with all its responsibilities and its laborious work. The lower motive of I Timothy 1:7 is incorrect, but the higher motive of I Timothy 3:1 is correct.

The desire for the office of bishop is the fruit of God’s gift (Eph. 4:11). The gift of overseeing is an ordinary gift. Where the gift of the apostles was to organize, establish, and lay the foundation, the ordinary gift is given to the local church. It is a day by day work in a particular church. The gift is of gratuitous character. It comes from God.

The gift of teaching is of neither nature nor training. More is required than natural ability and special training to qualify for eldership. The basic question of eldership precedes a call to the ministry. Many men can preach sermons publicly, but they do not have the gifts required for eldership. It is much easier to study and preach than it is to shepherd the flock. Elders must first be

recognized for their gifts to proclaim the word. Men today have the false idea that the ministry is for academics who are ordained to the ministry. With them, shepherding is an afterthought. The first deviation of the churches from the Biblical order was the introduction of sundry offices for which there is no Scriptural foundation.

The desire for the work of eldership is a consuming desire. It means more than life itself. Fulfillment of this desire does not lead to an easy life. It is not the mere preparation and declaration of messages. The tremendous responsibilities of caring, ruling, leading, building, guiding, inspecting, visiting, etc., are all included. The elder must be qualified to lead, feed, endure hardships, and persevere. The work the God-called man desires entails many duties. It is not a post of human honor, prophet, or an easy life. It is always in season (II Tim. 4:2). This work must be performed faithfully (I Cor. 4:1, 2), fervently (Acts 18:25), boldly (Eph. 6:19, 20), and uncompromisingly (Acts 20:24-27).

Elders must take the oversight willingly (I Pet. 5:1-3). They must not feel as though the work was forced upon them. They must not be led into the work by constraint from friends or relatives. The Divine call comes from within. Elders must not enter the work for the sake of filthy lucre. In many places the things of God have been turned into a racket to make money. Elders are not to drive but lead the sheep with the word of God and by Christian example.

Paul's appointment to minister to the Gentiles did not make him proud. He counted himself less than the least of all saints: "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8). A plentitude of grace is a cure for pride. Pride is a bastard if it is not sanctified by grace. Paul was proud that he was a child of God, but his pride was sanctified by the grace of the sovereign God. Paul gladly accepted the title of minister. Only by a twofold gift of God was it possible for him to be a minister. He was a minister by the effectual working of God's power (Eph. 1:19). By the grace of the gospel and by the power of God, the apostle Paul was effective in the work to which he had been called. Ministering was Paul's vocation, not his avocation. It was the principle, not the secondary thing in his life. He gave himself to that work to which he had been appointed.

The separation of elders from the world is essential to their witnessing to the world (II Cor. 6:14-16). Separation is both positive and negative. It can be determined by answering the following rules: (1) After I have preached, will I be able to say to those with whom I have been associated that I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God? (2) Have I been, or am I now, associated with a movement that is seeking to build the very things I have sought to destroy? (Gal. 2:18). (3) Do I act like Jehoshaphat who helped the ungodly and hated them that loved the Lord? (II Chron. 19:2). (4) Has my liberty become an occasion of stumbling to those who are weak? (I Cor. 8:9). (5) Is it not prohibited to fish in a place that is marked dangerous? The very appearance of evil must be avoided (I Thess. 5:22).

Training: The elder's academic training should be received wherever possible, but his spiritual training must come from God through the local church.

Saul was well versed in the Old Testament Scriptures. He had academic training at the feet of Gamaliel. He had an analytical mind and was able to put things together. His keen insight into the law was certainly no disadvantage to him after he was apprehended by grace. He then saw things in

the light of the indwelling Holy Spirit. He saw all the Old Testament prophets, their testimonies, and all the Old Testament shadows and types in their true perspective. They all pointed to Jesus Christ, and Christ was the substance of all the types and shadows of the Old Testament. Nevertheless, Paul spent three years in special training before he ever went out proclaiming the gospel. A three year period expired between the “certain days” of Acts 9:19 and “after many days” of Acts 9:23. During that time, Paul was in Arabia receiving special training for his future ministry (Gal. 1:15-19). There was a period of special preparation before he began his ministry.

When a person has received a certain amount of academic training, it does not take long in the school of Jesus Christ to be prepared, especially for the work to which the individual has been called. Paul was a recluse shut up to God for three years in Arabia. There, he saw things in a different light than he had. He knew the Old Testament Scriptures mentally, but he did not know them spiritually. He had a human understanding of Divine things, but now, by the grace of God, he had a spiritual insight into spiritual things.

God’s men in every age have been spiritually prepared. The Levites were in charge of the spiritual services under the Levitical system. Twenty-year-old men served as apprentices for a period of time before they ever officially served in the capacity to which they had been set apart (Lev. 1-4). The apostles were effectually called to discipleship and to the apostleship. They were called from fishing, mending nets, tax collecting, etc., but they served three years under their Instructor, Jesus Christ. Paul was one born out of due season with a special ministry to the Gentiles. He had seen the Lord, but he spent three years in special preparation for the work to which God had called him. Timothy and others were taught by the apostle Paul. Men today who are called of God to preach must receive special training. The younger elders receive that training from men who are their elders in the ministry in the local church.

Appointed To A Local Church: The appointment of elders to local churches is done extraordinarily and ordinarily. The first elders to local churches were extraordinarily appointed. The apostles ordained elders in every church (Acts 14:23). The number of churches and their duly appointed officers reveals the instructive fact that local churches stood directly responsible to Jesus Christ. The first elders were appointed, not by popular election, but by the apostles to whom authority for foundational work was delegated (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). Acts 20:28 gives a balance of truth in the appointment of the first elders. Although they had been appointed by the apostles, Paul spoke of them as having been made overseers by the Holy Spirit.

Elders today are appointed to local churches in an ordinary manner. By the use of the word “ordinary”, the extraordinary work of the apostles is omitted. In the early churches, elders were appointed by those already exercising spiritual authority (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). These men should be appointed by men of spiritual maturity already serving as elders in the local church.

Elders alone cannot authoritatively appoint men to preach. God gives the gift (Eph. 4:11). That gift must be recognized by spiritually mature men serving in the office of eldership who know what is required to serve in that capacity. God, therefore, gives gifted men by His Spirit and by a call in providence. The local church will also recognize the God-given gift of eldership in a man. The gift imparted to an elder continues to be the work of the sovereign God (Eph. 4:11; Acts 14:23; 20:28; Phil. 1:1; I Tim. 3:1).

Pastors constitute the proper authority in the local church (Heb. 13:7, 17, 24). These rulers possess no arbitrary authority. They are under Divine authority. Jesus Christ is the Head of each local church, and elders are subordinate rulers.

Authority administered by Divinely appointed elders is performed ministerially. People who think themselves wise and find their elder's ministry dull manifest their ignorance (I Tim. 1:7). They may be wiser, but God has not appointed them to occupy the position of eldership. A lawyer at the bar may be as knowledgeable as a judge on the bench, but he dare not sit on the bench. The person who sits in the pew may be wiser in many respects than the man who has been appointed as the spiritual leader, but he dare not occupy that office.

The great responsibilities of elders are set forth by the mention in the Scriptures of certain elders. Timothy was an elder in the Ephesian church (I Tim. 1:3). Paul left Titus in Crete to set things in order in the church there (Titus 1:4, 5). Evidently, Erastus served as an elder in the Corinthian church (II Tim. 4:20).

Timothy was charged by Paul to rebuke, before the church, the elders found to be sinners (I Tim. 5:20). The apostle himself had previously rebuked Peter in this manner (Gal. 2:14). Elders investigate one another. When one does not conduct himself according to the truth of the gospel, or according to any principle that should be upheld, the other elders are responsible to rebuke the erring one.

The charge of I Timothy 5:21-25 was given to Timothy, not to the church. Timothy was charged to show no preference in the appointment of elders (v. 21). He should not have an inclination for one particular person over another just because he liked him personally. The Scriptural qualifications of each man must be considered.

Timothy should not quickly give his approval of any man. The act of laying on hands simply means identification and expression of one's appreciation for and well-wishing to the person who has been appointed to that particular office. Ordinary servants can convey no power. An elder must not act hastily in the selection, appointment, or recognition of men for this most awesome position of eldership.

The elder who has preached many years has a serious responsibility. He must be very cautious about the person who says he feels he has been called to preach. It is a serious matter for one to say God has called him to preach and then he fails to make any effort to fulfill the call. The governing elder must be careful to commit the things of God to "faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (II Tim. 2:2). The bishop who gives his approval of one who proves unworthy becomes a partaker of that person's mistakes. In appointing pure men, the bishop keeps himself pure.

Some men's sins are so evident that they prove themselves unfit for eldership. They are disqualified. It is true that all the sins of the children of God will be revealed at the judgment seat of Christ (I Cor. 4:1-5; II Cor. 5:10). But this is not the teaching of I Timothy 5:24 and 25. The subject of elders and the judgment that must be exercised by them in that position in their selection and appointment of men was the subject of discussion. Judgment must be based upon the basis of what is seen. The teaching is that some who have been in the church for some time and have proved themselves are qualified only after looking beneath the surface.

Elders come from within the church. The person who takes the position of overseeing within the church should be an individual within that church who knows the problems there and has proved his worth to the church.

Jesus Christ is the Head of the church. As such, He has the sole right to give laws and institute ordinances for His people. Hence, the will of God is the guide of His people. His word is our only system of law, and His glory is our ultimate end.

Jesus Christ is the opener and closer of the door for service (Rev. 3:8). The addition of the word "door" proves that this refers to service and not to salvation (Acts 16:6-10; 18:9, 10; 19:21-23; I Cor. 16:8, 9; II Cor. 2:12). No man or group of men hold the door to Christian service. The door is the prerogative of Jesus Christ.

The average church appoints a pulpit committee to seek out someone to occupy a pulpit that has been vacated. Pulpit committees are nothing more than talent scouts listening to different preachers and selecting one who, to them, has the greater talents. He is then brought before the church and becomes their presiding elder. This is not God's plan. When God opens the door of service, no man can shut it. The door may not appear to be opened very wide, but the Lord will open it sufficiently for His servant. The God-appointed man in God's appointed place cannot be intimidated. No man can interfere with God's appointments.

A Public Teacher: There is a distinction between the public ministry of the word by those whom God has given authority to fulfill the office of teacher and the private ministry of the word by Christians. A public teacher is one the Holy Spirit has set in the church.

The history of the public teaching of the word of God will emphasize the distinction between public and private teaching. In the patriarchal period, the message of God was first proclaimed by God Himself to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. Our first parents then proclaimed the message to their posterity. Public worship was established in the times of Enos (Gen. 4:26). Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of Christ's second advent (Jude 14). Noah, the eighth, was a preacher of righteousness (II Pet. 2:5). Abraham had the message preached to him; and in turn, he preached the message (Gal. 3:8). During the Mosaic dispensation, there was a tabernacle where God met with His people. Priests and Levites were appointed to instruct the Israelites. Under the first and second temples, prophets were the interpreters of the law and the instructors of the people. The law and the prophets were until John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus Christ. During His sojourn here, Jesus Christ was a teacher/preacher. Following the time of Christ and during the last days of His public ministry, the Lord called and ordained the apostles and sent them forth, first to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and then He commissioned them to go to the world (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-20; Luke 24:46-48). Conclusively, the public ministry of the word is a standing ordinance of God. It must be proclaimed until every person for whom Christ died has been gathered unto Himself (Eph. 4:11-16; II Pet. 3:9).

There are private teachings, such as parents teaching their children (Deut. 6:6, 7; Eph. 6) and masters instructing their servants (Eph. 6:1-9). Private instruction is also given to instruct a person more perfectly in the way of the Lord (Acts 18:24-28). Older women privately instruct younger women but not in spiritual things. They teach them to be better wives and mothers (Titus 2:3-5).

The public ministry of the word is for public good and general usefulness. This is not a device of men for sinister ends and with selfish and lucrative views, but it is by the appointment of Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:7; II Tim. 1:11). Formal training is of no avail to the man who has not been made a minister by the appointment of Jesus Christ. He does not qualify to publicly teach. Barnabas and Paul were set apart for the work to which God had called them by the Holy Spirit. The church in Antioch simply recognized that these were the two God had selected to be sent (Acts 13:1-4). Since the public ministry of the word is a good work, it must be pursued by the gifted person God calls. The importance of pursuing the good work is emphasized by Paul's exhortation to follow after perfection and to follow that which is good (Phil. 3:12; I Thess. 5:15).

The Scriptural view of elders eliminates all lay teachers and lay preachers who perform publicly. Their witnessing and teaching is to be done privately (Acts 18:24-28).

God's plan is that Jesus Christ is the Head of the church, and the man is the head of the woman. The man is given the responsibility of leadership in the church and in the home. Therefore, women are disqualified as teachers (I Tim. 2:11, 12). The Biblical concept of elders removes all women from the place of usurpation (I Tim. 2:9-15; I Cor. 14:34, 35). The place of women is in their husbands (I Cor. 11:2-16). God's extraordinary employment of women in the past does not disannul the ordinary rules by which He wishes His people to be bound.

A woman has no right to intrude any church and teach anything: "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence" (I Tim. 2:11, 12). According to God's order, women have no public place as teachers.

The creation order is the norm for society in every age. God first created Adam and then Eve to be Adam's completion. Adam said, "...This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" (Gen. 2:23). Woman is man's completion. Man's existence before the woman and woman's derivation from man announced God's mandate for woman's subjection. God made woman to be man's helper. The role of women in today's world is defiant to God's creation order. The woman's place is in the home. The man's place is to earn the living, to protect and provide for his wife.

There is one sense in which a qualified widow ministers in the church (I Tim. 5:3-10). She assists the deacons in caring for widows in the church who are 60 years of age and older and who have no children or grandchildren to care for them. The woman serving in this capacity must also be 60 years of age or older. She must have shown by her life that she is well reported of for good works. She must have brought up children, manifested hospitality, relieved the afflicted, and followed every good work. Such a woman would visit other widows with problems improper for deacons to discuss with them. She would be a desolate widow, trusting in God and continuing in supplications and prayers, who was already being supported by the church.

Admonitions To: There are seven outstanding admonitions given to a minister in I Timothy: (1) "behave thyself" (3:15), (2) "exercise thyself unto godliness" (4:7, 8), (3) "give thyself wholly to them [to these things]" (4:15), (4) "take heed unto thyself" (4:16), (5) "save thyself" (4:16), (6) "keep thyself pure" (5:22), and (7) "withdraw thyself" (6:5).

A number of charges are given in the two epistles to Timothy. A charge is a military term, as a superior officer giving a command to someone under him in rank. Paul was giving a charge, or command, to Timothy who was under him. Timothy was responsible to listen to the charge. Men of God should be charged not to teach different from that which has been taught. Every God-called man is under the orders of Jesus Christ who is the Captain of his salvation. "The man of God" is a statement pertaining to the man God has called to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ (I Tim. 6:11). "The man in Christ" refers to every child of God.

The local aspect of the church was in order in the first letter to Timothy, but it was not in the second letter. Deterioration had set in. Therefore, it must be purged. I fear for those who regularly hear truth, lest they become familiar with the sound of doctrine and insensibly dead to its power.

The permissiveness of society in general is mentioned in the second letter to Timothy. Our permissive society is not an exclusively modern phenomenon. Every man did that which was right in his own eyes during the time of the Judges. Is it freedom to do what is right in one's own eyes? Is it freedom to express oneself to the limit, despising all law and authority? Is it freedom to vent one's passions to all kinds of evil without restraint and control? Categorically, I say no. That is not true liberty. This sick society has been seduced to believe that liberty lies along the lines of the three questions raised. Law is a very basic thing to society.

The minister is told to behave himself (I Tim. 3:15). There are two different views of this. "Behave" can also be translated "conduct." It means to behave or conduct oneself properly. It teaches that the elder should conduct himself properly in supervising worship and also in the appointment of the officers of the church. Paul was instructing Timothy, who, according to I Timothy 1:3, was without doubt one of the officiating elders in the church in Ephesus for a period of time. Timothy must behave himself properly in his appointment of men to various appointments in the church. Paul was writing to Timothy. He was not writing to the church.

The minister should exercise himself to godliness (I Tim. 4:7). Paul was instructing Timothy to lay aside every weight and the sin that easily besets us and run the race with patience that lay before him. Therefore, the teaching of I Timothy 4:7 and 8 is disciplining oneself in spiritual exercise. A preacher who will not discipline his life is not worth the salt that goes in his bread. Bodily exercise does profit, but above all be gymnastic in the things of the Lord.

Ministers are exhorted to give themselves wholly to the things of God (I Tim. 4:15). They should keep on "keeping on" in these things. The things to which they must wholly give themselves include the entire context of I Timothy 4. The good minister must give himself to reading, exhortation, and doctrine. He must not neglect the gift that is in him. There is a Divine interpretation of the gift in the man of God: "A gift is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it: whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth" (Prov. 17:8). "A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men" (Prov. 18:16). The God-given gift is precious to the man to whom God has given it, and his gift will make a place for him. The gift had been given to Timothy, but he was responsible concerning the gift. His mind must be immersed in the things of God, as the body is immersed in the air it breathes.

The minister is admonished to take heed to himself—watch himself (I Tim. 4:16). Watching oneself does not mean an occasional glance in the mirror of God's word. It means to continually look and

make personal applications of the word of God. It is not a cursory thought or a passing glance but fastening one's attention upon. Taking heed to oneself denotes earnest examination, a genuine attempt to keep things in their proper condition and perspective. This is a full-time job.

The minister is exhorted to save himself (I Tim. 4:16). Paul was not telling Timothy he could save himself in reference to the salvation of his soul. He was telling him if he would do as he had been admonished, he would save himself and those who heard him from false teaching. By meditating on these things and self-examination, he would save himself and his hearers from false teaching. The man himself must first be considered and then his teaching. If a man's life does not measure up to what he is preaching, one could have no confidence in his preaching.

The minister is admonished to keep himself pure (I Tim. 5:22). This exhortation is similar to the former one. This literally means to keep on keeping yourself pure. The way an elder keeps himself pure in this respect is to refuse to hastily approve and appoint an elder. He must make sure he appoints pure men, and in so doing he will keep himself pure in the process.

The minister must withdraw himself from men with corrupt minds who are destitute of truth and who suppose that godliness is gain (I Tim. 6:5). This is not in the original manuscript, but the truth expressed is taught in Romans 16:17—"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them." This harmonizes with what Paul told Timothy throughout the epistle to him. The word "avoid" comes from the Greek word meaning to decline or turn away from. This Greek verb conveys the sense of urgent obligation. People teaching things contrary to the truth of God's word should be avoided. Preference and prejudice should never overshadow doing the truth of God's word. The ministry is not something with which to trifle. Ministers are under the orders of their Commander and Chief, Jesus Christ.

Responsibility of Members Toward: The church is not a democracy. It is a theocracy administered by Divinely appointed elders who are approved by their fellow subjects. These men are not controlled by the opinion and will of those whom they govern (Heb. 13:7, 17; I Thess. 5:12, 13; I Tim. 5:17). They are regulated by the doctrine of Christ (I Tim. 1:3; 4:6, 16; II Tim. 4:1-5).

The church is more than a voluntary association of persons. It is an assembly called out of the world by regeneration and conversion. Her members believe certain doctrines and oppose persons who do not embrace them (Gal. 1:6-9; 5:12; II John 9-11). There are certain ordinances to be observed. Christians are to assemble for public worship (Acts 2:41-47; Heb. 10:25). Christ has fulfilled the ceremonial law for believers, but they remain under the moral law. They are no longer duty bound, but constrained by grace. Saints are under the law of Christ (Rom. 8:2). In love, believers submit themselves one to another in the fear of the Lord (Eph. 5:21; I Pet. 5:5).

Christians are under the admonitions of elders. These admonitions are both private and public. The elders have responsibilities to the church in which they minister, but the church also has responsibilities to her elders. When both assume their responsibilities, there is a spiritual church. Otherwise, there is only an organization. Preaching must be accompanied with practice. Many professing Christians claim to be members of the body of Christ and not under the rule of any man. However, every person belonging to the body of Christ is obligated to be in a local church and under the eldership of that local church (I Thess. 5:12, 13).

The writer to the Hebrews emphasized the responsibility of God's people to remember those whom the Holy Spirit has made overseers over them (Heb. 13:7). They should obey him (Heb. 13:17). Their obedience is to listen to him, yield to what he teaches from the word of God, and comply with it. They should submit themselves to him because the God-appointed elder watches for their souls. God's people should salute those who have the rule over them. Appreciation should be manifested toward those who diligently labor among Christians in a local church and give instruction (I Thess. 5:12, 13).

Members of the church are voluntarily submitted to the authority by indwelling grace. There are Biblical facts concerning Christ's church that must be understood. The church must be the center of Christian living (Acts 4:23). The believer must be church oriented. He does not live in isolation but in subjection to fellow believers (Eph. 5:21). Church orientation is visibly manifested in the fellowship of fellow believers (Acts 2:41-47). Union with Christ is manifested visibly, as invisible faith is manifested only in the works of faith (Acts 4:23; 11:23). As epistles of Christ, we are seen gathering together (Acts 14:27), observing the ordinances of the church (Acts 2:41-47; I Cor. 11), exercising discipline (I Cor. 5; Matt. 18:15-20), building one another up in the faith (Eph. 4), helping fellow believers who are in need (Acts 6; I Tim. 5; I Cor. 8), and propagating the gospel (Matt. 28:19, 20).

The local church is the pillar and ground—support—of the truth (I Tim. 3:15). God has committed His truth to the church and to no other organization. All nonchurch-related programs that attempt to do the work of the church are unscriptural and must not be supported by the church. All so-called good being accomplished by these nonchurch programs does not justify their existence. Anything devised without church orientation is unscriptural, no matter how much Bible is presented. None of these associations or institutions are authorized to observe the ordinances of Christ. None of them can discipline people, defend the faith, or use Scripture on separation to apply to themselves. These apply to the church of Jesus Christ.

Nonchurch-oriented people are worthless to the cause of grace and truth. Nonchurch-related programs are more oriented to their own organizations than to the church. Persons who support nonchurch-related programs or organizations may occasionally show interest in local churches, but only to gain financial or numerical support. The blessings of God are bestowed only when things are done God's way.

Christians know the local aspect of the church is imperfect. However, the local church is to strive for Christian perfection in the same sense that the Christian who knows he is imperfect is to strive for Christian perfection (Phil. 3:12-14). Believers also know that Christ's church is destined to completion and perfection, but both are future. All Christians are responsible to know that the church to which they belong is a Divine, not a human, institution. Those who know the church is the pillar and support of the truth are church oriented. The church is the custodian of truth. Our manner of life will manifest our attitude toward the church. Unrecognized authority results in disrespect for the office of eldership and causes disturbance in the church.

The disorders in the Corinthian church proved that the members did not really understand what the church was. Paul asked, "Despise ye the church of God..." (I Cor. 11:22). There were many who claimed to be instructors in the Corinthian church (I Cor. 1:10-17). But God has appointed certain

teachers—elders—to give Biblical instruction. The Biblical plan is that elders give Biblical instruction to edify the members of the church.

The Divine origin of Christianity reveals the folly of human factionalism. Divine objectives manifest the pointlessness of irregularities. The church must decide if she will institutionalize or personalize. God has not called members of the church to instruct one another. But edified members are to go outside the church to witness privately.

The very essence of the body of Jesus Christ has been committed to the visible, local aspect of the church. However, we must not expect the local aspect of the church to measure up to the invisible aspect. There is no perfect local church, but that does not excuse her for failure to follow as closely as possible the things that have been committed to her for safekeeping.

One cannot deny that the local, organizational, institutional aspect of the church has been drawn into the stream of history and has been influenced by it. Nevertheless, the principle of truth residing in the body of Jesus Christ has not been influenced by history. The truth remains the same in every age of human history, and it has influenced all saints in varying degrees through all ages. The body of Christ has not suffered losses. Every person added to the body of Christ by the Spirit of regeneration is preserved and kept by the Father and His Son without the loss of one. But the institutional, local aspect of the church has suffered and does suffer the loss of many.

The local aspect of the church gets her light from Jesus Christ who is the light of the world; therefore, her light is derived: “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (II Cor. 4:6). The church is made up of individuals who have been lighted by regeneration, but this light which is derived must be fed. Without studying and applying the word of God that is read and heard, the reflection of the light will weaken.

The church’s light is not only derived but it is clustered. The responsibility of every person whom the Spirit of God has lighted in regeneration is responsible to unite himself with fellow believers in a local church under the ministry of an elder. One Christian cannot isolate himself from other Christians.

There is mutual subjection by elders and saints. The relationship between the church family and the eldership should be the same kind that exists between a man and his wife. Both elders and church family must first be submitted to God (James 4:7). Their thoughts, counsels, affections, and actions must be guided by the strict rules of God’s word. Every thought should be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (II Cor. 10:5). Submission implies acknowledgement of needed mercy (Heb. 4:15, 16). Elders and church members must be subject to the disposal of God’s providence. Our carnal hearts should be submitted to God’s holiness, our proud hearts to God’s mercy, and our rebellious hearts to His absolute sovereignty.

There is a blessed mutual subjection of church members to the elder and the elder to church members which follows submission to God. The humble person’s practice of willing subjection in giving honor to others and doing them service becomes every member of the Christian family (I Pet. 2:13-21; 3:1-7; 5:1-5). The absence of proper respect is the fruit of no respect for God. Lack of subjection is a manifestation of pride. Pride is not a person sinning against precept, but it is

resistance against God who is God of the precept. The proud battle against God, refusing to yield to His government.

Admission And Dismission Of Members By The Church

Authority has been given to the local church to admit and dismiss members. Prospective members should be interrogated to determine basically what they believe. Allowances must be made for weakness in the faith; but when one has been subjected to the teaching of God's word, he should manifest the grace of God in his life (Acts 9:23-31). There must be mutual consent between prospective members and the church.

Discipline and the spirit of forgiveness both have their places in the local church. All judgment must be executed in the light of God's judgment, and all forgiveness must be in the light of God's forgiveness. Matters of judgment demand caution. It should be exercised by individuals, by several individuals, and finally, if need be, by the church itself (Matt. 18:15-17). Any church failing to exercise discipline is not a New Testament church.

Church history has revealed the neglect and abuse of church discipline. A guilty individual or a guilty church deserving to be disciplined will neglect disciplinary action. Those ignorant of Biblical teaching abuse discipline. The unrepentant accuse the church of unlawful judgment. The ignorant will go beyond that which is lawful. However, the Scripture is clear in its teaching of what is lawful and unlawful. Ignorance of Scripture excuses none.

The disciplinary action is against a brother in Christ (Matt. 18:15). The church does not judge a person outside the church (I Cor. 5:12, 13). Private, plural, and public judgment are taught in Matthew 18:15-17. A brother sinning against another brother is a personal offence. The offended brother should go alone to the sinning brother to reprove him and seek to reclaim him.

There is a difference between a private and a public offence. A sin known by the church is dealt with in a different manner than a private sin (Matt. 18:16). Two or three witnesses go to the sinning brother seeking to win him over from his estrangement. The law required two or more witnesses (Deut. 19:15; II Cor. 13:1; John 8:17). After the first and second admonitions, he should be rejected: "A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject" (Titus 3:10). The matter becomes more serious if he remains unrepentant (Matt. 18:17). It must then be taken to the whole church for his excommunication.

Many in professing Christendom question the exercise of church discipline by the local aspect of the church: (1) Did not God pass over sin? (2) Did not Christ eat and drink with sinners? (3) Did not the Lord say let him that is without sin cast the first stone? (4) Did not the Lord say let the wheat and tares grow together until the harvest? (5) Does not discipline cause division? (6) Who can determine the time allotted between the steps of Matthew 18:15-17? (7) Does not excommunication imply the loss of salvation?

Did God pass over sin? The forbearance of God of Romans 3:25 and 26 is the same as God's longsuffering of II Peter 3:9. God's forbearance and longsuffering are toward those for whom Christ died that they might be brought into the ark of safety. God's forbearance is not the same as man's

motive to “let it go.” A brother knowing the sin of another in the same local church and remaining silent for fear of harming the guilty person’s character is as guilty as the sinner himself. The apostle Paul rebuked the entire church at Corinth because they had failed to exercise discipline against a fornicating brother (I Cor. 5:1-13; II Cor. 12:21). A recipient of grace will not argue that God passed over sin to excuse himself from obedience to the Lord in the matter of discipline.

Christ ate and drank with sinners (Luke 15:2). How does the so-called tolerance with sin by Christ stack up with Christ’s suffering for sin? Jesus Christ was not tolerant with sin. His sufferings and ignominious death endured for sin prove His intolerance with it.

The Pharisees brought the woman taken in adultery to Jesus Christ seeking to ensnare Him. The Lord said the person without sin should cast the first stone (John 8:7). The answer is found in John 8:11. The Lord told the woman He did not condemn her and she should go and sin no more. Christ’s statement does not include tolerance but forgiveness.

Christ interprets the wheat and tares growing together until the harvest of Matthew 13:30 in Matthew 13:38—“The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one.” The field is the world. The word for world does not mean *ekklesia*. The sheep and goats grow up together in the world, but not in the church. We are not to try to weed out all the ungodly. The Lord was speaking of the final judgment. This eschatological judgment is not given to men. But there is a present judgment given to the local aspect of the church (Matt. 18:15-18; I Cor. 5:12).

When discipline is properly executed in the local church, heaven will sanction that which is done according to God’s will on earth. The language is the same in both verses of Matthew 16:19 and Matthew 18:18 concerning the binding and loosing, but the time and persons executing the authority differ. The time element is very important. The time of Matthew 18:18 has to do with the present dispensation of grace (Phil. 3:12-14; I John 1:8-10). There is no perfect Christian during the church age, when the church herself is incomplete and imperfect. The church is not complete because the last one for whom Christ died has not yet been brought into the ark of safety. The church will not be perfect until the Lord Jesus Christ presents her faultless before the Father (Eph. 5:27).

It is a fact that during the purest period of history of the local aspect of the church it had a mixture of people who did not have the Spirit of God. There was a Judas among the twelve apostles, a Simon Magus among the first converts to the church, and a Demas and a Diotrephes among the first servants of Christ (Acts 8; II Tim. 4:10; III John 9).

The only way the local aspect of the church could be sure of heaven’s approval of her judgment on conduct was to agree in the spirit of prayer: “Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:19, 20). The standard of heaven and the spirit of prayer and agreement are necessary to keep us from acting arbitrarily in our imperfect state. Whereas, it will be impossible to act arbitrarily in the kingdom of God. There will be no need for prayer in the kingdom, because we will then be perfect. But prayer is needful for our imperfect state. There will be no condition of agreement in the kingdom because we will be like Jesus Christ. Disagreements among God’s people are found in their imperfect state in the local church, which is imperfect. To have heaven’s approval

on judgment in discipline during this age we must know what the Scripture has to say about discipline, learn its boundaries, and understand its limitations.

No person has the prerogative to dismiss himself from the church. Since he came in by mutual consent, he must not leave without the same mutual consent. The local aspect of the church has been given authority to dismiss members either by letter or by excommunication. When a person transfers from one church that preaches and abides by the truth of God's word to another like it, a letter should be granted to the church receiving him (Acts 18:27; Rom. 16:1, 2; Col. 4:10). No person has the right to withdraw from a church and not show up any more. He did not come by his mere consent; therefore, he cannot leave in that manner. The church has a right to know the reason for his leaving.

Scripture teaches the excommunication of members and the attitude of the church toward them (Rom. 16:17; I Cor. 5:1-13; II Thess. 3:6-15; I Tim. 6:3-6; II John 9-11). Excommunication means the excommunicated person is deprived of all the privileges of the church. This is an awesome work.

All violations of Biblical standards of doctrine and behavior require some form of discipline (Heb. 12:6). The offender may need to be admonished either privately or publicly (Rom. 15:14; Col. 3:16; I Thess. 5:14; II Thess. 3:14, 15; Titus 3:10, 11; Heb. 10:24, 25). The offender may need to be reproved, rebuked, convinced, or convicted (Matt. 18:15; Eph. 5:11; I Tim. 5:20; II Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:9, 13; 2:15). The offender may need to be excommunicated (Matt. 18:17-19; I Cor. 5:11, 13).

The necessity for the church to exercise discipline is as great as it is to preach the word and administer the Lord's Supper. Christian love is violated by serious private offenses (Matt. 18:15-18). Christian unity is violated by those who form divisive factions which destroy the peace of the church (Rom. 16:17, 18; Titus 3:10). Christian law is violated by those living ungodly lives (Matt. 15:19, 20; Rom. 13:8-14; Eph. 4:25-6:8; Col. 3:5-4:6; I Thess. 4:1-10; II Tim. 2:22-4:5; Titus 1:6; 2:1-3:3). Christian truth is violated by those who reject the essential doctrines of faith (I Tim. 1:19, 20; 6:3-5; II John 7-11).

There was disciplinary laxity in the Pergaminian church (Rev. 2:14, 15). She tolerated evil teaching and became lax in discipline. This church was doctrinally weak. Had the church in Pergamos been as doctrinally strong as the Ephesian church, she would never have admitted false teachers and their doctrine.

Christians must recognize there are false teachers (II Pet. 2:1). They must also recognize there are false brethren (Gal. 2:4). They must avoid those who cause divisions (Rom. 16:17), abstain from familiar intercourse with them (II Thess. 3:6), have no intimacy with them (I Cor. 5:9, II Thess. 3:14), and reject them after the first and second admonitions (Titus 3:10).

The effect of discipline is nullified when a neighboring church welcomes a disciplined member. Discipline is not a matter of removing names from the church roll but a matter of spiritual fellowship. It is not a withdrawal of a person from fellowship but the withdrawal of fellowship from a person. Biblical teaching shows concern for the church first and the offender second. When church members manifest concern for the offender before concern for the church, those members

are in the same category with the offender and should be dealt with in the same manner with the offender. Church purity is of utmost importance (Ps. 93:5).

The sin of one member against another, which is a breach of love, is reason for discipline. Forming factions or parties in the church, which is a breach of unity, is reason for discipline. Disorderly behavior of members, which is a breach of law, is reason for discipline.

Particularization is an important part of discipline. A Christian confesses nothing through generalization. His faults, failures, or sins must be particularized. The apostles always particularized. The apostle Paul called the names of two women at variance with one another in the church at Philippi (Phil. 4:2). He also called the names of two men who erred concerning the truth of the resurrection and tried to overthrow the faith of some (II Tim. 2:17, 18). This is the only reference in both epistles to Timothy where Philetus is mentioned. However, Hymenaeus' name is referred to in I Timothy 1:20. He was excommunicated, but he did not cease propagating false doctrine. Therefore, Paul referred to him again in his second epistle to condemn his false doctrine. Wherever false teaching finds pasture, it must be immediately condemned. The apostle's exhortation is to "mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Rom. 16:17). "Marking them" is to keep an eye on them—observe them. Another instance of particularization is John warning the church about Diotrephes who loved to have the preeminence (III John 9).

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The church is not authorized to be a political or an economic adviser of civil government. Her mission in the world is to indiscriminately proclaim the gospel of Christ. Discrimination is the work of the sovereign God in giving hearing ears to embrace the gospel. Christian principles cannot be engrafted upon people by legislative acts. Hence, the church enhances her spiritual influence in the world by her separation from the state.

Social problems are not solved by the church in the same manner as they are by civil government. The state can only apply external methods, such as coercion and environment. Christ's church, on the other hand, proclaims the gospel and depends on the Holy Spirit to perform an internal work of grace in the hearts of those for whom the Savior died.

The struggle of our age is between two opposing sets of principles: the absolute sovereignty of God over all things adopted by the church and the materialistic policies embraced by the state for the purpose of establishing an earthly utopia. The purpose of God is eternal and immutable. Materialism changes when change becomes expedient.

The mission of the church is twofold: the gospel is to be proclaimed to all nations, and the converted are to be taught to observe all things for their edification.

The general proclamation of the gospel is the responsibility of the church (Matt. 28:19). The gospel is not confined to any particular nation or class of men. Christ's sheep are scattered among the nations (John 11:52; I Cor. 1:26-31). Any view of Bible doctrine that hinders the general proclamation of the gospel is false. Divine sovereignty is misapplied if the sense of responsibility is reduced to anything less than a general proclamation of the gospel. The reality of God's purpose does not give the church an excuse for disregarding His orders. God's use of human instrumentality to accomplish His purpose must never lead men to think that the cause of Christ would collapse without them.

Christians are workers together with God and with one another (I Cor. 3:9). They are workers not coordinate with God but subordinate to Him. There is no higher privilege than being a laborer for the Lord (Matt. 9:37, 38). The Lord, His word, and His work must be primary in the Christian's life. He cannot just serve the Lord when he feels like it or when he has nothing else to do. He labors exhaustively for the Lord. The child of God works out the salvation God has worked in him with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12, 13). He works diligently lest he labor in vain (Phil 2:15, 16).

Laboring must begin with the mind. The mind must be enlightened by studying to show oneself approved unto God (II Tim. 2:15). When he knows and understands truth, he becomes emotionally involved, and the result will be to exercise his will. Compassion sustains us in our service. The Lord Jesus Christ sustains us, and our emotions are involved in that love. Such compassion will carry one through any experience he might encounter.

The Lord Jesus was moved with compassion for His sheep because they were harassed and annoyed by political and religious leaders of that time (Matt. 9:36). He then exhorted the disciples to pray that laborers would be sent into the harvest: “Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest” (Matt. 9:37, 38). Christ drew a contrast between the multitude and the laborers. He was concerned not only about number but the quality of workers.

The Greek word for “laborers” of Matthew 9:37 and 38 means a workman, a laborer, or a spiritual laborer. It refers to the worker himself. These are three ways in which the word is used: (1) We are to pray that the Lord will send laborers (Matt. 9:37, 38); (2) The laborer is worthy of his hire (Luke 10:7; I Tim. 5:18); and (3) There are deceitful and evil workers or laborers (I Cor. 11:13; Phil. 3:2). The word is used of a minister of God. It is also used in connection with the deacon, an office in the church of lesser importance than the minister who deals with souls. Moreover, it is used in connection with God’s people in general as they serve and minister for Him.

Paul’s statement that the person who does not work should not eat also has a spiritual application (II Thess. 3:10). Any Christian who does not labor in the things of the Lord will be spiritually starved. The word study of II Timothy 2:15 is associated with labor. A person who will be a laborer for the Lord cannot be a lazy person and be effective in the service for the Lord.

Submission to God precedes submission to one another (James 4:7). What does it mean for a Christian to submit himself to God? There must be submission to God’s will to be governed by His will and pleasure. Hence, our thoughts, counsels, affections, and actions must be guided according to the strict rules of God’s word: “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (II Cor. 10:5). Submission to God implies acknowledgement of the need of mercy. This is the reason we must come boldly to the throne of grace to find grace and mercy for our time of need (Heb. 4:16). It is also placing ourselves at the disposal of God’s providence, His government over us. All nature is submissive to God’s laws of nature. It is therefore reasonable that we should submit ourselves to God’s will. There is a threefold submission: (1) our carnal hearts to God’s holiness, (2) our proud hearts to God’s mercy, and (3) our rebellious hearts to His absolute sovereignty.

The Laborer’s Goal

Every Christian who works effectively has a goal. Some aim to be deacons, elders, teach a Sunday School class, be a Sunday School superintendent, etc. However, this is not what Paul taught from I Corinthians 3. Each Christian must have a goal. Is your aim to be a faithful witness with every opportunity? The ambitious worker must be actuated by love of the honor of God.

We are workers together with God: “WE then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain” (II Cor. 6:1). In what capacity do we labor with Him? What does it mean to receive the grace of God in vain? The grace received in vain cannot be regenerating grace. The grace of regeneration cannot be received in vain. It is given by the sovereign Spirit, and men cannot cooperate in it. But grace may be received in vain if the message of grace is received in word only (I Thess. 1:4). The regenerated person never receives the gospel in word only. He receives it in power and much assurance. The truth is never received to no purpose by regenerated persons. Anyone who rejects the message of truth receives it in vain.

The worker's aim in labor is to strive, like Paul, to preach the gospel (Rom. 15:20). Striving is to be actuated by love of honor for God, to labor to be accepted of the Lord: "Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him" (II Cor. 5:9). Acceptance "in" the Lord has reference to our relationship with Him (Eph. 1:6). Acceptance "before" the Lord refers to the Old Testament saints (Ex. 28:38). They could not be accepted in the Lord, because Jesus Christ had not yet offered Himself. Therefore, they were accepted before the Lord on the basis of their method of worship in view of Jesus Christ who would come and offer Himself in the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Since we are accepted in the Lord, we should labor that we may be accepted "of" the Lord (II Cor. 5:9). Acceptance in the Lord is our position in Christ, and acceptance of the Lord is our condition of life.

The Christian must have a goal in his labor (I Thess. 4:11). "And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you." The Greek word for "study" in this verse is the same as "strive" of Romans 15:20. All may not reach the same level of study, but each must have a goal. We should labor not just to get money, a name, or learn some new thing to be different.

The Laborer's Associates

The word "helper" of Romans 16:3 and 9, I Corinthians 16:16, and II Corinthians 6:1 means to work together with, cooperate, or assist. It is used in connection with those with whom we labor (Rom. 16:3, 9; I Cor. 16:16). There must be cooperation in the work of the Lord. Christians are companions in labor (Phil. 2:25; 4:3).

The laborer, like Paul, recognizes not only his dependence on God but on fellow believers (II Cor. 6:1). Paul was thankful for the temporal assistance given him by Epaphroditus. He was comforted by Timothy's fidelity (Phil. 2:20). He was cheered by Luke's presence (II Tim. 4:11). He was dependent on Timothy for acts of kindness (II Tim. 4:11). He asked Philemon to refresh him (Philem. 20). He was laboring for God in the presence and by the power of God (II Tim. 4:16, 17), in the love of God (II Cor. 5:14), by the word of God (Acts 20:27), by the grace of God (II Cor. 12:9), and to the glory of God (Gal. 1:24).

Service by one out of fellowship with Christ is unacceptable to the Lord. It is not enough to belong to a local church. Christians must realize their responsibilities and perform them. They should redeem the time for the days are evil. Every child of God is responsible to be affiliated with a local church and give his best in service there. Service through love to Christ is the only acceptable labor. Affection carries one further than mere conviction. This does not minimize conviction, but a person can be convinced about something without having Divine love. Love does not count the cost. Jacob served Laban fourteen years for Rachel and counted them only a few days because of his love for her. Love renders difficult things easy and bitter things sweet. Christians love God because He first loved them. A person does not know the strength of his love until it passes through his intellect and affection to his will and enables him to sincerely will to give up everything, bear everything, and suffer everything for the sake of the One he loves.

The practice of willing subjection and submission in giving others honor and doing them service is expressed in I Peter 1 and 3. Such active practice of humility becomes every member of the Christian family, particularly the younger who are easily tempted to unhealthy self-assertion. A

church needs older people with their wisdom, counsel, and steadfastness and younger people with their zeal and enthusiasm. Enthusiasm needs mature guidance. Experience stabilizes enthusiasm. The average church today wants a young pastor with a dynamic personality who can lead young people. But they lack the stability and maturity supplied by older people.

Character Of The Worker's Labor

The character of the worker's labor is portrayed in the word "labor" of II Corinthians 5:9— "Wherefore we labour, that whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him." This word comes from the same Greek word used for "strive" of Romans 15:20. The worker's labor should be of such character that it will be accepted of the Lord. Only that which is activated by love from those who are ambitious for the honor of God will be accepted of the Lord. The time will come when our service here will be over, and we will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Will we be ashamed before Him? Will we hear Him say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matt. 25:21).

There is a work for each person. He should make it his ambition to perform his own business (I Thess. 4:11). When any member of the church gets out of his place and tries to do the work that someone else has been assigned, he will cause trouble. One should have a purpose in all he does and exert himself out of love to the object. The aim of the workman must be to glorify God and not to please men. Paul's aim was to plant, not to water (I Cor. 3:6). He desired to preach where the gospel had never been proclaimed. Those who came after him watered. There is a reward for each according to his work. The foundational work and the superstructural work are of equal importance, and both will be rewarded (I Cor. 3:13).

The Greek word for "endeavored" of I Thessalonians 2:17 means to hasten, make haste, exert oneself, endeavor, give diligence to do one's best, spare no effort, or work hard. We must know not only the fact of God's love but the way by which God's love acts. Listlessness in one's Christian life is a demonstration of the absence of love. Love is manifested by sparing no effort: "...be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless" (II Pet. 3:14). We must know not only the fact of love but the way of its acting.

The Greek word for "laboring" of Colossians 4:12 narrates the character of the labor. It means to be a combatant, to contend, fight, strive earnestly, or struggle. Are you willing to fight for what you believe? This is the word used by Paul when he said he had fought a good fight and had kept the faith (II Tim. 4:7). Any time a Christian will compromise on any point of truth in order to have peace in the family, in the church, or with friends, there is no end to his compromising. We must know the truth, fight for it, and be willing to die for it.

The Way The Laborer's Work Should Be Done

The way the laborer's work should be accomplished is described in John 9:4. The Greek word for "works" means to exert one's power, to perform, and to perform well. This verse is better translated, "We must work the works of him that sent me (or the one having sent me) while it is day." The Lord Jesus labored fervently to perform the work the Father sent him to perform in the

appointed time. Man does not know how long the day of opportunity will continue for him to perform the work assigned to him. Therefore, the laborer must do what the Lord has called him to do while it is day. He must perform his work, perform it well, and perform it now: “Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work” (II Thess. 2:17).

Exhaustion In The Work

There is physical exhaustion in labor for the Lord (I Cor. 15:10). The Christian life is a real labor of love. Every person who decides to become part of any fellowship should know what is involved in affiliation with the saints of God. The idea of joining and then attending when one feels like it or when he wants to is not the Biblical concept of the Christian life.

Christian living is a battle from the time of regeneration until the Lord calls the child of God home. There is a battle to be fought (I Tim. 6:12). The good fight of faith must be fought every day. There is an enemy to be overcome (I Pet. 5:8, 9). There is a watch to maintain (Mark 13:37). The Greek word for labor of I Thessalonians 1:3 means to labor exhaustively. This labor is by the grace of God, not by the energy of the flesh. Each Christian is responsible to proclaim the gospel.

Gospel Proclaimed By The Laborer

The mission of the church is not to regenerate men but to proclaim the gospel as the means of converting those the Holy Spirit has already regenerated. Distinction must be made between regeneration and calling. Regeneration takes place independently of the understanding and will of the individual. Calling, however, is effective in both the understanding and will. Regeneration is the begetting of new life. Calling is bringing forth that life. Regeneration is wrought without man's cooperation. Calling includes cooperation. The sinner is passive in regeneration. He is active in calling, because he has the principle of life within. The sinner is dead in sins at the time the Spirit regenerates him. The call is heard by the principle of life that is given in regeneration.

The first work of grace in the elect sinner is regeneration. The second is the effectual call. The seed, or principle of life, is planted in regeneration. This principle of life is brought to light in calling. The dead in sin are quickened in regeneration. The new life is present, but it may lie dormant for a few minutes or a few days. No one knows how long. It is like the seed in the ground during the winter. The life principle is there, but it is dormant. The slumbering life awakens to calling. The call addresses itself not to the deaf but to the hearing. Regeneration does something for the whole man. The mind is illuminated (Eph. 1:18). A new disposition is given to the affections, and the will is renewed. The whole man is brought forth into action in calling. The illuminated mind sees the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (II Cor. 4:6). A new disposition hungers and thirsts for righteousness (Matt. 5:6). The new will comes to Jesus Christ (John 6:37).

The subject is not conscious of what is taking place in regeneration. The consciousness of man is addressed in calling. Regeneration works from within. Calling works from without. Regeneration is a Divine quickening that makes the soul a fit subject for the effectual call. One cannot respond to spiritual things without spiritual light.

There is a great difference in the manner of the Spirit's working in regeneration and His working in calling. The Holy Spirit works upon sinners who are dead in trespasses and sins. They do not work

with Him. There is no synergism in regeneration. The Holy Spirit works in the regenerated to assist them in their calling; therefore, there is synergism in calling. The man who sees only his calling is like the living man who denies his physical conception.

God never begins something He cannot bring to completion. An effectual call is opposed to an ineffectual call (II Tim. 1:9). An effectual call gives response, and there can be no response separate from regeneration. There will never be any saving response to the general call—proclamation of the gospel—until an individual has been regenerated. The recipient of grace will respond to the call, and that makes it effectual. The Holy Spirit alone gives life and prepares a person, giving him the ability to respond to the call of the gospel. Every regenerated person will respond when the voice of Jesus Christ is heard: “...the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out....the sheep follow him: for they know his voice” (John 10:3, 4). This is the effectual call. Every person the Holy Spirit regenerates will be effectually called by the gospel. A work of grace in one’s heart makes him capable of hearing and recognizing the voice of truth. His mind is opened by the grace of God. He is no longer in the darkness of sin.

The Bible makes the distinction between regeneration and the effectual call. The word “saved” of II Timothy 1:9 includes all that is necessary to equip a person to make him capable of responding to the effectual call of God. The same Greek word for “saved” is used in Titus 3:5—“...according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration....” The washing of regeneration is a once-for-all cleansing (I Cor. 6:11). The apostle Paul told the Corinthians that they had been once-for-all cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ and that redemption had been applied by the Holy Spirit.

The gospel reaches only those who are effectually called (I Cor. 1:18-31). The effectually called are those the Holy Spirit has already quickened. The saving of I Corinthians 1:18-31 is effected by the gospel. Therefore, it cannot be the saving that precedes the calling of II Timothy 1:9 and Titus 3:5. There is no way the gospel can save a person before he is regenerated. The gospel is foolishness to every one who is not effectually called; but to the effectually called, it is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16).

The word “call” of Acts 2:39 is the effectual call: “For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” When a person has been regenerated, he will be effectually called. The general call makes men inexcusable, but it is not effectual. This proves that God does not effectually call everyone. God is not obligated to regenerate anyone, and He is not obligated to elect anyone to salvation. But God is obligated to regenerate and effectually call every person He elected. It is out of grace that we have been elected, redeemed, and effectually called.

The apostle Paul spoke to the Thessalonian saints about their being chosen of Christ before the foundation of the world; then, about their being effectually called by the gospel (II Thess. 2:13, 14). Their effectual call was subsequent to their having been elected before the foundation of the world and sanctified by the Spirit. Hence, God’s Divine order is election, positional sanctification by the Spirit of God, and effectual calling by the gospel. The Lord Jesus Himself said, “For many are called, but few are chosen” (Matt. 22:14). The Arminian cannot read this verse the way it is worded. He must read it, “Many are called, but few choose.” A person must first make his calling sure before he makes his election sure (II Pet. 1:10).

The view that God's effectual call carries with it the operative grace whereby a person is enabled to answer the call and embrace Jesus Christ as He is freely offered in the gospel makes calling and regeneration equivalent terms. If calling preceded regeneration, man would participate in the new birth. But the sinner is passive in regeneration and active in conversion. There is nothing left for regeneration to accomplish if calling gives the ability to respond. What can respond to the effectual call other than faith? Faith is the "fruit" of regeneration. It is the act of loving trust and self-commitment, of which none is capable until he is renewed by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the instrument of the Godhead in regenerating the lost, but He is the instrument in precisely the sense that Christ was the instrumentality of the Godhead in creating all things (Col. 1:16). As Christ acted as both agent and instrument in the creation of all things, the Holy Spirit acts as both agent and instrument in regenerating the lost. The Holy Spirit applies to the elect the redemption purchased by Jesus Christ by giving them the ability to believe, thereby uniting them to fellowship with Christ in their effectual calling. Neither truth nor man can operate directly upon the essence of the soul.

It is unthinkable that the Lord Jesus Christ shed His precious blood as the payment and then will not come into possession of all for whom He died. Is the gospel of Jesus Christ nothing more than a gospel of possibility? It is the gospel of certainty. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes (Rom. 1:16). The sinner does not vote Jesus Christ into office as Savior by his mere acceptance of the gospel or by his mental attitude toward the gospel. Jesus Christ saves every one He seeks, and He seeks those for whom He died.

The effectual call is by Jesus Christ. It goes forth in the power of the Spirit and much assurance (I Thess. 1:5; 2:13). The general call does not go forth in the power of the Spirit and much assurance. The effectual call is always effectual, but the general call is not. The calling of II Timothy 1:9 is the effectual call. A person may respond multiplied times to the general call without being effectually called, but the regenerate respond only once to the effectual call. The Lord stated that "many be called, but few chosen" (Matt. 20:16). The calling of the many is the general call. The calling of the few is the effectual call. The effectual call calls men out of darkness into the light of truth. The elect are effectually called by the gospel (II Thess. 2:13, 14). They are called into the fellowship of Jesus Christ (I Cor. 1:9). This calling is high and heavenly.

Response to the general call is ineffectual. The parable of the sower illustrates the ineffectualness of the general call (Luke 8:11-14). The wayside hearers responded to the word, but the devil took the seed from their hearts. The stony ground hearers received the word with joy. They received it emotionally, but the sense of truth and not the sound of it brings the message to a person's heart. There was some response by the thorny ground hearer, but the cares and pleasures of life soon choked it. Simon Magus of Acts 8:12-23 believed and was baptized, but his response was ineffectual. Religionists with more social programs and larger crowds have the greater physical response. But the response is not effectual. One of the persons at the wedding feast of Matthew 22 responded to the general call, but his response was ineffectual. The apostle Peter also described the ineffectualness of the general call (II Pet. 2:20-22).

The general call does not endure. However, the effectual call is without repentance (Rom. 11:29). The elected, redeemed, and regenerated person must be effectually called by the gospel. It is always effectual and never needs repeating. It always accomplishes its purpose.

The effectual call is personal, urgent, and humbling. It is a call from darkness to light (I Pet. 2:9, 10). In the effectual call, the understanding and will begin to act. The regenerated person begins to hear with both the inward and the outward ear. God gives the inner ability to hear by regeneration. He gives the outer ability to hear by the effectual call.

The effectual call does not begin with the preacher, but it includes him. The call of the regenerate is twofold: (1) It is by the word which is inspired, prepared, committed to writing, preserved, and proclaimed by Spirit-called ministers. (2) It is by illumination of the understanding to recognize and respond to the message when it is proclaimed.

From the standpoint of the preacher, the invitation is nothing more than a general call. The Holy Spirit makes it effectual in the hearts of those He has given the disposition for it. No assault is made by the man of God on the emotions of the people. There is no soft music played at the end of a sermon and lights dimmed to create an atmosphere for “easy decisions” in the effectual call.

The preacher cannot compel people to come in the sense of Luke 14:23—“And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.” The preacher proclaims the gospel (Matt. 22:9). Man cannot constrain an unregenerate person to regeneration. Many have been constrained by men to make decisions, but there was no work of regeneration that preceded it. Therefore, their so-called conversion is of short duration. They do not lose their salvation, because they never had it to lose.

God had only one Son, Jesus Christ, and He made Him a preacher. Preaching was primary with the Lord Jesus Christ. Miracles and healing were secondary. Christ sent Paul to preach, not to baptize (I Cor. 1:17). The preaching of the cross is foolishness to the unregenerate (I Cor. 1:18). Whereas, the preaching of the gospel is the power of God to the regenerate. God is pleased to save those who believe by the foolishness of preaching. Paul preached Christ crucified. He did not “offer” Him. Preaching had priority in the early church, but immediately after the early days of the church, it became secondary. This continued a number of years until the reformation when preaching again became primary. This lasted awhile, then it again became secondary and remains thus today.

Preaching the gospel to the poor had precedence over working miracles in the life of Jesus Christ: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised” (Luke 4:18). The result of a miracle performed by the Lord was that great crowds followed Him (Mark 1:30-39). They followed not because of His preaching but because of His miracle. Knowing their hearts, the Lord said to the disciples, “Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth” (Mark 1:38).

The Lord Jesus sent His apostles primarily to preach (Luke 9:2). Their healing was secondary. He commissioned the church to preach the gospel (Mark 16:15; Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 24:47). “Preaching” Christ is not “offering” Him. Neither Christ nor regeneration are man’s to offer. But the gospel should be preached to every creature.

The standard for the local church and all its activities is recorded in Acts. The book begins with the preeminence of preaching. The apostle Peter had previously denied the Lord in the presence of a

damsel, but he later preached the word with holy boldness (Acts 2:21-36). When Peter and James were forbidden to preach any longer in the name of the Lord Jesus, they replied, “For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). The man God calls to preach must preach. Paul said, “...woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel” (I Cor. 9:16). Priorities in the early church are clear in Acts 6:1-4. The apostles would not be sidetracked by serving tables. They gave themselves “continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4). Philip went to “Samaria, and preached Christ unto them” (Acts 8:5). He was later called to preach Jesus Christ to one lonely eunuch (Acts 8:26-38). Persecution could not silence the early church from preaching the word of God (Acts 8:1). Saul of Tarsus was regenerated, converted, and appointed to preach the gospel (Acts 9).

What is preaching? Preaching is a manifestation of the incarnate Word—Jesus Christ—from the written word—the Holy Scriptures—by the spoken word—the preacher. Preaching the word about Christ, His Person and Work, is foolishness to people who are perishing. But to the saved, it is the power of God (I Cor. 1:18-29). God is pleased to save those who believe through the foolishness of preaching. The apostle was not referring to regeneration but to conversion. This passage of Scripture makes a clear distinction between regeneration and conversion and shows the purpose of preaching. Preaching is the instrument used by God to save His elect who have already been regenerated.

Foolishness is not the fact that men preach the gospel but that God saves the regenerated through the message of the crucified, buried, and risen Savior. The wisdom of the world has never acclaimed the gospel as a masterpiece of wisdom. The natural man has always thought the gospel is foolishness and will continue to think so until he is regenerated by the Spirit of God. The truth that God is pleased to save them that believe the foolishness of preaching fixes attention on God’s sovereign choice. Men are not saved by the exercise of their human wisdom but by faith which is God’s gift in regeneration. The person who has been given faith by the Holy Spirit is enabled to hear and recognize the voice of truth when it is preached, and he exercises faith. Hence, he has a conversion experience by responding to the effectual call by the Holy Spirit.

The word spoken is the means of the gospel’s communication (Rom. 10:9-18). Beginning with verse 15 and going backward, the complete order of a conversion experience is taught. (1) The preacher is sent; (2) he preaches; (3) he is heard; (4) his message is believed; (5) the elect person is called by the gospel; (6) the elect person is saved (conversion experience); (7) the converted person confesses his salvation experience.

Preaching makes the historical acts of the gospel a present reality. These historical acts are the historical events of Christ’s Person, the impeccable life He lived, the impeccable Person He was, and the work He accomplished when He died on the cross. The saving act of God at Calvary becomes a saving act by faith through the spoken word. Preaching, therefore, is the timeless link between God’s redemptive act at Calvary, which was His eternal purpose, and the regenerated person’s apprehension of it by faith (I Pet. 1:18-21).

Preaching Christ is bringing the finished work of Christ into the realm of present experience by publicly portraying Christ crucified (Gal. 3:1). Preaching Christ does not in any sense crucify Christ afresh. It does not make the sacrifice of the Son of God a perpetual offering.

There is a distinction between preaching and offering Jesus Christ. God authorizes no one to offer Christ. The Son of God cannot be offered in regeneration. No one is authorized to offer deliverance from corruption and the guilt of sin. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Christian's to possess, not to offer.

The purpose of preaching is not to offer but to proclaim the gospel. Should the gospel be offered to every person, or should it be preached to every creature? The Biblical view is given in Mark 16:15—"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Christ gave the commission to the church to preach the gospel to every rational creature—human being. The offer of grace to sinners supposes their ability to respond, which is a denial of their depravity. Those who offer salvation indiscriminately deny the sovereignty of God in the application of redemption.

The means of expression must be clearly understood. It takes more than the sound of words to convey a message. It takes the sense of preaching. Those who make the statement that man paralyzes God through unbelief use Mark 6:5-6 to substantiate their belief. Christ said He could not do certain things because of their unbelief. Those verses teach that Jesus Christ did not will to use His power in this instance. He knew that performing miracles in that place would be of no effect. Therefore, He chose not to perform miracles there. The unregenerate sinner must not be presented as having ability to paralyze God in his unbelief. God must never be represented as not being able to do something until man lets Him.

How can a person give assent to that which by nature he hates? (John 3:19, 20). How can one acquiesce to that which he considers foolishness? (I Cor. 1:18). How can the natural yield to that which is spiritual? (I Cor. 2:14). How can God offer salvation to the nonelect? Will God dazzle the nonelect by offering them something they cannot have? How can salvation be offered to those whose sins were not paid for by Jesus Christ?

Scripture gives no authority to "offer" deliverance from sin. The Holy Spirit "applies" redemption to whom He will. Distinction must be made between restricting the preaching and the offering of Christ. Preaching Christ must not be restricted. He must be preached to every creature. Offering Christ is not man's prerogative. Salvation by looking to Christ is not the same as regeneration by the Holy Spirit. Regeneration makes salvation a reality.

From the preacher's viewpoint, the message must be given indiscriminately. It is not his prerogative to discriminate. From the Holy Spirit's viewpoint, the message does discriminate. Preaching is effectual in the hearts of the regenerate. The regenerated heart recognizes the voice of Jesus Christ when the message of Christ is proclaimed indiscriminately by the preacher. It becomes effectual in the heart of the regenerate. The gospel preached is the power of God unto salvation to them (Rom. 1:14-16).

Hearing Christ preached fills the regenerate with joy, while it fills the unregenerate with hatred because his evil deeds are exposed (John 3:19, 20; Luke 4; 5). Offering Christ appeals to the unregenerate. Christ offered to them leads them to think they can control God and that they have the power to either receive or reject Him. Hence, their ego is excited. They are led to believe their wills can determine what they will do with the sovereign God of the universe. Offering Christ attracts crowds in crusades, churches, etc. It gets success in the eyes of the world. Preaching Christ is to the

contrary. Offering Christ does not bring the unregenerate to the dust at the feet of the sovereign Savior.

The person converted by preaching is evangelized, but the person to whom the gospel is offered is not. Preaching Christ does not tease people by arousing expectations that can be brought to fruition by personal ability. The gospel of God is the power of God unto salvation. The Holy Spirit makes the message effectual.

The gospel preached binds up some of the broken-hearted, proclaims liberty to some captives, and opens the prison to some who are bound. The gospel is believed by the elect who have been regenerated. The gospel preached is not an offer but a power infused by the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 1:23, 24). Religionists teach that redemption's application is from without to within. Christians teach the opposite. An external offer of the gospel is not the Holy Spirit's internal work. The offer of grace is not a means of saving ability to close with Jesus Christ in a conversion experience. The offer of the gospel is not a means to work God's grace. The Holy Spirit makes the preaching of the gospel effectual in the heart, but He does not make it effectual in a mere offer of the gospel.

God's power is sent by means of His eternal purpose through the righteousness of Christ and not by means of man's offer of the gospel. The Holy Spirit reveals Jesus Christ to the heart of the regenerated person, and that person in turn says in the power of the Spirit, "Jesus Christ is my Savior and my Lord."

The Spirit of regeneration is the living principle of a saving ability. Hence, the principle of life which enables its recipient to believe on Jesus Christ can never be offered by man. The offer of grace is not the gift of grace. Giving and receiving are synonymous with God. He never gives anything that is not received. The gift is effectual, but an offer is ineffectual.

The gospel must be preached generally but not in the same sense of offering. The gospel should be preached indiscriminately; however, the salvation of it will reach only those who have been regenerated by God's sovereign Spirit. The gospel must be presented higher than any natural man can reach. Here is the heart of gospel preaching. The gospel is a spiritual message and cannot be comprehended by the natural mind.

The Spirit of regeneration is the principle of life; therefore, grace does not dwell separately from the Spirit. Christ is never offered to the nonelect, but the doctrine of Christ is sent to them for a savor of death unto death (II Cor. 2:15, 16). Offering Christ in the gospel supposes concurrence, which is cooperation. It supposes the sinner is capable of cooperating with what God offers, and he becomes a Christian by cooperation. That is not grace but Arminianism. Since the grace of God is wrought in the heart by the sovereign God, the gospel is not offered for either acceptance or rejection.

How can a Christian share Christ with a non-Christian? How can Christ be shared with anyone? Jesus Christ cannot be divided. Each Christian has all of Christ. Therefore, Jesus Christ cannot be shared, but Christians can fellowship with one another.

Those who deny the free offer of the gospel say that "offer" means to present for acceptance or rejection. Offering grace to sinners supposes self-power to accept. The "free will plea" goes like this: (1) Christ died for all; (2) salvation is finished; and (3) all one has to do is receive it. Offering

grace to sinners is a strange method of preaching to “dead” sinners. Redemption is finished; yet the dead must come. That means the sinner is left to do what he cannot do. To offer Christ to sinners is not to preach Him to sinners. The apostles preached Christ. They did not offer Him. Offering is used only in connection with sacrifices. It means to bring a thing and lay it down before a person. Offer is not a means unless it is accepted.

The word of God must be preached to every creature (Mark 16:15). The word goes forth as the general call to many. The Holy Spirit will use the message of Christ, and it will become the effectual call to those hearts which have already been prepared for its reception. A person cannot be persuaded to accept Jesus Christ in the sense of Christ becoming his personal Savior.

The nonelect may receive an offer. But the Holy Spirit works the internal change. The preacher can only tell people that the sovereign God makes the change in the lives of those whom He pleases. The Holy Spirit is sovereignly sent. Men cannot send Him. If one should say, “I offer you Christ in the gospel message,” would his offer be the means of sending the Holy Spirit? If the Holy Spirit is sent in man’s offer, He is neither sovereign nor effectual in His action. God’s power is not sent by means of man’s offer. It is sent by means of God’s purpose through the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

If man has the prerogative to offer the sinner a privilege which is above his ability to lay hold of, why does he not have the prerogative to offer the sinner the privilege which is above his depraved nature to receive? An external offer can never work an internal ability to lay hold of Jesus Christ. The indwelling Spirit of God is the principle of life. He does not enter by means of man’s offer. Men erroneously teach that regeneration turns on man’s will, not God’s, to decide who will go to heaven; and that man’s pen, not God’s, writes the name in the Lamb’s book of life. The “evangelist” says, “Christ is ready to write your name in the Lamb’s book of life, if you will only believe.” However, the Bible states that the names of the elect were written in the Lamb’s book of life before the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). God’s word does not authorize Arminian methods. Such methods cannot be used to proclaim the doctrines of grace.

Finite men cannot know who are the elect or who are the regenerate until life is brought forth by means of the gospel. Preaching the gospel has a twofold effect on mankind. It is a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved, and it is a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are perishing (II Cor. 2:14-16). A substance which is food to one man is poison to another. The gospel of God which includes the work of the Godhead—the Father’s election, Christ’s distinctive redemption, and the Spirit’s application—is the true message of God. Grace is food to the elect of God (John 6, 10, 17; Rom. 8; Eph. 1; Titus 2). However, it is poison to the nonelect. Isaiah was commissioned to proclaim the message that would make hearts fat, ears heavy, and eyes closed (Is. 6:9-13). The result of the Lord illustrating grace, with one widow out of many and one leper out of many, caused the nonelect religionists to manifest their hatred (Luke 4:24-29). Religionists become angry not only with the message proclaimed but also with the proclaimer of the message.

Regeneration cannot be offered to men indiscriminately. Man does not have the authority to invite men to “repeat after me and you will be saved,” or “pray this simple prayer and you will be saved.” Regeneration is by the mighty power of God (Eph. 1:19, 20). An offer supposes creature ability and cooperation. The true gospel is higher than any unregenerate person can reach.

The call of the gospel does not work in a creative way. Men think they make the gospel work creatively when they offer Christ in the gospel. The Spirit of God is the one who works creatively. He does so secretly, silently, and unconsciously to the heart of one when He bestows the principle of life.

The natural man labors under depravity. He may lack the desire for objective truth. He may not lack the evidence of the transforming power of truth. He may not lack the organ of the body called the ear, by which truth can be heard generally. He may not lack mentality to make certain judgments in natural things. Every unregenerate person in his right mind can do that. But he is invincibly determined against the truth of God (John 3:18-21).

Arminians teach a redemption that does not really redeem, a reconciliation that does not reconcile, a propitiation that does not propitiate, and a surety that gives no assurance. They claim that provisionally all sins are forgiven, but one must appropriate forgiveness by faith. They believe that God has reconciled Himself to all mankind and now it is up to mankind to reconcile themselves to Him.

If Jesus Christ has forgiven all mankind of their sins but mankind must appropriate that forgiveness by faith, what about those who fail to appropriate it by faith? What about Christ's forgiveness of their sins? That would mean that Jesus Christ changed His mind about forgiving them. He forgave them and then decided not to forgive them because they rejected the offer. This would result in a mutable God who did not know what he purposed or decreed.

The Westminster Confession defines the "free offer" as God freely offering sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in Him that they might be saved. Some "grace people" add to this definition by saying that inviting sinners to Christ does not deny the truth of God's sovereignty in salvation of the soul but merely recognizes that the sovereign God has decreed the use of certain means to bring about certain ends. They think the various aspects of salvation are nowhere expressed more delightfully than in II Thessalonians 2:13-14. The following brief outline is included in their statement: (1) The cause of God's purpose is Divine election. (2) The means is the gospel. (3) The purpose and means to accomplish it are laid side by side. The people who believe the preceding believe in "gospel regeneration."

An observation of II Thessalonians 2:13-14 will show that under the inspiration of the Spirit, Paul was contrasting the redeemed with the unredeemed. He had just shown that God would send the unsaved a strong delusion that they might believe the lie and be damned. In contrast, he was bound to give thanks always to God for the brethren because God had from the beginning chosen them to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit. The sanctification here is positional, not progressive. It is the same as that of I Corinthians 1:2 and Hebrews 10:10-14. Positional sanctification is synonymous with regeneration. Election is unto salvation, and it is through or by means of the efficacious work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. Belief of the truth is conversion. Therefore, both regeneration and conversion are taught in II Thessalonians 2:13. The call by the gospel of verse 14 is the "effectual call."

The following are seven facts concerning the “free offer of the gospel controversy.”

FIRST—It is a fact that God does not give saving grace to all men without exception. Think of Biblical characters whose names are listed who died outside the Lord Jesus Christ, faith, and grace. God has not, does not, and will not give saving grace to all without exception.

SECOND—It is a fact that all men do not come to the knowledge of the truth.

THIRD—It is a fact that God did not will the salvation of all men as a decree or a purpose. To say that God willed or decreed the salvation of all men if they will is not the will to purpose salvation at all. A statement such as “God willed the salvation of all men if they will” is like saying “I will that every individual person be saved; nevertheless, not as I will but as they will.” This concept makes the will of God mutable and uncertain and destroys the meaning of God’s purpose (Job 23:13).

FOURTH—It is a fact that Jesus Christ died for His sheep, for His people, and for many (John 10:15; Matt. 1:21; 20:28). This means that Jesus Christ redeemed, reconciled, propitiated, ransomed, and became surety of all those the Father gave Him in the covenant of redemption (John 6:37).

FIFTH—It is a fact that the gospel is universal in three aspects (I Thess. 1:2-8; 2:1-9, 13). (1) It is universal in the sense that it is sufficient to save all men without exception, if God had elected them. The gospel is representative of a price that could not have been higher for redemption. Christ gave His all. Jesus Christ did as much for the redemption of one person as if He had died for all mankind. (2) It is universal in the sense that it is to be proclaimed to people indiscriminately. The gospel should be preached to every creature. There is a difference between preaching the gospel to every creature and offering the gospel to all. (3) It is universal in the sense that all nationalities and kinds of people embrace it.

SIXTH—It is a fact that the free offer of the gospel controversy is inseparably linked to the extent of redemption. If the extent of redemption is for all men without exception, the offer must be to all men without exception. However, if the redemption of Jesus Christ is restricted to those the Father gave to Christ, the offer cannot be made to all without exception. To offer something that could never be possessed is mockery. It is a false exegesis to reason from a hypothetical premise and draw an absolute conclusion. This condemns the universal approach. It condemns even the so-called free offer of the gospel to all men, because that is the reasoning from the standpoint of a hypothetical premise and drawing an absolute conclusion.

SEVENTH—It is a fact that the gospel is not an offer but the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). Salvation is not offered to those for whom Christ died. It is “applied”. The Holy Spirit applies what Jesus Christ worked out on the cross. “Savior” and “saved” are relative terms. A Savior supposes persons saved. Persons saved suppose a Savior. The fact that the gospel is not an offer but the power of God unto salvation is different from what is heard on every hand. Each person and every religious group has some easy formula on how to be saved. Churches are begging sinners to “come forward” when the invitation is given. Evangelistic crusades are stressing “make your decision now.” Child evangelism counts as saved all who say they “love Jesus” or “raise their hands.” Campus Crusade gives the “four spiritual laws,” and they believe the job is done on the average person within thirty-five minutes. All of this is contrary to Scripture. The “gospel” is the

power of God unto salvation. It is called “the gospel of your salvation” (Eph. 1:13). But it is never called “the gospel of regeneration.” The gospel is not the means of regeneration. Salvation is the conversion of one who has been regenerated. The gospel will be the power of God unto salvation of every person the Holy Spirit regenerates.

Consideration of the following five questions will refute the “free offer theory”:

FIRST—How can life be offered by a preacher? Life is not offered. It is given by the sovereign Spirit in regeneration. The new birth is the work of the Spirit of God.

SECOND—What is meant by the term “life”? If the Westminster Confession signifies life as salvation through faith, John 3:8 contradicts it—“The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.” Regeneration is described in Ezekiel. God simply spoke to the infant “live,” and there was life (Ezek. 16:4-14). The Lord spoke at the time of love. Regeneration does not occur at man’s time. The Spirit gives life, and there is no condition attached. Faith cannot be attached as a condition of life.

THIRD—What is meant by the word “salvation” in the Westminster Confession? If the word means conversion, then faith is a condition for a conversion experience. But conversion is through faith. The person to whom God has given the principle of life cooperates by repenting and believing. God neither repents nor believes for him. Nevertheless, He enables men to repent (Jer. 31:18). God alone can give the principle of faith.

FOURTH—For what purpose did God decree the use of means? Some of the puritans taught that the gospel is the means of begetting. But that would be “gospel regeneration.” The gospel is not the means of regeneration, but it is the means of a conversion experience. The whole thesis of II Timothy 1:8-11 is that life is brought to light by the gospel. There is a vast difference between life being brought to light and life being brought into existence. Life is brought into existence by the Holy Spirit, and this life is brought to light by the gospel. “Gospel regeneration” is not taught in the Bible any more than “baptismal regeneration” or “decisional regeneration.” All require man’s cooperation. In “gospel regeneration,” the gospel must be proclaimed to produce the new birth. But the sovereign God of the universe gives the principle of life without human cooperation. After the principle of life has been given, the born-again individual responds to the gospel when he hears it. This is the effectual call.

FIFTH—Are sinners to be invited to Christ for regeneration or for salvation? An indiscriminate invitation cannot be given to sinners for regeneration, but the invitation should be given to the weary, thirsty, and heavy laden to come to Jesus Christ for rest and to have their thirst quenched.

The person who reasons has been made reasonable by the grace of God: “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Is. 1:18). The unregenerate person is unreasonable and remains thus until he has been made reasonable by the grace of God. The person who comes to Christ is one who has been made weary of the burden of sin by the grace of God in regeneration (Matt. 11:28). The individual who thirsts for the grace of salvation has been made thirsty by God’s grace in regeneration: “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he

that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Is. 55:1). Within the context of Isaiah 55:1-3, there is a proclamation, an invitation, and an administration. The invitation is “come ye.” Those who have been made thirsty by grace are without anything within themselves to lay hold of heavenly commodities, but having been born from above they are heavenly merchantmen. The invitation includes the regenerate but unconverted. The invitation is not given indiscriminately to come to Christ for regeneration. However, it is given to those who have been regenerated but not yet converted. The invitation is restricted to the thirsty. It is not a universal invitation. The invitation to those who have no money to come buy wine and milk does not indicate that they were destitute of this world’s goods. They were questioned why they spent money for that which is not bread. They did not have the ability within themselves to buy this heavenly commodity or to trade for it. A person will not seek God until he has been sought and found by God in regeneration. The one who thirsts for the water of life has been made thirsty by the grace of God in regeneration (John 7:37; Rev. 22:17).

Cornelius was regenerated before he sent men to Joppa to get Peter to come and preach the word to him. He was a certain man, a devout man who feared God, gave alms to the people, and prayed to God always. These are characteristics of a regenerate person. He had been given a taste for the word of God by the grace of God in regeneration. Cornelius was hungry for the word and sought someone to proclaim it. The words he would hear from Peter were not for his regeneration but for his conversion.

Some have said that there is a fine line between inviting and offering. But there is a line. They are not synonymous terms. The synonyms for offer are proffer and tender. “Offer” implies putting before someone something which may be accepted or rejected, or make a show of willingness to perform or give. “Proffer” differs from offer chiefly in more consistently implying putting or setting before one something that he is at liberty to accept or reject. It usually expresses voluntariness, spontaneity, or courtesy on the part of the agent. “Tender” was originally, and still is, a term in legal use meaning to offer something to the court or to a person concerned, according to the terms of the law for formal acceptance or approval.

The synonyms for invite are bid, solicit, court, and woo. They are comparable when they mean to request or encourage a person to come to another or fall in with one’s plan or desires. Invite, in its ordinary and usual sense, implies a courteous request to go somewhere, do something, or give assistance which it is assumed will be agreeable, or at least not disagreeable, to the person invited. Man has no authority to offer Jesus Christ or the new birth, but he has every right to invite persons in whose hearts is the grace of God. Man simply proclaims the gospel, inviting all who are thirsty, weary, and heavy laden. All those hungering for the word come because it will be pleasant to them. Such an invitation is disagreeable to the unregenerate.

Man can neither offer nor invite anyone to be regenerated. However, he can invite, not offer, those who have a disposition of heart for spiritual things to the Lord Jesus Christ who is revealed in the gospel for a conversion experience. The man of God never exploits the gift of God. His motive is to please God and not to exploit Him (1 Thess. 2:4-6). Men are entrusted with the gospel, and they should speak to please God who tries their hearts and not to please men.

Arminians distinguish sufficiency from efficiency. The erroneous idea that the atonement was not limited in its sufficiency has been illustrated with a man sitting in a burning building because he

was not sure that God had decreed that he should survive. However, there is a vast difference between physical and spiritual safety. Any person in his right mind in a burning building will do his best to get out. He will not sit and reason with himself wondering if God has decreed that he perish with the building. In contrast to the illustration, the person who does not have the grace of God does not know his condition. He will never know it until his heart is touched by grace. From the standpoint of the dignity of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, it is sufficient to every human being ever born, had God willed. There is nothing wrong with the dignity or the sufficiency.

According to the “gospel regeneration” theory, spiritual life is a faith union with God through Christ. Those who hold this theory accuse believers in “Spirit regeneration” of being hypercalvinists and making spiritual life a sort of spiritual deposit. They charge them with teaching that an elected heathen need not learn of Christ or know Christ, for he will be made alive by the Spirit. The followers of this theory make no distinction between life and the consciousness of life. According to their argument, a fetus has no life until birth, and the newly born infant does not have life until it becomes aware of father and mother. Ministers of grace do not deny the use of means for the purpose of conversion, but they do deny their use in the creative act of regeneration. The Spirit quickens the dead in trespasses and sins before He bears witness to him of Jesus Christ. The order is conception and then birth.

Every man is in the valley of depravity by birth. He can neither see, hear, nor understand the gospel when it is preached. Preaching to the unregenerate is like Ezekiel of Ezekiel 37:1-6, preaching only to dry bones who are incapable of response. The Lord alone causes the Spirit to enter into them and makes them live. The preacher follows God’s command to preach. Preaching the gospel is the means God has chosen to bring the regenerate to the knowledge of his salvation, but preaching cannot give life. It may reform, but it cannot regenerate. It may organize, but it cannot give life. Preaching may cause a great deal of excitement, but noise is no evidence of spiritual life.

In order for God’s purpose to have any meaning, He must put forth power to overcome all opposing resistances. God’s grace, therefore, is invincible. If God’s grace were dependent on man’s faith, it would not be grace. How could it be given from eternity, if grace were dependent on man’s faith? If grace is dependent on man’s faith, it is deprived of its merciful act and is nothing more than a mere offer.

If grace simply gave a free offer, it could not reign. But “...sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 5:21). Grace reigns in election. It was given the elect in Christ before the world began. Grace reigns in redemption. It brought Jesus Christ into the world to die for the elect. Grace reigns in regeneration. By grace the elect are born of the Spirit. Grace reigns in sanctification. By grace the elected, redeemed, regenerated person embraces Jesus Christ as Lord by faith. Grace reigns in glorification. The elected, redeemed, regenerated, converted individual will be glorified.

The conversion of those the Holy Spirit has regenerated is accomplished by summoning men to turn to God in repentance and faith (Acts 20:21; I Thess. 2:13; II Thess. 2:13, 14). Repentance and faith are both the gifts of God (Acts 11:18; II Tim. 2:25; Jer. 31:18; Eph. 2:8; Phil. 1:29; Heb. 12:2). Turning of the heart in repentance is the work of God (Jer. 31:18, 19). The impartation of supernatural faith is the grace of the Spirit (Rom. 4:17-25; Titus 1:1; II Thess. 3:2).

Paul's going to the Gentiles was for the purpose of turning—converting—those the Spirit had regenerated (Acts 26:16-18). “To open their eyes” does not refer to regeneration, but to a conscious conversion experience. The gift of the faculty of sight is accomplished by the Spirit in regeneration. “Turning from darkness to light” is related to the conversion experience. Conversion is the fruit of regeneration. The gospel, proclaimed by Paul, was the Divinely appointed means of leading the regenerated from the darkness of ignorance to the light of gospel truth and forgiveness.

The conversion of men is the objective of the church. It is a matter of informing (II Cor. 5:19, 20). It is not some brainwashing technique to induce decisions. There must never be an intrusion into the office work of the Holy Spirit.

Gifts are given to the church for the edification of the saints (Eph. 4:11-16). Believers must be taught to observe all things in order that they might grow up into Christ in all things (Matt. 28:19; Eph. 4:15). In Ephesians 4:15, Paul was not speaking of persons growing into the Head, but in relation to Christ. Growth comes under the headship of Christ. The body derives capacity for growth and activity from Christ.

Ordinary gifts are perpetually given for the erection and maintenance of the superstructure (Eph. 4:11-16; I Cor. 3:6-11). Ministry of the word is God's means for the perfecting of the saints. Perfecting means bringing the saints to a state of fitness for the discharge of their functions in the body of Christ. Edifying of the body points to the building of the body (I Cor. 3:12-15). The apostle is emphasizing growth and unity of the body. The unity of the faith is something for which all believers strive. There is no doubt that all Christians believe exactly alike in the glory of the eternal state, but Christ has given gifts for making us more alike while we are on earth.

The goal of the church on earth is unity of the faith. Believers are united to the one body by the one Spirit; therefore, they are to strive for unity of the faith once-delivered to the saints (Phil. 1:27; Jude 3). Where the “one faith” is duly proclaimed, believers from different backgrounds of error and ignorance come into a growing understanding of the truth. Growth in grace leads to an increasing reliance on the one Lord and an enlarging appraisal of the one body.

As long as the ministry of the word to the church continues, it proves that the body is not of full age. Absolute maturity will not be experienced until the presentation of the church to Christ. Until the perfection of the church, believers must be on constant guard against false teachers (Eph. 4:14). The doctrines of men are described by wind because of their subtlety, uncertainty, and destructive power. False teachers are recognized by their deceitful schemes and cunning devices.

Unless believers are properly taught, they will be carried about with various winds of doctrine (Eph. 4:14-16). Saints who are instructed in all things have a good foundation. Properly instructed believers have knowledge of their relation to the foundation and to one another. From a practical viewpoint, there may be many groans before Christians assume their rightful places in the body.

The message of the church is authoritative. Religionists do not want a message of authority but one of arbitration. They want to have something to say about what they must believe and practice. It must be understood, however, that God's message for all men was settled in heaven before the foundation of the world (Ps. 119:89; 147:5; Eph. 1:2-14; II Tim. 1:9-11). God's message is eternal because He is infinite (Ps. 147:5). God sees future, present, and past all at once because He is one

mind (Job 23:13). God has a permanent purpose. It is for all history. There are many pages in His book, but they constitute one purpose. He has but one message for all mankind. As there is no succession in God's knowledge, there can be no additions to His message.

God's eternal message is relevant for all history. Relevance, to modern-day liberalism, means a system of theology that meets the approval of depraved intellectualism. True theology is relative to the word of God. It is occupied in continuous attentiveness to the eternal Word, and it accomplishes proper relevance only in obedient consideration of the word of God—not to the spirit of the times. The message is relevant only when duly relative. Theology too often witnesses to itself, rather than to the Word of God. It has too often been articulate without first being attentive. Christian theology is based upon the teaching of the whole Bible, received as the infallible word of God. There is no inner light or revelation given above that which is written. Individual revelation is without a standard.

The message of the gospel must be proclaimed to sinners. The gospel is that God has executed His eternal purpose of glorifying His Son by making Christ's soul an offering for sin (Is. 53:10), and exalting Him as the Savior of sinners (Rom. 5:6-11). The Person and Work of Christ cannot be divided in the gospel message (I Cor. 2:1-5). An isolated consideration of Christ's Person is impossible, because He can be known only in connection with His work. To mention Christ's name is to point to His work. As Jesus, He saves His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). As Christ, He is anointed for that purpose (Acts 10:38-41). As Lord, He has authority for its accomplishment (John 13:13).

True peace is found only in Christ (John 16:33). This peace is the result of His work (Col. 1:20) and is known only in fellowship with His Person. In union with Christ, it is impossible to isolate the gift from the Giver. Jesus Christ is not an unknown Giver. In human relations, however, gifts can be enjoyed apart from the knowledge of the giver.

The gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). Certain objective facts of history, such as the virgin birth, sinless life, vicarious death, and the resurrection of Christ must be placed within the redemptive framework to constitute the gospel. The gospel is not an offer, but the power of God unto salvation. The gospel does not come merely to inform men, but to invade the elect as a call to conversion.

The message of the gospel must not be deprived of its true character. The message must never be watered down, regardless of the response. Preaching, from the viewpoint of the church, is general in scope. God, not man, sends the messengers and determines the recipients and the time when the message shall reach them. The whole counsel of God must be taught the converted for their spiritual maturity (Acts 20:27; Matt. 28:20).

The manner in which the gospel must be proclaimed is spiritual. Meetings that are adapted to please the flesh are not of God. The main thrust of the gospel is not the changed sinner but the slain Lamb. To become occupied with what the gospel can do for the sinner is nothing more than orthodox humanism. When externals are emphasized, the convert rests content with changed externals. In true conversion, the subjective spirit becomes occupied with the objective Christ (Col. 3:1-4).

All services where the word of God is ministered must be on a high spiritual plane. Attempts to give entertainment lessen the sense of God's majesty, banish the spirit of worship, and feed depraved minds and hearts. If services make the gospel sound like an entertainer's plaything, those in attendance will not be made to stand in awe before the holy God. When music and sob stories are used to stir sentiment, the conversions which are produced are nothing more than psychological and emotional upheavals. The true motive for ministering the word of God is twofold: There is love of God and concern for His glory. There is love to men and concern for their souls.

Sinners must be brought to the feet of the holy God. Sinners were never told, in all the recorded messages of Acts, that God loved them. The Acts of the Apostles is the book that gives the norm of witnessing. The love of God is declared to be in Christ (Rom. 5:8-10; Eph. 2:4-10; I John 4:10).

True preaching is not the preacher inviting men to Christ. Jesus Christ is not a pleading beggar. Christ speaking through His ministers extends the effectual call to the elect. At the same time the effectual call is heard by the elect, the wicked and reprobates are despising and refusing the general call of the same gospel message. The correct concept of true preaching eliminates the often heard expression, "Have you tried Jesus?" Arminianism would give Christ a bride He did not choose. Their false concept of soteriology (science of salvation) represents Christ to the world as a Person who will marry anyone who will have Him. If every man feels he has the right to choose his own bride, why should religionists deny the Son of God the prerogative of choosing His bride? (Ps. 65:4; Eph. 1:3-6; II Tim. 1:9, 10).