

# THE HOUSE OF GOD

---

by William C. Hawkins  
and Willard A. Ramsey

---

**Published by  
HALLMARK BAPTIST CHURCH**

P. O. Box 205  
I-385 at Bridges Road  
Simpsonville, S. C. 29681  
1992  
Copyright© 1980, 1992 by  
Hallmark Baptist Church  
P. O. Box 205 • I-385 at Bridges Road  
Simpsonville, S. C. 29681

Second Printing (Revised), October,  
1992 Printed in the United States of America

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## **Introduction**

**The House of God: A Perpetual Institution.....pg. 10**  
by Willard A. Ramsey

**The Nature of the Church on Earth.....pg. 23**  
by Willard A. Ramsey

**The Authority of the Church.....pg. 34**  
by Willard A. Ramsey

**The High Places.....pg. 46**  
by William C. Hawkins

**Biblical Evangelism.....pg. 58**  
by Willard A. Ramsey

**Building Churches for Unity:  
According to the Blueprint of Christ.....pg. 72**  
by William C. Hawkins

**The Unexplored Mountain.....pg. 79**  
by Willard A. Ramsey

## PREFACE

The first edition of *The House of God* (1980) contained an introduction and five sermons delivered in the regular services of Hallmark Baptist Church which remain unchanged in this second edition. This edition contains two additional chapters further expanding the ramifications of the church question. Now, as we look toward the third millennium since the advent of our Lord, it is time for God's divided people to become serious about change toward unity in truth.

We appeal to every fair-minded Christian seeking "all the counsel of God" including unity in truth. Consider the vision of the glorious possibilities and blessings that would accrue to the whole world (see John 17: 21) if the ugly face of discord could be replaced by the beauty that adorns God's ideal churches, like Smyrna (Rev. 2:8-10) and Philadelphia (3:7-10).

To attain such blessings, it is essential that issues of truth be finally resolved among Christians, and this requires sincere dialogue with one another. We can rarely see our own blind spots, for "He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbor cometh and searcheth him" (Prov. 18:17). By this process the early church settled differences (see Acts 15).

We therefore ask each individual Christian to consider seriously the contents of this book which differs in important ways from the conventional wisdom in church doctrine and views of church history. The core issue that divides us, after nearly twenty centuries, remains the nature of the church. If we dare, nineteen hundred years after New Testament times, to search together for the ecclesiology of Jesus and for the historical church movement that issued from and embodies His ecclesiology, what will we find? It seems inevitable to us (but we are willing to be shown otherwise) that if those in harmony with the tight biblical/historical analysis presented in the following pages are not essentially the fruit of the ecclesiology of Jesus, then His ecclesiology has been barren throughout history. We humbly submit that the Catholic-Protestant-Interdenominational succession cannot be the normative God-ordained fruit that issued from New Testament ecclesiology. We must look elsewhere or admit that the ecclesiology of Jesus produced no normative New Testament succession in history - which would be an unthinkable offense to Christ.

What then is the problem? Is it lack of data? Is the New Testament so obscurely written that we cannot discern the nature of the church of which it speaks so voluminously? Then what about church history? Is the data so sparse, or has time been so short, that we cannot discern the existence of a visible institutional succession that has exhibited the characteristics of the New Testament throughout the Dark Ages until the present time?

No, the problem is not a lack of accurate data; but with a sincere spirit of charitable dialogue, this problem can be identified and solved.

**William C. Hawkins and Willard A. Ramsey**  
**Simpsonville, South Carolina**  
**August, 1992**

## INTRODUCTION

This book contains five sermons dealing with foundational principles of the doctrines concerning the church in the New Testament. Baptists a century ago would have felt at home with these principles, but today they will seem strange to many. Yet these principles, woven as they are into the purpose of God for the publishing of His redemptive truth and for the proper representation of His name before the world, are indispensable. They are essential for an on-going effectual evangelism and for the long-range maintenance of sound churches of a quality suitable to accurately represent Christ without cheapness and distortion before the world.

The first three of these sermons deal doctrinally with bedrock principles of the nature of the church as God has perfectly designed it for His purpose. The last two sermons attempt to show how any change, "improvement," or deviation from God's design mars its perfection, weakens, divides, and results in a confused and ugly representation of Christ to the world as we see today. Most Christians, including many pastors, seem unable to understand why a pure doctrine of ecclesiology is important or how neglect or error in this area will hinder the salvation of souls and injure the moral stability and economic prosperity of a society.

### **Needed: A Revolution in Ecclesiology**

The changes implied in the biblical principles presented in these sermons would be truly revolutionary in Christendom today.

But nothing short of a revolution would restore biblical Christianity to the churches. The application of biblical principles of ecclesiology would completely alter and transform the denominational structure of Christendom. The problems of denominationalism and its more promiscuous daughter interdenominationalism, and her younger sister ecumenicalism, have been a scourge to the kingdom of God for many years. Despite the prayer of Christ on the eve of His suffering (see John 17), many Christians today think of denominational divisions as a Christian norm. Not only, some think, is it perfectly normal, but even desirable. For example, this contemporary fundamentalist interdenominational teaching was reflected in a rather innocent statement by a young man who had been led to believe that God is pleased with the denominational divisions. He contended that the unity for which Christ prayed (John 17:21) was to be best realized in the intermingling of different denominational positions in a "school like Bob Jones University."

Now this position may be excused in a youth. But the system of doctrine, or lack thereof, that imparted this opinion to him is a marvel of shallowness, is injurious to the cause of Christian truth, and should be challenged. We strongly challenge the notion that God is pleased by denominational division among His people or by those who have accommodated their theology to include division as a Christian norm. And we challenge as well the notion of "unity" not built on Scripture truth. Moreover, if the urgency to press for unity in the truth exhibited by the apostle Paul (see I Cor. 1,2; Acts 15) was pleasing to God, then it is clear that denominational division is not pleasing to Him. Then nothing short of prayerful concern and a positive effort toward a biblical unity (not

ecumenical or interdenominational) is incumbent upon every Christian. And among most conservative denominations ecclesiology is a serious point of discord, not only as a doctrine, but a sound biblical ecclesiology would heal most of the other breaches or at the very least provide a platform for doing so.

There are over fifty million conservative—evangelical or fundamental—Christians in this country who have no coherent doctrine of biblical ecclesiology. If Christians would take seriously the biblical teachings on the church, would carefully study them and make the necessary changes to apply them, revival would explode over this entire globe.

Dr. J. L. Vipperman, a student of B. H. Carroll and one of the last of the scholarly Baptist pastors who loved and understood New Testament ecclesiology, wrote in an unpublished manuscript concerning the question of church doctrine:

This question settled scripturally (please see Jer. 23:18, 21, 22, 25-29, 36) would tremendously set forward the work of scriptural evangelism in the earth. But like the wave of skepticism which swept the world some three hundred years B.C., there are so many conflicting systems of doctrine that people are losing faith in any and all of them.... How we do need to turn again to our Lord's words in John 17:23 and to deeply heed them. (Emphasis added.)

Aside from the doctrines of salvation itself, the proper understanding and application of the doctrines of the church are perhaps more vital to evangelism than any other doctrine. It is one of the ironical distortions of history, that when evangelism is mentioned, it is always epitomized by the names of Wesley, Whitefield, Moody, Sunday, and now Graham. Yet, none of these gifted men held a sound biblical ecclesiology. If their energies, as Paul's, had been guided by a scriptural application of the doctrines of ecclesiology, their work of evangelism would have continued to expand long after their decease. Yet even the institution originating from the societies which Wesley left behind, the United Methodist Church, has now grown grossly liberal like most other top-heavy denominations and is an example of the long-range effects of an institution built upon an unscriptural foundation in church doctrine.

Jesus did not forget to concentrate on the teaching ministry while He evangelized, and He founded an institution grounded on principles that will not admit of improvement. His church as He conceived it is perfectly suited to its purpose. Before a church can go wrong, it must first depart from the teachings of Jesus and His apostles. Jesus designed His church for the very purpose of evangelism; therefore nothing could be more important to evangelism than the understanding, preservation, and application of the biblical doctrines of the church. Jesus concentrated more on teaching truth than on amassing numbers (see John 6:26-65, especially v.66), which thing has been essentially reversed in the past half-century.

Yet it is encouraging that there are occasional signs that some are beginning to recognize the sterile fruitlessness of the massive crowds built by hot-dog evangelism or other drum-beating tactics. The soul that loves the Word of God cannot long be satisfied with the things that do not measure up to the apostolic foundations. One commendable example of courage and humility who has raised a voice in this area is Pastor Truman Dollar of the Kansas City Baptist Temple. Pastor Dollar wrote an article called "An Era of Discontent and Discouragement" published in the October 12, 1979 issue of the Baptist Bible Tribune which expressed candidly and overtly some of the weaknesses and frustrations of contemporary fundamentalism. And while not everyone may admit it, in our hearts we know he is right. Dollar said in part:

A disquieting unrest and discouragement plagues fundamentalism today. It is not discussed publicly .... It is almost like the appearances of euphoria must be maintained

by the myriad of conference speakers and their sponsors or else their very reason for existence would be removed ....

The bold truth is that there is currently a hollowness in the lives of Christians in fundamental churches .... Evangelism is vitally important, and a church will die without it. Discipleship, however, is equally important, and a church will remain weak without it. The lack of discipleship is an insufferable weakness in the independent movement .... There is little indoctrination. Expository Bible preaching that enlightens and instructs is rare.

If pastors and churches will respond to Dollar's challenge and begin to discuss the problems openly in this honest way, we will soon begin to hear "a sound of abundance of rain" (I Kings 18:41). But any fruitful approach to biblical discipleship must involve a biblical doctrine of ecclesiology. The church is God's discipling agency, and it seems axiomatic to us that the discipling agent must be sound and efficient before it can build sound disciples.

## **A Quality Church Membership and Representation— the Basic Issue**

In our re-examination of church doctrine, we do not need to start with "fine tuning" what we now have. If the doctrinal foundations have decayed, we must begin with the basics. And what is more basic than the constituency of a church? Of what does a biblical church consist? It consists of "members in particular" (I Cor. 12:27). Nothing could be more basic and important to the image, influence, and power of a church than its membership.

The kind of members a church has is its first order of responsibility under God, because what the members say and do represents Christ to the world accordingly. If they say and do ugly unchrist-like things, Christ is misrepresented. Only fervent and righteous words and conduct properly represent Christ.

The determination of the membership therefore is so important that it is "bound in heaven" by God Himself (see I Cor. 12:18; Acts 2:47). But God's binding in heaven is done in conjunction with the church as it is to "bind on earth" (see Matt. 16:19; 18:17,18; compare also Acts 2:41; 10:47; Rom. 14:1; 16:2; I Cor. 5:4, 5, 12, 13). Now if God is to bind in heaven what His church binds on earth, we had better "bind" in accordance with His will, and church membership is among the most important matters a church ever "binds." The membership of a church represents Christ, both individually and corporately, to the community and to the world. Hence the membership is vitally important to an accurate representation of Christ.

We have come now upon the pivotal point of the doctrine of ecclesiology: the church is for representation not for salvation. Only God can save, but the church represents Him. There will doubtless be thousands in heaven, saved by the grace of God, who were never in a church of any kind. Works are not required for salvation (e.g., the thief on the cross), but works are required for representation.

Christian leaders desperately need to understand this one simple truth: salvation alone does not qualify a person to be an official representative of the name of Christ on earth with the sanction and franchise of God upon his life. If Christian leaders would only understand and apply this, it would essentially settle the question of ecclesiology and greatly enhance the unity of the faith and the effectiveness of the gospel message. It should be an elementary concept that it is more difficult to properly represent the name of Christ on earth than to merely receive the free gift of salvation without works. Salvation is by grace alone, but representation is by grace plus works. A saved person must be baptized and otherwise obedient before he can consistently represent Christ or

scripturally be received or retained as a member of a church. A disobedient or poorly instructed Christian cannot properly represent God's name; he rather misrepresents it. One becomes a citizen of the United States of America by merely being born, but to be an ambassador and represent this country as an official spokesman requires more than birth and citizenship. It requires training, maturity, loyalty, obedience, and an official sanction and appointment by the President and Congress. Just so, a person becomes a citizen of the kingdom of God by merely being born spiritually, but only those who are obedient in baptism and in other normative Christian virtues may be members of a scriptural church (see Acts 2:41,42), which alone has the sanction and appointment of God for ambassadorship and official representation of His name.

## **A Quality Membership and Regeneration**

In view then of the weight and consequence of a quality church membership to God's purpose for the church, it is imperative that we begin with a teachable member. This narrows the field at once to a regenerate membership, for only the regenerate are really teachable (see I Cor. 2:14). Although the principle of a regenerate church membership is elementary to the Scriptures (Acts 2:41, 47; Eph. 2:11-22; compare Matt. 3:8-10), more than half of Christendom operates on a church membership process that does not require it! Even many Baptists, who acknowledge the principle, have adopted procedures that subvert it. To "walk the aisle" and shake a pastor's hand or to be lead through a "repeat-after-me" prayer for salvation are tactics which not only subvert the principle of a regenerate church membership but frequently subverts regeneration itself. This shallow, deceitful, accommodation process must be changed for the biblical fruits of repentance. The Bible speaks of confessing with the mouth (Rom. 10:10), and a person who cannot or who will not verbalize in some way an experience of grace is no candidate for church membership. And a church which makes no requirement for the body of saints to hear and evaluate such a verbal expression of the Saviourhood and Lordship of Christ will fill itself with unregenerate members. What they bind on earth will not be bound in heaven, and they will be left an empty shell of a "church" having no candlestick. A scriptural process for the reception of members must begin with some kind, however theologically incomplete, of an expression of an experience of regeneration.

Now this is an immensely powerful conditional requirement which God has taught us for the establishment of a quality church membership to represent His name. If there is no confession with the mouth, there should be no membership. But the truly regenerate have a story to tell—an experience to verbalize. And beyond that, they are teachable and have a desire for obedience (Heb. 10:16). Hence they that "gladly received his word were baptized" (Acts 2:41).

## **A Quality Membership and the Ordinances**

As one aspires to become a church member, an official spokesman for Christ, God in His wisdom has established ordinances to further qualify the membership of His churches. It is an incredible travesty upon Christian truth for an individual or institution to presume to speak in the name of Christ as an ambassador while refusing, neglecting, or perverting His ordinances—baptism and the communion. These therefore, in the wisdom of God, represent a further qualifying process for membership in His churches. Baptism serves as a "coarse filter" for sifting or screening, as an initiation into the church. It sifts out those whose commitment to Christ is too shallow for even this

elementary act of obedience. If one rejects baptism, he must be rejected as a representative of the name and will of God in His church.

The Lord's supper serves as a "finer filter" to maintain the quality of membership. This ordinance is connected in the Scripture, not only with the memory of the great price paid for our sins by the Lord (I Cor. 11:24,25), but also with the requirement of a solemn self-examination (I Cor. 11:27-32). But beyond that the communion is connected with the "finest filter" of all: church discipline (I Cor. 5:7-11). Since the church has been charged with the administration of the communion, it cannot scripturally open the communion to every person who professes to be a "brother" or a Christian. There are other qualifications beyond being merely saved: "... if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, covetous . . . with such an one no not to eat" (I Cor. 5:11; also see v.5). This requires a church examination by observing the lives of its members (I Cor. 5:12). The loose manner in which the Lord's supper is handled in these days is a perversion of the true communion both with Christ and with the brethren (I Cor. 10:16-21) and leaves the churches filled with hypocrites who will not examine themselves.

## **A Quality Membership and Church Discipline**

The censure of sin and the discipline of the individual member by the consensus of the whole assembled church body (I Cor. 5:12,13; Rom. 16:17; I Thess. 5:14; II Thess. 3:6-15; I Tim. 6:1-5; Titus 3:10; Matt. 18:17,18) is God's ultimate provision for the maintenance of a quality membership. This truth is illustrated in the fifth chapter of First Corinthians:

... if any man that is called a brother, be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat .... Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person (I Cor. 5:11,13; emphasis added).

The discipline by the church body, not just the pastors or deacons (see I Cor. 5:4), is the ultimate scriptural filter to screen the membership to keep it pure for the proper representation of the name of Christ. Today few churches use this filter anymore, and those who do not become cesspools of covert corruption. But it cannot be completely covered. Sooner or later undisciplined sin breaks through for the world to see! How then can this be anything but a misrepresentation of Christ and a gross disobedience to the Word of God?

## **A Quality Membership and the Church Letter**

Another great biblical principle which the Scriptures exemplify as a filtering process for the maintenance of a quality membership is the church letter (see Appendix). This great and vital principle has degenerated to a mere formality among many Baptist churches. Many think of it as not a scriptural principle at all but a mere tradition. Yet the effectiveness and weight of the entire process of church discipline hangs upon careful observance of this biblical practice. It seems self-evident to us that if a member has been excluded or "put away" (I Cor. 5:13) from the membership of one church because of sin, having no letter nor commendation from a sister church, and with no questions asked, may go down the street to another church and be received with open arms, biblical church discipline has been wholly subverted. If church A disciplines a member, church B should honor that disciplinary measure until reconciliation is accomplished or at least until both sides of the question are heard to ascertain the truth.



The scriptural provision and instrument for the maintenance of a quality membership in the transfer of members is the church letter. It is an instrument of unity and honor between churches and an instrument of concern for both the individual and for the representation of truth. This great principle deserves more than a "Broadman" form can give it.

### **A Quality Membership and the Teaching of the Word**

God has further provided for the building and maintenance of the quality of the membership of a church through the pastoral functions of preaching, teaching, and counseling and through the mutual admonition of each member for the growth and perfecting of the membership (see Eph. 4:11-16; II Tim. 2:2; Rom. 15:14). It is the churches' responsibility to provide, or at least to carefully oversee and guide, the training of those within the membership, especially those aspiring to the pastoral office. The responsibility for the church to accomplish this cannot be side-stepped by catering this task out to a school that is not wholly under the jurisdiction and oversight of a scriptural church. God has not established "the school" as the "pillar and ground of the truth" (I Tim. 3:15). The pastors train the church members who then are to admonish one another from a position of maturity. And ultimately when the task of training pastors is catered out to schools, this practice will finally subvert the quality of membership throughout the churches. For this we call history to witness—as goes the seminary, so go the churches. The churches themselves must provide sound pastoral training or the quality of membership will finally decline.

### **A Quality Membership and the Purpose of the Church**

The task of the great commission (Matt.28:19,20) belongs to the church. Evangelism is the great central objective. But the ordinances, the teaching, and disciplining for the maintenance of a quality membership is indispensable to this task. Yet, to accomplish these things requires a platform of principles, and these principles form the subject matter of the sermons to follow. The "House of God" must be understood as an official representative of God's name. The "Nature" and "Authority" of God's house, the church, must be understood. We must identify and avoid that which is not the house of God—the "High Place." Moreover, the fact that all these things greatly affect our central task of "Evangelism" must be acknowledged and appropriate changes made.

The churches today have fallen into a state of low credibility with the world. This desperately needs to be changed; and by the offering of these five sermons, we hope to stimulate further study and cross-fertilization of thought as we re-examine the foundations of God's teachings concerning the church. We would hope for a revival of another great biblical principle effective for purifying and unifying the churches and the maintenance of truth among them—the church council (see Acts 15). We do not have all the answers, but we are eager to hear further biblical truth from any church or brother who can say with the psalmist: "My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times" (Psm. 119:20).

## **THE HOUSE OF GOD: A PERPETUAL INSTITUTION**

*“But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory” (1 Tim. 3:15,16).*

These two verses declare that there is an institution called "the house of God." Since it is called a "house," it is a place of dwelling— "an habitation of God" (Eph. 2:22). This institution is also called the "church of the living God," or the assembly of the living God would be a better translation. It is further designated the "pillar and ground of the truth." A pillar is something that supports—something upon which another thing rests for its support. The house of God is to support and hold up the truth for all men to see in every age.

The next verse (vs. 16) summarizes the major points of truth that the church is to uphold, namely, the great mystery of godliness. The things that pertain to God Almighty and the redemption that He has made available to His created beings are great mysteries. And here is the greatest of all mysteries, the central mystery and the central point of all truth of God—that "God was manifest in the flesh." That is, God was shown to men in flesh like unto men. Jesus Christ was God who came into the world, who became a man and lived in the world. Now this is undoubtedly the greatest of all mysteries—how God Himself could become man, how He could become flesh and dwell among us. Yet this is the heart and core of the truth the church is to support. It is the message that the church has to offer to the world—that God Himself became infleshed in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, lived a perfect life, and went to the cross of Calvary, there willingly giving His life for our sins. God placed upon Him the sins of us all and offered salvation to each of us who would repent of sin and trust in Him.

There is the message God has for the world. There is the central core of the truth that the church, which is the pillar and ground of truth, is to support and bear to the whole world. "God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit," that is, He was vindicated; His whole ministry of life was vindicated by the work of the Holy Spirit. He was "seen of angels" whose eye-witness accounts will further vindicate His work at judgment against all unbelievers. He was "preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world," and these believing saints will add their witness to that of the angels. He was visibly, before many witnesses, "received up into glory."

This is a synoptic abstract of the great truths of the Scripture. It is the task of the church, as the pillar and ground of truth, to uphold and bear this body of truth, the mystery of godliness, to the whole world for as long as it is required—until this One who was received up returns to receive those whom He has left behind to occupy the land.

Therefore, since the church of the living God is to support the truth, and since God has identified His name with it, calling it "the house of God," it behooves all Christians who profess to be part of the church or the house of God to know something about this house. We cannot presume to be God's house unless we know what we are to

be, what our task is, and what the plan and purpose of God is for this institution. God Himself, through the Lord Jesus Christ, has reserved to Himself the right to determine the characteristics of His house, and we must learn these characteristics and see that we observe them.

I believe that most of the turmoil, trouble, strife, and division in the world today in the name of religion is because many have omitted—have failed to study and espouse—the truth God has set forth in His Word concerning His church. He commanded that His church be a unified body where everyone speaks the same thing and gives voice to the same truth and gives allegiance to the same Lord. But this is not the case today within that which we call Christendom. And so this would suggest at once that "Christendom" is not the "house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." Therefore, I want to discuss more fully the ancient principle or concept of God's house—of His having chosen Himself a place to establish His name before men.

## **The Ancient Foundations**

It has ever been God's design to perpetually maintain His name and His truth before the whole world. It has long been the purpose of God that those He has created receive the testimony—the Word—of the truth. God purposed to reveal His will that men might understand something of Himself. It is not God's nature to create a people and then leave them to grope in darkness.

I would like to turn back to the book of Exodus where we may begin to see the unfolding of God's plan to perpetuate the testimony of His name and His truth through appropriate agencies of His own sovereign choice.

Regardless of the age in which we live, there is a place which God has established to put His name. God appeared to Moses in the burning bush and commanded Moses to go to the children of Israel. Moses wanted to know who he would say had sent him:

. . . Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM . . . (Ex. 3:13,14).  
The House of God: What more could God say? Could He say that He is not? Could He say that He was or that He is going to be? He can say only that "I AM." God then made a very significant statement concerning His intentions that this name and the eternal concepts in this name would be established as a memorial to all generations:

. . . Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, the Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations (Ex. 3:15).

The term "all generations" includes you and me. It includes all the generations yet to come and all the generations back into the time of Moses and even beyond that. His name was set before Adam and Eve personally. God has declared His name—a memorial and testimony that is intended to extend to all generations. And inasmuch as

He will establish His name to all generations, He also has been careful to plant an official, authorized place, entity, or institution—localized and visible to men—that will represent His name to any generation according to God's own sovereign choice.

## **God's House: The Tabernacle**

Not long after God gave Moses these instructions, He began to establish a place which would represent His name. It would be His official place. In the events of the exodus and following, we see God beginning to single out an institution for His name, for the purpose of perpetuating the truth down through the ages unto all generations: "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering" (Ex. 25:1,2). He then goes on to enumerate what the offerings should be, and then He says: "And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them" (Ex. 25:8).

Now God is not in need of a house for his own sake. But we are in need of God's dwelling among us that we might know Him. And God in His love and in His mercy condescended to dwell among His people in the Spirit. "Let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them," because God has something to say to us. He has truth, and a name that He would declare to us and to all generations. Therefore, He established an official place to which the world can point and say, "There is the official place where God has declared to place His name and to give forth His truth." So He said, "Let them make me a sanctuary .... According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it" (Ex. 25:9).

God gave Moses very detailed instructions as to how to make this sanctuary which He called the tabernacle. Whatever is to stand to represent the name of God, the place God chooses to put His name, it is very important that it be made according to the will of God. Variation is not permissible; God will not have just anything we might desire. It is totally unfair and sinfully presumptuous for us to proclaim a place to be the house of the Lord, or the place where God's name dwells, unless we have made everything after the pattern that God Himself designated. To do otherwise is to misrepresent God. That is presumptuous. If we represent Him in any way other than the way He has shown us by the pattern He has set before us, then we have maligned His name. We have been slanderous of His name and blasphemous. He wants His name to be represented as He wants it to be represented. We have no options in this matter. So He gave Moses detailed instructions. There were various furnishings to be put in the tabernacle—all typical, looking forward to a definite purpose. These things were prophetic primarily of the coming of Christ. God gave the final instructions on the ark of the covenant:

And thou shalt put the mercy seat above upon the ark; and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee. And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel (Ex. 25:21,22).

So God said He would meet with men from this place. That was a condescension on God's part. It was not to satisfy God; I hope you will understand all of these things. God is not a trivial little god that sits on a mountaintop wanting someone to cater to the needs of his ego. God is condescending in mercy. God is coming to us to teach us and to meet our needs and to accurately maintain His name before us that we might be able to understand the great mystery of godliness. So He said in mercy, "There I will meet with thee. . . ."

When God, having given specific details, told Moses to build the tabernacle, Moses set about the task. After the tabernacle was finished—every bolt and screw and all of the coverings in place—it stood there complete but empty.

Was God's name in that tabernacle?

How were men to know that this was the place where God chose to dwell? How was the world to know? How were all the children of Israel to know God told Moses to do this? He gave Moses the instructions. Moses said God would dwell there. The people had Moses' word for it.

But how are ordinary people to know that God has put His name in a certain place or institution as opposed to all others?

Were there not other so-called gods on this side of the desert? Some said, "Here is where God lives." Others said, "Over in Egypt is where God lives." Everywhere today, as well as then, people are saying "here" is where God lives.

What about this question? Who will settle the matter?

Only God Himself can settle this question, and He did. God Himself attested to the fact that this tabernacle was where He would dwell:

... So Moses finished the work. Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle (Ex. 40:33-35).

After the tabernacle was finished, the glory of the Lord overshadowed it, saying miraculously and visibly before three million witnesses: "This is my house." There was God's attestation to the fact that He had accepted this tabernacle as the place to put His name. And without this miraculous attestation, the people would have had nothing but Moses' word as evidence that this was God's house. God's house is the place where God represents Himself through human agencies. It is the place through which God executes His business on earth, where He meets with men and works through them for the extension of His purpose.

God authenticated the tabernacle. He made it the authentic representative of His name in the eyes of all the people. The place that He Himself had authenticated was the place where His name dwelt. It therefore became an institution with the people, the service, and the law. It was the hub of God's witness upon the earth:

But unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek . . . (Deut. 12:5).

Inasmuch as a manifestation of God had come down to the earth and had established a place where He had put His name, God further said that this was the place where men should seek. In the light of this commandment, men had no moral right to go down to Egypt and say, "I will seek God there." Men must go to the place where God has established to put His name. There are no "freelance" unattached Christians in the Scripture. There is an authenticated institution where you will meet, seek, find, and serve God. God further says:

. . . thither thou shalt come: And thither ye shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and heave offerings of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks: And there ye shall eat before the Lord your God, and ye shall rejoice in all that ye put your hand unto, ye and your households, wherein the Lord thy God hath blessed thee. Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes (Deut. 12:5-8).

God will not have us do whatsoever is right in our own eyes. If God has established a place to put His name, and we go and espouse ourselves to another place, then we have rejected His name. We have not served God unless we serve Him in the place where He said, "I will put my name."

Now this is a principle that holds throughout the Scriptures. If God says, "I will be here," but we say, "I would prefer to serve God there because I like the music, the

atmosphere, the preacher, the youth program, the social environment," we do not serve God at all. Unless we serve God in the place where He has put His name, we do Him disservice—not service. We build up by patronage and cause to survive, or even to thrive, that which should perish. Furthermore, we permit to perish, for lack of patronage, that which should survive.

But in the place which the Lord shall choose in one of thy tribes, there thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings, and there thou shalt do all that I command thee (Deut. 12:14). And again:

And thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite that is within thy gates, and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are among you, in the place which the Lord thy God hath chosen to place his name there (Deut. 16:11).

This emphasis of the choice of God versus the choice of the individual is like a drum beat throughout the Scripture. Where God has chosen to put His name, there is where we shall rejoice. There is where we shall work. There is where we shall bring our tithes and our offerings and "do all that I command you."

The Lord shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the Lord thy God, and walk in his ways. And all the people of the earth shall see that thou are called by the name of the Lord; and they shall be afraid of thee (Deut. 28:9,10).

Here God has established a testimony; He has established His name in a people for all the people of the world to see. This is not a secret thing; this is not a thing to be done behind closed doors. This is not a thing done for the sake of a small minority of Jewish people. Neither was this done because Jewish people were the only people in the world that were true believers—saved. We are speaking of the sovereign choice of God in the authentication of an institution to represent His name on earth. We are speaking of representation, not salvation. Representation is not equal to salvation. Many people were and are saved by God's grace who have never identified themselves with the "house of God" because they have been deceived or for other reasons. Almost the whole city of Nineveh was saved, but they did not join themselves to the house of God. The whole work was done that all the "people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the Lord." That is according to the purpose of God in maintaining His name and His testimony to all generations all over the world. Remember, "... this is my name forever, and this is my memorial unto all generations" (Ex. 3:15).

Now the tabernacle that Moses built in the wilderness had the purpose of being the place of the testimony of God in a unique period of time. The people of Israel were in transit from the land of Egypt into the promised land of Palestine, and therefore the tabernacle necessarily had to be portable. It was a tent. They could take it down, fold it up, and put all the parts on carriers. The Levites then marched along carrying the tent as they moved from place to place, and they would put it up again wherever they camped. That was a functional, utilitarian type of arrangement. God's designs are practical, functional, wise.

The time came, however, when a tent no longer was needed, when that arrangement no longer served the best purpose. When they had moved into the land of Palestine and had settled down permanently, the tabernacle was no longer the best of all places where God could establish His name. Later we find another building, another "house of the Lord" that superseded this antiquated tabernacle. It had served its purpose well but had become obsolete now because it no longer was the best possible instrument in the maintenance of God's name.

## God's House: The Temple

As God had told Moses, He in like manner told Solomon to build Him a house. And Solomon, as Moses had done, built the temple exactly as God had commanded: So was ended all the work that King Solomon made for the house of the Lord. And Solomon brought in the things which David his father had dedicated; even the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, did he put among the treasures of the house of the Lord (I Kings 7:51).

A new house was built. They brought in and established the ark of the covenant again in the house. And when this temple that Solomon had built in all its beauty and all its glory was completely finished and everything was totally in its place, there it stood—just a house.

Was God in this new house?

Was His name there? Was there evidence to the people that God had accepted this place for His name? All they had was Solomon's word.

But when the house was finished, again God authenticated and validated before all the people the house that He had told Solomon to build:

And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord, So that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord. Then spake Solomon, the Lord said that he would dwell in the thick darkness. I have surely built thee a house to dwell in, a settled place for thee to abide in for ever (I Kings 8:10-13). The old portable tent was now obsolete, but the "house of God" moved on as a memorial of God's name "unto all generations":

And the Lord hath performed his word that he spake, and I am risen up in the room of David my father, and sit on the throne of Israel, as the Lord promised and have built an house for the name of the Lord God of Israel (I Kings 8:20).

There was a new format, a new shape for the same institution—the house of God. There was a new form for God's house serving a better purpose, a more permanent purpose, a more stable testimony. And God came, after the house was finished, and filled the house with His glory attesting the fact that He had accepted it; confirming that He had entered into it and that this now was the official place where His name would dwell. No longer in the tabernacle—not over in the camp of the Philistines—not down in Egypt—but in this temple that He had visibly and miraculously authenticated was the place where His name would dwell. And Solomon prayed:

That thine eyes may be open toward this house night and day, even toward the place of which thou hast said, My name shall be there: that thou mayest hearken unto the prayer which thy servant shall make toward this place (I Kings 8:29). So the name of the Lord was there; and whatever they did, they did with respect to the place where the Lord had put His name. If they prayed, they prayed toward the temple where God had said He would put His name. If they offered burnt offerings, they offered them in the temple. In their worship, they went to the temple. Their tithes went into the temple. This was God's institution—the temple, the people, and the truth of God's Word. It stood for the name of God before the rest of the world. It was God's agent in the world: Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. God is known in her palaces for a refuge. For, lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together. They saw it, and so they marvelled; they were troubled, and hasted away (Ps. 48:1-5).

As the temple superseded the tabernacle, so in due time the temple itself would

be obsolete, because it would have served its purpose. All the things in the temple were prophetic in nature: the golden candlestick, the brazen altar, the ark of the covenant whereupon the priests sprinkled blood. All these things spoke of the coming Messiah—of the coming Redeemer and His work—in types and in pictures. So when Jesus Christ came and fulfilled the types of the temple, the testimony of the name of God in the temple was complete. The temple no longer was the best form of institution to bear the name of the Lord. So the day that Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross, the veil of the temple was rent in two, and the way into the Holy of Holies was made open and complete. The typical system of testimony then being fulfilled and obsolete, God would establish another testimony, another house, a more suitable dwelling place.

## **God's House: The Church**

Just as Moses prophesied (Deut. 12:10-11) that the temple itself would be built and supersede the tabernacle, so Joel prophesied that a new institution would supersede the temple. In the book of Joel we find the prophecy of this new thing that God would do:

And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit .... And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call (Joel 2:28,29,32; cf. Acts 2:16-21).

This you recognize immediately as the prophecy of the special work of the Holy Spirit which occurred at Pentecost. That God would establish a new format for His house was no strange thing by now. It was no strange thing at all to a Jew that the Spirit of God would come and dwell among them. He had long been with them in the tabernacle era and in the temple era. He had been in their midst long before this. He had filled the tabernacle; He had filled the temple. He had worked with the Jews all these years. But Joel said that God would pour out His spirit upon all flesh—not merely Jew, but all flesh—both Jew and Gentile. Now this was a strange thing to a Jew. Never before had the Gentiles as such (without becoming Jewish proselytes) been included in the institution of the house of God as the authenticated representatives of the name of God before the world. But now God would bring forth another format, another shape to His house which would include not merely the Jews but the Gentiles also.

This prophecy from Joel was repeated by John the Baptist who said:

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire (Matt. 3:11).

This was another prophecy of the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

Jesus had said concerning the former house just prior to His death, "Behold your house is left unto you desolate" (Matt 23:38). Therefore, on the first Pentecost after the death of Christ, the veil of the temple having been rent, the obsolete temple format of the house of God which had served its course now stood "desolate." But the house of God moved on. The name of God would be kept in memorial to "all generations" (Ex. 3:15). There would be no break, only the adaptation of the form to the most functional design God's wisdom could provide.

When Jesus came to the earth, He came to die. But He also came to establish a



new kind of house to continue as a pillar and a ground of His truth. He came to build a new tabernacle for God to inhabit—a new temple not made of stone—a better institution that would bear the "mystery of godliness" before the world. He chose twelve men, and the Scripture says the apostles were placed first in the church (I Cor.12:28). He had chosen these men. Teaching them day by day, He had traveled with them up and down Palestine. He told these twelve that "upon this rock (He was referring to Himself as the rock) I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). So He had established, built, or formed a living institution. As Moses had built a physical tabernacle and Solomon a physical temple, so Christ built a living church.

There it was in its infancy before Pentecost under the personal direction of Christ. He gave to His apostles (foundational blocks in the church) the institution of the Lord's supper; He commanded them by the Great Commission that they should go into all the world, that they should preach the gospel, that they should baptize men and teach them to "observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20). On the last day He was with them He led them out as far as Bethany, and they watched the Lord Jesus ascend bodily up into the heavens. When He had ascended, an angel stood by and told them not to go immediately out to fulfill the great commission, but rather to wait for that which Joel and John foretold (Acts 1:5). And we find them, in the last part of this chapter, waiting—one hundred and twenty people.

This group waited in an upper room with the apostles, with those whom the Lord Jesus had trained. This was Christ's assembly. Christ had said, "I will build my church"—that is, "my assembly." There they were—sembled, organized, commissioned. This assembly had ordinances, officers, and members in particular. They elected an officer to fulfill the place of Judas. It was a new house, finished and ready. But was it God's house?

How were men to know where the name of God would now be placed? God had said He would be in the tabernacle, and His glory filled the tabernacle. It was authenticated. God had said He would be in the temple, and His glory filled the temple. It was authenticated. Now Christ had built His church—His assembly. But how is the world to know that this is the "house of God"—the place where the name of God is? They were to be shown in the same way that He miraculously and visibly authenticated the tabernacle and the temple. God likewise miraculously and visibly authenticated His church:

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1-4).

This was the authentication and empowering of the new format of God's house. He poured out His Spirit on that day, upon the people in that specific assembly who were waiting with the apostles. That assembly of believers was localized at Jerusalem on that day, and God authenticated it as His choice of a new house—of the place where

He would place His name. With this miraculous, visible demonstration God put the world on notice and said in effect, "This is the place I have chosen now to put my name." An institution full of types of something to come was no longer suitable. What God desired now was an institution that was filled not with furniture, but with the warm hearts of people made righteous—of those who were born again of the Spirit of God,

who had repented of their sins, trusted in the Savior, and had been obedient to the ordinances and commandments of God. God chose a house not of lifeless stone but of "living stones," built into "a spiritual house" (I Peter 2:5). This was to be a house of people, both Jews and Gentiles. God authenticated the church that Christ had previously built during His personal ministry. This church was waiting at Jerusalem for the promise of the Holy Spirit. He came upon them miraculously, visibly, and demonstrated that certainly the church is the house of God.

## **God's House: All Flesh**

Yet there was some further persuasion to be done, even among the apostles themselves, that "all flesh" included the Gentiles. When a house is built of living stones, the ideal shape is not quite as simple to achieve as with physical stones, but the function is infinitely more powerful. The hundred and twenty Christians had been baptized in the Holy Spirit and empowered with the miraculous demonstration of God's sanction. But what of the Gentiles? There was not as yet a complete understanding of this aspect of the church by the apostles. But God further instructed Peter in a vision and then miraculously sanctioned the inclusion of the Gentiles (see Acts 10) in the same way He had authenticated the Jewish church on Pentecost so there could be no mistake of His intentions:

While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word [Gentiles]. And they of the circumcision which believed [Jews] were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 10:44,45).

The Jews were astonished, but surely they were not thinking. Joel had already said God was going to pour out His Spirit on all flesh, both Jew and Gentile.

God was still at work to establish His name before all generations and to all the world, as we read in Deuteronomy and in Exodus. God had no small-scale tribal plan for the Jew and the Jew alone. His testimony was to be to all the world, and so He included both the Jew and the Gentile in the institution which was to bear His name. The Jews were astonished, for they heard Gentiles speak with tongues and magnify God. Then answered Peter, "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" (Acts 10:47). Peter got the message and at once applied the new initiation ceremony, baptism, to the Gentiles. At a later date Peter rehearsed this event to the church in Jerusalem: "And as I began to speak," he said, "the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning" (Acts 11:15). He immediately recalled that the Holy Ghost had fallen on them at

Pentecost in the same manner. He continued:

Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life (Acts 11:16-18).

Now, in passing, I want to clear something up for you. This phenomenon, God's miraculous deed in the empowering and authentication of the church, is all that is meant by the "baptism of the Holy Spirit." It is so simple, and yet the misinterpretation of this phrase which is used seven times in the Scripture has produced more excesses and confusion in the Christian world, and before the unbelieving world, than scarcely anything I know.

## God's House: A Structured Assembly

In the miraculous sanction of both Jew and Gentile, God effectively tied His new house together so that both Jews and Gentiles could serve side by side. In Christ He has made them both one, and now He must teach them that this is to be a practical, literal union in localized bodies—not a mystical, theoretical union. It is the will of God that all Christians work together in assemblies—not scattered within a hodge-podge of schismatic denominations (see John 17:21,23). An assembly is a coming together in a location. And this new kind of house was to take the form of localized assemblies of obedient, baptized believers. The idea that the church of God is made up of a saved person in the Catholic church, another in the Presbyterian church, another in the Methodist church, and another in a Baptist church, or of saved people here and there in all the different churches is not a biblical idea of the church of God. That is not one accord; that is schism. That is not what Christ prayed for.

God authenticated a kind of church, local in nature, that includes all kinds of people who believe upon Him and who uniformly obey His Word. He built them into localized unified bodies as are exemplified in Scripture. That is the only kind of house God authenticated—the only kind in which God will dwell. He will dwell in no other kind of house. Paul explains how God accomplishes this in the second chapter of Ephesians, so let us follow his discussion:

Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world (Eph. 2:11,12).

Here is a description of the position of the Gentiles before salvation. This does not mean that no Gentiles were saved before Christ came. Redemption has always been to all men. The Old Testament abounds with examples of saved Gentiles. But membership in the house of God has not ever been, and is not now, predicated solely on salvation. Paul simply means that as a class of people, the Gentiles were not a part of the "commonwealth of Israel"—the house of God. The name of God had never been identified before with the Gentiles per se. As a class of people they knew little of the great promises and covenants God had made, even those promises concerning the Gentiles. But now in the new format of God's house this would be changed. The Gentiles as a class now have access to the house of God, to be authorized as official representatives of His name on the same conditions as the Jews as a class. But for this to work, regeneration is a necessary prerequisite:

But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father (Eph. 2:13-18).

Paul here is discussing the work of regeneration and reconciliation through the blood of Christ whereby even parties at enmity with each other may be reconciled. As Paul shows in this passage, the regenerate nature is an essential prerequisite for the coming together of diverse parties into a unified body, living and working together

harmoniously in the literal, visible joint-community and fellowship of the "household of God" (see I Cor. 12). So Paul further reasons:

Now therefore ye [Gentiles] are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God (Eph. 2:19).

The principle is this: upon the grounds of the regenerate nature, the Gentile may become a "fellowcitizen" of the new house which Christ established. Under the Old Testament format of the house of God, a regenerate Gentile (and there were many) still could not become a part of the official house of God without circumcision, or becoming officially a Jew. But now, for the first time, God has purposed to include regenerate Gentiles as official representatives of His name, along with regenerate Jews, but only as they both submit themselves to Christ and to obedience through this new institution God had sanctioned as elsewhere established in Scripture. But apart from such submission and obedience, no person, Jew or Gentile, regenerate or unregenerate, had any part in the "house of God."

Paul does not say that regeneration alone automatically makes one a part of the church, or house of God. The language at a casual reading can seem to imply such in this specific passage. But that is because Paul was writing to the Ephesian church—Christians already in the church at Ephesus. Furthermore, in the mind of New Testament writers, those who would not receive baptism and align themselves with a local congregation and be in submission to it and in obedience to its ordinances and teachings were not considered regenerate or saved. So it was the natural assumption that any truly regenerate person would definitely follow through and become part of the household of God through obedience to the ordinances and church fellowship. Paul was not addressing free-lance Christians at large but a local church, and that explains the language. Many Christians have been led into serious error concerning the nature of the church by lack of carefulness here, and have then attempted to re-interpret the rest of the Scripture in light of this error—hence the schism and division we see today. But the former is assumed throughout the New Testament in that the pen of inspiration recognizes no Christian apart from the church, except as erring brethren—if brethren at all.

Christ commanded that if one would not hear the church, "Let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican" (Matt. 18:17). This is in keeping with the ancient principles governing the constituent members of the house of God—"ye shall not do ... every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes" (Deut. 12:8; see also Deut. 12:13,14). Uzziah is an example of this presumptuous attitude toward the Lord's house and the principles governing it (see II Chron. 26:16-21). He was "cut off from the house of the Lord" (v. 21; see also I Cor. 5:5,13). All those who are truly a part of the Lord's house are regenerate, but the case cannot be made that all who are regenerate are automatically a part of the Lord's house. Obedience is involved (see Acts 2:41,42). God will not permit even regenerate people to represent His name officially, unless they also obey His commandments.

Paul further observes that those regenerate Gentiles who had submitted themselves to Christ and the principles of His house were builded on the apostolic foundation. As in Acts, they "continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42). They were fitly and suitably "framed together." This framing forms a temple, a house, "an habitation of God." But notice they are framed together, not framed apart. God's house is a structured assembly:

(You Ephesians) being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone; in whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord (Eph. 2:20,21; ASV).

A temple is a place where God lives, and He said you (Ephesians) also (vs. 22) are builded. Each local assembly of Christ is builded together and fitly framed. He could have said: you (Hallmark) also are built together for a habitation of God. A habitation is a place to live, a house of God. Each church is a habitation of God through the Spirit, and God dwells and lives now in each genuine church. There is where He meets the people. There is where He reaches the world. There is where He has placed His name. Do not think of the church either as a lifeless material building or as a dismembered, scattered, divided, invisible entity. It is a building, but Peter said it is built of living stones. Each member is a stone, and all the stones are structured together. Each one of you who follows the will of God as expressed in the New Testament Scriptures, is builded and fitted together in a body, a temple, a house. I will discuss in much more detail the church as a body at a later date. But briefly the body of Christ is a unit in which all the members are fitted together (see I Cor. 12) so that Christ can function through it, so that He can work there, so that He lives in this new assembly that was authenticated by the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit. Now He dwells in this new and authenticated house built of living stones—of people who have come together in one accord, in one mind, and in one Spirit for the purpose of proclaiming the whole message and truth of God and representing His name to the world according to God's sovereign choice.

God has maintained a house on the earth for His name to dwell all through the generations. The church is the last house to represent His name on the earth. It is the purpose of God, His eternal purpose in Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:11), that now (this last dispensation) through the church the powers and principalities might become aware of the manifold wisdom of God:

To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:10,11).

If the "principalities and powers" (vs. 10), that is, "the rulers of the darkness of this world" (cf. Eph. 6:12), are ever to see the "manifold wisdom of God," it will be by the agency of the New Testament church as God has eternally purposed. This is the last "house of God" to be on this earth to represent His name to "all generations." It is the "pillar and ground of the truth" (I Tim. 3:15); and the truth it bears is the mystery of godliness (I Tim. 3:16), the saving work of Christ, and all things whatsoever Christ has commanded us (Matt. 28:20). This final earthly house by the power of God's Spirit through Christ will accomplish His eternal purpose on earth. It will be successful:

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord (Isa. 2:2-5).

## **God's House: The Final Abode**

Yet there is to be a final heavenly house—a magnificent phase of the house of God. But it is not for the purpose of bearing the name of God before the lost world of

principalities and powers, nor before the generations of men in "flesh and blood" bodies who inhabit this environment of death. It will be God's glorious "tabernacle," not a habitation of God merely through the Spirit, or by the shekinah glory, but in the full glory of His personal presence (Rev. 21:23). This house will be in a "new heaven and a new earth." As the wilderness tabernacle fulfilled its purpose and became obsolete, and the temple likewise, so the church will accomplish its mission on earth and become obsolete. There will need to be a greater house, more suitable to the purpose of celebrating the glorious victories of Christ in His redemptive work.

Amazingly, the final and eternal dwelling place of God will be with men: "... Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them . . ." (see Rev. 21:1-4). What a prospect to contemplate! What a glorious finale when God himself shall perfectly represent His own name in His most glorious house by His personal presence among all the generations of the redeemed for as long as eternity shall continue.

## THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH ON EARTH

...that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth (I Tim. 3:15). Last Sunday evening, from this same text, we considered the phrase "the house of God," and we considered that concept as it relates to the broad purpose of God from ancient times to the end of the world and beyond. Tonight, I want to look at the phrase "the church of the living God." What does it mean? What is the church of the living God?

### The Popular View of the Church

In order for us to gain the greatest profit from a study such as this, I think we must take a brief look at the contemporary concept of the church. We need to see the contrast between the ideas pervading the theology of the church today and the scriptural concept of the church. The doctrine we will set forth here tonight from the Scripture may indeed be somewhat new to some of you. It may even startle you a little to find that the Scriptures teach a different thing than the view commonly held by many of our contemporary brethren who are fundamental, Bible-believing people.

The contemporary view of the church could best be illustrated, I think, by calling attention to the Scofield Reference Bible. In the old Scofield Bible you will find two or three different kinds of churches designated or distinguished by Scofield in his notes. He distinguishes an entity he calls the visible church, by which he means the aggregate body of all "professed believers." He sees another entity he calls the true church (known by others as the invisible universal church) by which he means all true believers—the saved from the time of Pentecost until the time of the Rapture. Then he finds also the local church which he considers to be the assemblies of "professed believers" in their respective localities.

Now we notice that since the "visible church" and the "local church" in Scofield's view are both comprised of "professed believers," they are essentially the same entity. One is merely the aggregate of the other. Also, we notice that since the "true church" is set over in contrast to these, the local church and its aggregate, the visible church, must be false or inferior churches or perhaps not churches at all in the scriptural sense, according to Scofield and those who follow him. I know, of course, that not everyone who holds to the idea of the invisible universal church follows Scofield in every detail, but all who hold to the idea of the "true" or "invisible" church have one thing in common: that the localized bodies of baptized believers, so predominantly in the forefront of the work in Scripture, are not really "true" churches—that is, they do not represent that entity called in Scripture, "the church of the living God." They are appendages to be tolerated, "helped," or exploited by the schools, mission boards, evangelistic associations, and the giant denominations. They are considered inferior units built by "man," not to be thought of as "the church of the living God."

I do not think this is exactly what we will find the Scriptures to teach—that there are two or three different kinds of churches. When Jesus came and built His church, did He build one kind of church or did He build two or three or dozens of different kinds of churches? Certainly the thing that is called the "invisible true church"—which is said to include all the believers whether a saved Catholic in the Catholic church, a saved

Methodist in the Methodist church, a Lutheran in the Lutheran church, a Presbyterian in a Presbyterian church, and a Baptist in a Baptist church, all those that have been saved in the various churches—presents a picture of such disunity, schism, and division that it The Nature of the Church on Earth 37 approaches blasphemy to say this is the church Christ has built.

## **The True Church**

Now I do not think that this divided church is what Jesus Christ had in mind when He said "I will build my church," yet this is what the invisible church brethren call the true church. It is far short of what the New Testament demands of a church. But whatever the true church is, we will, I think, have to admit that Paul is speaking of the "true church" in our text when he says "the church of the living God." Now are there any other kinds of churches—scriptural churches, New Testament churches, Bible churches—are there any other kinds of churches that might be called a true church that is not "the church of the living God"? Of course not. Then tonight, when I use the term church I want it to mean, unless otherwise distinguished, the only true church of the living God as presented in the Scripture.

Let us look, then, at the first mention of the word church in the Scripture (Matt. 16:18). Jesus, speaking to Peter on the occasion of Peter's confession of the great truth that "thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," answered back saying that flesh and blood had not revealed that to Peter, but His Father in heaven had revealed it. He said, "And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock [that is, upon Christ, upon the implications in Peter's confession] I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). Now the phrase to be examined is the phrase "my church." Whatever we may think the Scripture says about the term church, if we are going to come to grips with the true church, we must find out what Christ meant on this occasion when He said "my church." Whatever He had in mind here is what we must call the true church. I think that He meant the same thing that the apostle Paul meant when he was speaking in the first chapter of I Corinthians. Paul addressed this letter to "the church of God which is at Corinth." Now my question is this: is that entity which Jesus called "my church" the same as "the church of God"? Is it the "church of God at Corinth"? Is the church of God the true church? Then is the true church not localized at Corinth? It begins to appear, then, that the true church is local in nature. But is the invisible church the true church, the aggregate of all the saved? Is that what is meant by the church of God? Is that what Christ meant when He said "my church"? Well, we are shut up to the Scriptures as we try to find out the answer in this. We must look to the Scriptures, because no man has the prerogative to make a judgment and say, "Well, I think this" or "I think that." Where do we answer these questions? Not by consulting popular pastors, nor in theology books. Where shall we find the distinction? We must, of course, find the distinction by looking into the Scriptures.

## **Three Lines of Data—One Truth**

As we examine this question, we find that we have three lines of information—three main lines of data from which to draw. First of all, there is the linguistic information concerning the word church itself. In the Greek, it would be the word *ekklesia*. The second line of information that we have to draw on would be contextual, or how this word is used in each setting wherever we find it. And then the third line of information that we have to draw upon to distinguish what is the true church is



doctrinal, or the theological aspect—that is, the kind of church the doctrine surrounding this subject demands. I want to look at these three lines of information in order to distinguish what the church of the living God is like. What is its nature? What kind of an entity is it? Did Christ establish several different kinds of churches? Or did He establish one kind of church? Is that church alone to fulfill His desire to have an agency of truth here upon the earth?

## Linguistic Data

The first line of evidence that we want to present is the word itself. The Greek word which is translated "church" in the New Testament is *ekklesia*. Jesus said, "I will build my *ekklesia*." The ancient meaning of the word *ekklesia*, if you go back to the Greek etymology of it, has the basic connotation of a called out people being called out as to an assembly in some official capacity. Now the usage in the day that Jesus Himself was living is where we find the most meaningful information. How was the word used when Jesus used it? What Was the contemporary usage in Jesus' time? I think the best illustration of that is from the Scripture, so let us look at Acts chapter nineteen. There we will find an example of the general usage of the word—how it was used by the common folks.

Christ did not invent a new word when He began to talk about His church, or *ekklesia*. He borrowed a word which was in contemporary use. He borrowed a word from the language of the day so people would know what He meant. And the word *ekklesia* was used in that day almost the same way as the word assembly is used in our day. You would call an *ekklesia* an assembly. So may we look in Acts chapter nineteen to illustrate this point. This, you will recognize the story, is when Paul was at Ephesus. The silversmiths raised an uproar in the city because Paul's preaching was destroying their trade of production of silver shrines for the goddess Diana. So they had a meeting. It was a sort of spontaneous wild-cat labor union meeting as we would know it today. The silversmiths met to discuss this matter, and "Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused ..." (Acts 19:32).

The point I want to make is this word used for assembly is the word *ekklesia*. Now this confused meeting of the silversmiths was designated in that day by the word *ekklesia*. So it was a common word used to describe an assembly—a coming together of people, a literal, localized assembly to engage in some decision-making process. But most commonly in classical Greek it referred to the official assemblies of the legislative bodies in the Greek city-states (see v. 39). Thayer calls it "an assembly of the people convened at the public place of council for the purpose of deliberating" {Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 196}.

Continuing with the episode at Ephesus, the text says that "if ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly" (Acts 19:39). Now the first was a wildcat assembly so to speak, but the phrase "lawful assembly" has reference to legal assembly of the city council. They would meet to consider this matter in a lawful *ekklesia*. And then in verse forty-one the text again refers to the wildcat assembly as *ekklesia*. Now all three of those words are the same as the word Jesus used when He said, "I will build my church." He meant He would build an officially authorized assembly to officially deliberate and execute (or "bind and loose") the affairs of His kingdom on earth (Matt. 16:18, 19; 18:17,18). He did not envision a scattered, divided, dismembered "body."

If there had been consistent translation throughout the New Testament, all of the places where *ekklesia* is translated church, it would have been translated assembly. The

word church was used because it suited better the traditional concept at the time of translation and would not call attention to the inconsistent hierarchical form of the Anglican church and other Protestant denominations. It was derived from a German word which was in turn derived from a Greek word which meant the Lord's house, and it relates more to the meeting place than it does those who meet at the place. But the scriptural idea is that the church is an assembly of people.

So the word itself is one line of evidence as to the nature of the church. We must say then that if the idea we have of the church cannot meet the qualifications that the word itself requires—if a "church" cannot assemble, deliberate, and "bind and loose"—then we have the wrong idea of what the true church, the church of God, is. And honesty requires us to change. If it cannot assemble on earth, then there is no ekklesia on earth. If it can only assemble in heaven, there is no assembly on earth. There will one day be a great assembly in heaven, but if it meets the right criteria of the word itself, then it will be a literal assembly localized in heaven; and naturally the nature of that assembly will differ from the nature of the localized assemblies on earth both as to purpose and constituency.

## **Contextual Data**

Now the second line of evidence or information that we have at our disposal to determine the nature of the church Jesus said He would build is the contextual information. Was it indeed an assembly that could assemble on earth? We will look then at a few examples to see how the concept is revealed by what is said about the church. From the context in Matthew sixteen, the first mention of the word church, we cannot really determine exactly what the church would be. But if you will turn the page over to chapter eighteen, we will see a context there that will shed more light upon the nature of the church both in chapters sixteen and eighteen. This, of course, is concerning disciplinary matters. Christ gives instructions to His disciples that if there be any quarrels among them that they should bring them to the church. In verse seventeen we read, "If he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican" (Matt. 18:17).

This context makes it clearly understandable what was in the mind of Christ when He used the word church. The church that He would build then is a place where you can bring your petitions. It is a place where you can bring your grievances for a hearing. It is an entity that can assemble, hear, deliberate, and render a decision concerning the affairs of His kingdom. It is localized and can come together. This interpretation satisfies the meaning of the word that Christ chose out of all the language to call His church. It can assemble; it does assemble. In fact, it must assemble if it is going to hear what a brother has to bring before it. This must be a localized assembly, because when you come together to hear an individual—a specific man's problem or complaint—and to make a decision on it, this means that the church must come together in a locality. The so-called universal invisible church can never function in this manner. The words of Christ make no sense if what He had in mind when He used the word church was the invisible universal church. You cannot tell anything to such a church; furthermore, it can never return to you advice or counsel. Jesus clearly had in mind a localized body.

Now there is another and more weighty principle concerning the nature of the church revealed in this passage. I refer to verse eighteen where the same words are repeated that were originally spoken by the Lord as we read in chapter sixteen (verse 19). In both these verses the formula is repeated: "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth

shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:19; 18:18). This does two things. First, it places a tremendous weight of responsibility on the local assembly to render decisions—to bind and loose—according to truth. Second, it teaches us that in the mind of Christ His usage of the word church refers to the same entity in both contexts. Therefore, when He said, "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18), He meant exactly the same institution as He meant when he said, "Tell it unto the church" (Matt. 18:17). In both cases, the church is a binding and loosing agent, and in the latter case the action can only be done by specific, localized churches. Jesus knows nothing of a universal, invisible, dismembered, split, and divided church that cannot render a decision according to truth and execute it on earth as He binds it in heaven.

Let us look now at other examples. In the book of Romans we read: "I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea" (Rom. 16:1). Phebe was a servant of the church at a specific locality. This church at Cenchrea was not the overall church, but it was the church in this locality. Look at verse five now: "Likewise greet the church that is in their house." There was a church localized in the house of Aquila and Priscilla. Looking down the page we see that Paul says, "The churches of Christ salute you" (verse 16). You see the plural is used. There are many churches that Christ would call "my church." The writers of Scripture have no concept of one big overall church. Continuing on, Paul speaks of Gaius as being his host and host to "the whole church" (verse 23). He calls it the whole church, so you see you have the entire church—you have an entire ekklesia—in one locality, even in one house, in one village, as we have here tonight. It is not a part of a great big overall thing, but a church entire, complete and whole in one locality. This is compatible with the concept of the church we have seen that Jesus had (Matt. 16,18).

Now, out of all the Scriptures I have brought these few examples. Yet, there are fifty-six such examples that definitely and obviously teach that the church of Jesus Christ is a localized body of believers who can assemble and who do assemble in one place.

The Scriptures further confirm this notion or this idea by the usage of the term ekklesia in the plural. I want to take a few examples of such usage. Luke, speaking of the churches in Judaea as having rest after the persecution, says, "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied" (Acts 9:31). Luke, then sees them as churches, plural. Now does this mean two or three different kinds of churches, or does it mean a plurality of the same kind of church? It means, of course, a plurality of the same kind of church. And so the New Testament concept is not one of "the church" or "the true church" but of the true "churches." It is the concept of a plurality of complete and whole individualized assemblies meeting wherever they may exist. That is the New Testament concept.

Another example of the usage of the word ekklesia in the plural is in Revelation. These are the words of Jesus Christ Himself; this is the view Jesus Christ holds of the nature of the church. (For a listing and analysis of all the times Jesus Christ used the word church, see *The Nature of the New Testament Church on Earth*, W. A. Ramsey, Hallmark Baptist Church, Simpsonville, S.C., pp. 6,7). If you say, "What concept or doctrine does Christ have of the church?" here it is in Revelation. This is His message to John: "The mystery of the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches" (Rev. 1:20). Jesus sees the churches as a plurality. Furthermore, He sees Himself as one walking among the candlesticks or among the churches (Rev. 1:13). He is not as one who is with one large

aggregate church, but one who is walking among and being with the individual churches. This passage goes on to give specific messages to each of these seven churches, and by the number seven I interpret to mean simply that this is a number of completeness, chosen to be representative of all churches everywhere. At the end of each one of the passages in chapter two He says, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." Jesus obviously has the concept of a plurality of churches.

We now have given a few contextual examples of singular usage of the word church which demand a localized interpretation, and there are fifty-six such examples. I have also given a few examples of plural usage in Scripture contexts which obviously require a local interpretation, and there are thirty-six such examples. The word *ekklesia* is used of a secular assembly (the silversmiths) three times, which we have considered. It is used once of the assembly of Israel in the wilderness (Acts 7:38), and once in a prophetic reference to the final gathering in heaven of all the righteous angels and men from the foundation of the earth (Heb. 12:22,23). This is a much broader assembly than merely the New Testament church. (For a grouping and analysis of all the references to the word church in the New Testament see *Nature of New Testament Church*, pp. 4,5) This accounts for all the references in Scripture but eighteen, and now we must deal with this class of references, for here is where most of the misunderstanding lies. But when eighty-four percent of all the passages unequivocally demand a local interpretation, we had better be careful how we handle the other sixteen percent. If the eighty-four percent are true churches of God, we had better think twice before we relegate them to some inferior classification and establish in their stead a divided and scattered entity that violates every principle of unity, obedience, ministry, and mission in the Scripture. We must now consider this last class of references, of which there are eighteen. For consistency this group should be classified as examples of generic usage of the word church.

Let us look then at one or two examples of generic usage of the word church. Look back to Matthew 16:18 where Christ says, "And upon this rock I will build my church." Now that is used in a generic sense. It does not necessarily refer to any specific, particular local assembly but to all such assemblies in general as kind or genus. Let me explain: If you should say, "The horse is a beautiful animal," how would you be using the term horse? You would be speaking of horses in general as being beautiful animals. You would be using it in a generic sense. If you were referring to a specific horse you would say "That horse is a beautiful animal." But if you say "the horse" you are using it to designate a genus or species, a kind. Therefore, Jesus is saying: upon this rock I will build my kind of church (Matt. 16:18). If we were to say, "The horse is a beautiful animal," we would not be trying to teach that there exists somewhere one big universal horse comprised of all the horses of the world. You would not understand it that way. We might say, "Man is an intelligent creature," but we would not mean that there was just one great big man somewhere. We would be speaking generally of all mankind. There is no great big man. There is no man at all except as man exists in individualized units. Is that not so? There is no horse at all except as the horse exists in individualized units. Likewise, there is no church at all on this earth except as the church exists in individualized units. So that is the generic usage of the word church. Christ was not trying to say that He would build one (numerically single) great big church. If so, this would have been incompatible with the word that He chose to use, because you cannot take, as I mentioned before, all of the aggregate of the saved people on this earth and bring them together. Neither can they function as a body. They cannot exercise discipline, nor can they bind or loose, ordain officers, baptize, or execute the

great commission.

Now we will look at one other example of the word church in the generic usage. The book of Ephesians is perhaps the greatest book on the subject of the church when properly understood. Yet, most of the doctrine of the invisible church comes from misinterpretations of this great book. If you will look in chapter five of the book of Ephesians, it says: "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body" (vs. 23). We have here an excellent illustration of generic usage of terms. The first, of course, is the husband. It is not trying to teach, as everyone knows, that there is one great big husband; it is teaching that the husband as a kind or class—each individual husband— is the head of his individual wife. And every individual wife is likewise to be subject to her specific, localized husband. You see, that is perfect generic usage of the term wife and of the term husband. Then it says "even as Christ is the head of the church." Now that does not need to be interpreted as speaking of one great big aggregate church of all saved people, but rather that Christ is the head of each specific church wherever it may be. It is clear that Christ so considers Himself (review Rev. 1-3). It is His desire to sanctify and cleanse each specific local church and to present each one to Himself holy and without blemish (see Eph. 5:23-32). How much easier would it be to do that in an obedient unified localized body, with pastors and teachers (see Eph. 4:11-16) than in the divided, schismatic "invisible body" distributed throughout a hundred heretical denominations and taught every wind of doctrine by unsaved and self-serving pastors and priests? If we say that is the church Christ has built and is the head of, then we have charged Christ with building the thing that the devil has obviously built.

Although much more could be said about the contextual usage of the word church, we must draw this part of our study to a close. We have looked at the first class of information bearing on the nature of the church: linguistic, the word itself. We have examined the second class of information: contextual, the usage of the word in context. Now we must examine the third class of information: doctrinal or theological. How do the theological or doctrinal implications of Scripture concerning the nature of the church require that we think of it?

## **Theological Data**

Already we have observed from the Lord's direct teachings on the church (see Matt. 16:18; 18:17, 18) that it is to be perpetual as a kind of institution. It has been given "keys" which represent a certain official authority of custodianship concerning the affairs of the kingdom of heaven. This custodianship involves a "binding" and "loosing" activity. A part of this, we have seen, involves the purging of itself of insubordinate and sinful members, and this is to be and must be done by each specific localized church. Therefore, theologically we must conclude that each local church has an official custodianship under Jesus Christ and is responsible to accurately execute—bind and loose—in the affairs of the kingdom. Whenever a church fails to execute its affairs in accordance with the will of Christ its head, its churchhood is in jeopardy—its "candlestick" will be taken away unless it repents (e.g., see Rev. 2:4,5).

Some will object that no church is perfect, to which I would agree (especially not the schismatic, disobedient, universal invisible church, so-called). But an imperfect church can render perfect decisions through its majority; and when a church becomes so corrupt that its majority decisions are contrary to the will of its head, Christ will no longer own it as His church. It loses its candlestick, its keys, its churchhood. No human being knows how many of the architecturally impressive plants—the sanctuaries,

classrooms, and gymnasiums—house assemblies which have had their custodianships revoked.

As we look further at the doctrinal implications of the nature of the church, we find the church which Jesus had personally founded during His earthly ministry assembled together, already binding and loosing in the affairs of the kingdom (see Acts 1:13f). True to the word *ekklesia*, the members were assembled. They knew how many were committed to this assembly—one hundred and twenty. They knew the "number of the names together," and this tells us that they knew the names of the ones involved. They had counted their number. This was a distinct body; it was concrete, not abstract. This was a visible, discernible, responsible assembly—not a dismembered, phantom church of free-lance Christians each doing what was right in his own eyes. This church had a church roll containing the names and number of its members. It had officers, the apostles, set first in the church by Jesus Himself (I Cor. 12:28; Luke 6:12-16; Mark 3:13,14). It had organization, and for that reason only it may be called an organism. This was the true church, "the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."

The church did not originate on the day of Pentecost, but on that day it received its visible, miraculous sanction. It received God's stamp of approval publicly before men and began to execute its full commission to go into all the world on that day. Like the temple and like the tabernacle, it had been already built and was sitting there complete, furnished and waiting. The shekinah glory came down and filled the tabernacle and filled the temple; and so it was on the day of Pentecost that the Holy Spirit, in fulfillment of Joel's prophecy, filled the waiting church which had already been organized. Before that they had already begun to execute business while they waited. They elected another officer to fill the position of Judas who had been disqualified. So there was, from the doctrinal aspect, a functional organization to the church already binding and loosing. There was localization of the church. There were specific members and officers in it.

This church also had the ordinances. This is another doctrinal aspect of the church which could hardly be executed and carried out by such an entity as the "invisible church." So further on in the book of Acts we read:

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers (Acts 2:41,42).

So they had organization, counted the members, had officers, and were executing the great commission in that they were preaching the gospel, baptizing, and observing the communion and teaching the new converts. So the Scriptures exemplify an official, visible, well-defined entity that was called and recognized as the church of Jesus Christ.

Another doctrinal aspect is this: the church of Christ must be able to exhibit qualities of unity and functionability. It is a body. Paul uses the analogy of the human body to illustrate the qualities of unity, organization, coordination, and functionability (see I Cor. 12). The church must be this kind of an institution: "For the body is not one member, but many" (I Cor. 12:14). Now the idea that the Apostle Paul is setting forth here is that the church of Jesus Christ must fulfill the qualifications of being a coordinated body. He is illustrating something. He calls it in other places the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22,23; Col. 1:24). He is illustrating a functional, coordinated unit. (A complete listing and analysis of every New Testament mention of the word body, as it pertains to the church, is given for your further study in *Nature of New Testament*

Church, pp. 7-12.)

What is a body? A body is an organism. An organism is a highly organized living thing. It has specific attached parts or members for specific functions. I have hands, I have fingers, a mouth, eyes, and feet. These parts are all connected together—not scattered around the world. I am in some sense coordinated. I can move about on my feet and watch where they go with my eyes. I can speak while I move my hands. I can pick up objects. All of the motions of my body are coordinated and directed by my head. Jesus is the head of the church body; Jesus Christ is the head of the body, and in the same way that my body responds to what my head is thinking, so a church (if it is a scriptural church) must respond to what its head thinks and says to do.

Now the body—if it is a body—is coordinated. And let me ask you—if the true church were comprised of a saved member in the Catholic church, a saved member in the Methodist, and one in the Lutheran, and a member here and a member there of all who were saved in the world, then how could it ever conform to this image and analogy of a coordinated body? The invisible church fails at every point to satisfy the scriptural teachings of the body of Christ. The invisible church is disjointed and scattered; a body is connected and assembled. The invisible church is not doctrinally unified, not scripturally organized, not morally disciplined, not mutually coordinated, not practically functional; a body is all these things. In the scriptural body each member is functioning and consciously aiding the other. It is impossible to achieve and to obey this picture if we say that the true church is the invisible church as we know it. And if you hold the doctrine that the true church is an invisible church, you had just as well throw out this portion of Scripture (I Cor. 12), because such a church will never be able to obey this passage. The only possible way of obeying it is to have all the members of the family of God come together locally and agree with each other, and cooperate with each other, and for each to fulfill his function according to the commandments of the Lord in one accord. When this is done what you would have would be local New Testament churches, unified in one kind of body as Paul indicates by the generic use of body (I Cor. 12:12,13). Let us read on:

And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another (I Cor. 12:19-25). Now in the invisible church situation, this does not and cannot exist. We cannot exhibit this picture except in localized gatherings. The church of the living God is the localized assembly, and the living God has no other kind of church on this earth. It must be a coordinated, functional, unified unit. Now turn to the book of Ephesians:

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly

joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love (Eph. 4:11-16).

Now there are churches that are interdenominational in their basic beliefs. They say it does not matter what your basic doctrinal beliefs are: Do not worry too much about doctrinal matters—come on and all of us can ignore the great biblical principles, and we will be one body and be unified by casting off these doctrinal matters. But whenever you have such a church as that, it must either grow wholly insensitive to Scriptural truth, or sooner or later—probably sooner—there will be a split. It will split right down the middle, and this happens frequently. Since the turn of the twentieth century, the Baptist movements have had more splits because too many Baptists have taken an interdenominational doctrinal position of the church. Many have been tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. But the teaching in this passage (Eph. 4:11-16) is that Christ has given officers in the church for the perfecting of the saints and building up of the body that we be no more children carried about by the sleight of men, their cunning craftiness and false doctrine.

Paul then goes on to discuss the unified body aspect of the church. The body of Christ is joined, compacted, and built together. The idea of the scattered invisible church is a complete contradiction to these Scriptures. If this is not a localized assembly, then how in the world can you ever achieve a compacted, built-together body with every joint (or member) supplying that compacting force according to the "effectual working" of every part? We can only work effectually, scripturally, in literal assemblies.

With the truth of God being administered in a body—a local situation where every member is in his place and where every member in particular is coordinated with, knows, and cares about the others—there follows the compacting, the fitly joining together until you have the healthy mature body which God commands of His churches. The churches are to be unified and functional. But they will neither be unified nor functional unless they are together—unless they are taught and builded together. Look now in the second chapter of Ephesians: "And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:20-21). That is the local church; an habitation of God—the house of God. That is the church that Jesus said He would build. That is the only kind of church He has ever built: one that is builded together, fitly framed, compacted, and unified. Now such a closely framed and unified church is the result of a very important Scripture principle which is explained in earlier verses (see Eph. 2:13-18). This is the principle that the church is to be comprised only of regenerate members—those having been born again, changed by the Spirit of God. This close-knit, compacted unity is possible only when the members are regenerated: "that he might reconcile both unto God in one body . . ." (Eph. 2:16). "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. . . . Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:41,47). Whenever a church departs from this regenerate, compacted character then we no longer have a right to call it Christ's church. Both the Catholic church and the Protestant churches, with the practice of infant baptism have departed from the scriptural concept of a regenerate church membership, and within this hodge-podge we are supposed to find the "true" church!

Now I want to ask the question: How in the world with a church concept where one member is here and one member is there believing this doctrine and that doctrine,



with all kinds of doctrines that there are among all the people that are saved—how can such a church ever carry out the great commission or teach one to observe all the things Christ commanded? It cannot do it. How can they obey in baptism when one is sprinkling and one is pouring, another is baptizing infants, and another is baptizing believers only? How can you obey Christ's commandments when all this is so? That is not His church. Christ makes no claim to such a church. What He claims is the kind of church taught by Scripture. And if we say that His church is something other than this, then we have taken presumptuous liberty with the teachings of Scripture. We have no right! That is worse than plagiarism; that is assigning false views to God Himself who does not hold those views.

How can discipline and the communion be scripturally administered if the invisible church is the true church? The Scripture says that we are not to eat with the immoral or with heretics (I Cor. 5:11), yet if the invisible church is the true church, then the Catholic, the Methodist, the Mormon and everyone else that claims salvation in the name of Christ must sit down together if salvation is the only qualification. Or for those here and there who are really saved through the grace of God—how can they ever obey the scriptural commandments to eat the Lord's Supper only with those who are unified in a disciplined church? It cannot be done.

And how can such a church exhibit to the world the unity and the love for which Christ prayed? We must exhibit visible, practical, observable unity to the world if the world is going to be saved (John 17:21-23). I believe that is exactly why the message of the gospel has so little power today. It is because the way things are that there is no witness of unity that can be seen. The mystical brotherhood of believers is not something the world can see unless we are unified in truth, practically and scripturally. Christ provided for this to be seen through the unity within and between local churches everywhere of one kind. How can the church be the pillar and the ground of the truth as our text says if all of the members hold these various different doctrinal positions? Truth is not diversified. The truth is unified. But as long as people hold to the idea of the invisible church, diversity of doctrine is thereby justified—there can be no discipline on doctrinal grounds. We must get back to the scriptural concept of the church. It is more than just an academic matter. If it were merely academic, we could just say it does not matter. But it is a terribly practical matter. People are doubtless going to hell because this heresy has been so broadly publicized, and the churches have become so corrupt and divided that the world cannot tell who to hear. So they have largely stopped listening.

We here tonight have not only the right but the obligation to say we will do whatever the Lord says. We will be unified; we will structure ourselves according to the truth and build upon that. We will help one another and love one another. We will strive to be a cohesive, coordinated body. And if the world could see many churches in that light, it would then begin to think. It would then begin to see God's people as compatible with the kind of personality that Jesus Himself was. Then they would say, "These are the people of Christ. He was the Son of God." But until we get the church concept straight and exhibit it before the world, the world can never see Christ for who He is. God in His wisdom established and designed the church to be the most effective instrument possible before the world. When we change His design, we change the effectiveness of the gospel. Let us therefore pray and work that God will raise up churches everywhere, that the world can see Christ again as He has not been seen since the first century.

## **THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH**

The subject of church authority which I am about to treat is not frequently mentioned in these days. Yet it is a principle which must be dusted off and reconsidered. It is of great importance both scripturally and as an ingredient essential to the solution of many of the problems facing the divided and schismatic churches today. It is ever true that when great biblical principles are allowed to fall into disuse and away from conscious consideration and application, the work of God always suffers. In order for churches to remain pure to represent Christ as He would be represented and to spread the gospel over the globe, the principle of church authority must be understood and applied again. Each individual Christian is duty bound to submit himself to the institution to which God has given the authority and responsibility to execute the affairs of the kingdom of heaven.

### **Institutional Versus Individual Authority — An Ancient Principle**

Now this should not be a surprise, for God has since the days of Moses delegated certain authority to some earthly institution rather than to each individual: Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every [individual] man whatsoever is right in his own eyes (Deuteronomy 12:8).

Now if there is an authority, if there is an institution with sanction from God, then we are not to choose whatsoever is right in our own individual eyes. The individual is not his own law in God's service, but he is to be subject to the institutional authority that God has established. The above passage is not out of context in this sense, but if you will look up in verse five (Deut. 12) you will get the context:

But unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come (Deut. 12:5).

This establishes the fact that the place where God chose to "put his name" must be the central base of individual activities in service. Again look in verse thirteen: Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest (Deut. 12:13).

This establishes in the Old Testament the principle of institutional authority—that God would put His name in a certain place. When God puts His name in a certain place and sanctions and designates that place as being the place for His name, then it is altogether out of order for an individual to set up his own institution or go to another place, to another institution, to another situation where God has not put His name and say, "There I will serve the Lord." We have no right to do that. We are altogether bound to the place where God has put His name.

God, today, has put His name in the New Testament church. It is the house of the living God, the pillar and the ground of truth (I Tim. 3:15). If this Old Testament principle of the sanction of God upon a place or institution to represent His name is a universally valid principle—if it is a valid principle that knows no time limit, a timeless principle—then it will also be found in the New Testament as well. We turn then to the New Testament to see if the church has an equal authority as far as being the representative of God in this day and age.

## **New Testament Foundations for Institutional Authority**

To determine this, we must go back to the beginning of the activity that was started by God Himself in bringing into existence the new covenant era which we call the New Testament dispensation. Mark puts up the first signpost pertaining to the gospel era, the actual beginning of those things that were prophesied in the Old Testament concerning the first advent of Christ: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). The Old Testament foreshadowed a new situation. It foretold that God would pour out His spirit upon all flesh including the Gentiles. The Messiah would come and suffer and die and be resurrected—all of these things were prophesied. By Mark's introduction—"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God"—he means, here and now these gospel-related events are starting to transpire. They will lead to and culminate in bringing the good news of the redemption that Christ has brought and all things pertaining to it.

The specific prophecy Mark used to introduce the gospel era was the coming of the messenger to prepare a way for the Lord, that is, the ministry of John the Baptist. Mark quotes from the Old Testament:

As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight (Mark 1:2,3; see Isa. 40:3 and Mal. 3:1).

John was preaching in the wilderness and preached the message of repentance for remission of sins. So then Mark put down a signpost when he said these things are the beginning of the gospel. From here his narrative builds with the other gospel writers toward the whole system of New Testament events which results in an institution, the church, to which Christ will give the keys of the kingdom.

As God begins a series of events to bring this institution into being, Mark's statement identifies the first authoritative agent of God for this new work. This agent is John the Baptist; he antedates the church itself. The church did not come into existence right here with the preaching of John, but John's baptism was the sign to identify Christ, the authoritative founding agent of the future church:

This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water (John 1:30,31).

Jesus Christ, being God, came to the earth and became the agent of God for bringing into existence the new covenant. He was the Lamb of God. Part of John's work was to identify Him to Israel (John 1:31). That is why God sent John baptizing—to identify Christ, to initiate an ordinance, and to prepare a people.

Now then, does a man just get out in the wilderness and start preaching and start going through some ceremonial act without any divine authority? If so, we need not pay the slightest heed to it—there is too much religion without the authority of God today. That is why it is important to identify the institution today where God has put His name. Many today just grow a beard and go out and start some kind of personally owned and operated "ministry." They say: "I have the authority of God upon it."

There is no authority in the world but that which is authorized of God. God is the only authority and whatever John did, if it had not the authority of Almighty God upon it, means nothing whatsoever. But God sent John to baptize (John 1:33). John's authority for this act was given by Almighty God. There, Jesus submitted to John for baptism and to none other. We have the obligation to submit to whatever is from God.

The Lord did not count Himself an exception. He submitted and surrendered Himself to the baptism performed by a man because God had commanded John to baptize:

Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased (Matt. 3:13-17).

Jesus went all the way from Galilee to a southerly part of Jordan because He was able to discern in the Scriptures that the ministry of John was of God. He therefore submitted himself and sought out the man God had authorized. God Himself spoke from heaven and publicly owned Jesus as His Son; He said He was well pleased. This was a direct sanction on John's ministry as well as on Christ. John was sent by God to begin the gospel era (Mark 1:1). Here in the beginning of the New Testament era we find God's authoritative sanction upon the agencies of His choice, and as we shall later see, there is a continuum of institutional authority from these foundations.

## **The Contemporary Negation of John's Baptism**

Now let me digress for a moment. Today—it is a sad commentary—the Protestant and the Catholic positions on the baptism of John are alike opposed to it as Christian baptism. Jay Adams, for example, is adamant that baptism did not originate with John (See *Meaning and Mode of Baptism*, p. 5). They will not admit that John's baptism is Christian baptism. They say it was Old Testament baptism or Jewish proselyte baptism. And the reason they will not admit its validity as Christian baptism is that it condemns their own baptism. The baptism of John undercuts three errors precious alike to the Catholic church and her Protestant daughters: (1) it condemns infant baptism; (2) it condemns sprinkling and pouring; (3) it condemns baptismal regeneration. These three things make it necessary that Protestants and Catholics not acknowledge John's baptism as true Christian baptism. Now Jesus submitted to it. And if the baptism of John was not Christian baptism, then Jesus did not have Christian baptism. If the baptism of John was not Christian baptism, then the apostles did not have Christian baptism. And if Jesus and the apostles did not have Christian baptism, the church or anyone today does not have it.

John required repentance which, of course, is a thing that infants cannot do. Furthermore, if a person repents and puts his faith in Christ, he is regenerated—saved. Therefore John's baptism condemns baptismal regeneration. John categorically rejected a covenant relationship based on ancestry:

And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father-, for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham (Matt. 3:9).

Ancestry, the Catholics and Protestants say, is the basis for infant baptism. They say they have a Christian father, they have Christian parents; therefore, infants are in the covenant and so should receive baptism. But John's baptism says no to the proposition of ancestral baptism. John said do not say you have such and such parents or such and such a grandfather. Do not say you have Abraham for your father—that was the basis upon which some of the Jews were coming. But in contrast to the old covenant—now in the new covenant, the "axe is laid unto the root of the trees" (Matt. 3:10). Every individual tree that does not bear its own fruit of repentance (Luke 3:8,9) will be hewn

down.

## **The Development and Continuity of Institutional Authority in the New Testament**

Now the baptism of John is the authoritative sign to identify the agents (Jesus and the apostles) that God would use in the foundation of the New Testament church. And John's baptism had its authority from heaven. Since John's baptism was from heaven and since the apostles had received it, it was God's purpose that the apostles themselves become agents of God authorized to carry on this baptism under Christ. They then continued with a direct continuity from the baptism of John, to preach the gospel and baptize. The message of Christ and the apostles was the same as that of John (Compare Matt. 3:2; Mark 1:15; Acts 19:4), and their act of baptism was the same (John 4:1). In John's Gospel (4:1) we read of Jesus and His apostles continuing after having received the baptism of John. They began to execute the ministry that God had called them to execute. John the Baptist as the authorized agent who began the process under God's direct commission must now decrease, and Christ who had God's authority from heaven, continued to increase—taking up the same basic work which John was to lay down: ". . . Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples)" (John 4:1,2).

Institutional authority therefore has continuity. Continuity from the baptism of John became one of the hallmarks of apostolic authenticity and qualification. There was a continual line of authority starting with the baptism of John and continuing right up to the day of Pentecost, as we shall later see.

Remember that John's function was two-fold. First he was to identify the Messiah to Israel (John 1:30,31). Second he was to "make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17). Now the people who were prepared by John's preaching of the gospel and by his baptism began to follow Christ. The only authorized direction this prepared people could take was to leave John and become followers of the Lord. The Lord was about to build a house—the church—a permanently authorized agent to handle the affairs of the kingdom of heaven on earth. David was authorized and commanded by God to gather materials for the temple, but Solomon was to build the temple (I Chron. 22:5,6). So John prepared a people for the Lord, and Christ Himself built His infant church from these prepared people. Hence, the work had a perpetual flow according to God's purpose.

The Scriptures say the apostles were first placed in the church (I Cor. 12:28). Upon one occasion Christ went up in a mountain and prayed all night, and then He called His disciples and chose twelve and ordained them (see Mark 3:13,14). That was the infant church where the apostles were first placed (Compare Ephesians 2:20). Then the people prepared by John, including the apostles, became the first members of the church, and the Christ of heaven placed upon the church the authority of heaven just as John had upon his prepared people. This is all one work of God—a continuum.

The foundation of the church is made up of the apostles, prophets, and Christ (Eph. 2:20). But Christ was the chief cornerstone, and He was the authority and power behind this God-sanctioned work of beginning the church and personally guiding it throughout His life until the day He was taken up. Therefore, prior to the day of Pentecost, the church had residing upon it and vested in it the authority of the Holy Trinity.

Divine authority had been established with John the Baptist and transmitted through those vessels chosen of God who were to continue under the personal ministry

or instruction of Christ until the day that Christ would pour out His Holy Spirit upon the Church at Pentecost. During this time, the authority of Christ was vested in His church as the qualified custodian of the kingdom of God.

## **The Keeper of the Keys**

The next gospel passages touching the continuity and authority of the church are the teachings of Christ in Matthew, chapters sixteen and eighteen. These are passages that show the on-going process of the work of Christ in building a qualified institution which has perpetuity and official status.

Now I want to turn to a study of the Scripture on this subject and read a text found in Matthew's Gospel:

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 (16:19).

The language of this text obviously speaks of some kind of responsible authority delegated to some person or institution. Then let us consider the context to discover what or to whom this authority has been given. In the verses preceding this text, Christ has received from the apostle Peter that great confession that He was the Christ:

And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16).

In reply to Peter, Christ speaks of Himself (relative to those great truths implied in Peter's confession) as a massive stone upon which His church is founded and He refers to Peter as a smaller stone. He further says, "I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). He is speaking to and of the apostles as the infant church, not to Peter alone. We know this because the total description of the foundation of the church is given elsewhere in Scripture (Eph. 2:20), and there it includes not just Peter but all the other apostles and prophets as well. Then it specifies Christ as the cornerstone. Therefore, it would be theologically inaccurate to suppose, as many do, that Christ addresses Peter as the foundation of the church, or that the following reference to "keys" and to "binding and loosing" (v. 19) is directed toward

Peter only. This is made clear by references in Matthew, chapter eighteen (v. 18) which we will consider momentarily. These things are directed to the infant church, comprised at least of the apostles. We must conclude too, that the keys remained in the church after all the apostles passed off the scene.

The Scriptures say the apostles were first set in the church, and Christ in this passage is delivering to the infant church the keys of the kingdom of heaven for the purpose of binding and loosing (v. 19). Now anyone who holds the keys to anything is in some sense an authority concerning that thing. Jesus Christ holds the keys of death and hell. He therefore holds authority over death and hell. Just so Christ as the authority over the kingdom has handed to His church the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and the church has become the earthly custodian under Christ of the affairs of the kingdom of heaven. This is clearly shown in Matthew, chapter eighteen (v. 17,18) where the church, not Peter, is "binding and loosing" in the exercise of this authority—using the "keys" in matters pertaining to the kingdom of heaven. The keys then make the churches authoritative earthly representatives under Christ of the kingdom of heaven.

Let me consider briefly now the serious implications in the words of Christ that "whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:19; 18:18). I say these are serious implications because they place such a load of responsibility on the church to

accurately discern the will of God in all its activities. We know the nature of God is unchangeable and perfectly righteous and that He will not bind in heaven something that is not right. What then can we make of His promise? Is God binding Himself to the will of men? Obviously not. A better rendition of this promise would be, "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven," etc. This means that the earthly binding agent is only following, not determining, the will of God. He is leading us; we are not leading Him. In this we can see the great responsibility that rests upon the church to accurately follow His truth and the leadership of the Holy Spirit in discerning His truth through Scripture.

An example of this is seen in the first chapter of Acts where the church chose Matthias to take Judas' place. They first consulted the Scripture (v. 20). Secondly, they sought the guidance of the Lord (v. 24) and prayed, "Shew whether of these two thou hast chosen." God, you see, had already chosen. Then they bound a very important action pertaining to the kingdom of heaven—the choosing of an apostle. The will of God had been bound in heaven—now it was bound on earth by the "amen" of the church to God's prior choice. And the church is the only institution which had been given such authority.

Now a solemn fact is established by these principles: that if God has promised to bind in heaven the things His church binds on earth, it is certain that when an institution begins to make decisions or "bindings" contrary to God's will they no longer can be His church. He will doubtless remove the "candlestick" or churchhood when this happens (see Rev. 2:5). This authority is therefore a serious responsibility which every true church must accept in fear and trembling with a solemn humility. The church then is recognized by Christ as the earthly authority representing Him in the matters pertaining to the kingdom of heaven.

## **The Continuum of Institutional Authority from John the Baptist to Pentecost**

Now I want to move on to a very significant set of occasions which show clearly that Christ had a very concise and deliberate consciousness of the principles of authority and continuity concerning the work and purpose of God. There was an occasion when the Pharisees demanded of Jesus an authority for what He did:

And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority? (Matt. 21:23)

They demanded an authority. This was a good question had it been sincere; the question of authority is a major part of biblical theology. When you do things without authority, you act presumptuously. Therefore, they properly asked, by what authority do you do such and such. He said in reply, I am going to ask you a question which if you can answer, I will tell you by what authority I do these things:

The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? (Matt. 21:25).

The question that He asked them was also His answer. He cited the baptism of John because He knew it was from heaven—and they had rejected it. Therefore, they could not answer without condemning themselves. So they said, "We cannot tell." If they had answered in the affirmative, then Jesus would have said something like this: "Since you admit John's baptism is from heaven, then obviously my authority is also from heaven — I am working under the authority of God, and you should know this

because I submitted to John's baptism which is from heaven." Jesus put Himself into the hands of the agent that God had commanded to preach and to baptize. Though He was God, yet He submitted to heaven's earthly authority. This is an example of obedience and humility in which few people of this generation are willing to follow Christ. If you desire the authority of heaven on your work today, you must be in the lineage of perpetuity that reaches back through the church, through Christ, through John to God the Father. Christ did not chafe at the thought of God extending his authority through mere men—why do you?

Now please turn to Luke, chapter seven, and we will see from that passage that all of those who received the baptism of John justified or vindicated the word or counsel of God. They upheld the Godhead; they honored the whole Trinity. It says: And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John (Luke 7:29).

They magnified the name of God by submitting to that which God had ordained. The opposite of that is to reject the counsel of God: But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him [John] (Luke 7:30).

Now this is a very interesting reaction in view of the many today who attempt to negate John's baptism in one way or another. Those who would refuse to be baptized and to submit to the authority of God through His ordained agent rejected the counsel, the advice, or the command of God. They threw His commandments back in His teeth because they would not be baptized with the baptism of John. We cannot say that we are submitted to God unless we are submitted to His ordained agencies and authorities. Many so-called Christians today reject John's baptism calling it "man's" baptism. And they reject continuity of institutional authority with it, holding a "baptism" that has no continuity with God's sanction, therefore, no continuity with the apostles or with

Christ in the institutional sense. When you reject any part of a continuum, you reject the continuum. When you break the continuum, you have broken with the institution.

Now we pick up the teaching on authority again in the great commission: "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and earth" (Matt. 28:18). All power would be better translated all authority, and when He said "I am with you . . .," He was speaking obviously to the eleven institutionally as the infant church—as being the institution that would continue always even unto the end of the world. The actual persons before Him would not continue that long. This was His commission to His church. He gave this commission by His great limitless authority. And anyone who dares to usurp this authority—who dares to go in the name of himself, the individual, or in the name of some other para-church institution to do the work of God—has usurped that authority. He has rejected the authority that came from heaven and trespassed into areas where he has no authority unless he goes as a part of and under the authority of the church of Jesus Christ.

This great commission reconfirms the authority of the founder of the church as well as the authorization of the church under Him. This is true to the ancient and the New Testament principle of institutional authority which Christ so clearly acknowledged and so carefully observed in practice and teaching. The great commission is not to the individual except as he responds through the institution.

The final passage I want to consider in this series shows that continuity from the baptism of John was one of the hallmarks of apostolic authenticity. It was essential as a qualification for that unique group—the twelve apostles. To them institutional identity and perpetuity was an important and valuable principle to be regarded.



The gathered church was about to select another apostle to take the place of Judas according to the Scriptures (Acts 1:20). The apostolic criterion was that they must select another apostle who had continued with them all the time from John:

Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection (Acts 1:21,22).

Most, if not all, of the apostles had been baptized by John, as well as many of those who followed them, of whom Matthias was one. This occasion clearly shows that in the mind of the apostles of Christ, the work of God from the commission of John the Baptist throughout the ministry of the church was one institutional continuum. This leaves no room for the presumptuous free-lancer, extra-church institutions, or individuals doing whatsoever is right in their own eyes.

Christ, then, vested His own authority in the church. Wherever you find that institution today, you find the authority of Almighty God behind it. It is up to us to identify that institution and to submit ourselves to it even as Christ our example humbly submitted to John. This authority that is vested in the church by Jesus Christ, we have shown to have been a continuity from the beginning of the gospel (Mark 1:1,2) up until the day of Pentecost.

### **The Perpetuity of Institutional Authority Following Pentecost**

At this point I want you to recall the studies we made formerly, when we studied "The House of God" concerning the baptism of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. This event, in fulfillment of Joel's prophecy was, among other things, to show the world visibly and miraculously that this new institution Christ had built was, like John's baptism, "of heaven." That is, God showed by the miracles that came through and upon this institution that it was the official representative of the name of God on earth. The church was thus shown again to have the authority of God behind it, and therefore every believer must apply to it for baptism, for service, and for the validation of his own personal ministry. There should be no free-lance "Christian" organization or institutions not answerable to a specific church. Every authentic church work or ministry must have a descent from the church at Jerusalem which received the miraculous validation of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. I know that many brethren will despise this statement, not because the Scripture does not exemplify this principle, but because of vested interests in para-church institutions or "churches." But the time has come when all Christians should make a responsible accounting of their stewardship.

Now any person or people who would be in the church of Jesus Christ must be tied to a church which relates ultimately to the authentication of God on the Jerusalem church. This principle is sometimes called "church perpetuity." This is a principle conclusively demonstrated from Scripture, and satisfactorily confirmed by history. It is not necessary to defend it from history since the principle is established by Scripture, and it is incumbent therefore upon every Christian to observe and preserve the principle in his church relationship.

Then let us look more closely at this principle of church perpetuity—or, we might call it, the succession of authority, authenticity, and truth from one church to another. The first scriptural example is the occasion when Philip went up to Samaria and preached the gospel up there and had a great revival. He baptized many, and he was from the church of Jerusalem. Now when the brethren at Jerusalem heard about Philip's success, they sent Peter and John who laid their hands on the Samaritans; and they

received the miraculous power and demonstration of the Holy Spirit that had been seen in Jerusalem.

Now this receiving of the Holy Ghost at that time was a miraculous demonstration of the sanction of God upon them, and no one could refute it because of the visible, miraculous manifestation. But this was done in Samaria only after the apostles from Jerusalem had gone up and had laid their hands upon them. But why the apostles and the miracles? Because the Samaritan people had always falsely said God's authority was upon them (see John 4:20), and not in Jerusalem. Samaria, they said, was the official house of God—but Jesus said, no it is not the official house of God. God sanctioned the temple in Jerusalem in Solomon's day. Salvation is of the Jews in Jerusalem (see John 4:22). God had never authorized Jeroboam's system of religion in Samaria, but He sanctioned His church at Jerusalem.

Now if God had spontaneously poured out the manifestation of His Holy Spirit there and sanctioned the Samaritan people apart from the obvious and unique tie to the church at Jerusalem, through Peter and John, then they would have said, "See, we really are the house of God. We do not need to be one with you. See, we are not attached to you. See, we have not received authority through you." Then you would have had the first "Christian" separation and a new denomination of the Samaritans. But God ordained that His church would be the instrument through which the authority to do His work would be perpetuated. Now consider Paul's conversion and call:

And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou earnest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost (Acts 9:17).

Why was it God's will that one of the Damascus brethren go and put his hands upon this great apostle who was to be one of God's greatest instruments for truth? Doubtless because God's authority is not vested in the individual, not even Paul, but it is vested in the institution of the church. God wanted to demonstrate that His power and His sanction came through this church lest when Paul had received great revelation he could say to the churches, "I don't need you; I am an institution to myself."

Another instance of the miraculous sanction of God coming through the church is in Acts, chapter nineteen (v. 1-6). We can easily understand the significance of this passage in the light of the principle of church authority. And we can see further confirmation that the church is now God's only authorized agency on earth for carrying out His work. Paul had encountered a dozen believers who had been baptized by Apollos who in turn had been baptized by John (see Acts 18:24; 19:1). Apollos, however, had not known about the church and its development under Christ and hence was not working under the agency authorized by God. He was sincere, his own baptism was valid through John, but Apollos had not continued under the church and so he had no authority to baptize others. The apostles had valid baptism from John, but their authority to baptize others came from Christ and was perpetuated through the church. When Paul therefore explained to the disciples of Apollos that John's message pointed to Christ and was the same message that Paul now preached, they eagerly submitted to Paul's baptism in Christ's name and hence came under the authority of the church. They were no longer spurious, free-lance Christians. Apollos himself was brought up to date on these matters by Aquilla and Priscilla (Acts 18:26), and he gladly submitted to the authority of the church, continued his ministry in the church, and all was well. Here then is the first example of what Catholics and Protestants later called anabaptism (re-baptism). Was Paul then the first Anabaptist? Actually these twelve believers did not have baptism at all, because their baptism did not have the authority of the church

behind it. When a proper authority had baptized these believers and had laid hands on them, God's Spirit confirmed this work by a miraculous sanction (Acts 19:6) similar to that at Pentecost, at Samaria, and at the household of Cornelius.

Now the above three cases (Samaria, Paul, and the twelve believers) are all the examples we have of laying on of hands followed by a miraculous authentication, and these are special cases for special confirmation of authority. But there is one other example of miraculous authentication where the people spoke in tongues as on the day of Pentecost. Yet there was not laying on of hands; this needed to be a spontaneous act of God. This was the household of Cornelius, the first Gentiles to be included in the church. Yet, it is quite consistent with perpetuity in that Peter and the brethren with him were the agents of the church bringing the message to Cornelius and baptizing them (see Acts 10:44-48). But when Peter saw the miracle of tongues, he at once connected this sign with the initial baptism of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and this was both an authentication of the Gentiles to the church and of the church to the Gentiles (see Acts 11:1-18).

Another example of church perpetuity not involving miraculous intervention at all is the founding of the church at Antioch. The church at Jerusalem heard about some converts there, and they sent by their vested authority, Barnabas to teach them and to raise up a church there (Acts 11:22-26). The Antioch church then, as the Samaritan church, was started from the Jerusalem church.

Now the Antioch church became the mother of many churches. It, under the direction of the Holy Spirit sent, by its vested authority, Paul and Barnabas who founded many churches. Then again, they sent Paul and Silas to plant yet other churches (see Acts 13:1-4; 15:40). The mother church at Jerusalem then became a grandmother through their work. Timothy was from the church at Lystra who labored with Paul and others in founding churches. Thus through Lystra, Jerusalem became a great-grandmother and Antioch a grandmother. So the faith spread by an orderly succession according to the will and purpose of God.

The authority Christ vested in His church from the beginning was perpetuated from church to church. It was miraculously confirmed at Pentecost and on a few other occasions. Then as the institution was unquestionably established before men as the house of God, the *modus operandi* of Scripture was not miraculous but for one church to beget another—*ad infinitum* to the ends of the earth. There were no free-lance Christians in those days. There were no churches "created" by individual fiat nor born illegitimately by schism. All were born like children—genetically like their parents with the authority of Christ resting upon them. Anyone presuming to operate under a different system today is usurping authority, creating schism among the churches, and establishing illegitimate institutions as Jeroboam did. Untold injury has been done to the work of Christ by this means, and one day all such "high places" will be thrown down.

### **Authority Seen As Responsibility**

Now today Christ is at the right hand of God backing up the authority of His churches. Jesus Christ has bound himself by promise:

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 (Matt. 16:19).

This is an amazing truth. From a human standpoint this is hard to believe and to assimilate. Yet, it is clearly taught. And this is an amazing thing that God would bind Himself by a promise to the action of His churches. The transactions of the church of

Jesus Christ are to be bound in heaven according to what they bind on earth. This principle puts teeth into the relationship a church has with Jesus Christ. If we are one of His churches and He is going to bind in heaven according to what we bind on earth, then we have the terrible responsibility to bind only what He would bind. If we are not one of His churches, then He will not so bind. When our binding is not responsible—not according to His will, that is when we cease to be a church. When we begin to bind things that are not in accordance with His will, that is when He will remove the "candlestick" because He has bound Himself by His promise only to the church. He will not bind the transaction of a "high place" or an illegitimate "church."

We may not go out and establish any other entity to do the work of the kingdom of God. We cannot scripturally set up a convention to do the work of the church. We have no right to set up a board to do the mission work of the church. We may not scripturally set up evangelistic associations to do the work of the church.

The church cannot delegate its work or responsibility to another entity. If a father tells his eighteen-year-old son to drive to the grocery store, this son may not delegate the task to his fourteen-year-old brother. The first son has been given both the authority and responsibility to drive the car, but he has not been given authority to have his younger brother do it. Christ designed the church to be the most effective agent for the job—any other entity is second best. It is presumptuous for us to think we can improve on God's plan. If Christians had worked as hard to work God's plan as they have to circumvent it, or to invent a "better" system, the world would have been won long ago. The work of the kingdom must be done through the church or else it does not have the authority of God behind it. He has authorized no other institution.

Neither can an individual go out and establish another church out of thin air. Men may not create churches by individual or corporate action apart from a previously existing church. A new church is to originate by the authority of another church. This is the biblical doctrine of church perpetuity. We may not baptize by individual authority or serve the Lord's supper individually or in any institution apart from the church. The Pharisees might have gone through exactly the motions that John did to baptize, but they would not have had the authority of heaven to do so. No one can say he is working according to the commandments of God if his work is not under the direction of a church. There are many good works that a person can do, but they should be done in the context of the authority of his church. If we do not, then what authority do we have for working as a free-lance agent? None. There is an authority which is in the church derived from God himself which puts us in a position of responsibility to serve in such an institution.

Now why should individuals and institutions chafe under the responsibility of these principles? If the multitudes who support extra-church institutions in neglect of the church would obey God in this principle of church authority, the greatest revival since Pentecost would follow. Let us not be guilty of this debilitating practice. Many Christians today rebel at this doctrine. "I will never submit myself to 'man,'" one said. "I obey only God." What a contradiction! God said we are to submit ourselves to "man"—"one to another in the fear of God" (Eph. 5:21). Furthermore Paul wrote:

I beseech you brethren, (ye know the house of Stephenas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,) That ye submit yourselves unto such, and to everyone that helpeth with us and laboureth (I Cor. 16:15,16).

And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God (II Cor. 8:5).

No person can obey the will of God without giving himself to the brethren in the

church relationship. That is the will of God, and every Christian is to be under the discipline of the church (Matt. 18:17). Paul wrote, ". . . do not ye judge them that are within [the church]? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (I Cor. 5:12,13). One of the principle reasons I have belabored this question of church authority is that each individual may know that God has an agency on earth to which we are to submit. We are to work in it and through it as we serve the Lord. The same principle that Moses wrote long ago of the tabernacle still applies to the church:

Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest: But in the place which the Lord shall choose in one of thy tribes, there thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings, and there thou shalt do all that I command thee (Deut. 12:13,14).

To the world and the individual, the principle of divine commission and sanction on the church speaks of authority. But to the church itself and its members, this vested authority speaks of responsibility. We must handle the affairs of the kingdom of God carefully. Christ has delegated to the church the responsibility to bind and loose according to His revealed will—all the counsel of God. It is an elementary concept that delegated authority cannot be delegated to another entity or institution. Each church must accept total responsibility under Christ for the great commission and proceed to win the whole world in the manner exemplified by the Word of God.

# THE HIGH PLACES

The message I want to bring tonight will be mainly a study of the high places of the Old Testament and of God's response to those of His people who worshipped in that setting. Then I want to draw some lessons from these studies as we notice some parallels which exist today as many of the people of God worship and serve in settings other than God's house—other than the church of the living God.

## The Concept and Characteristics of the High Place

The term "high place" as used in the Old Testament ordinarily refers to a place of religious worship, usually but not always pagan, located on a hill or mountain. The concept of the "high places" in Israel came to stand for a place of worship over against—in contrast with—the authorized and divinely appointed house of God. Even though Jehovah was frequently worshipped in high places, yet the high place was a bogus (i.e., spurious, not proceeding from an authentic source, counterfeit, illegitimate) institution.

Now this same contrast exists today. The church is today the "house of God," and therefore any other religious or "Christian" institution that is set up to replace or do the work of the church, as described in the New Testament, is by analogy a "high place." I want to use this term high place then in this analogous sense that we might see the true character of the many "venerable" Christian institutions of our day—institutions which are today "worshipping Jehovah" but are undermining His purpose by undermining the house God built for His purpose.

The Scriptures reveal how God felt about those people in the Old Testament who lost the vision for God's house, who did not care about God's house, who let God's house go in disarray, and who went to serve God in other ways and in other places, specifically in "high places." Let us look into the subject of the Old Testament high places and ask this question: Are these high places that God hated so much in the Old Testament counterparts to the present day institutions which call men to worship and serve God outside of and apart from His church?

Let us consider the subject of the high places and try to understand God's view of the situation today and what our response should be—to try to understand where and how we should serve the Lord. Ezekiel, the prophet, recorded here the words of the Lord rebuking those who did not serve God properly.

Therefore, son of man, speak unto the house of Israel, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Yet in this your fathers have blasphemed me, in that they have committed a trespass against me. For when I had brought them into the land, for the which I lifted up mine hand to give it to them, then they saw every high hill, and all the thick trees, and they offered there their sacrifices, and there they presented the provocation of their offering: there also they made their sweet savour, and poured out there their drink offerings. Then I said unto them. What is the high place whereunto ye go? (Ezekiel 20:27-29).

The Lord told the prophet to speak to the children of Israel and to say to them, "Your fathers did wrong. Do not revere your fathers in this. Do not imitate your fathers in this; they did wrong in this. They went out and looked up into the hills, though they had a house to worship in, though they had God's house to serve in—they looked up

into the hills and turned their backs on God's house. They climbed up those hills, and there they offered their sacrifices; there they offered their sweet savour offerings, and there they burnt incense and tried to serve God."

Now it is very interesting to me that God would be concerned about this. In this day and age we hear so many times that it does not make much difference where you go, where you serve, or what kind of church you belong to—just as long as you "serve God." God's response here was displeasure. He was not displeased that they had made sweet savour offerings, nor that they had burnt incense, for those deeds were performed in obedience to the levitical laws given to them in the Old Testament. But God was displeased with where they did these things. His concern was that they had turned their backs on the house of God and had gone up and had done these things in the high places. It was more convenient for many of them. Many of them lived out in the valleys at the foot of the mountains. For many of them it was convenient to go up into the hills and thus avoid the longer trek to Jerusalem, to the holy mountain of Jerusalem where the temple was built. It was much more convenient for them to go and worship up in the mountains. To many more of them, it took less dedication; it took less care and less precision in their service because the temple was to be set up and organized and run according to a rather detailed set of guidelines that God had given. And we find as we read in the history of the high places, that many of these people who went up actually built little houses up there. They mixed the religion of the Canaanites, and of Baal worship, and the religion of Ashtoreth with the religion of Israel. They could do whatever came to their mind. If they felt like going, they could go; if they felt like burning incense, they could burn incense. If they felt like sacrificing a lamb, they could sacrifice a lamb. If they did not feel like it, they did not have to. They took that approach, and they worshipped God in the high places. And the Scripture says, God was wroth with them.

## **The Concept and Characteristics of the House of God**

The house of God in contrast to the high places is the institution of God's choice, of God's design and purpose over against the high place an institution of man's choice, of man's design and purpose.

Now we read what God really wanted for His people, where He wanted them to worship, and how He wanted them to serve:

For in mine holy mountain [Zion], in the mountain of the height of Israel, saith the Lord God, there shall all the house of Israel, all \ of them in the land, serve me: there will I accept them, and there will I require your offerings, and the firstfruits of your oblations, with all your holy things. I will accept you with your sweet savour, when I bring you out from the people, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you before the heathen (Ezekiel 20:40,41).

Why do you suppose it was so important to God that the people serve him in His temple? Certainly part of the answer is found in verse forty-one, "And I will be sanctified in you before the heathen." What does sanctified mean? It means made holy. What does it mean to be sanctified before the heathen? It means to be set apart as a distinctive people in the eyes of the heathen, in the eyes of the lost person, in the eyes of the world, in the eyes of those who did not serve Jehovah, and in the eyes of those whose lives had not been touched by God. They would look through their eyes to see what kind of people belonged to the living God of Israel. This means the heathen's vision of God, his understanding of God, was framed to a great extent by the conduct of God's people. They saw God more as He is when God's people worshipped the way God

said—in His house, the temple at Jerusalem. But too often, the people went up into the high places. They did whatsoever was right in their own eyes. They decided they would do their own thing. They would not go and worship in God's house.

Well, you might ask, how could it be so important? How is it that God would be sanctified in the eyes of the heathen as His people worshipped in His house? Why do the preachers and teachers here at Hallmark include the doctrines of the church for emphasis even as we do the other great doctrines of Scripture? Is it only because we think it is just the best way and it will work better than the other ways? No, that is not the root of the matter. Yet, it is very clear from the Scriptures that God in wisdom ordained His house—first, the tabernacle, then the temple, and as we will show a little later on, the church, the local assembly in the New Testament. He ordained His house and set up a form of worship in it with the primary purpose that the world could see what kind of God He is. Now I want to set briefly before you the picture of the beauty of God's house in contrast with the high places. The psalmist writes:

How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: They will be still praising thee. . . . For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness (Psalm 84:1-4, 10).

Here is the expression of a man who had a vision of God's house. He saw the temple of God as that special dwelling place of God, and he saw it as a wonderful thing, saying, "How amiable are thy courts." There he could bring up his young in God's truth. There is where God's honor dwells (Psalm 25:8). It is the "pillar and ground of the truth" (I Tim. 3:15). He would rather be there than any other place in the world. He would rather be there for one day than spend a thousand days any place else. He was very much in love, if you will, with the house of God because he knew how much God loved His house and how concerned God was for the condition of it. Now, I hope that each one of us today can enter into some measure of fellowship with the writer of this psalm concerning his love for God's house.

God designed His house so that the world might be able to see His truth and righteousness. God's house is functional—it gets the job done if it is ordered according to God's design. The house of God reflects God's attributes. The psalmist further says: "Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth" (Psalm 26:8). The house of God is the place where God's honor dwells. It's the place where the people of the world can see the worship and the service of the saints of God. They can see the honor of the Lord. They can see something of God in that kind of setting. The psalmist continued: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord . . . and to inquire in his temple" (Psalm 27:4). The Lord gave instructions first to Moses to build the tabernacle, then to Solomon to build the temple; then Christ Himself built the church and left it. In each case God gave explicit instructions as to how His house was to be built. As He spoke to Solomon, He told him how to build the altar, how to build the entrance, how to hang the veil, how to build the holy of holies, where to place the candlesticks, how to build the laver, how to build each aspect of the temple. Each aspect signified something of God's redemptive work to man. It spoke of the beauty of God, of the beauty of His plan, and of the beauty of His purpose. It spoke of the wonder of His love and of the exactness of His judgment. And only when it was set up properly could men see the honor and the beauty of God in it.



It is clear that men could see this beauty. It is clear that it was God's plan that man should see God reflected in His house. As we read in the forty-eighth Psalm, I would especially like for you to follow with me. It was not just a fetish with God that His people should worship in the house of God as opposed to the high places. It was not just a quirk, if you will, with the Lord. There was purpose in it; there was a plan to it. We read this Psalm and we gain another insight into God's purpose for having His people worship in His house:

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. God is known in her palaces for a refuge. For, lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together. They saw it, and so they marvelled; they were troubled, and hasted away. Fear took hold upon them there, and pain, as of a woman in travail (Psalm 48:1-6).

When the house of God in the city of Jerusalem was standing and functioning the way it should function, when the service was being carried on the way it should be carried on and the worship as it should be carried on, even kings that came from afar—people in trade and commerce—would go by and see the glory of God's house. They would see the dedication of the Levites. They would see the fervency of the people of Israel as they worshipped and served there. They would see the cleanliness of the house; they would see the beauty and the order of God's house. They could sense the purpose of the house and sense that God was real. They would certainly think back on the things that God had done, and they would tremble.

We read about discoveries that have been made in relatively recent years about non-Jewish civilizations. They learned by their own history of some of the awful judgments God had made against nations and against people. These generations had heard, I am sure, of the plagues of Egypt. They had heard of the parting of the Red Sea. They heard of how God sustained three million people in the wilderness for forty years. They had heard of how the flood had come and had wiped out all the sin and the decadence. Having heard these things of God, when they came close to the house of God, it says they trembled like a woman in travail. Their palms probably sweated; they probably felt a discomfort in their stomachs, and they felt conviction and nervousness. Here they were before the house of the same God who had done all these things.

Consider afresh the words of Ezekiel: "I will be sanctified . . . before the heathen" (20:41). That is the purpose of God in preserving a house where His name dwells. God wants to show to His people and to the world who He is. He wants to meet in His house in a special way with His people. He did so in the tabernacle. He did so in the temple, and we know also that He does so today in the church of the living God.

Now, of all the places of worship that beckon us today, how can anyone be sure which house is God's house? Today some say, "We have our own church—we consider this organization or that to be our church." Surely this question has been raised in every generation. Suppose you were a little Jewish boy or Jewish girl in a

Jewish family back a thousand years before Christ and you wondered where the house of God was. You might have looked up into the mountains and have said: "Father, is that it up there, or is that it over there in that grove of trees, or is it on top of that mountain over there, or is this it here in Jerusalem?" But God did not leave the children of Israel or anyone else for that matter to wonder about where His house was. For when the tabernacle was built, God authenticated the tabernacle. He came down in a special way; His shekinah glory, the cloud and the flame of God, came and settled upon the tabernacle, and later it settled upon the temple.

And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the

cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord (I Kings 8:10,11). And if that were not enough, He said unto Solomon after he had offered a sacrifice and a prayer of dedication for this house:

And the Lord said unto him, I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication, that thou hast made before me: I have hallowed this house which thou hast built, to put my name there forever and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually (I Kings 9:3).

Therefore, those who saw and heard could turn to their children and say: "That is God's house; that is where His name dwells." Then much later, a similar manifestation of the Holy Spirit settled upon the church in the New Testament (Acts 2). This served to show the world and to show the people of God that the New Testament Church was God's house.

## **The Decline of the Vision**

But as time went on, somehow the children of God had lost the vision of what God's house was. They would walk by God's house on the way to the high places and let it fall into disrepair. The stones that had been set there so perfectly by the craftsmen in accordance with God's commands began to loosen. The mortar started to crumble, and here a stone fell out and a door caved in, and here the altar crumbled and even scrolls of the Word of God were buried under the rubble. Rats and all manner of vermin ran throughout the house of God. We can almost envision those Jewish men and Jewish women and children walking by the temple of God with the weeds growing up through the courts long in disrepair—walking by and looking at the house of God. Perhaps the father said, "That is God's temple," and then they eased on up into the high places to worship God up there.

Clearly this grieved God because He had chosen that house as His own. The temple was the place where He was to be sanctified before the heathen. But there is another reason why it stirred God's displeasure: it was because the high places were associated with wicked religions. They were associated with the religions of the Canaanites even though many of the Jews worshipped only Jehovah there. The high places represented humanistic thinking—the tower of Babel idea—get up higher, get up there closer to where God is, so we can talk to Him better and so we can look down on the valley and have a certain feeling of power, if you will. Go up there where everybody else worships. The Canaanites worship up there; so we, God's people, should go up there and worship.

The world could hardly tell the difference between God's people and the pagans. And God was not sanctified in the eyes of the heathen. He was not set apart in their minds and in their eyes. So it is not strange that we hear God commanding Joshua, as he goes in to take the holy land and to cross the Jordan, to pluck down the high places. It is not strange that we hear God time and time again saying that the high places provoke Him.

Keep in mind that today God has ordained the church, His church, His house, to represent His name and to accomplish His work and to fulfill His purpose. Yet, countless hundreds of other institutions and other types of organizations—high places by analogy—have sprung up. Many of them are almost perfect facsimiles of the world's corporate and business institutions. These have sprung up as repositories of Christian talent and effort—places where well-meaning Christian people come, serve, and put their time and money. Well, how does God look at these things?

## God's Displeasure With the High Places

Now to further study God's attitude toward the high places, we look again at some of the Old Testament characters. The first character we want to look at is Manasseh—a man who led a halfhearted revival in Judah but stopped short of a complete return to the will of the Lord. He restored the temple worship, but retained the high places:

And he [Manasseh] repaired the altar of the Lord, and sacrificed thereon peace offerings and thank offerings, and commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel. Nevertheless the people did sacrifice still in the high places, yet unto the Lord their God only (II Chron. 33:16,17).

Now it is interesting to me, that God would record there, "nevertheless." Even though Manasseh restored the house of God, still he left a very important thing undone. He let the people keep on going up to the high places. It was clear that God was displeased with the fact that they went up into the high places even though they sacrificed to the Lord only. One cannot patronize the high places without neglecting and weakening the house of God. In II Chronicles we read:

For our fathers have trespassed, and done that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord our God, and have forsaken him, and have turned away their faces from the habitation of the Lord, and turned their backs (II Chron. 29:6).

They turned their backs on the house of God, part of losing that vision, a part of not seeing the completeness and the importance and the centrality of God's house. Manasseh did a halfway thing. He cleaned up God's house, but kept the high places. We read further that during Hezekiah's reign, Hezekiah called attention to what the fathers had done, that they had forsaken the habitation of the Lord. One does not have to offer human sacrifices to turn his back on the Lord's house. When a Christian serves God through an institution which supplants God's house, he has been unfaithful to God.

This is expressed in a way that anyone can understand in the following passages: In that thou buildest thine eminent place in the head of every way, and makest thine high place in every street; and hast not been as an harlot in that thou scornest hire; But as a wife that committeth adultery, which taketh strangers instead of her husband (Ezek. 16:31).

I don't know of a clearer picture, for we could never miss it, of how God looks at worship in the high places. You were not like a harlot, he said. It was bad, but it was not that bad. You were not like a harlot; a harlot does not have a husband. A harlot just goes and commits fornication and adultery "for hire" with anybody and everybody and has no affection to any one particular person. He said, no, you were not like that, to your credit. You were more like a wife that commits adultery. You do have some affection towards me. You do nod your head in my direction and acknowledge that I am your husband. You are nice to me from time to time, but still you have committed adultery with somebody else. That is how God looks at those who worship Him apart from His house in the high places. He does not utterly cast them off and say, "I never knew you." He does not say, "You are like a harlot, gone off after other gods." He says, "You are like an adulterous wife."

So, the people who neglected the habitation of the Lord and went up into the high places displeased God and brought His jealousy and anger against them. He had set up His house in a way that would glorify His name and would be in the best interest of His kingdom and of His people, and they ignored it and went up into the high places. There is no exact analogy in the human realm that would fit this very closely, but I think

of a recent article I read in a local newspaper. It spoke of a psychiatrist who went to a psychiatrists' convention. I suppose not unlike the textile machinery convention that we have here occasionally. He worked all year on a booth for this convention. He set up a presentation that taught what the psychiatrists of America were doing to educate the public concerning their profession. It was some sort of a static display. He had all kinds of things and, I suppose, a film of some kind. This had been a major project with him for a year. And then in the booth next to him, another psychiatrist had set up a booth to show a filthy movie—just a filthy movie. He put over the door to his booth, "For Your Relaxation"—no other preparation, no real work, and no real message. Well, the big story in the paper was that nobody even looked at the professionally prepared booth. The attendants stuffed themselves into the booth with the pornographic movie, all day long, all week long. The reporters interviewed the man who spent so much on his booth, and asked, "How did you feel?" He said, "I didn't feel very good; I spent all this time, and they all went by me, and went into the next place." In a very small way, that psychiatrist got a taste of what God must feel when His people leave the habitation that He put loving care and concern into building, when they walk by that and go up into the high places to "serve" Him. Or, in this day and age, they leave the church of the living God, walk by the church of God, allow the church of God to grow weak for want of patronage, allow the house of God to go into disrepair, and go serve in para-church organizations, high places—presuming to serve God:

In that thou, buildest thine eminent place in the head of every way, and makest thine high place in every street; and hast not been as an harlot in that thou scornest hire; But, as a wife that committeth adultery, which taketh strangers instead of her husband (Ezek. 16:31).

These are expressions of God's feeling about those that serve in the high places. Not everything, however, in the Old Testament concerning the house of God and concerning revival was negative. There was one king who saw the high places for what they were. He saw these other institutions, these other organizations apart from the house of God for what they were. King Josiah, contrary to Manasseh, made a complete return to the Word of God. He cleaned up the house of God, then tore down the high places:

And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest, and the priests of the second order, and the keepers of the door, to bring forth out of the temple of the Lord all vessels that were made for Baal, and for the grove, and for all the host of heaven: and he burned them without Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and carried the ashes of them unto Bethel. And he put down the idolatrous priests, whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah, and in the places round about Jerusalem .... And the high places that were before Jerusalem, which were on the right hand of the mount of corruption, which Solomon the king of Israel had builded for Ashtoreth the abomination ... of the Moabites, and for Milcom the abomination of the children of Ammon, did the king defile. And he brake in pieces the images, and cut down the groves, and filled their places with the bones of men (II Kings 23:4, 5a, 13,14). God was pleased with Josiah's response to the high places. God's desire is that the high places be brought down, and Josiah's repentance and restoration resulted in the greatest revival, I believe, in all the Old Testament. In the revival under Josiah, they went into the old temple and they found God's Word. They read there the instructions that Solomon had been given about the house of God and about the form of worship. Then Josiah rose up with indignation and determined to put the precepts of God into force. So the high places were torn down, and the religion of Jehovah was able to prosper as it had been ordained. Surely God was sanctified in the eyes of the heathen,

and surely the great kings would tremble again. Surely God was pleased that these high places had been taken down.

## **The House of God Today**

Where is the house of God today? Has it perished? What happened to the temple? When our Lord Jesus Christ went to the cross and said it is finished—what happened to this house of God this temple? When Christ died, the veil of the temple was rent in two. The old order was complete, and the new order which Christ had established continued. The Lord Jesus Christ clearly started the church before His death, and at that point all the types and all the sermons were fulfilled. The house of God, the temple, had previously preached sermons. You could look at the altar and that was a sermon. And you could look at the sacrifices and they were sermons. All those sermons were prophetic sermons about what Christ would do. They all were fulfilled when Christ died on the cross, so that all those types no longer had a purpose, and the veil of the temple was rent. Just a few years after that, the old temple was leveled to the ground. Not one stone was standing upon another. But that does not mean the house of God ceased to be in existence. Christ had said, "I will build my church; and the gates of hell will not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). And speaking of this same church that the Lord Jesus Christ established Paul remarked to the Ephesians:

So then ye are no more strangers and sojourners, but ye are fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:19-22, ARV). Paul said in effect: You people at Ephesus have been converted. We have ordained pastors in your midst. You have a commission, and now you are built together in accordance with the commandments of the Lord. You are built together as an habitation of the Lord: that is the house of God.

Just as the tabernacle and the temple were authenticated as God's house in the Old Testament, so was that first gathering or assembly, that first New Testament church in Jerusalem authenticated as God's house (Acts 2). And every church having descended from that church (as the Ephesians) and retaining the characteristics established by its founder, Jesus Christ, is likewise the house of God. The critical principle here is that when God designs an institution for worldwide evangelism (Matt. 28:19,20) and to be the custodian of the truth (I Tim. 3:15), the design is perfect and optimum for the task. When men attempt to design an institution to "improve" upon God's design, it is ultimately a detriment to the affairs of the kingdom of God; it is an imposter, a usurper of authority, a bogus, wildcat institution—a high place!

But the wisdom of God has designed the church and has given us the blueprint. He tells us how to select pastors and deacons—how the elder women, how the young men ought to act—the young women, the elder men and the children, how they ought to behave themselves. He tells us how we should handle our money, our charities. He guides us concerning orphans, widows, and so on. He tells us how the church is to exercise discipline toward its members, how to conduct missionary work, how to perform the ordinances, and to perpetuate the unity of the faith.

God tells us all this, which is like a blueprint for the way the church is to be organized and to be run. This blueprint is given "... that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God,

the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15).

Here is the house of God in the New Testament; here is the church. Read the commandments of the Lord. Read how the church is to be kept clean by discipline (Matt. 18:15-20; I Cor. 5:1-12). Read how the pastors and deacons are to be selected (1 Tim. 3). Read how the spirit and unity of the church should be, and about the gifts in the church and how they should be exercised (I Cor. 12, 13). Read in the Scriptures and see how the house of God is to be built and perpetuated and how the Lord is to be served. His house is to be pre-eminent among all other institutions.

## **The High Place Today**

Thousands of Christians today are deeply involved with organizations and institutions that presume to do the work of the kingdom of God which Christ left to the church. Yet they have little in common with the church of the New Testament. These organizations are commonly called para-church organizations and range in their attitude and work from a condescending and patronizing spirit, to being self-appointed "big brothers," saviours, and revivors of the churches, to downright exploitation of churches through high-pressure Madison-Avenue techniques.

I can take almost any Christian magazine I choose—I have one of them here tonight—and turn page after page and read all kinds of different institutions, types of organizations or places where you could serve, could send your money, or worship if you want to. Not the churches, mind you, but other types of organizations and institutions.

On almost every page there is an advertisement appealing for money or membership in some "special" type of organization. Here is an organization incorporated to minister especially to the Jew. There, a "specially designed" fellowship for college students. The list of "special" organizations is almost endless.

A word of caution is in order here. It would be wrong to assume that every Christian endeavor which is not directly carried out by a church is therefore analogous to a high place. For example, a church member may operate a print shop, or other institution, and do a meritorious work for the Lord's name and for Christian truth if the owner of that print shop is scripturally submitted to his church. Then the earth-salting influence of the church as the pillar and ground of truth would be extended through this submitted member to the publications of the print shop. The authority and discipline of the church would be extended indirectly to the publications through the member, and never would the God-given authority of the church be usurped or distorted.

A person so submitted to biblical truth would never presume to operate an institution for the purpose of doing that which has been given directly to the church to do. Preachers of the gospel—evangelists, missionaries—are to be trained, ordained, and sent by their respective churches. They are not to originate corporate entities—a school, an evangelistic association, or mission board to do that which is given to the church only to do.

In the most basic language a high place is a high place because it disobeys Scripture principles. A school, an orphanage, a print shop could exist fully in the will of God by conforming fully to Scripture truth, and this includes the truth concerning God's house—the church.

But unfortunately, the list of those who disobey these principles by usurping the work and distorting the truth of the church continues to grow. Incorporated mission boards have all but taken over the work of the great commission, the biblical missionary work God gave to the churches. Privately owned or corporately owned colleges and

universities have taken over the training of pastors and have become the self-appointed guardians of a corrupted "truth"—even though God has said the church is the pillar and ground of truth. Privately owned or corporately owned evangelistic associations have assumed responsibility for the work of evangelism which God gave to the church.

But someone will say, "The churches have failed." I suggest that it is the unwise and unscriptural leaders of these modern high places who have "failed" the churches. The founders, executives, and gifted personalities have withheld their own leadership and promotional gifts from promoting the house of God and have promoted high places. Furthermore, they have exploited the churches by siphoning off the most gifted of the personnel to work in the high places. So how can the churches help but "fail" when they have relatively little available personnel, talent, or money to man the outreach to the world?

But have the churches no blame in this situation? They do. They have cooperated with the high places. They have been naive and have been hood-winked by them, been taught by them, and have been misled by them. They have been too lazy to study the Scriptures and have allowed the high places to exploit them. Many churches have not wanted to be bothered with missions, education, and evangelism and have "catered" these tasks out to the "professional" high places, and some institutions called churches are nothing more than high places themselves.

Then when there is an individual church which does take to heart the great commission of the Lord, it is so lonely and isolated (not to say ostracized) that its work is not as powerful as it would otherwise be if it had the fellowship, cooperation, aid, and encouragement of its sister churches. If all the churches took individually to heart the world-wide responsibility of the great commission and repudiated the high places, we would see the book of Acts re-enacted in the twentieth century!

God has revealed the importance of His house to us by His Word and His Spirit. Every Christian is responsible to God to uphold His house, sustain His house, strengthen His house, support His house, and clean up His house. And with that impression made upon our hearts, and that vision impressed upon our minds and souls, what manner of people ought we to be? How serious are we? How concerned are we? God is very concerned about the condition of His house; God is very concerned where you will spend your life, your time, your money, your energies in worshipping and serving Him. He is very concerned about where your friends, your Christian brothers and sisters will expend their lives. And so He records that the church of God is the house of the living God (I Tim. 3:15). And He tells us that is where we are to serve and worship. And He says, I believe, speaking of revival, speaking of making things right by a great cleansing in the kingdom of God, "Judgment must begin at the house of God" (I Pet. 4:17). The churches need to be set in order, the doors put back on their hinges, the mortar replaced, the rats chased out. The altar must be built up. The Word must be re-established. The church is where His name must dwell and where revival must begin.

The Lord looks down and considers the service of men—the gifted executives of the high places. The Apostle John wrote in the book of Revelation the mind of God concerning the churches in that day. He said that in Pergamos they had the doctrine of the Nicolaitans which God hated. I'm not sure, but I understand that the sin of the Nicolaitans was the exaltation of the pastors over the people—"being lords over God's heritage" (I Pet. 5:3). They threw out the principles of Matthew chapter twenty, which says that you're not to act like the Gentiles who exercise lordship over one another. The church of God is to be different from the "Gentile" way of doing things. Do you know how the Gentiles organize? One of them always rises to the top and takes authority. And he stands up and says, "Now, this is the way it's going to be." He says, "Now you folks

listen to me. I'm in charge here. Do you understand me?" That is the way the Nicolaitans operated. That doctrine had slipped into Pergamos. This principle grew and became the dominant characteristic of the Roman Catholic Church—the hierarchical system of religion where a bishop gets up and says you go here and you go there, where a Pope makes decrees for all people, and where a little parish priest tells his people whether or not their sins are forgiven. They take command and take charge and take authority far beyond what God ever intended. These have left the New Testament pattern and become a high place.

This doctrine of lordship was also outlined in the epistles that John wrote, when he spoke of the spirit of Diotrephes (II John 9). Diotrephes sought the pre-eminence. I believe, almost to a tee, as we consider the "high places" of our day and read of those things that are counterfeits of God's house, we'll find time and time again this Gentile approach to organization. It seems to be a universal quality—just like going up into the high places, just like having an elevated worship place in the Old Testament. Today it seems like a common denominator—the executive approach to religion. When the few control or powerfully influence the many, the devil has only to control the few and he controls all. God is not the author of this system. When one man takes charge, the whole concept of the church as a body breaks down. The whole concept of the church and the strength of the church relies on the fact that it is a functional body (I Cor. 12). This man over here, this woman over there, that man there, and that woman there are all equal before God. One is just as important as the other. Each has his or her gifts. The toes are just as important as the hands:

Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary; and those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked (I Cor. 12:22-24).

This principle has been laid aside.

So it is not strange that God would record in the sixth chapter of Ephesians, as He looks down on all of this and speaks to us of the challenge that we have in this world. He said we do not wrestle against flesh and blood. We are not wrestling in a physical battle; He says we are wrestling against spiritual wickedness in high places. Spiritual wickedness in the high places is a battle that is still before the Lord's people today. As long as the high places persist, and as long as the house of God is in disrepair, how can we hope that God will be sanctified in the eyes of the heathen? How can we hope that people who go about on this earth can say God is real? How will they fear God as they did when the temple was in good repair back in the Old Testament days? Jesus prayed for the unity of His people: "I pray that they all be one, that the world might know that you have sent me." He wants them all to be one. He wants this house of God to be together and to be unified and to be the way He had planned it. Well, here is the question: What about our situation? I cannot help thinking of that long train of saints who left their nets and went to preach—who were pastors, deacons, and faithful witnesses, who remembered the church of God down through the ages. Many of them paid with their lives to uphold the house of God and His name and His commandments. They paid the price to keep it clean, to keep it pure. They were faithful that the Lord Jesus Christ might be able to present the church one day to the Father—to present bodies of believers to the Father, clean and spotless—not having the blemishes nor being filled with wickedness and debauchery. God is concerned about these things. Should our concern not be the same as His? Should we not be putting our shoulders to



the wheel? Should we not be concerned that the church of God prosper and the house of God be cleaned up? Should we not work and pray that the houses of God that are in disrepair all over this land be repaired and that the high places should be brought down? We cannot bring them down, but God can. And it will be a simple matter for Him to do it. High places turn on the dollar, and when the dollars stop rolling in, the high places will collapse at once. God forbid that any of God's churches should use God's money, given for His glory, to sustain and perpetuate a high place.

Many doubtless mean well. You see, in the Old Testament many well-intentioned people, apparently with a heart that really wanted to serve God, went up to the high places. And yet He was wroth with them; so today, hoards of Christians are sending money, spending time and effort building that which will surely perish and ought to perish. Only one type of organization has the promise that the gates of hell will not prevail against it. So where do we stand? What is our response? How much has the zeal of God's house eaten us up? (see John 2:17). How much are we concerned with the situation? In the Old Testament many of the saints fasted and prayed and wept over the condition of the house of the Lord. They were concerned about the status of the house of God. And God is greatly concerned about the status of the house of God. And God is greatly concerned with how the high places have flourished; how countless millions of dollars and millions of man-hours are going into these institutions which must come down.

I ask you the question: How can we do anything but stay and fight and work to build up God's house? How can we do anything but work as did Josiah, Peter, John, and Paul, and all our brethren through the Dark Ages and many up to now, to make sure that God's house stands—to make sure God is sanctified in the eyes of the heathen, and to hope and pray that we see the high places come tumbling down, and see God's name established once more. God will be as pleased as He was when the temple was re-established, as pleased as He was when those churches recorded in the book of Acts (chapter 15) were revived and united together in one accord. Let us work to that end. We need to build up the church and sustain it, be instruments to perpetuate it in accordance with the will of God. The world can best be won to Christ when God is sanctified in the eyes of the heathen through His church. And this will only come to pass when God's people long to see the Lord of Hosts' "tabernacles" set aright and amiable. Our spirit must be like David's who declared to his Heavenly Father: For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness (Psalm 84:10).

## BIBLICAL EVANGELISM

My subject tonight is biblical evangelism, but please do not prepare for a lecture on how to conduct an evangelistic campaign using all the latest techniques, gimmicks, and big-named personalities. That is precisely how not to evangelize. That approach has only been developed in a desperate attempt to see some "results," or to circumvent the frustration arising through long-term efforts destitute of power, producing a mere pittance of fruit that remains to bear fruit again. Even the great revivals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries only scratched the surface and were often suspect as to the genuineness and enduring quality of the converts. Charles G. Finney complained, in the mid-nineteenth century, "that fewer of the converts make stable and efficient Christians . . . than in former revivals." Even Jonathan Edwards, a century earlier, while acknowledging that great good was accomplished in the half-dozen or so years of intensified religious interest [c. 1735-1741], afterward observed, ". . . the temper that some of them (the revival converts) show and the behavior they have been of ... make me much afraid lest there be a considerable number that have woefully deceived themselves."

The revivals of the periods of "Great Awakening" have been too rare and too temporary in results to be considered the optimum or the Christian norm for evangelism of the biblical style when many strong Christian churches were planted from Jerusalem to the British Isles in less than a century.

Therefore, in this study I want to probe below the surface of traditional notions of evangelism. There is no need to simply seek to streamline traditional and contemporary methods. We need to root them out and search for the scriptural roots of long-range evangelistic power. The evangelism of the first century was revolutionary in that it changed not only the individuals, but they in turn changed the fabric of the very communities where they lived and established the ongoing evangelistic influence of indigenous churches carefully following the Scriptures in word and deed.

### **A Peculiar People**

Now this work is impossible with the attitude that pervades contemporary Christendom. It requires a peculiar kind of people with a very special attitude toward God and His truth and purpose as expressed in Scripture. In this message I want to identify this special attitude and show why it is absolutely essential to biblical evangelism.

To introduce this attitude, I cite you now to a verse of Scripture in the book of Psalms. This verse says, "My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times" (Psm. 119:20). This expression describes a very special class of people. The subject of this psalm is the Word of God. Throughout this psalm the commandments of the Lord and precepts of the law are in view. The psalmist has seen the glory of God's righteousness as expressed in His Word: "With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments" (Psm. 119:9). The expression of the psalmist is unusual in his obvious passion for the truth of God. This twentieth verse, however, appears to be the deepest expression of his feeling for it. "My soul just breaks," he seems to say, "because I long so much for thy judgments—thy precepts." It is his greatest delight to know, to understand, to obey, and live in the

precepts of God.

This very special longing, I believe, is the ultimate key to effectual evangelism. This attitude toward God's truth must characterize a large segment of God's people before there will be any great work of evangelism in this world. We shall later consider why this is so. When there was that kind of feeling in the first century, God's people were an evangelistic power, and when there has not been that kind of feeling, things have deteriorated until the work of God in evangelism has ground to a halt.

Now this class of people is a peculiar class of people, and when you find such a class of people, you will find the people who please God. I want to read a passage from Matthew which further describes this same class of people who have a longing for the Word of God. Let me bring to your attention a distinction between people who merely say the Word of God is true and people who truly love the Word with a heartbreaking longing after it. Jesus made this distinction in these words:

For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:18,19).

There is the principle by which God makes the distinction of greatness as contrasted with smallness or insignificance in His work and in His kingdom. Greatness in God's eyes is based upon how a person considers the least of the commandments. God calls a person great who so longs for and whose heart so breaks for the longing it has for the precepts and judgments of God that he is very careful to attend to the least of the commandments. That kind of a person is as careful concerning the small details of the Scriptures as God is, in a sense, concerning the small sparrow that falls to the ground and the small animals of His world which He feeds and keeps and notices. He is so careful to make sure that they are cared for and that they have their food in season according to His own purpose and design. God is concerned about the sparrow, and so the man whose heart longs and breaks for obedience to the Word of God is very careful even with the least of the commandments. He longs to see God's Word have its day and to see it have its way because it is God's Word. He loves the Word because of who spoke it, because of who is behind it, because of love for the Saviour. He wants to see his Saviour's Word and his Saviour's truth have its day. That kind of a person is careful with the little things—just the little crumbs of the Word, as it were, that fall from the table of God.

This is the kind of people, I believe, that has generally comprised the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. When He said He would build His church, I think those were the kind of people He envisioned to fill it. Now I do not say that everyone who is in His church is personally that way. I do not think that that could be supported by Scripture, nor from experience, but certainly those outside His church cannot be that kind of people because, if they were, they would be gathering up these little crumbs of the Word so carefully that they would very soon put together the fact that the Lord has a church which has certain characteristics and that He has an expressed will concerning that church and concerning His work in the world. They would find that kind of church, stay with it, and love it because they love the truth and because their hearts long to see and obey the precepts of God.

I believe all of us have experienced some sensation of pride, in the good sense. Perhaps one of your children has done something outstanding and his picture is in the paper. You will want to show that picture to people. You clip it out and put it away somewhere, and soon someone comes to visit and you say, "Look, Johnny got his

picture in the paper." You want to show it to people because you love Johnny; there is a certain desire to promote him. If one of your friends would write a book, you would want to see it go—you would want to see your friend prosper and be successful.

This is the kind of attitude these special people have toward Christ and His Word. They have such an attachment and such an affection for the Saviour that they want to see His Word prosper greatly. The more you love Christ and His truth, the more you would want to see it widely spread. You want to hear it on the lips of everyone so that the Lord's name would be magnified because you want to see Him exalted—you want to see Him lifted up. That is the kind of motivation that causes this class of people to be powerful evangelists. It is because they want to see the Lord exalted. They want to see His Word prevail, and so they give their all to it. Their heart breaks when they see it otherwise. Their heart breaks when they see the precepts of God ignored or perverted—when they see people going on, treading roughshod over the commandments of the Lord. It bothers them, and most especially when they see those who claim to be Christians treading over the Word of God, because that is much more hurtful.

It harms the cause of Christ much more for one who claims to be a Christian to disobey and to let down the standards of the Lord than it does when an arrogant sinner does. It makes little difference when you see an arrogant and wicked sinner sinning. Everyone expects that. But let that man be a Christian, let him be in a church, and let that church be fairly close to the Scriptures and then let that person disdain some "small" principle of God's Word; it is a hurtful thing. It hurts the cause of Christ and of truth.

## **The Peculiar People in History**

Now there has been a people that the Lord has described in Scripture that comprised the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the solemn duty of every Christian to search for this people, to identify this people in history, and to join with this people. Now to identify this people in history, as nearly as possible in one word, so that you would understand generally their position both doctrinally and practically, I could not use the word Christian alone, because it has been applied to every heretical movement as well as to those who are Christians. After much consideration I have arrived at the conclusion that the word Baptist could come nearer to describing this people than any other single term. The baptistic people of history (baptistic in principle but not always in name) more nearly describe the church in the New Testament, more nearly exemplify the character of it, are more nearly in obedience to the commandments of the Word of God than any other people I know. Now that does not mean that everyone who today is called a Baptist exemplifies that character. I do not say that. Do not say that I am preaching that wherever you find a man called a Baptist, he therefore loves the truth and is in the category of those who long for the precepts of the Lord. Not at all. I am just trying to explain in a word the general doctrine and character of the people who historically have most forcefully exemplified the principles of the New Testament Scripture through the centuries, and who have most carefully exemplified the spirit of longing for the judgments and precepts of God in history—even unto death. They have not always been called Baptists, because for the first sixteen hundred years they went under all kinds of names given them by the world. They generally had been called Anabaptists, meaning rebaptizers (although not all Anabaptists were baptistic), but in the providence of God this same people with this set of values and these doctrines and the same love of the truth has emerged in the last four hundred years under the name of Baptist. Therefore, since it worked out this way in the providence of God, I think it is

expedient to use this term that you might understand the general nature of the people I am speaking of.

## **The Baptist Distinctive**

Now the characteristics we have seen in the two verses of Scripture that I have just read (Psm. 119:20 and Matt. 5:19) are still around today and have been since the first century. I want to read from two articles that I think will show this to be true among this baptistic people. First, I am going to read from a book called *Why Baptists Are Not Protestants* by Chester E. Tulga. It says in this little book, page sixteen:

There are many evidences that the Anabaptists took a higher view of the authority of the Word of God than the reformers, and that the Word was deeply embedded in their thoughts and lives. John C. Wenger, writing on *The Biblicism of the Anabaptists*, says "The Anabaptists were distinguished by a diligent study of the Scriptures from the moment of their conversion." Harold S. Bender says, "From the court records of the Anabaptists who were seized at the beginning of the Reformation era it is at once evident that they possessed an amazing knowledge of the Bible."

Amazing is not too strong a word, for the fact is that untrained lay brethren often proved more than a match for Roman Catholic doctors of theology who interrogated them. So overwhelming was this proficiency in the Scripture that it was sometimes explained (by their persecutors) as being due to demon possession. (*The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, p. 167). The evangelical Anabaptists, then, took a higher view of the authority, now get this, not necessarily of the truth of the Scriptures but of the authority of the Scriptures than the reformers. The Reformation leaders most certainly did say back to the Bible, *Sola Scriptura*, and proclaimed with their lips that they were to obey the Scriptures only, but as we shall presently see their deeds belie their words.

Tulga further writes:

The Anabaptists stood for separation from everything they considered to be contrary to the Word of God. They fell under the disfavor of the Reformers, because they insisted upon the Word of God as the sole authority for faith and practice; they insisted upon the New Testament church in its original faith and purity, rather than the patched up churches of the Reformation, whose pattern was often determined by both political and religious expediency; they insisted not only upon the doctrine of legal justification by faith, but its fruit in real sanctification of life and devoted discipleship; they refused to accept the Reformation idea of religious survival by alliance with the state and the world, but contended that believers gathered together in a New Testament church should walk in faith before God, accepting the consequences even until death.

Now, it is strange that two peoples, both of them saying the Scripture is the sole authority, should be so divided and that the Anabaptist should fall under the disfavor of the Reformers and be persecuted by them because they insisted upon obedience to the authority of Scripture. But that is what happened, and it cannot be reasonably denied that the evangelical Anabaptists held a higher view of the authority of Scripture. They were of the same general character of the psalmist whose heart was broken when he saw the precepts of God not being magnified.

When they saw the Reformation leaders coming out from the Catholic church, they hoped that might be the salvation of the world. They rejoiced in it in the beginning, but when they saw the union of state authority with the Reformation church, when they saw the retention of the Catholic ordinances of baptism of infants and of sprinkling, they were very disappointed. They soon began to recognize that the reformers were not

of the same spirit, that the Word of God was not supreme in their lives. If the Word of God had been supreme, the reformers would have gone all the way back to the Scriptures and would have given themselves to obedience.

Now in order to get a better understanding of the two different kinds of people that I am talking about, I want to read some of the words of the reformers themselves. The chief reformer was Martin Luther, and this passage I am going to read from his writings illustrates one of the classes we read about in Matthew 5:19. Here is what Luther said concerning baptism:

Baptism is *baptismos* in Greek, and *mersio* in Latin, and means to plunge something completely into the water, so that the water covers it. Although in many places it is no longer customary to thrust and dip infants into the font, but only with the hand to pour the baptismal water upon them out of the font, nevertheless the former is what should be done (Works, Bachman, ed., XXXV, 29).

What now does that tell us? It tells us that Luther recognized that the Scripture taught baptism by immersion. He understood that, and he admitted it. But what else does it tell us? Inasmuch as he did not obey that, it tells us that he was not careful to observe the "little things" (if baptism be a little thing, and I think we'll see later that it might not be a little thing after all) and that he was not of the same heart with the psalmist—that the Word of God was not so precious to him as to cause him to teach all of those Roman Catholic churches over which he had control throughout Germany the whole truth. He was not so committed to the Word of God that his heart would break for it, and his heart did not long for it in such a way that he was willing to teach them these precepts that he admitted to be true according to the Word of God. This, then, shows a distinct difference in the way Luther regarded the authority of the Word and the way the psalmist regarded it. You see, it is a distinction of principle.

Now let me say this: someone may say that all I want to do is to castigate other Christian people, but this is not the case. There is a very important principle at stake here which involves our ability to evangelize. There never has been in the history of the world a message of God's truth that has ever gotten over to a generation without the prophets of God saying what is wrong as well as what is right. Biblical evangelism requires some revolutionary changes; the status quo must be challenged. If you are unwilling to take a stand against something, you are unwilling to take a stand for something. We should resolve that whatever is wrong, no matter how much you may think a man is worth, that which is wrong, and only that which is wrong, should be rebuked in him. We do not rebuke Luther for everything. Thank God that he taught salvation through faith—justification by faith. Thank God that he made many improvements; thank God for all the good he did. But "these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Matt. 23:23). Then evangelism would not be in the condition it is in today or that it was then.

Now consider another vastly influential man, John Calvin. What was his attitude toward the Scripture? Here is a book that, I suppose, next to the Bible has influenced more people since the sixteenth century than perhaps any other book. It is Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion. This book takes a similar position to Luther and says:

Whether a person baptized is to be wholly immersed, and that whether once or thrice, or whether he is only to be sprinkled with water, is not of the least consequence: churches should be at liberty to adopt either, according to the diversity of climates, although it is evident that the term baptize means to immerse, and that this was the form used by the primitive Church (Institutes, IV, 15,19).

Here Calvin, like Luther, admits that immersion is the form of scriptural

baptism, but he says that we ought to have liberty in this matter. Many statements are found, as you read through the works of these two men, which show that their hearts did not break for the 'least commandments.' Anyone can plainly see that Calvin was willing to break what he admitted the Scriptures taught, and was willing to "teach men so." Luther, again, based his defense of infant baptism not on Scripture but on the long standing practice of the Catholic Church. His argument was that the Catholic Church had so long done these things that therefore it must be right because "the church" could not so long be in error on a matter like that.

I have brought these two men up not in order to defame them, but because I suppose that in history they are among the best of men who do not exhibit this spirit that we read about in the Psalms. Certainly they are very famous and influential men, and hundreds of thousands have followed their erroneous teachings!

Now I want to bring an illustration of a contrasting attitude toward the Scripture—again of those who long after the Word of God. This is from an old writing called *Baptist Why and Why Not*, written by Dr. R. M. Dudley in the latter part of the eighteenth century. A chapter from this book was reprinted in the *Ashland Avenue Baptist*, 1968, under the title "The Baptist Distinctives." In this chapter Dr. Dudley discussed the distinctives of the historic Baptist faith. Unfortunately, these things do not apply to all contemporary Baptists, but to the historic faith. The question is: what distinctively marks the Baptist people? Dr. Dudley writes:

Even intelligent Baptists are sometimes very careless in the statement of the fundamentals of the denomination. Dr. Gotch, the president of a Baptist college in England, says . . . "The Baptists as a denomination are distinguished from other denominations by the views they hold respecting the ordinance of baptism." To proceed from so high a source, this statement is a marvel of shallowness and carelessness.

I demur to the statement of the venerable Dr. Armitage . . . that the distinguishing difference of the Baptists is "in the demand for a positive moral change wrought in the soul by the direct agency of the Holy Spirit as an indispensable qualification for membership in the churches." And what shall I say of the popular and useful little book from the pen of the venerable Dr. Pendleton, "Three Reasons Why I am a Baptist"?

A truce to all these brethren, honored and beloved as they are; but in the statement of the fundamental distinction of their denomination they need to go deeper and lay bare the broader foundation, that the full truth may be known.

The fundamental principle of the Baptists is their belief in the supreme authority and absolute sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures; and their separate existence is the practical and logical result of their attempt to apply this principle in all matters of religion.

This is the bedrock on which the denomination rests; and we do not come down to the true foundation until we reach this. Now there are many people in the world today, almost every kind of Christian, who believe that the Bible is the Word of God. They will even say it is the supreme authority, but when you get down to the application of this principle, there is where you find the dividing line. To apply the principles of Scripture is far different from saying, "Yes, this is the Word of God." Luther and Calvin both said that. They admitted that immersion was practiced by the early church, by Christ Himself, by the example and precept and commandment of Scripture, but they did not apply the biblical teaching. Now let us look further into the attitude of those who have historically had the attitude of the psalmist toward Scripture. Dr. Dudley continues:

I will show you by the shortest of short methods that the statements of Drs. Gotch and Armitage and Pendleton come short of the full truth.

Ask Dr. Gotch why the Baptists believe in immersion; and he will tell you. Because the Scriptures teach it. Ask him if some other way would not do as well; his reply would be: We have no right to alter any of the plain and positive commands of the Bible. This brings us to the bedrock truth stated just now.

In the same way you ask Dr. Armitage why Baptists believe in a converted church membership; and he will tell you that it is because the Scriptures so teach. But why not admit to the church all who belong to the same family and nation? The answer would be: We have no right to go beyond the teachings of the Scriptures.

If you ask Dr. Pendleton why he practices closed communion so-called, that is, why he restricts the invitation to the Lord's Table to baptized believers; there is but one answer that he would think of giving you: The Bible teaches us that the Supper was ordained by Christ; and He has taught us in His Word that only baptized believers are to approach it; and that we have no right to go contrary to His Word.

Let us look a moment at this principle and its importance. A father says: Son, do this. But his son does something else. When asked about it, he says: Well, I thought that what I did was as well as what you told me to do. A master says to his servant: Do this. But he does something else, and when asked about it replies that what he did was altogether more convenient and withal more proper.

Such a course of conduct in a son or servant when deliberately settled upon is a direct arraignment of the wisdom and authority of the father or master.

Baptists say that in matters of religion there must be absolutely nothing like this. God's Word is the supreme and infallible rule for our guidance. We must not go contrary to it in any article of belief or in any duty enjoined. It is no partial revelation. By it the man of God is thoroughly furnished unto all good works. This is the fundamental position of the Baptists; and every peculiarity which characterizes them is the practical outcome of this principle.

. . . Take, for example, the question of baptism. Luther said that the primitive baptism was immersion and that the primitive practice should be restored. The Baptists said the same thing, and following out that belief immersed all who came to them, even though they had been sprinkled before. Strange to say, for this Luther hated the Baptists hardly less than he hated the Catholics.

Calvin said that the word *baptize* means to immerse and that it is certain that immersion was the practice of the primitive churches, but that in this matter the churches ought to have liberty. ... Luther and Calvin thought that they were at liberty to practice another form; the Baptists said that we ought to do whatever the Master commands ....

Now there is the principle that I am talking about. It is the longing of the heart for the judgments and precepts of the Word of God to the point of actual obedience. The hearts of these ancient people cleaved to the truth because they loved the Saviour. Now I do not care whether you call them Baptists or not—their beliefs are baptistic. But I am not here to defend a name or a term. I am here to defend a principle of God's Word held dear by a great people. Whoever holds this love of truth is great in God's sight (Matt. 5:19). This principle has historically worked itself out through the baptistic people, and I want to give credit where credit is due.

Now this attitude toward truth is the bedrock principle of the people who will finally—when the world is evangelized—who will finally be the ones to do it. But a few people cannot do it as long as there are massive numbers of Christians setting a different image before the world.



## Why Evangelism Has Broken Down

Early in the first century the Christians were relatively few, and they did have the attitude of intensive love for and obedience to the truth. And their evangelistic efforts were highly productive. But there was not a massive number of Christians who were careless with the Word of God—breaking and teaching others to break these "least commandments." There was not a massive number of divided Christians who by their attitude toward Scripture were distorting the image of Christian truth before the world. When there are many distorting the truth, it is impossible for the world to get the true picture of the gospel and Christian truth from the small minority of Christians who are concerned with "all the counsel of God."

That is why evangelism has broken down. And even in the midst of the most powerful revivals a very small percentage of the masses has been really converted. Much of the evangelism that has been done has been accomplished through God's infinite mercy, by those who have been willing to break God's Word—simply because of their massive numbers. Furthermore, their own indifferences toward the "least commandments" has prevented both themselves and the minority who have sacrificially held to the obedience and love of the truth from making a massive impact on the world through effectual evangelism.

The world must see two things before it can respond to the gospel: 1) genuine love of God, truth, and each other (John 13:34,35) and 2) genuine Christian unity (John 17:21) around the truth—even the "least commandments." But this cannot be unless massive numbers of Christians feel a heartbreak for "the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times" (Psm. 119:20). I believe that until this attitude toward God is shared by a large segment of people, by a large enough number so the people can get the un-distorted Christian message, so they can hear it and see it, there will not be a great work of evangelism.

If that one principle is let down in any generation, the following generation will not be evangelized as a people. If the principle of obedience and love of truth is let down, it is going to affect both present and future evangelism. It is going to affect the way you proclaim the good news of God's salvation and the way people hear. In the seventy-eighth Psalm, we read:

For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children (Psm. 78:5).

Now he is talking about the Word of God; he is talking about this principle of which the psalmist wrote (Psm. 119:20). God established a testimony in Jacob and the psalm continues:

That the generation to come might know them even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children (Psm. 78:6).

To what purpose is this declaration of truth generation after generation? It is so that they may be evangelized. That is what this verse means: that they may be saved: that they may have the life-giving gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. It says it in these words: "That they might set their hope in God . . . ." That is the Old Testament equivalent of faith, saving faith. Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness. And that, says the psalmist, is the reason God has established the law in Israel and the testimony in Jacob: "That they might set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments: And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; . . . that set not their hearts aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God" (Psm. 78:7,8).

Now the precepts and the law of God has to do with whether the next generation is going to be evangelized or not. Let me ask you something, and I want you to personally answer this in your own heart: do you care about the next generation? Are you bored with the fine detail of God's Word? Do you care about the next generation? Do you see that Christ must be represented according to truth before the world can see Him as He is? Are you going to be called "least in the kingdom of God" because the "little" words of God do not mean much to you, or are you going to be called great in the kingdom of God by God Himself because they do mean everything to you? Every Christian should dedicate his life to the principle of upholding every jot and tittle—every small thing—so that God's pure truth might be made available to the next generation.

## **How the Least Commandments Affect Evangelism**

Now I have made a big point about the Word of God, but more specifically how does it really affect evangelism? There are several biblical principles to which we have given a lot of study since the inception of Hallmark Baptist Church. I think these principles would be called "little things" by most people today—even by most Baptists, I am sorry to say.

There is a trend toward interdenominational-mindedness among Christians today, and this includes many of the Baptist churches which are turning essentially Protestant in their view of Scripture. Their doctrines and practice are becoming more and more like the reformers. It is too widely that way, but many Baptists are seeing the trends and are taking a fresh look at the Scriptures.

Yet evangelism—true sweeping gospel power that converts large numbers of souls—has not been known in our generation anywhere. There have been a few local short-lived revivals. There have been a few evangelists who seem to have had a lot of converts. There have been a few gigantic churches which sprang up like mushrooms and appear to have many souls saved, but when you examine the lives of the people, examine the church rolls, I think you will find only a few who have really been born again. What you find frequently is fifteen thousand names on the church roll and only five thousand in church on Sunday morning and about five hundred on Wednesday night. That is a sad ratio. If you see a church with a hundred and fifty members and only fifty are in church on Sunday morning and only five on Wednesday night prayer meeting, you would say something is wrong. And while these figures are intended only to illustrate a trend, they are not far out of scale, if at all. I have been in some of these churches and at one time gone along with their methodology. I speak from firsthand knowledge on this subject, and I am persuaded that if the Word of God were applied in these jumbo churches, they would be suddenly decimated!

But now, how do the doctrines of the truths of God's Word affect evangelism? To understand this, we must ask the question: can we ordinary people really know what the Bible teaches or are we shut up to the speculations of the scholars? There is always the hue and cry: "You have your interpretation and I have mine." That is a shallow cry. It is the expression of a heresy of long tradition that you cannot really understand the meaning of the Scriptures for sure. But the Bible says: "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine" (John 7:17).

That means to me that you can know what the Bible teaches. If God holds us responsible for the "least commandment," we can understand it. If you do not have that concept down in your heart, that you can properly interpret and know what the Bible teaches, the effect will be, after a generation or two, that the Word itself will be

powerless and meaningless to a people. A person who does not believe he can surely know the Bible cannot teach the Bible. And soon if he continues, he would not teach it if he did know it, because he would have no heartfelt conviction for its truth, saying in effect that you cannot know what the Bible really teaches.

I heard a prominent Christian leader say to a large body of several thousand impressionable students that beyond the five great fundamental doctrines of the Scripture you could not know the truth on the controversial doctrines that have divided Christians for so long. And he advised the students, "Where great men differ, walk softly." His teaching was clear: do not worry about the "least commandments"; you cannot really understand them anyway. One of these students told me, "You cannot learn doctrine from the Scriptures." His faith that he could go to God's Word for answers had been completely shattered by this fundamentalist school! You do not have to say the Bible is full of errors to destroy one's faith; you merely have to convince him that he cannot know for sure what it teaches. The message is clear: get rid of the "little things" of Scripture. Do not make an issue of those "least commandments."

How does this affect evangelism? It affects evangelism because there are few witnesses in the world who stand firmly and without apology for obedience to the Word of God. The world cannot look today and see a large mass of people who are satisfied with all the Scripture, who are satisfied with the full truth. There is no large mass of people who are satisfied in their souls with walking in the truth.

The Bible teaches not only that you can know the truth but that you can know that you do know it. Paul prayed for the Colossians that they might have the "full assurance of understanding" (Col. 2:2). That means you may have the understanding of God's truth; now that is one thing, but to have the assurance of understanding is another. A person sometimes has salvation, but he may not have the full assurance of it. Such a person will be weak and he will not be able to give a convincing witness. Neither will a person who has not the assurance of understanding the truth be able to convey to the children of this generation any kind of impression that "God has established a testimony in Jacob." They are just not going to learn it; they will not receive it unless their fathers before them both believe that they can learn the Word of God and that they can be assured that they have learned it. Then they must preach it and proclaim it as one having the authority of God behind him and not as the scribes and Pharisees. We have no inherent authority within ourselves, but we have all the authority of the Godhead behind us as long as we say what His Word says. God will back it up all the way, because it is His Word.

We cannot evangelize with a weak position on the Scripture. People will not listen to the gospel when they see a vacillating divided people—when they see Christian people not united and not settled upon the meaning of the small details of Scripture with great conviction. They may come in great numbers to such churches. They may join those churches in droves, for the world likes loose commitments. But they will not be evangelized in great numbers.

Now I am going to name several specific doctrines which have been neglected by the majority of the churches and discuss the serious effect this neglect or denial has had on evangelism. Unfortunately, most of our interdenominational-minded fundamentalist brethren have never even thought of the connection between the doctrines I am going to discuss and effectual evangelism. Many of them are so busy running contests and special promotional campaigns to amass bodies together that they have no time to savor the truths of the Scripture. Hence, they cannot see the sorry spectacle this approach sets before a world already given over to carnality. The world does not need more of the same from the church of Jesus Christ. Now let us look at

some specific biblical principles.

## **First—Church Authority**

There is the doctrine of the authority of the church (always localized in nature) as the only authorized agent of God for the work of His kingdom or the great commission (see sermon "The Authority of the Church"). The neglect or denial of this great scriptural principle has a very serious detrimental effect on evangelism today. But you may ask, "Is that authority not given to every Christian as an individual?" No I Not apart from the institution, the church. In fact a professed Christian in the New Testament would have been rejected as a Christian—would not have been recognized as a believer—had he refused to submit himself to the institution that Christ established, saying: I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. And I give unto you the keys—the authority or custodianship—of the kingdom of heaven and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven. Too many free-lance Christians, setting up "high places" (see sermon "The High Places"), distorting the Christian message and image, doing whatsoever is right in their own eyes, are injuring greatly the cause of evangelism because they reject the scriptural doctrine of church authority.

## **Second—The Ordinances**

Closely related to the principle of the authority of the church are the ordinances of the church. Are the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper merely little insignificant appendages to be shifted around as we please like a putty nose, as John Calvin says?

The authority of the church is primarily expressed, maintained, and perpetuated through the ordinances. The wisdom of God has designed two ordinances, which when obeyed as the Scriptures sets them forth, will maintain the authority and the purity of the church. For example consider Israel and the commandments of God to circumcise every male, whether he be a stranger of some other land or whether he be born in Israel. A person just could not be identified with that institution of God unless he submitted to the ordinance of circumcision. If one refused circumcision, he was cast out from among the people. God did not consider him a part of the institution of Israel except he submitted to that ordinance, which God commanded him to do. God almost killed Moses (Ex. 4:24-26) when he went down to lead the children of Israel out because his son had not been circumcised. Little petty things? No!

The wisdom of God is wrapped up in these simple ordinances. How insignificant they seem, but how carefully and accurately they separate those who long for every small precept of God from those who do not. The more trivial and humiliating the act, the better it works to separate those who love the "small" things of God. Even an arrogant man would do some great thing, but not many, like Naaman, would go and dip in the muddy Jordan.

O the wisdom of God! How I admire His genius. I stand in awe of His holiness; I praise His mercy and grace, but I greatly admire His genius to work His providential purposes with the simplest of rules. Who would have thought of a forbidden fruit to plumb the depths of human nature revealing the depravity from which He would redeem to the heights of glory! And who would have thought of dipping in water to make such a wide distinction in the attitudes of professed Christians throughout the centuries. Baptism has distinguished murderers from martyrs and obedient from disobedient—which things will be taken into account at the judgment.

God knows His purpose in them. With a little reflection we can see the very wisdom of God in this one ordinance of baptism. Throughout the centuries it has separated these two categories of people I have been talking about tonight. This one little ordinance has distinguished; it has been an issue and a battleground ever since the days of the first century. Most people have never liked the idea of going down under the water as a believing adult; they have always fought it. The Roman church fought it and the reformers fought it. People fight it today, but it distinguishes, perhaps more than any other single commandment, these two classes of people: those whose hearts break for the precepts and the judgments of God's Word from those who are willing to teach men to break these little commandments.

Now does observing the wisdom of God affect evangelism? Does it affect our ability to evangelize?

Absolutely I

Why?

Because to disobey or change His commandments divides the people of God. When God's people are divided, God's people cannot proclaim the gospel with the same power that they could if they were not divided. Jesus everywhere taught that we ought to be of one accord and one voice. He prayed that we be one in a way that the world could see (John 17:21). Whose fault is it when there is division, separation, and schism among Christians? It is the fault of the ones who depart from the truth—that is whose fault it is. And the one who departs from the truth of God's Word is the one who will be called on the carpet before the throne of God to give an answer for his deeds, because he has divided the brethren.

You say these little things do not make any difference? Calvin says they do not. But God says there are six things He hates; seven are an abomination to Him, and one of them is: "he that soweth discord among the brethren" (Prov. 6:19). To depart from the "least commandments" of His Word is to sow discord, confusion, and frustration among the brethren. God hates it, and whoever has departed from the little things of the Word has sown discord among the brethren and has hindered and hurt the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. He has caused it to have a diminished effect to the people of this generation. This generation looks at the people of God with suspicion and disdain and will not hear what they say about salvation. This is because Christendom is all divided, split, and splintered up and because many have departed from that first principle and do not love the precepts of God. Their hearts do not break because this is true, and there is no longing for His Word. That is the underlying cause for the difficulty in true evangelism today.

Do the ordinances make any difference in evangelism? Absolutely, because the whole program of God is distorted when you depart from His Word.

### **Third—Church Discipline**

The authority of the church expressed through the ordinances is also an instrument of a third principle: church discipline. The Scripture in an abundance of places teaches that the church has the responsibility to examine and to "judge." I am quoting the Scripture; it says judge (I Cor. 5:12) the lives (not motives) of those who are within its membership concerning their overt conduct and behavior. The Scripture teaches that the church is to judge those that are within its membership, and God will judge those who are outside.

It further says that those who sin are to be rebuked before all (I Tim. 5:20,21). Perhaps this is the strongest commandment in all of the Bible. I just want to read two

verses to show you that God feels strongly about this matter. I Timothy 5:20 says, "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear. I charge thee before God . . . ." Now listen to the strength He puts behind that. It is no small commandment if we can judge by the qualifications and the feelings that God expresses here. "I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels. . . ." He is calling to bear upon this thing all of these great beings and personages: the Lord Jesus Christ, God Himself, and the elect angels. He charges us in their behalf, "that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality" (I Tim. 5:21). Now observe them; do not just say that, yes, this is the Word of God and then ignore it! But read what it says and do what it says. If there be no other souls on the earth but ourselves alone, it is our obligation to do them, to teach them, to proclaim them to our sister churches, and to take them to the ends of the earth.

So then would we expect church discipline to influence evangelism? It most certainly does; the biggest cry in all the land is "hypocrites in the church." Everywhere I go, people, unbelievers, tell me, "I am just as good as so-and-so in the church over there." They will not listen to the gospel. The unbelieving world knows what its church-going neighbors do. They know of their drinking, and their adultery unrebuked by the church. And they say, "I'll make it to heaven if they do," and they will not hear the gospel.

Why? Because the Christian people of this generation have fallen down on those first principles—they do not love and long for obedience to the Word of God. If each church would consistently apply the principles taught in Matthew 18:15-18; Romans 16:17; I Corinthians 5:1-13; I Thessalonians 5:14; II Thessalonians 3:14,15; I Timothy 5:20,21; Titus 3:10, the churches would be much smaller but much more powerful in evangelism. They would be respected for their purity, and their gospel would be heard.

#### **Fourth—Scriptural Missions**

Another area where careful observance of the Word would make a great difference in evangelism is in the missionary methods exemplified in the Scripture. Paul is the great prototype missionary, and he was sent out both by the Holy Spirit and by his church—acting in agreement (see Acts 13:1-4; also 15:40). The church is the only "mission board" known to Scripture, and if today's churches loved the "little" details of the Word, they would be vital missionary centers, sending out some of their own pastors, as did Antioch which had five (see Acts 13:1), while the others carried on at home. The Jerusalem church did the same. First there was Philip (Acts 8:5); then they sent Peter and John (Acts 8:14); then Barnabas (Acts 11:22). Every church could be a powerful evangelistic center if they would stop the unscriptural practice of hiring a "professional" missionary "catering" service, a mission board, to do its normal biblical evangelistic outreach. I have not time to go into it now, but the arguments that a single church cannot do this or that is nonsense. There can be biblical cooperation between churches with each acting as its own "board" and home base for its missionaries. What a power for evangelism if every church had this normal biblical vision.

#### **Fifth—Body of Christ**

The concept of the body of Christ, as it is taught in the twelfth chapter of First Corinthians, the twelfth chapter of Romans, and the fourth chapter of Ephesians has been so distorted by the Reformation concept of the "invisible church" that the application to the local church of this great truth is almost unheard of today. The neglect

or misapplication of these truths has seriously weakened the cause of evangelism, because it has weakened the churches which are responsible for evangelism.

The term "body of Christ" in the Scripture is peculiar to the writings of Paul. He is the only biblical writer who uses the term. It is his way of expressing the unified and coordinated nature of an individual scriptural church. Now if a church is not coordinated and "fitly joined together and compacted" (Eph. 4:16) where every person is in his place and everyone fulfilling that peculiar gift that God has given to him, then the image of that church does not look right to the world outside. Such a church cannot effectively evangelize. The people of the world will not listen to it, because it has departed from a vital precept of God's Word. A church should exhibit the unity and coordination that a human body exhibits. Such a church Paul calls, by analogy, the body of Christ as it is expressed in the Scriptures in those places that I named. That is a teaching, a doctrine.

Now if each church had faithfully preserved the principle of this body concept from the very day of its inception, if it had always exercised its duty toward the ones within, there would not be any division in Christendom today. Everyone would be united. There would be one voice in the world; there would be one testimony as it was among the first-century churches. What an effect they had—what a power they were. The practical, visible unity for which Christ prayed (John 17:21) is to be realized in the localized assemblies, and the world must be able to observe this as a general characteristic of Christians before it will believe. But Christ's prayer shows us that when there is a visible unity, then "the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:21). Does this have anything to do with evangelism? Practical obedience to the Word within the unified body of Christ, the localized assembly, has everything to do with evangelism.

## **Sixth—Interchurch Unity**

Now we will consider the interchurch relationship, i.e. unity between churches, a big thing in the fifteenth chapter of Acts. You find there churches together searching out and settling their difference, because they were concerned that a difference had arisen. How many people do you find today who are concerned that there is division among Christians? Not very many, but if they did care, and if they were obedient to these precepts of the Scripture, then there would be unity.

The churches of Antioch and Jerusalem came together to seek what the Word of God said about their differences; they found what the Word of God said and went away unified. The interchurch relationship and the interchurch unity is an essential thing for evangelism and is of the same essence as intrachurch unity discussed before under the body concept of the church. If two churches are unified in truth within, there will be unity between the two churches. It is axiomatic that if two churches are each in harmony to Christ their head, they will be in harmony with each other.

Now what is necessary for unity? Nothing but a heartbreaking longing for the precepts of God's Word. When two parties or two churches come together with eagerness to understand and obey God's Word, they will "know of the doctrine" (John 7:17). They can then be ". . . knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding . . ." (Col. 2:2). People who approach the Scripture in that manner can both "know" and have assurance that they know.

Practical biblical unity is this: "... that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (I Cor. 1:10). What is wrong with the idea of a Presbyterian, a Methodist, and a Baptist coming together and candidly testing all their various views by the Scripture, changing in those points that are wrong and going on from that time

forward in one accord—radically changing their traditional structure if need be? What a powerful setting for evangelism that would create.

To say that cannot happen is to deny the Scriptures which say we can know and have full assurance of understanding. The truth is that the thing that so far prevents unity is that someone will not obey, therefore cannot know the doctrine. The churches of Antioch and Jerusalem had "much disputing" at first, but they went away unified. The modern "ecumenical movement" has failed because they approached unity in exactly the opposite way the Scriptures teach. They tried to see how far from the Scriptures they could go—how much truth they could throw out—so that there would be nothing to disagree over. True unity involves an approach that seeks to include all of the "least commandments," approved examples, and implications of Scripture. Evangelism can never be what God intends until His people are unified.

## **Seventh—Implications**

I want to discuss now the idea of the implications of the Scriptures. Some things the Scriptures merely imply, but those who long for the precepts of God seek to follow them. All Scripture is profitable, even the implications. I want to read a story from the book of Philippians just briefly to give you the teaching by implication of one of the really serious problems that is hindering evangelism among churches today. We read: "But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state" (Phil. 2:19). Now you see, Paul is wondering about the state of affairs of the church down in Philippi. He longs to know how it is with them. He has a love and a concern to know about their progress and well-being.

There are three or four churches within a short distance around here, and we do not know of their affairs and they do not know of our affairs. We have tried to have some exchange, some fellowship, with them, and we have found out that they do not care about our affairs. By and large that is the way it is all over town. One church does not particularly care about the affairs of another church. This interchurch relationship is an unscriptural one. This is an example of some of the implications of Scripture that we need to attend to. This is a spirit that you find in Scripture, but it does not pervade the churches today. It has to do with the image of God's people and is vitally important to evangelism. The world does not see the churches caring for one another or having the spirit of concern one for another. They do not see this love that is exhibited in this passage of Scripture. This is how, Jesus said, men are to "know that ye are my disciples" (John 13:34,35).

Paul continues, "Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellow-soldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants" (Phil. 2:25). Epaphroditus was a man sent from Philippi to Paul to minister to him. Here again is shown the personal involvement and concern of the Christians one for another: "For he longed after you all ... ." Epaphroditus was up there in Rome, sick, and he longed after his brethren back in Philippi. He was worried about them because they had heard he was sick and he was concerned that they were sorrowful.

This is an attitude, you see, not a direct commandment, but vitally essential to evangelism. It would do more than a billion dollar promotional campaign of some contemporary "super saint" evangelist. Paul continues: "For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick. For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I sent him therefore the more carefully,



that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful" (Phil. 2:26-28). You see the implications of the Scripture are important. These are great doctrines of truth that you gain from reading, as it were, between the lines. These little passages come to us, and they are God's Word. They are God's truth and He means for us to observe the spirit of these things.

Does it affect evangelism? Most certainly it affects evangelism, because if that one spirit pervaded all of the churches I believe it would break the heart of the hardest sinner. In a historical account of a great revival in the nineteenth century, it was said that there was such love between the brethren and between the churches that it was enough to break the heart of the greatest infidel living. Does it affect evangelism? I say it does. You see, what is wrong with evangelism today is that everything else is wrong. The gospel is declared widely every day, but everything else is wrong with the Christians. It goes back to that one bedrock principle of obedience to the Scripture.

Do we love God's precepts, His judgments, His laws, which have been so carefully selected, line upon line and precept upon precept, and set forth here to produce the perfect instrument to proclaim the gospel? If you change perfection you have damaged it; you have made it less effective. Do you love the Lord? What is your life going to be dedicated to? Are you going to give it over to the precepts of God, or are you going to use it up in some high place promoting half-truths? The greatest thing you can do in service to God is to obey His Word. When this message comes home to a majority of Christians, you will find an evangelistic impact just like there was in the book of Acts. You will not find all these specialized high places; you will find churches of the living God, the pillars and the ground of truth, all over the earth. You will see the beauty of unity and the beauty of love. You will see a beauty in the lives of people, and a solid church foundation to proclaim that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." People will listen to that from a truly scriptural platform. It would be enough to melt the heart of the greatest infidel living. It has done it in the past; it can do it again, but not until you and I get serious about every line and precept of God's Word.

That is my message on evangelism, and that, by the grace of God is what we at Hallmark Baptist Church are trying to accomplish. We have bypassed many temporary expedients and are still very small because of it. But we believe the long range pursuit of righteousness and Scripture truth is most profitable for evangelism. We are going to work at it until we die, but it will take more than one church to see powerful evangelism. Yet the Bible says:

I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name (Rev. 3:8).

The key to the open door is that they had "kept my word." I believe that the opening of the door to powerful evangelism to any church, who will pay the price, will also include somewhere, somehow, at sometime one of two things: God will either bring down the high places that are obscuring the Philadelphian churches dotted over this land, or else He will revive and change the high places, if that be possible. But as long as there are ten thousand high places, and only a few Philadelphian churches that are trying to serve the Lord, there is not going to be any great impact of evangelism because the world sees the image of the ten thousand and they like it better. But in the promise of the open door, I believe that as the Philadelphian churches raise their voices to God, He will bring down the high places and open the door to true biblical evangelism. I trust and pray this may happen in our day and in our generation, and if not, then in that of our children, that the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ might have and

be a power in the world.

## **BUILDING CHURCHES FOR UNITY** **According to the Blueprint of Christ**

Jesus must have been deep in thought as He made His way up into the mountain that special evening. There He would continue all night in prayer before selecting twelve unique men whom He called apostles. There He laid the initial foundational blocks which would flank the massive Cornerstone of an institution that would bring glory to Him "throughout all ages" (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 2:20; 3:21). Long before a foundation is laid, a master architect shall have completed a design concept with all the features and details of the "blueprint" precisely conceived and arranged to achieve all his purposes for a building. Jesus is the Master Architect of the building He called "my church." And it seems elementary, though extremely important, to realize that every feature necessary to achieve His every purpose for His church was already clearly in His mind before He started to lay the foundation that night.

The purposes to be served by His church are many, but I want to focus on a few design features that, if properly implemented, would serve one of His most important purposes: the unity of the faith in truth.

### **The Church Is Perfectly Designed For Unity**

If it is the will of Christ that "They all may be one ... that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:20-23), then we may rest assured that the church which He designed, authorized, and empowered as His official representative to the world was, in the mind of Christ, perfectly de-signed for unity. The church as His body is to reflect the mind of Christ, the Head, even as the human body's actions reflect the human mind. The body does what the mind commands. The churches of Jesus Christ are in-tended to be the products of the mind of Christ: and to the degree that they actually are, there will be unity within and between such churches.

Now if it is in Christ's mind that his authorized representatives on earth should be unified, then we would expect Him to build His churches with the perfect design for such unity. Per-haps this is one reason we see the first churches so strongly exhorted to obedience to the ecclesiology of Christ and so sharply rebuked for their disobedience and variation from it (Rev. 1-3).

We too must be so exhorted and seriously seek to implement the ecclesiology of Jesus. It behooves us then to look more closely at the design features conceived in the mind of Christ.

### **Baptism — Design For Unity**

The first unifying feature in the design of the church encountered by a new believer is baptism. This means of entering the church as a new member was set forth carefully out of the mind of Christ. Those who were added to the church at Jerusalem were those who first "gladly received the word" and then "were baptized" (Acts 2:41).

Is this part of Christ's design for unity? How can a people be unified if they are not of the same mind concerning their sin and concerning the Gospel remedy for their sin? John the Baptist would only baptize those who showed fruits of repentance (Matt. 3:8). Baptism is the answer of a good conscience toward God (1 Pet. 3:21). Christian

unity would require that Christians enter the covenant community together at the same door of obedience, with the same heart and attitude toward Christ, salvation, and baptism. The Scriptures unequivocally set forth a regenerate church membership of baptized believers. The protestant denominations that baptize infants and fill their churches with unregenerate members is a source of discord. Notice that Acts 2:47 says of those baptized believers at Jerusalem (v. 41) that "The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."

Now in considering the unifying character of this ordinance, we see again the genius of Christ's ecclesiology. Scriptural baptism with its slightly discomfiting immersion, calls for humble obedience to Christ as Lord. It speaks of a death to sin and a deliberate commitment to a new walk (Rom. 6:1-8). Many who promote putting on the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5) forget that this involves humble obedience (v. 8) to the entire will of God.

Baptism should be seen not as an apocryphal appendix to the will of Christ but as a feature central to His will and as an ordinance that came out of His heart and mind in wisdom. See Him submitting to His own ordinance, and hear the voice from heaven approving this action (Matt. 3:13-17). See His people uniformly following His example (e.g., Acts 9:18). See those who received a "baptism" inconsistent with the mind of Christ submit again to scriptural baptism (Acts 19:3-5) consistent with the mind of Christ.

Scriptural baptism is a critical starting point for unity. Those who were unified (Acts 2:46: 4:32) in the early church started their association by baptism and continued with a faithful walk, according to the mind of Christ: "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine ..." (Acts 2:42).

## **The Pastoral Office — Design For Unity**

Christ planned His church to be a continuing, growing, representation of Himself on the earth. He placed pastor-teachers in the church to teach, preach, and exemplify the Word for edification and stability (Eph. 4:11). He could not have expected unity if the saints were "tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (v. 14).

Consider now the context of this great principle. He wants us to grow up as His body into Him — the head (v. 15). Thus the body will be "fitly joined together and compacted" (v. 16) or properly unified. This architecture for church edification and unity through the ministry of pastors was by deliberate design out of the mind of Christ.

To achieve His purpose, the design of this office was critical. Pastors were to be ordained from among the people of the church only after they were considered by the church to meet Christ's qualifications (1 Tim. 3; Titus 5). They were of the same "stuff that composed the body. The pastors were to be servants (Matt. 20:25-28). For how else could they lead the body of Christ to be consistent with the mind of Christ? "Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister" (v. 28).

There was no provision made for preeminence among pastors or for a clergy above the people. In fact, considerable provisions were made to preclude such practice. For example, the earliest practice, straight from the mind of Christ, was a plurality of co-equal pastors co-laboring together. This was the consistent pattern in every New Testament church in all known cases. It is consistent with Christ's genius to include in His ecclesiology something that would wonder-fully "startle" the world where "they that are great exercise authority upon them" (Matt. 20:25).

Imagine two or three or four dynamic, spirit-filled individual leaders pulling in the same harness to plow in the same vineyard because they loved the harvest and the Lord of the harvest more than their own "place." preeminence, or accolades. This itself is a picture of unity which, if it were still practiced, would be an example to the church and make an impressive distinction between the church and the world.

In Acts 15 the entire church with its several elders (v. 22) made a unified decision (v. 25) concerning a serious doctrinal matter (v. 5. 28. 29). Clearly this action was not the result of one man effectively pressing His will upon the people. The leadership of Peter, Barnabas, Paul, and James was exercised and the "disputing" (v. 7). undoubtedly a valuable part of the process of consideration (v. 6), gave way to a pleasant unity (v. 25). The plurality of elders helped produce this unity and served to demonstrate it as well.

This continuance in the things consistent with the mind of Christ was not left solely to the pastoral office. A plurality of deacons selected by the church worked in accord with its directive, that the pastoral attention might be more focused on the Word (Acts 6:1-7).

## **A Decision-Making Membership — Design For Unity**

The officers' work and ministry did not diminish the answerability of the collective body or of each member to Christ the Head. On the contrary, it is the task of the pastors so thoroughly to teach the church that its collective resident wisdom can render wiser decisions than any one of the pastors individually. Each member is personally responsible before God to interpret and obey the Scriptures (Acts 17:11) and to participate in the collective decision-making process (Matt. 18:17,18; Acts 1:23-26:6:3; 1 Cor. 5:4. 5, 12, 13; 2 Cor. 2:6).

The idea of the church "catering" its responsibility for decision-making to a single executive pastor or a board of deacons is foreign to the mind of Christ. This departure from Christ's architecture has caused countless splits or has resulted in an "empire" of trucklers held together by an iron-fisted pastor. As the people in Acts watched and participated according to each member's responsibility, the body was drawn together in its purpose (Acts 2:42-47).

## **Church Discipline — Design For Unity**

Individual participation includes the loving confrontation commanded by Christ as a merciful means of purification of the body (Matt. 18:15-18). Christ gave authority to the church (Matt. 16:18-19) and the responsibility to invoke that authority in matters of sins of heresy (1Cor. 5:4-5; Matt 18:17). How can a body be unified when those who have entered by the same door and have started to grow together do not continue together in their department or their doctrine? Church discipline will either bring those members who will repent back to the place of unified service or will purge out the ones who persist in discordant sin. This is perhaps the most important design feature for the maintenance of church unity that has come from the mind of Christ.

This continuance in a disciplined unity is further enhanced by the periodic observance of the Lord's Supper as an internal means of remembrance and self-examination (1 Cor. 11:28).

Have we lost sight of the importance of all these and other provisions Christ has made that we may continue unified in the apostles' doctrine? How many other aspects of the mind of Christ' in ecclesiology bear on this subject of unity?

## Reproduction In Kind — Design For Unity

Consider one more critical design factor for unity: Christ designed His church to reproduce itself in kind while fulfilling His will to preach the Gospel to every creature. From the beginning everything God has made has been "very good" (Gen. 1:31): the church is no exception! And God de-signed every good thing so that it could reproduce "after his kind, whose seed is in itself (1:11). Again the church is no exception. It is designed to reproduce after its kind, which re-production is Christ's provision for unity between churches. If a new church is "genetically" like its "mother," and they each maintain the unity within, as described above, there will always be unity between them. When we see how this worked in the approved examples of the New Testament, the importance of Christ's ecclesiology is again highlighted as a marvel of insight and wisdom.

Notice, now, that the church at Jerusalem — with its baptized believing constituency, its discipline, and its many pastors — made unified corporate decisions (e.g., Acts 1:24-26; 15:22-25) including those necessary to press the Word into other places. Thus the church at Antioch was formed out of the deliberate efforts of the church at Jerusalem (11:22-26): "they sent forth Barnabas" for this work, and Antioch had the same characteristics and was unified — after its kind — with the church at Jerusalem.

Then the church at Antioch, with its five pastors co-laboring together, was led by the Spirit to make a corporate decision to send out two pastors for the purpose of reproducing churches of the same kind in Asia and elsewhere (Acts 13:1f).

If there was genius in designing the apple (and there was), there was double genius in designing an apple that would reproduce itself in kind. Likewise, there is double genius in Christ's design of the church. It reproduces itself in unified bodies wherever Christians follow the mind of Christ.

Whenever a system works for such immense good, it is criminal to change it! It is ecclesiological suicide to drift from these principles or to proliferate new movements or competitive para-church organizations to "improve" upon the design of the mind of Christ.

This is inherently divisive. These hybrids are not necessary, and they never enjoy the genius of Christ's architecture. They are formed out of the minds of men — so inferior to the mind of Christ!

No wonder the world is confused about the mind of Christ. Those claiming to represent Him come in the eclectic trappings of mission boards, evangelistic associations, self-created "churches" and denominations. They reflect confusion and not unity. Remember, Christ wants the world to see Him by watching His church.

We cannot afford to make the mistake of separating the ecclesiology of Christ from the mind of Christ. When we speak of the unity Christ prayed for, we must also think of implementing the unity He desires and will achieve through the unified ministry of His body here on earth as He reigns from God's right hand: "Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church. Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all (Eph. 1:21-23).

## **Conclusion**

If the church was designed out of the mind of Christ, then following that design is absolutely mandatory. His attributes of humility, sacrifice, and obedience (Phil. 2:5-8) are supposed to be our attributes "that ye may be blameless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15). There is no better way to showcase all the qualities of Christ than through unified churches made up of disciplined, obedient, believers led by the example of humble pastors toward the greatest objective in all the world: "That ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

## **THE UNEXPLORED MOUNTAIN**

### **The Ecclesiology of Jesus in Historical Reality**

One of the last of the Baptist pastors early this century to plead for a biblical ecclesiology was Dr. J. L. Vipperman of Spartanburg, South Carolina. With more profundity perhaps than the average Christian would realize, he said: "Should the church question be scripturally settled, practically the whole world would be at peace and worship God under his own vine and fig tree in all safety throughout the whole world as the people did in Solomon's reign from Dan to Beersheba." This is a beautiful thought and very true.

But sadly, most Christians have accepted as normal or inevitable the variegated, grotesque, and disfigured face of discord on that which passes as "the church" or "the body of Christ" today. And perhaps more sadly, few Christians have the vision to see the glorious possibilities or the blessings that would accrue to the whole world if the ugly face of discord could be replaced by the beauty that adorns God's ideal churches, such as the churches at Smyrna (Rev. 2:8-10) and Philadelphia (3:7-10).

Because of these possibilities, I want to reason now with every soul today who is a true believer in Jesus Christ — saved by the grace of God — whatever his church or denominational affiliation, or lack thereof. We all begin on equal ground at the foot of the cross; we all stand by the sheer grace of God upon the same foundation: "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (I Cor. 3:11). The Gospel — not the church or the denomination, not the baptism of a believer or the sprinkling of an infant, not a Baptist church, a Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran or Catholic — the Gospel "is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth" (Rom. 1:16). All who are believers are born of God, and as such they are my brothers and sisters in Christ. Though some of them maybe still in a Catholic, Protestant, Pentecostal, interdenominational, or non-denominational church, or in no church at all, I love them and look forward to dwelling with them in heaven forever. All who reach heaven will do so by exactly the same means — by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. That is the only way.

Now this should lay to rest, with every charitable soul, the paper tiger that some would create saying "the Baptists think they are the only ones who will be in heaven" thus placing the possibility of charitable and sincere dialogue under a considerable strain.

### **Believers Prefer Truth, Over Error**

In this article, however, I want to appeal to the true believer, to the fair-minded Christian seeking "all the counsel of God" including a unity in truth. Because a work of regeneration has been performed in us all and the same Holy Spirit indwells us, there is in every believer an inherent impulse toward God's truth. If we, therefore could help one another to break free of all false or negative influences which close the mind, confuse, or deceive (such as the negative influences sometimes exerted by the traditional ties of family, friends, church, pastor, worldly habits, false doctrines, or emotional persuasions), a true believer would always prefer truth and righteousness above error and sin. The Holy Spirit always influences the believer toward choices of truth and



righteousness (Phil. 2:13), and the believer will always make the right choices when he is willing in his heart to break free of these negative influences that cause him to fear or dread the changes God's truth would require. When we Christians can come to the point where each can both help others and receive the help of others to lay bare all our vested interests to the light of truth with a readiness to obey it, we will find it (see John 7:17). And when two or more Christians accomplish this, they will find one accord. The possibilities inherent in these truths are very exciting.

I am making this plea for all believers to make a sincere study of the body of truth concerning the church because most of the discord among fundamentalist and evangelical Christians surrounds the issue of ecclesiology. But private study, done without any challenge, will rarely produce wholly accurate conclusions. We are too prone in such cases to follow our internal biases. It is essential that issues of truth be finally established in dialogue with other believers: "He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbor cometh and searcheth him" (Prov. 18:17). We can rarely see our own blind spots until we allow a neighbor to search us. Neither can our neighbor see his until we are concerned enough to search him. It was by this process that the early church settled differences (see Acts 15).

## **A Mountain On The Plain**

Since we must all start from where we are, I therefore want to ask my Christian brothers and sisters everywhere to just consider something that is different from the conventional wisdom of the protestant-interdenominational or fundamentalist-evangelical understanding of church doctrine and church history. There is one great and voluminous body of truth that few Christians know exists; and it looms as a mountain on the plains of theological and historical reality. It has been camouflaged, minimized, and distorted by many venerable theologians and historians. This mountain has twin peaks. They are: 1) the great body of biblical church doctrine (ecclesiology), and 2) the great body of church history that has been the natural, inevitable, spontaneous outgrowth of the ecclesiology of Scripture.

I will state the issue succinctly, but will make no attempt here to demonstrate or prove the issue. It is: 1) The biblical doctrine of the church — biblical ecclesiology — has established the fact that the church is a localized body of baptized believers continuing steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine. 2) This truth has resulted in a visible orderly succession of non-catholic, non-protestant churches beginning in the New Testament era and continuing throughout history until the present time. These churches have been given various names by their enemies (names not chosen by, and usually denied by, the churches themselves) including, but not limited to: Montanists, Novationists, Donatists, Paulicians, Waldenses, Albigenses, Anabaptists, and finally Baptists. These have all been baptistic in their understanding of the faith and are part of a continuous succession from the first century, always standing in contradistinction to the Catholics and the Protestants who consistently persecuted them from the fourth until the nineteenth centuries.

## **A Candid Proposal**

Although I present this candid statement of my present convictions, I am willing to be searched. I will not retreat to an obscure and ambiguous corner so that others cannot tell where I stand. Honest dialogue must begin from where we find each other. My concern is that non-Baptist Christians living today (including those Baptists who

have embraced Protestant or interdenominational ecclesiology) have not faced the mountain of biblical and historical data with a willingness to be searched in open, tough, but charitable dialogue.

The facts of Scripture and of history have tremendous implications which will make a difference in the church affiliation of any true believer who will strip himself of all traditional negative influences long enough to stand before these truths objectively. I propose that if we stand nineteen hundred years away from the New Testament and look for the fruit — the actual church movement — that issued from its church doctrine, there is none at all unless it is found within the Donatist-Waldensian-Anabaptist-Baptist succession. It does not take a very astute theologian to see that the Catholic-Protestant-Interdenominational succession cannot be the God-ordained fruit that issued from New Testament ecclesiology. If the Donatist-Waldensian-Anabaptist-Baptist succession is not the fruit of the ecclesiology of God, then His ecclesiology has been barren throughout history, and the "gates of hell" have robbed the post-Constantinian world of the privilege of ever seeing a true church of Jesus Christ.

After a careful and sincere study of the church-related doctrines of the New Testament and the subsequent movements in history, the most credulous of all people could scarcely conclude that the relatively few regenerate persons divided and scattered throughout the bloody and oppressive Catholic-Protestant state-church movements, from the fourth to the 19th centuries, could have been the normal fruits of New Testament ecclesiology. Neither could the most credulous conclude that this was what Jesus envisioned and purposed when He said "I will build my church." If this is not so, then we are left with only two alternatives: 1) The fruits of those doctrines of God are to be found within the Donatist-Waldensian-Anabaptist-Baptist succession, or 2) the ecclesiological doctrines of Christ bore no fruit at all — and this conclusion is an unthinkable insult to God.

But people who are truly saved and only slightly informed in the Scriptures and in the historical character of the Catholic-Protestant succession, know two things: 1) that the "gates of hell" have never prevailed against the church of Jesus Christ and 2) that neither the Catholic-Protestant succession nor all the saved therein comprises the church of Jesus Christ.

## **The Growing Disgust Of The World**

Furthermore, the clock is running — the pressure is increasing: the world is demanding that we show them something more than the presumed saved, whom they cannot see, divided and scattered abroad in factions across the checkered face of Christendom. The world is saying, "If there are true representatives of the name of Jesus Christ on earth, who are you? You must show us something more than a bevy of charismatic leaders enthroned at the pinnacle of their respective empires, evangelistic associations, world congresses, denominations, or self-created local 'churches.'"

The church of Jesus Christ is not the ward of any man. It is a localized body of scripturally baptized believers continuing steadfastly in the apostles doctrine with Christ as its only head. And every assembly that fully meets that definition is automatically and intrinsically in one accord with every other such assembly. God Intended that these units, like stones, perfectly fitted together without mortar, form a monolithic monument to the name of Christ — not divided, not invisible, but with a high, unified profile in the eyes of the world.

Such churches can be comprised only of regenerate, obedient, and disciplined people, but if the regenerate ignorantly or wantonly cleave to the checkered, man-made

institutions of Christendom, this monument can never have the visibility or the monolithic character to impact the world with a sobering and effectual representation of the person and work of Jesus Christ. The clock is running. The pressure is building. The world is saying to Christians, "Put up or shut up. Give us no more revamped state churches. Give us no more giant, cold, formal, hierarchical denominations. Give us no more individual empire builders, warring conventions, charismatic playboys, or local churches taunting us with fun and games and filled with immorality." The world will be impressed only with what Jesus envisioned — unified, indigenous, disciplined churches at the grass roots of each community.

The secret is out. Among the last prayers Jesus uttered was the plea "that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe ..." (John 17:21). The church-building work of Jesus was compatible with His prayer. He built, not a divided schismatic "invisible church"; He did not design a dismembered, scattered body; He established visible, localized bodies that could exhibit a visible unity to be seen by the world. Jesus purposed for every regenerate soul to serve Him in visible assemblies indigenous to each respective community with each so perfectly related to the same Head that they inherently are perfectly related to each other. That is God's solution to the unbelief of the world.

God's design of the church (generically speaking) was "... to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be [made] known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:10, 11). God's plan is to impact the world, the "principalities and powers," the rulers of the darkness of this world, spiritual wickedness in high placed (Eph. 6:12), by means of the visible, unified church; but the Christians today are not listening.

## **A Two-Fold Problem**

What then is the problem? Is it lack of data? Is the New Testament so obscurely written that we cannot discern the nature of the church of which it speaks so voluminously? Then what about church history? Is the data so sparse that we cannot discern the existence of a visible institutional succession that has exhibited the characteristics of the New Testament throughout the Dark Ages until the present time?

The problem is two-fold. First, on the front cover of this publication we have pictured only a few but enough books to demonstrate unequivocally that such a succession exists. And it is my claim that this body of truth has been ignored in deference to the Catholic-Protestant-Interdenominational succession and that the divisions among Christians and the ensuing conditions of sin and immorality in the world is largely a result of this fact. The scholars who have noticed this body of truth have seized upon a small percentage of inexactitudes, inaccurate, or even obnoxious statements in these writings and have thus rejected the massive body of unequivocal evidence they present. If some claims are in error, as we readily admit some are, a thousand other facts stand up to take their places. No, the problem is not a lack of accurate data; it is an ignorance of or an indifference to them.

Second, the majority of the Baptists of today, among whom the Donatist-Waldensian-Anabaptist-Baptist succession now continues, have either not understood clearly or have not cared enough for their brethren of the Catholic-Protestant-Interdenominational succession to make a direct, sincere, and reasonable appeal for charitable dialogue concerning biblical church doctrine and church history. We have

been divided ourselves. The world sees no monolith among ourselves. We have done poorly in the presentation of this great body of truth.

On the one hand, some have been ashamed of it; and on the other hand, some have been arrogant about it. Although I am persuaded that the historic Baptist faith is the contemporary and on-going representation of the fruits of biblical ecclesiology, there is no room for pride on my part. I did not invent or create this succession; it is the work of the providence of God maintained through the ages against great odds. I found it, and I joined it as a privilege — not necessarily a right. There is no more room for arrogance for being a part of the church of Jesus Christ, which He authorized to represent His name, than there is to be arrogant that we have an inheritance in heaven. We must neither be ashamed nor arrogant, but it is the duty and privilege of every believer to identify the church movement in history that is the product of Scripture truth and to join it and promote it with all our strength.

Because of the abundance of information and data available, the identification of this church is not difficult. It is this fact that makes Christian indifference, whether Baptist, Protestant, or Catholic, to the facts — even distortion of the facts — so reprehensible.

## **A Rigorous Identity**

There is a factor broadly established and exemplified in Scripture that makes it relatively simple to identify the church in history. It is the principle of persecution. Jesus said to those placed first in the church, "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you..." (John 15:20). "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (II Tim. 3:12). "And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus..." (Rev. 17:6).

These verses establish a generalized prophetic truth: the world, not the church, persecuted Jesus; the world, not the church, will persecute His followers. How can a case be made that an institution is a church of Jesus Christ whose members have remained aloof from His church, whose members have never submitted to a scriptural baptism by His church, whose members have never entrusted themselves to the discipline of His church, but who have consistently persecuted it? Religious persecutors can never qualify as a church of Jesus Christ.

By this principle then it becomes a simple matter to look into history and see who were the persecutors and who were the persecutees. For fifteen centuries a long and persistent campaign by the Catholics, in alliance with the state, was made to stamp out by force the Donatists and the Waldensians to be joined after the Reformation by the Protestants persecuting the Anabaptists and Baptists. But now if the Catholic-Protestant-Interdenominational succession is the historic manifestation of the true church; and if, as they claim, the Donatist-Waldensian-Anabaptist-Baptist succession is heretic, then the true church, contrary to prophecy and truth, became the persecutors and the world became the persecutees. This is an unthinkable inversion of the teachings of Jesus and of the whole of New Testament truth.

I plead with every believer — especially my Protestant and interdenominational fundamentalist brethren who defend the false succession and denounce the true succession: "come out of her, my people..." (Rev. 18:4). There is no want of evidence. Do not crash blindly against the mountain of biblical and historical evidence that is silhouetted so vividly against the light of God's eternal truth.

**The End**