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Ecclesia Communities

KEY TO A
GODLY SOCIAL ORDER

Lou and Greg Poumakis

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Foreword

In his earlier book, *Faith on Earth?*,¹ Lou Poumakis makes a strong case for taking the Great Commission seriously in all its aspects, using Scripture to sweep away several centuries of accumulated cultural pessimism and setting the record straight. In this new volume, *Ecclesia Communities: The Key to Godly Social Order*, Lou teams up with son Greg and seeks to put practical legs on the earlier book's program.

The resulting work casts a very wide net, blending features of devotional writing with Christian exhortation and, not surprisingly, some controversy as well. The controversy arises as much from their call for maturity, responsibility, and self-government (in an age where few Christian leaders call for them) as it does their rethinking of church itself, which motivates much of this work. By spanning so broad a range of concerns, they do not fail to kick over quite a few rice bowls: the entrenched interests of the laity lazily deferring to the supposed spiritual elites, and the entrenched interests and fiefdoms of the elites themselves.

Lou and Greg are not proposing a leveling of spiritual authority to the lowest common denominator, as some critics might prematurely conclude. Their position comes closer to the plaintive cry of Moses recorded in Numbers 11:29 – “Would to God that all the Lord’s people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!” Of course, even this Biblical

¹ Lou Poumakis, *Faith on Earth?: When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?* (Ventura, CA: Nordskog Publishing, 2013).

sentiment raises the hackles of those intent upon protecting hierarchical pretensions.

The authors argue that we've strayed for centuries from the original intent of the Scriptures when it comes to the question of church, having accepted a situation we've inherited historically without applying the due diligence of the Bereans to it. To use Matthew Henry's phrase, *Quod initio non valuit, tractu temporis invalescit* (that which was originally destitute of authority, in the process of time acquires it) – and it is precisely this mindset that they challenge.

Knowing that the word “church” is an already-loaded term for their readers, the authors throughout deliberately cross out the word *church* and replace it with the term *ecclesia* (from the original Greek word *ekklesia*). They want us to consider the term and the idea in a different light than history has bequeathed to us, viz., heavy with connotations, stereotypes, and mischaracterizations. In many respects, the authors come closer to doing justice to the original meaning than others do. If nothing else, they avoid cross-contamination with existing institutional notions of church (the various traditional ideas that they see as stifling the work to be done by the Lord's people in this world). They depict *ecclesia* in a decentralized way but argue that this in no way weakens her in her appointed task: it is what makes fulfillment of her world-transforming destiny possible.

By emphasizing the family as the basic unit of the Kingdom of God, the authors put responsibility back where it belongs. Their approach is Kingdom-centered (which is why they cite Matthew 6:33 repeatedly, to emphasize this focus) but it is also family-centered. But it is not church-centered in the modern sense of the word – although the *ecclesia* does play a major role when properly understood.

There may be some confusion over this book's call to “come out from among them, and be ye separate” (2 Cor. 6:17), especially in the context of what the authors call *ecclesia*

communities. First, it is important to note that they are not advocating that Christians adopt a ghetto mentality, which is clear both from their position that the entire world will actually be Christianized *and* from their use of *salt* and *light* in the context of the individual believer providing these blessings to the world at large.

Second, it is important to see this in the light of a *moral separation* from unbelievers and the works of darkness, as R. J. Rushdoony has taught.² What good would a geographical separation do if there is no moral separation? The latter concern is the central one (lest we “clean only the outside of the cup”), although separation clearly has physical implications when applied to the government schools and other similar contexts.

The authors wisely point out the prophet Daniel as a strong example of biblical separation: a man who was engaged in the world but not contaminated by it, nor governed by anyone but God Himself. This emphasis should be warmly received by every reader.

Critics might argue that actual, geographically distinct Christian communities have historically bristled with all manner of abuses and pathologies. For their part, the authors head off these objections in terms of Christian self-government, repositioning elders and deacons so as to block tyrannical power grabs that seem to proliferate whenever a community becomes ingrown and overly dependent on its presumed leaders. Say what you will, but they have clearly foreseen these issues and dealt with them.

One way they do this is by taking Paul’s description in Ephesians 4 seriously, so that the *ecclesia* actually functions through “the working of every joint or part” rather than by top-

² Rousas John Rushdoony, *Sermons in 1 & 2 Corinthians* (Vallecito, CA: Chalcedon/ Ross House Books, 2022), p. 62.

down hierarchical authority. Pertinent here is their analysis of the idea of “elders who rule well,” a re-examination of 1 Timothy 5:17 which seeks to invest the term “rule” with its original meaning in the Greek. They arrive at the same place that Dr. Rushdoony and Dr. Marshall Foster arrive at, namely, that Christian self-government is fundamental, grounding all else in this book’s analyses.

Notably, when today’s churches set aside “the working of every joint or part,” the authors argue that “the mechanism for resolving differences is no longer in place” (and here they include doctrinal differences, not merely personal differences). One might object and counter that we need seminarytrained experts to guide us doctrinally, but surely we’ve all benefited from William Tyndale’s claim to the spiritual elite of his day that he “will cause a boy who drives a plough to know more of the scriptures than you do.”

And here lies another strength of this book: its emphasis on *teaching* Scripture. The authors prioritize teaching, as it is central to the Great Commission and other imperatives laid down in Scripture. Teaching isn’t even necessarily a formal process but occurs all the time, naturally and informally (in keeping with the decentralization at the heart of their proposals).

I mentioned earlier the common failing of ingrown communities, but we must grasp what the authors are commending to us: not monolithic uniformity of thought, but as they write, “an environment that provides free access to dissenting views.” This emphasis is dutifully coupled with the believer’s “responsibility to learn the teachings of Scripture.” Small wonder that they cite Hebrews 5:11ff in this connection.³

³ See Martin G. Selbrede, “The Perpetual Kindergarten,” at <https://chalcedon.edu/magazine/the-perpetual-kindergarten>

There was a time in church history when believers understood what Jesus meant when he called out the crowds for hypocrisy:

“He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?”

(Matthew 16:2-3)

Why did our Lord call them hypocrites? Because they proved that they had the mental apparatus to evaluate evidence for themselves (drawing conclusions about the weather) but ran to the experts (the scribes and Pharisees) to tell them what to think when confronted with Christ’s miracles. Christ here is asserting that they were fully equipped to draw conclusions for themselves, but they preferred to have plausible deniability and delegated the more important decision to blind guides.

So too do the authors argue for personal responsibility, which (they argue) cannot be delegated to an elite clergy (just as Christ argued above against such hypocritical gambits). This opens up and widens the teaching role in terms of Hebrews 5:11ff, as well it should. This realignment of priorities is one that they invite their readers to embrace without flinching. “The teaching strength within the ecclesia communities as a whole is far more important than the external achievements of its most notable individuals.”

The end game that the authors envision may be afar off, even centuries hence, but that doesn’t alter one iota of our obligation to work toward it. As resident scholar of the Chalcedon Foundation, a Christian educational organization, I regard my

mission as a simple one: I need to make my job, and our organization, obsolete. The training wheels cannot stay on forever, lest we end up, culturally and spiritually speaking, giving our son a snake when he asks for a fish, or a stone when he asks for bread.

Lastly, we should consider what motivates our antipathy to the idea of *ecclesia communities*, seeing them in a pejorative light by lumping them into earlier failed experiments that actually didn't implement anything close to every jot and tittle of Scripture. Those earlier attempts failed because a little leaven leavens the whole lump (see also Haggai 2:11-14). But if we're paying attention to the argument the authors are making, they are not only purging *ecclesia* of faulty meanings that accumulated over time, but also restoring the term *community* to its fullness.

For we live in an age where community has become an alien concept. In the 1980s, Dr. R. J. Rushdoony delivered a series of lectures on the topic of community in Chatsworth, California, because he believed it was of paramount importance for Christians to recapture the idea and live it out. Few attempts to flesh out the idea have crossed my desk since, until I was given the manuscript of this present book. Its focus is commendable, even if we draw different conclusions than do the authors.

Even if we should disagree with any perceived implication of withdrawing into Christian communities (which, being populated by regenerated sinners, will have problems just as unbelieving communities do), we must also grasp every aspect of what the authors propose and not shoehorn their model into an uncharitably hostile context (since they don't counsel a pietistic withdrawal but a vigorous engagement with the world in terms of 2 Corinthians 10:4-5). Even the harshest critic of this book's thesis would be on the hook to explain how their objections don't apply equally to Christ's description of "a city on a hill."

After all, the authors are simply saying that once you have a working community, you can replicate it world without end. If

we're alert to the potential downsides, might we not be able to navigate the narrow space between the extremes the critics fear? As it's never been tried before (except sporadically and deficiently throughout history), and since the status quo exhibits every pathology that the authors itemize herein, these ideas (at a minimum) deserve to be debated. Perhaps communities will arise that operate according to the blueprints that the authors apparently identify in the Bible. We might then know in retrospect what today can only be guessed at in prospect.

Either way, the authors are correct in saying that our responsibility is simply to be faithful: the results are ever in His hands. A focus on the Great Commission provides the moral imperatives that flow through their presentation. Teaching the nations is a major task, although we're told that it *will* be accomplished, leaving no one untaught about the Lord (Jeremiah 31:34). Baptizing the nations is also a massive task, yet we're told that the Messiah "shall sprinkle many nations" (Isaiah 52:15).

The promise of His presence in the *ecclesia communities* that the authors describe can even harmonize with the prophecy of Isaiah that God's presence would appear over family dwellings *and* the *ecclesias*:

"And the Lord will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence." (Isaiah 4:5)

The term *assemblies* is interesting here. Prof. Edward J. Young noted that "the word is actually a forerunner of the New Testament *ekklesia*."⁴ If future scholarship should strengthen this connection,

⁴ Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), vol. 1, p. 186.

perhaps we'd do well to reconsider our notions of the place of Christian community within the context of God's Kingdom in this world.

As asserted at the outset, the devotional and hortatory aspects of this work, in tandem with its call for moral responsibility in the context of community, are to be welcomed, as this work does satisfy Paul's dictum that all things are to be done unto edification. Let iron sharpen iron: Lou and Greg Poumakis call upon us all to be Bereans as we assess this book, written to promote the cause of Christ in the world.

Martin G. Selbrede

Vice President, The Chalcedon Foundation

Introduction

500 years ago, Tyndale's⁵ pen hit the page, and the Word of God was once again in the hands of the common man. Although some traditions persist, 1,000 years of false traditions of men that had infected church and civil institutions were swept away.

It is a constant struggle to clear away the clever ideas of men and get back to God's Word. Ecclesia Communities is intended to push back against false traditions that remain and ground our thoughts, words, and actions solely in the perfect Law Word of God.

We have work to do!

What follows is a sincere effort to make clear what Jesus meant when he used the word ecclesia in Matthew, Revelation and elsewhere in scripture. In the King James Version, ecclesia is mis-translated as "church." This we will see was due to the influence of tradition as well as some heavyhanded manipulation by the monarchy and the clergy. Separating tradition from scripture is essential to gaining a correct understanding. Traditions that have affected our understanding began in The Garden with Satan's temptations. It was the first known instance of lies being mingled with the truth. This mingling is what makes traditions effective and hard to undo. Lies, effective ones, often contain partial truth. However, lies either add to or ignore part of the truth that scripture teaches. Our effort in this book is to root out such traditions. The following key questions about Jesus'

⁵ A special thank you to Ruth Magnussen for her work at reviving the Bible of William Tyndale. "The October Testament, the New Testament of the New Matthew Bible". Where used the verse references will include NMB. Baruch House Publishing, Ruth Magnusson, The October Testament, The New Matthew Bible Project, newmatthewbible.org

ecclesia will be explored using the passages below and in related passages.

- What is ecclesia?

“Upon this rock I will build my ~~church~~ [ecclesia]”⁶

- Who are its members?

“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people”⁷

- What is its structure?

“Come out from among them, and be ye separate”⁸

“Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”⁹

“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works. Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”¹⁰

“Put away from among yourselves that wicked person. Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?”¹¹

- What is the purpose?

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations”¹²

⁶ Matthew 16:18

⁷ 1 Peter 2:9

⁸ 2 Corinthians 6:17 ⁹ Romans 12:2

¹⁰ Hebrews 10:24,25

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 5:13-6:1

¹² Matthew 28:19

“Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”⁶

- What can we learn from history?

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”⁷

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”¹⁵

- What is the future, here on Earth, for the ecclesia of Jesus?

“the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

Many of these scriptures have been confused by tradition, too narrowly interpreted, or overlooked altogether. These passages with careful study will impact us personally and corporately.

⁶ Ephesians 6:13

⁷ Timothy 3:16-17

⁸ Timothy 2:15

⁹ Matthew 16:18

When considered, they will have us renew our thinking which has been confused by long held traditions.

As we study God's Word and its teachings regarding the early ecclesia communities, time and again we find answers, real answers to problems that have troubled Christians in the past and continue to trouble us today. The wisdom and understanding to be found and gained through careful study of this precious Word that God in His mercy and grace has given us will not only help us in our personal lives and local communities but will help us build a Godly social order that answers Jesus' prayer – Thy will be done here on earth!



The Ecclesia of Jesus Christ

The gates of hell shall not prevail against the ecclesia of Jesus Christ! Jesus, speaking to Peter, chose the word “ecclesia” to describe His victorious people, all those that by faith believe in Him:

“He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my ~~church~~ [ecclesia]. And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”¹⁰

ECCLESIA! ---Jesus here, and later the apostles, used this meaningful and provocative word to describe God’s people. It appears over one hundred times in the original Greek New Testament. Tyndale translated it as “congregation.” In the King James version and later modern translations ecclesia is translated “church” in all but a few places.

The literal meaning of ecclesia is not at all what our modern translations and traditions would lead us to expect. What ecclesia meant to the apostles and other writers of the New Testament was the “called-out” ones. The Greek “ek” meaning “out” and “klesia” meaning “called.” The word “ecclesia” was well known in Jesus’ time. It was used to denote the governing body of a Greek city-state. Alexander “the great” had conquered most of the known world in the centuries leading up to Jesus’ birth. As

¹⁰ Matthew 16:15-18

a result, the Greek language spread across all nations and became the language of commerce.

In a Greek city-state democracy, the ecclesia consisted of all the male citizens. The elders of the city called the ecclesia to meet whenever citywide decisions were needed. Decisions were not made by the elders or a ruler. They were made by full consensus of all citizens! Any single member could hold up any decision.

We see this same consensus arrangement in Jesus' ecclesia as well. In Matthew 18 the final decision on a matter is not in an institutional office but rather with the entire congregation.

Jesus, in His infinite wisdom chose this word ecclesia to name and thereby describe His people. He saw them as His own and declared they would grow to cover the earth and successfully teach the nations to obey His commandments.

The word church however is derived from a completely different Greek word, the word "kuriakos" meaning the "Lord's house." This is an obvious mistranslation of "ecclesia." The word ecclesia is a reference to the people themselves, not the building in which they meet. This is further made clear by the apostle's description of believers as a body:

"But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. ... That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. ... Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."¹⁸

"And he is the head of the body, the ~~church~~ [ecclesia]: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."¹⁹

William Tyndale dedicated his life to produce the first English language translation of the New Testament as well as much of the Old Testament.

¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 12:18-20,25,27

Tyndale spoke seven languages, including Latin, Greek and eventually Hebrew. He did not personally need an English version for himself. He used the word “congregation” to translate the Greek word ecclesia.¹¹ For example, Tyndale’s rendering would be:

“And I say also to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my congregation. And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”¹²

Tyndale’s use of ‘congregation’ vs ‘church’ put the correct meaning back into Jesus’ proclamation. He knew the ecclesia is not a building – the ecclesia are the people.

Tyndale’s great desire was to put the Word of God into the hands of every believer. With the Word in the language of the common man they could come to know the Word and its true application to life. They would be able to discern the lies of the clergy and the civil government. His intent in this is clear in his other works attacking the clergy and the government: *The Obedience of the Christian Man* and *The Practice of Prelates*, respectively. For his lifelong commitment to the work of translating God’s Word into the common language and its challenge to the clergy and government institutions, Tyndale was hunted all his life and eventually captured, strangled, and burnt at the stake.

A generation after Tyndale’s death, King James commissioned the King James Version. The authors of this Bible, at the direction of the King plagiarized nearly all of Tyndale’s work. They also set out fifteen principles of translation which were instituted by the King via Richard Bancroft, the bishop

¹¹ see: THE CORRECT MEANING OF “CHURCH” AND “ECCLESIA,”

<http://www.aggressivechristianity.net/articles/ecclesia.htm>

¹² Matthew 16:18 NMB

of London in 1604. We see in rule number three a direct attack on Tyndale's work:

*“The Old Ecclesiastical Words to be kept, viz. the Word Church not to be translated Congregation.”*¹³

¹³ <https://www.petergoeman.com/15-rules-of-translation-for-the-king-jamesversion-kjv/>

The remaining rules put the translation into the hands of the clergy. This protected the institutional order and hierarchy. James, as monarch and as head of the institutional church, was in control of the people and their faith. As David Daniell put it,

“James gave the translators instructions intended to ensure that the new version would conform to the ecclesiology of, and reflect the episcopal structure of, the Church of England and its belief in an ordained clergy.”¹⁴

Many scholars have noted the mistranslation of *ecclesia*. They have, however, failed to adopt a new, corrected terminology and to explore its application more deeply.

One of the great ironies of history is that the ‘re-form-ation’ did not change the “form.” It corrected many very important doctrinal errors but left the institutional “form” in place. This book proposes that we once and for all end this extra-Biblical use of “church.” The word “church” was introduced by tyrannical institutions looking to protect their false authority. Whether we move to Tyndale’s ‘congregation,’ assembly, body or other term; we need to refer not to the hierarchical institution of man, but rather to independent loosely associated *ecclesia* communities of believers. This represents a change from a very old error to the doctrinally sound God-given form of Christian assembly and life. This was the form of assembly that God gave us through His apostles. Those early AD, obedient *ecclesia* communities grew to be so strong and vital a Christian population that it forced the

¹⁴ Daniell, David (2003). *The Bible in English: its history and influence*. New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press. ISBN 0-300-09930-4. Daniell (2/17/29 – 6/1/16) was an English literary scholar who became Professor of English at University College London. He was founder of the Tyndale Society, a specialist in William Tyndale and his translations of the Bible, and author of a number of studies of the plays of Shakespeare.

Roman Empire to renounce emperor worship and declare Christianity to be the official state religion.



Who We are in Christ

Welcome to the Body of Christ, the most blessed group of people in the world; a group of which it is a great privilege to be a member:

“But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and ~~church~~ [ecclesia] of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.”¹⁵

We consider here something of the wonder of who and what we are in Christ. The nature of the extensive, in-depth change God’s regenerating work produces in our hearts is truly amazing. It is generally understood that Christians are different from unbelievers. The depth, though, to which these differences can extend is seldom fully grasped, even by most believers themselves. Come along as we investigate some aspects of the effect of the faith on its highly blessed beneficiaries. You will very likely find it to be a pleasant and rewarding surprise.

God tells us here that we, as members of God’s ecclesia, are associated with an innumerable company of angels, the saints of

¹⁵ Heb. 12:22-24

history, every true believer in the world today, and all the new arrivals yet to be reborn in this world. Breathe deeply, the air is precious!

Chosen

“...God hath from the beginning chosen you...”²⁵

Before He created the world, God chose each person that was to become a member of His ecclesia! Their membership was validated by Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross and put into effect when The Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Triune God came to reside within them. The Eternal God actually present within us! How is this possible? Of course, we cannot comprehend the magnitude of such a thing today but, God willing, one day it will all be made clear to us.

For now, we should appreciate that to be chosen by God is indeed a great privilege. It has eternal value and surpasses by far the greatest, most prestigious acclamation or award anyone can receive in this world!

“...Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”²⁶

“For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”²⁷

Both apostles, Peter and Paul employ here the same analogy: from darkness to light; from the darkness of this world into the light of Christ. The light of the knowledge of the glory of God shines in the face of Jesus Christ. He causes His light to shine in the previously darkened hearts of His chosen people. We were in

darkness (ignorance) and suddenly light (knowledge) appeared and we could see (understand).

What great event is it that took place within us that it should require so dramatic a description? It included our release from Satan's bondage:

“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that

²⁵ 2 Thessalonians 2:13

²⁶ 1 Peter 2:9

²⁷ 2 Corinthians 4:6

through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”¹⁶

The fear of death is present in all unbelievers; it may be suppressed much of the time, but it arises quickly in any life-threatening situation. We are told here that the Devil employs this fear to keep them in bondage for their entire lives. Christ delivers all those that God chose from this satanic bondage in which he holds the entire unbelieving world. This shows us something of the significance of God's choice. Christians are called-out of the darkness of this world into the marvelous light of Christ. It is in this light that we can see the Kingdom and understand God's reign.

¹⁶ Hebrews 2:15

“... Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.”¹⁷

We need no longer stumble about in the darkness of our former ignorance but are now able to discern and appreciate God’s truth. We were chosen to be members of the Body of Christ, chosen by the Triune God before the worlds were made before there was a universe! We were released from Satan’s bondage by God the Son on the cross, and then reborn, given new hearts, by God, the Holy Spirit, at the appointed time in our lives. We were chosen to show the world, by the kind of lives we live, what God has done for us. We are the seed of the woman that God spoke of in the Garden;¹⁸ we are the ecclesia, the new, called-out people of God, the bornagain humanity in Christ.

Does this describe you? If so, you have been blessed with the greatest blessing anyone could ever receive in this world. Don’t let your appreciation of this, the greatest of all gifts, be played down, even by those that claim to be God’s chosen ministers. Hold tightly to it; it is precious!

Justified

These chosen people of God were justified, that is: made to be just, righteous in God’s eyes. God sent His Son, the Second Person of the Godhead to become a man, to be born of a woman, to live among His creatures for thirty years and then to die in their place, the innocent for the guilty.

¹⁷ John 3:3

¹⁸ Genesis 3:15

“... to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.”¹⁹

The Judge pounds the gavel, case-closed, not guilty. The price has been paid, the burden of debt is gone, and we are free, just as if we had never sinned. We are declared to be innocent. All our past, present, and future sins are forgiven, wiped off the record books, and we will stand before God as fully cleansed, sinless creatures.

“... being justified by faith, we have peace with God...”³²

Justified by faith alone! We know we are still far from perfect, but in God’s eyes we are just, without sin and are at peace with Him. Jesus our intercessor paid our sin-debt, the due penalty of our sin, on the Cross.

All we needed to receive the greatest gift anyone could ever receive was faith, but where did that faith come from? Did we simply look at all the evidence and then decide on our own to believe? No indeed: here again we needed God’s help:

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”²⁰

¹⁹

Roma
ns 4:5

³²

Roma
ns 5:1

²⁰ Ephesians 2:8,9

Even the faith to believe in Christ was not our own. It was a gift from the God that loves His creatures with an infinite love.

How can we ever comprehend such love? How can the Eternal Creator ²¹of the universe first assume creaturehood and then give up His life for His sinful creatures? We can never fully understand the infinite, but we can see by comparison our own limitations and just thank Him for His great mercy.

Transformed

God's gracious choice of us and our being declared just in God's eyes, is merely the beginning. Every member chosen to be in Jesus' ecclesia is changed to such a great extent that he is described as a new creature:

*"... if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."*³⁴

*"... in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature."*²²

This is indeed a sweeping transformation, one so great that God chooses to describe us as new creatures. We are no longer what we were before but have undergone a change so extensive that the result is a new creature. We retain the same outward appearance but are so very different inwardly. We are different because of the presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit and His work in our hearts to make us more like Jesus. The old is gone forever, passed away. "All things are become new" and an

²¹ Corinthians 5:17

²² Galatians 6:15

entirely new life lies before us. We should embrace the difference. Consider all that God did:

- He gave us new hearts and a new spirit:

“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.”²³

New hearts, a new spirit, a new kind of desire. It is no longer the old hard and stony heart that desired the things that gratify the sinful nature. It is a heart of flesh, a heart that has feeling and compassion, that shuns evil and desires only what is good and righteous.

- We are God-created workers:

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”²⁴

We are created in Christ Jesus, unto good works, works that the infinite eternal God ordained that we should walk in them.

- We are created in righteousness:

“And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”²⁵

²³ Ezekiel 36:26

²⁴ Ephesians 2:10

²⁵ Ephesians 4:24

Surely God expects much of His new creatures: we are to put on this newness of character, as we would an item of clothing, something to wear. Righteousness and true holiness are to characterize our lives.

- We are a peculiar people:

“... Jesus Christ, Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”²⁶

Christ *gave Himself* to make the beneficiaries of His sacrifice a peculiar people, very different from unbelievers. He expects us to be zealous, desiring from deep-down inside ourselves (from our inner hearts) to do good works. We are a highly blessed and privileged people that will spend all eternity with our Lord and Savior.

It is all too easy to minimize the force of these passages, especially in an environment that has already minimized much of the power of Scripture. All too commonly, Christians play down the significance of this change. “All things” become “some things” and soon is demoted to “a few things.” A “new creature” becomes a “changed person” and then, a person with a “new outlook,” and so on. This tendency to detract from God’s declaration is sinful; it demeans God’s word and, if practiced habitually, can seriously limit the Christian’s personal development and his impact on the world. The believer that has a realistic appreciation of the vast difference between what he has become and what he was before, is a far more dedicated and powerful influence on his surroundings than is one that lacks this comprehension.

²⁶ Titus 2:13-14

Is this a new experience for you dear reader? If so, hold fast to it; don't let the feeling of newness and difference slip away; it is precious beyond measure! These are huge and deeply penetrating changes but there are more yet to consider.

Mature

“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;”⁴⁰

“That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”⁴¹

Our justification was a single act of Jesus on the cross. The development of maturity, on the other hand, is a process that continues throughout the believer's time in this world. Rebirth is after all, a birth, just a beginning, with growth and development to follow. The development of maturity begins with the new birth and goes on from there to produce significant

⁴⁰ Ephesians 4:13,14

⁴¹ 2 Timothy 3:17

and lasting changes deep within the individual. It is a learning and growing process that is accomplished through study, trials, and effort.

We are to become more like Jesus and more like the believers of the first century who were the first to be called “Christians” (little Christs) because they lived and demonstrated their faith.

The differences between believers and unbelievers are real and huge, but to begin with they are not always clearly evident. There is usually an immediate recognition of a change within. The new believer feels and knows he is somehow different. The immense magnitude, though, of the changes that have begun and can continue throughout life, is usually not immediately grasped. There is a potential for more, much more, to follow. The new birth is a real change of heart, but it is also the beginning of a development process. This requires time and effort as the individual gains insight and the differences become more and more evident, first to the believer himself and then to others.

There is a renewed outlook on life and a new mind-set is developing, one very different from the typical attitude of an unbeliever. In principle, it is becoming more and more God-centered as opposed to the previous tendency toward self-centeredness. The believer's mind-set is gradually conforming to God's original and ultimate plan for His special creature, mankind.

This process, though, is often interrupted, sometimes very early. God, in the book of Hebrews gives us an example of the frequent lack and great need for maturity:

“For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For everyone that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”²⁷

²⁷ Hebrews 5:12-14

These Hebrew believers should have been teachers but were still babes in Christ. So it is, with so many Christians today that are satisfied with, and go no further than, the most basic understanding of the salvation process. Do not misunderstand; God is pleased with all that come to Him, but out of His great love for us, He asks for more:

“When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.”⁴³

“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.”⁴⁴

“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.”⁴⁵

We see here that God expects His children to grow up, to mature and to become adults. May God bless you as you progress ever further and ever closer to the very high standard God has set for all He chose and set apart in Christ. He will bless you over and over again for every effort you exert in this development process.

Assured

How do you know that you have been justified and are safely in God's arms? It is as we observe our own obedience and how much we have changed since our conversion that we gain confidence and assurance of our place in Jesus' ecclesia. A truly God-fearing person develops assurance gradually as he lives a life of faithfulness. It is through careful examination

⁴³ 1 Corinthians 13:11

⁴⁴ Ephesians 4:14-15

⁴⁵ 1 Peter 3:15

of the evidence of our works, obedience, and faithfulness that assurance is gained.

*"But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead."*²⁸

"Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."^{29,30}

As we study the Word and apply it, our assurance continues to grow. It increases as we study together in family and community, teaching and admonishing one another.

"And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of

²⁸ James 2:20

²⁹ Hebrews 13:5

³⁰ John 3:3-6

the law. And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him."⁴⁸

John uses here two different Greek words both translated in English as sin. He uses first the word for occasional sin and later the word for repeated, habitual sin. The former is forgiven in Christ. The latter is an indication of an unbelieving, unregenerate heart.

Dear child of God, none of us is entirely free from the sin we hate; but we can rest in the knowledge that our loving Savior paid the price of all our sins on the Cross.

*"Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*³¹

Set Apart

The word "holy" in Scripture is often misunderstood. The Hebrew word for holy is "qodesh" which means apartness, set-apartness, separateness, sacredness.³²

God's people were chosen to be holy and without blame before Him in love.³³ They are a holy and peculiar people:

³¹ " Romans 8:39

³² See: What Does the Word Holy Mean? Bible Definition of Holy: Christian Crier: <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/christiancrier/2014/05/24/what-does-the-word-holy-mean-bible-definition-of-holy/>

³³ Ephesians 1:4

“For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto Himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth.”^{34,35}

“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”³³

We saw above that God’s people by our consistent obedience are becoming increasingly set apart to God’s service. We see here that God declares His chosen people to already be holy, set apart. Is this a contradiction? Not at all. In His eyes, eyes that see the end from the beginning, they already are His royal priesthood and His holy nation. As such, they should show forth (demonstrate) the praises of God by living a life that is in accord with what God chose them to be: set apart, separate, and sacred unto Him. These characteristics should stand out. People should see that Christians are different. When God’s people embrace the difference, they exude God’s light, the light within them, with great brilliance. He calls them out of darkness into his marvelous light. His purpose is to alert all His chosen but yet unconverted people to Him and to the future He has prepared for them.

God, who loves us with an everlasting love and knows us so much better than we know ourselves, tells us here, in no uncertain terms that we, as His chosen people and the blessed benefactors of His grace, are a peculiar, a distinct and different, people. He identifies us as His ecclesia—His “called-out” ones—those He has called to come out from the general population and be His special people, separated from sin and all ungodliness.

³⁴ Deuteronomy 14:2

³⁵ Peter 2:9

God does not choose names frivolously; He identifies His elect as His “called-out” people, and that is precisely what we are. He has called us out of our previous associations to come together and be with Him as His own possession.

As unworthy recipients of His grace, we see in this something of the great depth of God’s love. It humbles us and can bring us to tears when we consider how unworthy we are of such an immeasurable and magnificent love! One day, though, we will stand, as Adam once did in the garden, without sin, face to face with our God.

“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.”⁵⁴

“... To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.”⁵⁵

Called

God calls His highly blessed, chosen people, those He rescued from Satan’s cruel grasp. He calls them to obedience in His service. What does God, the Giver of the greatest gift imaginable, ask of those He redeems?

⁵⁴ 1 John 3:2

⁵⁵ Revelation 2:17

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”³⁶

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”³⁷

He asks us here to dedicate our lives to His service, to seek first (as our top priority in life) His kingdom and His righteousness. This is to ask a great deal, a total commitment! How do His people respond? How many of His so very greatly blessed recipients obey and to what extent? God asks for total commitment, not so much in terms of time, but in effort, dedication, and priority. Sadly, none obey fully, a few faithfully, most just a little, some hardly at all.

Most Christians do not have a good understanding of the extent to which God really requires their contribution and is depending on them. Yes, He is all powerful and could, in an instant, with less than a wave of His hand, correct all the evils in His universe. For His own reasons though, reasons perhaps beyond our ability to comprehend, He decided to place this awesome responsibility, the reshaping of the future of the world, in the hands of His chosen people.

Yes, this sounds like a huge task, but it is also a great privilege. Our sins are forgiven in Christ, a huge gift from a loving God, and here we are given yet another gift, one which we will find to be in itself a great blessing. We have been given “Permission to Serve” our Creator and thereby express our gratitude for all He has done and continues to do for us.

³⁶ Rom. 12:1

³⁷ Matt. 6:33

Dear fellow believer, let this humble word be a reminder of God's call to each of us. Yes, it might mean taking a significant step. Take the step! Commit the remainder of this short life to the service of the One who has given you the immeasurable gift of eternal life.

It may seem awkward or difficult at first, but in the long run, you'll be glad you heeded His call. Remember, this life cannot be compared with the eternal glory that lies ahead for all God's so highly blessed children. *"But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him."*⁵⁸

Obedience is often uncomfortable and may seem awkward at first, but we soon find that God's way is best. It is easily neglected without a strong and ever-present motivating force.

What is this force? It derives from faith, faith in God, faith that He exists, faith that His word is true, and faith in the knowledge that He never asks anything that is too difficult for us. Christians must believe that God is interested in them as individuals and will be pleased when they obey and displeased when they disobey.

As we develop the habit of trusting God in all things, we find that God is not stingy; His rewards are many and often. He loves us so much He gave His only, beloved Son for us; He wants to give us more gifts, many more, but will only do so to the extent we are able handle them. As we develop a life of obedience to this loving God, He lifts us up and up and up, and we become more and more like Him and His Son. As we progress on this path, we will see that this in itself is indeed a great reward.

*"But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."*⁵⁹

We know from Scripture that in the long term the Christian faith will eventually permeate and come to predominate in all the nations:

“And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever.”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ 1 Cor. 2:9

⁵⁹ 2 Cor. 3:18

⁶⁰ Rev. 11:15

This, though an absolute certainty, will not just happen of its own accord. It is what God’s people are called to bring about.

“The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool.”⁶¹

God doesn’t change, nor does He equivocate. When God says, “sit at My right hand,” He is speaking to Jesus. When He says, “while I make the nations Thy footstool,” He is speaking about what He will accomplish through us, not to us or for us. We have work to do.

God calls all His children to His service; it is a privilege and honor to be called by God. His faithful servants understand the great significance of such a call and respond eagerly and with joy; they gladly put all else aside in an effort to please Him. God’s plan for a world that conforms to His standards may be realized in a century or less; on the other hand, it may require many centuries. It is all up to us, His people. God truly has placed the future of the world in our hands.

“For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?”⁶²

The extent to which this is true has not yet penetrated the minds of most Christians. When enough of us awaken from our slumbers and respond to God’s call to action, we will see a new trend taking shape. The sun will shine brighter; the earth will begin to shake, and as God’s Word is restored to its rightful station, the enemy will seek to retire into his deepest hiding places.

Is God calling you to be a part of this? Are you willing to set aside the many attractions of this world and take up His challenge? If so, God will bless you in ways far beyond comprehension. Do you love God? Truly? Demonstrate that love through obedience and look forward to unheard of blessings, blessings beyond our ability to even begin to imagine.

⁶¹ Psalms 110:1

⁶² 1 John 5: 4-5



A Community

The typical American neighborhood was once seen as a good clean and relatively godly environment in which Christian families could live and have fellowship with their neighbors. They could send their children to school and let them play with their friends afterward. They could, without fear and with little effort be comfortable in the knowledge that both they and their children were living godly lives and would not be led astray by anything in the normal daily environment.

Dear fellow believer, this is very definitely no longer the case. There have always been impediments to that idyllic environment but while we were relaxing, the enemy has been at work and we now face three significant obstacles:

- First, the totally godless public-school system works to corrupt the morals of our children to the greatest extent possible, at as young an age as possible.
- Second, even the better neighborhoods present a godless example and are often a morally dangerous environment, especially for susceptible children.
- Third, television brings the filth and corruption of the outside world right into our homes.

Children may be restricted and taught at home to live godly lives, but the example emanating from almost every aspect of the external environment tends to lead them away from the faith. They cannot be kept entirely isolated from it, and it should be no

surprise to us that so many leave the faith in their teenage or college years.

What are God-fearing parents to do? How can they raise their families in such corrupt environments and expect their children to live Godly lives? The answer is they cannot; to attempt to is foolish. They need to find someplace better, much better! A place where they can breathe the air and relax knowing they are obeying God's instructions for themselves and their families.

Our loving and all-knowing God has of course foreseen all this and prepared an answer, one that we need to study, come to understand, and then employ. He says: "come out from among them and be ye separate".⁶³ He tells us that His people need to form communities in which they can find peace and a true respite from the turmoil of a world gone mad. Peace, though, can only be found where God's Law is honored and faithfully obeyed. They know they cannot remain in their current, godless, worldly environments but need one in which God's Law is respected and obeyed, communities in which they can live and bring up families that worship and obey God.

God's people have been asleep too long. In taking this step, they would signal the end of a long period of inactivity and begin a return to the muchneeded task of teaching people about the Kingdom of God. They are very much in the shoes of the early Christian converts of ancient Rome, and before that, of Adam and Eve.⁶⁴ The day will come when this God-given task will have been fulfilled just as God intended and the world will be populated by a God-fearing and God-obeying people.

Until then, the focus will be on the establishment, development, and maintenance of these godly communities. This, without doubt, will be an uphill struggle against an enemy that will be intent on their utter destruction. America is no longer the land of the free. The once powerful supporters of Christian

freedom have been neutralized by the public schools, the controlled media and the force of government. All these powerful agencies are now firmly in the hands of Christ's enemies.

God, though, will pour out His many blessings on His obedient servants and these ecclesia communities. As they continue to obey, they will feel His strength and will overcome every obstacle the enemy attempts to place in their paths.

⁶³ 2 Corinthians 6:17

⁶⁴ Gen. 1:28

Families

Marriage began in the Garden when God created Adam and Eve. God declared that husband and wife are one flesh.⁶⁵ As a marriage relationship matures, husband and wife are to become increasingly united in mind and purpose. The idea of the lone individual living on his own is an exception recommended by Paul only for special circumstances. His advice to remain single⁶⁶ was given during a time when God's judgment was falling on the nation of Israel and the 1st century believers were fleeing Jerusalem.

In the Ephesians passage below Paul gives us a hierarchy of the family including the husband, wife, and children's roles and proper attitudes. Husbands should consider that their headship of the family is compared to that of Jesus who gave His life for the ecclesia. Wives should consider that to submit to their husband is to submit to Jesus:

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the ~~church~~ [ecclesia]: and He is the saviour of the body. Therefore, as the ~~church~~ [ecclesia] is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their

own husbands in every thing, Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church [ecclesia], and gave Himself for it; That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That He might present it to Himself a glorious church [ecclesia], not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church [ecclesia]: For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church [ecclesia]. Nevertheless let every one of

⁶⁵ Genesis 2:24

⁶⁶ 1 Corinthians 7:8

you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.”³⁸

The man is the head, but a truly godly man gives his wife as much freedom and responsibility as she can manage. The man’s concern is broader and more outwardly focused. He delegates the greater portion of the home-related activity to his wife, his helpmeet. There is mutual respect, love and care for the entire household. Both husband and wife functioning in obedience to God is critical to the well-being of the family.

The family reflects the Godhead where we see the Father, the Son, and the Spirit as individual persons in perfect union

³⁸ Ephesians 5:22-33

governing creation. God tells us that we have been created in His image as individuals, and united in families.³⁹

Individuals are products of families; each new generation is birthed, nurtured, and educated in families. Family members are subject first to Christ and then to the individual family head, who is subject only to Christ.⁴⁰ The members of the godhead do not act as independent individuals but always act in complete unity with each other.⁴¹ Sinful men today do not have such unity within their families and therefore husband and wife often act as independent individuals. Unity in the larger society can only begin with unity in the family. The family is everyone's original training ground. What is taught there is never really lost. It colors everything that is learned subsequently. Today's disjointed families cannot bring unity to the larger society because they have little or no unity in themselves.

Children need to see this unity and common purpose in their parents. They are then drawn into this unity and purpose and grow to become useful members of the family and ecclesia. The family is bonded together in love and faith. It is the basic functional entity in the body of Christ and is dedicated to the renewal of the world.

Godly families emulate their Creator when they approach Him in unity. Dissention within the family is a very serious matter and can never be tolerated. Rather, resolving it deserves the fullest possible attention, for as long a time as is necessary, of every family member. True unity is realized when family members, without diminishing their individual roles within the family, strive to constantly improve the level of family unity. As this objective is taken seriously and pursued, our families will become less fragmented and more of one mind. We will then be

³⁹ Genesis 1:27, 9:6

⁴⁰ Ephesians 5:21-24

⁴¹ John 10:30

able to begin to export our internal unity to the larger society, and the world will gradually change.

Families, broken by death, divorce, or abandonment are, to the extent possible, resolved into other community families. We see the command of a brother to take responsibility for his deceased brother's wife.⁷¹ Additionally, we are to care for the widows and orphans.⁷²

Families form the core of society and societal organizations and contribute toward the shaping of the larger society. Godly families that are unified within themselves bring their values with them wherever they go and cannot help but influence the larger society. Long before they become even a significant minority, their influence will be felt in the world around them. The recovery of God's Kingdom must begin with the family and the individual family heads. Family involvement and participation at every level of society is an essential factor in its restoration. This is one of the primary means whereby the Christian faith will one day become the universal faith of all the nations.

Children

We all begin as newly conceived infants in our mother's wombs. To begin with, we are totally dependent creatures. There is nothing we can do for ourselves; we can't even breathe yet. That begins at birth with a new life in the great world outside the protective and sheltered environment we were in those many months. We gradually develop both physically and mentally and slowly accommodate ourselves to this new and very different outside world.

The child's dependence on its mother gradually diminishes as more months and then years pass. To begin with, children are like sponges and absorb information without first processing, analyzing and categorizing it.

⁷¹ Mark 12:19

⁷² 1 Timothy 5:16

It's just information, the true and the false placed together in a common, undifferentiated database. We, in our pre-teen years, very gradually learn to differentiate between truth and falsehood but initially, we just put it all away, the false with the true.

The children God gave us are the next generation and should be the most important people in our lives. He instructs us in His word:

“And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.”⁴²

It is difficult to punish those we love as much as we love our children, our own flesh and blood. God says, though, that if we truly love them, we must punish them when it is needed.

“He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.”⁴³

“The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.”⁴⁴

Punishment for wrongdoing, though, is not enough; they must be taught to do what is right:

⁴² Deuteronomy 6:7

⁴³ Proverbs 13:24

⁴⁴ Proverbs 29:15

“Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”⁴⁵

This is a much broader task, a part of which is to protect the child from evil influences he is not yet able to handle alone. Children in their pre-teen years are not yet fully able to discern right from wrong and need to be shielded from evil influences. It seems that we may have seriously overestimated the ability of children to discern between truth and falsehood. We may have heard that they merely assimilate as truth everything they hear, but we may not be aware of the dangerous, long-term effects of assimilated false information.

These learning years are particularly critical in that impressions are made, thoughts and ideas are planted, and the thinking process itself takes shape. These are the years in which the foundations that form the basis of the future adult’s mentality are put in place. They are very critical years during which children develop both physically and mentally. They can develop into model citizens or become lazy, useless, or even criminally minded. It is a time in which evil influences can do virtually irreparable damage, damage that carries into adulthood and endures for all of life.

Clearly, the environment in which our children come to maturity is very important. They require much more protection from falsehood and other evil influences than do adults. We’ve not assessed this danger thoroughly and may have seriously underestimated its significance.

In their teenage years they physically enter adulthood, begin to mature and transition into adult life. Until then, though, they are still children and as such need our protection. The answer God gives that satisfies this need, especially in today’s wicked

⁴⁵ Proverbs 22:6

world, is the ecclesia community. It is an environment in which all, and young children in particular, are protected from all sorts of improper and potentially damaging outside influences. Our obedience to God in the formation of these communities will prove to be a ten times greater blessing to our children, and through them to us, than we may imagine.

Our previous failure to fully obey God and separate from this Satandominated world, as God so clearly commanded, goes back to soon after the time of the apostles. All through the ensuing centuries, God's so highly favored and richly blessed people, have not separated themselves (and protected their children) from the contaminating presence of unbelievers. Instead, they followed the path of Ancient Israel, the path of partial obedience.

It seems that God does not tolerate or compensate for our propensity to partial obedience. He allows us to suffer the consequences, whatever they may be, even to centuries of blunders and failures. We suffer today from this history of disobedience and need to put it behind us forever. The ecclesia community is a beginning, a healthy turning point from which many blessings will flow. These flow especially to our children, perhaps the first generation that will mature to adulthood in the environment God-ordained from the beginning and has now made possible for them.

God is truly a loving God. His blessings and gifts seem to flow from every direction. Let us thank Him for these children He has given us to raise up as His champions for the next generation. They, with this Godappointed nurture, will surely accomplish far more than we ever could, and we have so very much more to do.

A Separate Body

Writing to the Christians at Corinth, the Apostle Paul gave them, and gives us today, some of the reasons underlying God's command to be a separate people:

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”⁷⁷

Here we see something of the emphasis God places on the need for believers and unbelievers to be separate. The argument rests on the fundamental differences between true believers and the rest of mankind. Notice the contrasts God identifies between the two:

- Righteousness with unrighteousness
- Light with darkness
- Christ with Belial

⁷⁷ 2 Corinthians 6:14-18

- He that believeth with unbelievers
- The temple of God with idols

God tells us here that there cannot be any true and lasting fellowship, communion, or agreement between God's people and the lost. He describes the fundamental differences between the two that exist today but may not be fully evident. As both mature and grow more consistent with what they believe in their hearts, the huge difference between the two becomes evident.

Believers and unbelievers are, in their heart of hearts, absolute opposites. In time, they will come to have very diverse interests. Believers have been so changed and have something within them that makes them so different from what they were before, and from unbelievers in general, that its expression taxes the limits of our vocabulary.

God's people are not just the same as unbelievers with merely some minor differences. We are so very different internally that God calls us new creatures.⁴⁶ The Holy Spirit indwells us; we are His ecclesia, His sons, and daughters, called to come out from among the unbelievers of this world. As God's holy people, we are to set ourselves apart from all worldliness and dedicate our lives to His service.

Because believers and unbelievers were both created in God's image and are externally alike in many ways, we tend to minimize the significance of these differences. We often try to find some common ground on which we can agree. But this is just the danger, the thing that must be resisted. R. J. Rushdoony put it this way:

"The Christian must separate himself from humanistic statism, its schools and ways. The summons is, 'come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and

⁴⁶ Galatians 6:15

that ye receive not of her plagues.’⁴⁷ The future is the Lord’s, and only ours in Him.’⁴⁸

We may question the need for such a radical, life-impacting step and may ask: can’t we just serve God right where we are as best, we can? The answer dear brother, dear sister is yes. We could, but this is the kind of compromise that has brought us to the sorry state we are in today. God, who loves His children with an eternal and unfathomable love, knows how deeply, and sometimes so very subtly, our surroundings affect us. In His great love for us, He gives us several reasons why it is imperative that we change them. We may think that we are so strong and so secure in our faith that this kind of radical and possibly traumatic change is not really necessary. But God, who knows us far better than we know ourselves, tells us that we still have a very long way to go before we become the kinds of servants, He commands us to be. Obedience brings progress, disobedience results in frustration.

God told, first the Ancient Israelites, then the early Christians, and tells us today: to form our own separate and independent communities, to bring the new converts into them, and just allow the existing worldly environments to die off from a lack of support. They must be left to fade out as they are gradually replaced by a truly biblical world order.

No conflicts, no wars, no political maneuvering, no mass evangelical movements, just God’s people living in accord with His Word will change the world. It’s just that simple!

⁴⁷ Revelation 18:4

⁴⁸ R. J. Rushdoony. “An Informed Faith,” Chalcedon/Ross House Books, Vallecito, California, page125. Rushdoony (4/25/16 – 2/8/01) was an American Calvinist philosopher, historian, theologian, teacher, preacher, advocate, father, and husband. He also like to point out he was an Armenian. He is credited as being the father of Christian Reconstruction and an inspiration for the modern Christian homeschool movement.

Why is obedience so very hard? God who knows us far better than we know ourselves gave these instructions to us as well as to all our predecessors because, despite our modern technology we, in our inner hearts, are very much the same as those ancient peoples. God knows full well how weak and how susceptible we are to Satan's ploys. He knows we must separate ourselves from them and thereby prevent infection from the evil influences they carry in their hearts and communicate through their words and deeds.

The God that created the universe with the breath of His mouth tells us that we can't make real progress while we remain in close contact with the kinds of evil influences that surround us in today's wicked world. He loves us with an infinite love and tells us, plainly and directly that we are so very different from unbelievers. He has a purpose for us and our coming out from among them and being separate is essential to that purpose!

We also see this separation raised to another level, one that is even more challenging:

"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us."⁸¹

Here we are commanded to withdraw ourselves from brothers, supposed fellow believers, that are behaving like unbelievers. There are two reasons for this: first, we must protect ourselves from their ungodly influence; and second, for his own benefit, the supposed "brother" must be shown his true condition and his need to repent and beg God's forgiveness.

"If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God

*speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.*⁸²

Here we are told that there is to be no fellowship with openly professing unbelievers. They should not be welcome into our homes and we should not encourage them in any way. When we do, their evil rubs off on us.

*“Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals.”*⁸³

*“But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.”*⁸⁴

Sharing a meal has a great deal of sociological significance. It approaches that of being members of the same family. Not to eat, Not to

⁸¹ 2 Thessalonians 3:6

⁸² 2 John 1:10-11

⁸³ 1 Corinthians 15:33

⁸⁴ 1 Corinthians 5:11

keep company with someone is to exclude that person from one's circle of friendship.

These actions may seem to be selfish and unloving but, as we said before, this is not the case. We love those we separate ourselves from and want to help them see that they need to repent and become sharers with us of God's Glory for all eternity. To fail to separate is to promote false assurance. It says, all is well when it isn't well at all.

Gifts

Our primary connection within Jesus' ecclesia is the saving and sanctifying work of God the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is followed by our familial bonds within the Christian family. Another agency that binds us together within the local body are the gifts of the Spirit. Not all receive all gifts; some receive one gift while others receive different gifts. This creates an interdependence which enhances cooperation within the body. This distribution of gifts keeps us from becoming loners.

“Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.”⁸⁵

The body is an interactive community, one in which people talk to each other. This is the most favorable environment for the benefits of these gifts to be realized. The ecclesia community provides just such an

⁸⁵ 1 Corinthians 12; 4-11

environment. Christians are called to gather, to associate and interact with one another. To restrict meetings to a lecture hall

style, where one person speaks and everyone else listens, is first to disobey God and second, to suppress the intended employment of His gifts.

Another aspect of the gifts is that they require our effort to discover them and to put them to use for the benefit of others. This is true of the gifts in the same way that it is true of the armor of God that needs to be “put on,” faith that needs to be “shown by our works,” and character which we gain through Godly actions.

Functions

Elders

The tradition of elders as leaders and representatives of the people dates to early Israel, long before the time of the kings, when virtually all government resided in the families. The elders were the senior (usually older) family members. There were elders when the Israelites were slaves in Egypt: Moses was told to take the elders of Israel with him and speak to the king of Egypt.⁴⁹ Later he as the God-appointed leader established a hierarchical structure of eldership over tens, fifties, hundreds and thousands.⁵⁰ This system of family rule, in which each group of families provided an elder (probably a grandfather) to represent them and they in turn selected higher levels of elders, was perpetuated throughout the history of Ancient Israel. It continued into the New Testament time and beyond.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Exodus 3:16-18

⁵⁰ Exodus 18:24

⁵¹ Deuteronomy 5:23, 19:12; Judges 11:5-11; 1 Samuel 4:3, 8:4; 2 Kings 6:32; 2 Chronicles 5:2; Ezekiel 20:1-3; Matthew 26:3; Luke 20:1).

R. J. Rushdoony described the highly varied functions of the Old Testament elders:

“The function of the elders of the people were (1) to represent the people in the covenant and in the proclamation and government of the law of God.⁵² They were to see to it that God’s law governed the land and the people. (2) The elders of⁵³ the people appointed a leader, governor, or king.⁹⁰ (3) These elders declared war.⁵⁴ (4) They conducted political negotiations and made pacts and agreements.⁵⁵ (5) They performed some sacred ceremonies, as in the Passover,⁵⁶ communion,⁵⁷ and in witnessing sacrifices.⁵⁸ (6) They acted in times of national crisis as an aid and consenting witness to God’s prophet,⁵⁹ in seeking God’s mercy through repentance.⁶⁰ It was the elders of the people or of Israel who met in the city square next to the city gate.⁶¹ Their deliberations were thereby to be open to both God and man.”⁶²

⁵² Exodus 19:7; 24:1, 9; Deuteronomy 27:1; 29:9; 31:9; Joshua 8:33; 24:1; II Kings 23:1

⁵³ Samuel 8:4; Judges 11: 5-11

⁵⁴ Josh. 8:10; II Samuel 17: 4-15; I Kings 20:7

⁵⁵ Exodus 3:16, 18; 4:29; Numbers 16: 25; II Samuel 3:17; 5:3

⁵⁶ Exodus 12:21

⁵⁷ Exodus 18:12

⁵⁸ Lev. 9:1

⁵⁹ Exodus 17:5,6

⁶⁰ Josh. 7:6; I Chronicles 21:16

⁶¹ Deuteronomy 21:19; 22:15; 25:7; Ruth 4:1ff; Lam. 5:14

⁶² See: R. J. Rushdoony, “Law and Society,” Ross House Books, 1982, page 658.

We see Moses, Joshua and later the prophets and kings meeting with the elders of Israel on various occasions.⁶³ These meetings, clearly, could not have required the presence of the entire body of elders (thousands of men). It was a representation and not the entire body of elders that was present on such occasions. We are not told precisely how these representations were formed but can surmise that it was probably a hierarchical process. Elders of closely related family groups chose one or more of their number to represent them. These came together and selected the next level of elders; this process being repeated until all Israel was represented by a body of manageable size.

These elders clearly had a great deal of responsibility, but what was its source? To whom were they responsible? They were not appointed by a king or the prophets or anyone. They were the delegates of the people, the chosen leaders of a family-oriented people. They guided the nation in accordance with the wishes and in the best interest of the people. The entire authority structure was inverted; the highest level was chosen by the level below it and so on down to the families at the bottom, where ultimate authority resided.

In war or peace, the people followed their elders and not the king or the king's appointees. The Israelites of old, prior to the establishment of the monarchy, were a free people that governed themselves through God's law. The only authority any of the elders possessed was a delegated authority, an authority that the people gave them.

This tradition of self-government was continued in the early ecclesia communities. We read of the ordination of elders in two places in the New Testament:

“And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to

⁶³ Exodus 12:21; 17:5,6; Joshua 23:2

Iconium, and Antioch, Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. And when they had ordained them elders in every church [ecclesia], and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.”⁶⁴

“For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee.”⁶⁵

The Greek words translated “ordain” in these verses are “cheirotoneo,” which means “hand-stretching” or “selecting,” and “katastello” meaning: “should be constituting.” Neither of these words convey the concept implied by today’s ordination ceremonies. They merely relate the idea of selection or recognition. There is not the slightest hint here of any God-ordained ceremony that communicated any special gifts, knowledge, powers, or ruling authority to the elders. They were elders in the same sense that the elders of Ancient Israel were elders. They were the older, wiser, and generally more capable individuals that Paul and Titus recognized as the natural leaders within the ecclesia communities.

We see also that Peter referred to elders and even identified himself as an elder:

“The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed.”¹⁰³

⁶⁴ Acts 14:21-23

⁶⁵ Titus 1:5

Paul selected elders in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch; Titus, at Paul's request, did the same in Crete. Scripture does not give us the detailed process they employed or the extent to which the local personnel participated in the selection process. It would seem highly unlikely that it was done entirely authoritatively, without such participation. Since the term elder is used, it very likely paralleled the historical tradition and, where possible, recognized family structure. These men were planting, throughout the Mediterranean world, Christian communities modeled to a great extent after the structure God established in early Israel.

These elders, following this long-held tradition, would have functioned as judges in both civil and religious matters. The civil aspect was limited to courts that adjudicated local issues and disputes. They adjudicated disputes among the families within and often without the ecclesia communities. They were only judges and not magistrates as are most of today's judges. They gave their judgment but did not pronounce sentence on anyone. The consequences were left to the plaintiffs and the community. The larger civil authority, Rome, was rarely involved in local affairs and the families, within their communities, largely governed themselves.

An elder is a known wise person that was "obeyed" only in the sense that God's law is obeyed as a consequence of the elder's declaration of that law. It was God and not the elder, His servant, that was given obedience. Elders are the wiser and typically older men that were respected for their greater wisdom and godliness.¹⁰⁴ They were recognized within the community and identified as men that deserve respect and whose word should be heeded. This, though, is not absolute; only Christ is Lord!

¹⁰³ 1 Peter 5:1

When an individual disagrees with an elder, and they cannot resolve their differences, the controversy should be broadened, to the entire community if necessary:

“Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the ~~church~~ [ecclesia] but if he neglect to hear the ~~church~~ [ecclesia], let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.”¹⁰⁵

Elders are teachers and overseers, but God calls them to humility:

“The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God, which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.”¹⁰⁶

Elders are not to misuse the position that the ecclesia community entrusts to them. They are told here to feed the flock of God and to employ their knowledge and skills to build up the weaker members. They are not to be lords over God’s heritage but are to teach them through explanation and example rather than dictation. They are to do so, not for pay but of a ready mind, willingly. God’s command is that the strong teach the weak out of a genuine desire to help them. They are to discipline

themselves to spend time on this rather than in what might be more attractive activities.

We see from this injunction that in the kingdom of God, it is of greater importance that the weak be strengthened than that the strong become even stronger. The whole body is to be developed as a unit and

¹⁰⁵ Mathew 18:15-17

¹⁰⁶ 1 Peter 5:1-3

class distinctions, which lead to a general weakening of the entire body, are to be avoided.

*“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:”*⁶⁶

The elders themselves, need to guard against the sin of pride. They will tend to be recognized by their fellow elders, and the entire ecclesia community, as special persons, persons to whom perhaps much authority has been delegated. They should be careful to resist this tendency and explain that they are basically teachers and have no special authority over others. They need to recognize that God has given them whatever abilities they have and should employ them as His humble servants for the benefit of the entire community.

Elders are also referred to as bishops in the King James Version (Gr. “episkopon,”⁶⁷ which implies supervisor, but Tyndale used the term overseer. The use of the institutional titles

⁶⁶ Ephesians 4:13

⁶⁷ Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 3:2; 2 Timothy 4:22; Titus 1:7

as mentioned earlier was forced into the King James Version to protect the clergy.⁶⁸

An elder is a teacher, a facilitator, and caretaker, not a ruler. His responsibility is in keeping with every believer's responsibility to be sensitive to the needs of others, particularly those weaker than themselves.⁶⁹ All should have this concern and, as they become more mature in the faith, it should increase accordingly. A concern for others and for the ecclesia community as a whole should be visibly present in all those recognized within the community as elders.

Elders are not rulers in the modern sense of rule. A passage that is often used in defense of elder rule is:

*"Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double
70 honour, especially they who labour in the word and
doctrine."⁷¹*

The word translated rule here (and in⁷¹) is "proestotes" which is literally: "ones having presided." It is a reference to a teacher or a chairman of a meeting, not someone that commands others. The word rule in its broader and earlier sense might have been appropriate centuries ago, when the King James Version was written but it is highly misleading in its modern sense. Scripture does not give us elders as a ruling upper class that must be obeyed.

So, we see that elders are not rulers but teachers. Does this mean they have no authority? No indeed! They have much authority. As teachers, they have great influence, which translates

⁶⁸ Daniell, David (2003). The Bible in English: its history and influence. New

Haven, Conn: Yale University Press. ISBN 0-300-09930-4

⁶⁹ Romans 15:14; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 3:13, 10:24

⁷⁰ Timothy 5:17

⁷¹ Romans 12:8, 1 Thessalonians 5:12 Titus 3:1

into real power. They influence how God's word is understood by His people. For this reason and because of the sin which still resides in us all, a plurality of elders is needed. ⁷²

Another view of the ultimate goal of eldership is to see, in God's grace, every family head as becoming an elder. They are all under Christ and should all grow to approach Him in every respect possible. In time, as the ecclesia communities mature and more and more family heads are recognized as elders, the role of elder should become so common as to disappear entirely as a distinguishing mark. All will be elders, or we could say: the office of elder has become obsolete.

This model of the structure of an ecclesia community addresses a danger associated with recognizing elders, the tendency toward the formation of a class system. This is especially critical when the body has not properly guarded itself against impurity and unbelievers are admitted into fellowship. The elders, as was the case in the early centuries, can then come to be seen as the only segment of the community that is pure. This tends to separate them from the rest and an upper class begins to form. Over time, leadership and responsibility are gradually transferred from the membership at large to this extra-biblical, clergy class. Once begun, it deviates ever further from Scripture and may become more a tool of Satan than of God. This demonstrates how necessary it is that we remain cautious and ever beware of any tendency to deviate, however slightly, from God's directions.

⁷² For a thorough analysis of God's Word regarding the role of elder, see: "Christian Elders in the New Testament," by John Piper: <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/christian-elders-in-the-new-testament>. See: Acts 14:23; 20:17.

May God bless you as you seek to obey our gracious and loving Master in these and all His kind, considerate and lifegiving commandments.

Deacons

We read of deacons early in the history of the faith:

“And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the

disciples unto them, and said, it is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch.”⁷³

We see here that the work of the apostles was bearing much fruit and that they desired help with the everyday effort of the care and support of the needy widows in the congregations. They asked, not the elders but the believers, the multitude of the disciples, to choose seven wise and godly men. These were to relieve them of the work of distributing the tithe equitably to both the Grecian and Hebrew widows. The first person named as a

⁷³ Acts 6:1-5

deacon in Scripture was Stephen, who demonstrated the sincerity and depth of his faith and was martyred for it soon after.⁷⁴

The Apostle Paul writing to the believers at Philippi, began His letter with:

“Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.”⁷⁵

This letter is addressed to three sets of individuals: the saints as a body, the elders and the deacons. These titles denote function and not authority, which belongs to Christ alone. The saints are all the true believers in the assembly. The function of the bishops (elders) is to teach, and of deacons, as we saw above, is to serve. The deacons off-load the administrative duties from the elders (previously appointed by the apostles), to whom they would otherwise naturally tend to fall.

The word “deacon,” means “servant.” A deacon is someone that serves others as his regular, everyday activity. This is his chosen and Godappointed function in the Body of Christ:

“But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.”⁷⁶

The qualifications for deacons are:

“Likewise, must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon,

⁷⁴ Acts 6:5 -- 7:60

⁷⁵ Phil. 1: 1,2

⁷⁶ Matthew 23:11

being found blameless. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.”¹¹⁸

These qualifications are very similar to those God established for elders. Deacons as well as elders are to demonstrate the virtue of godliness as being characteristic of them in every aspect of their personal lives. They are to be proven and visible examples of godliness that the saints would look up to and emulate. Deacons in the ecclesia communities must be outstanding individuals, godly, honest men selected by their congregations to perform the duties necessary for the total functioning of the ecclesia communities.

- Their duties would include management of the community finances, physical property, the well-being of unsupported widows, families with special needs and other related activities.
- In general, the duty of the deacon is to off-load as many responsibilities as possible that would tend to fall to the elders, so that the latter would be able to focus on their primary responsibility: teaching the people of God the Word of God.¹¹⁹

Deacons, as servants of the Lord and the ecclesia community, are chosen by, granted authority by, and are responsible, for the discharge of the duties assigned to them, to the congregation as a whole. The historical practice of a periodic reporting of their work to the community in assembly is reflective of this fact.

Faithful and proven deacons have typically been given great liberty of action and much authority.

Government

The Bible speaks of kingdom because in times past kingdom was the prevailing form of government. To better understand the concept of kingdom we should consider kingdom as equivalent to government. In the “government of God.” Christ is absolute Lord and Master. His rule

¹¹⁸ 1 Timothy 3:8-13

¹¹⁹ Acts 6:1-4

over the natural order is recognized and obeyed; it is a subtle rule, one that functions through nature. As with gravity, one cannot deny it or resist its influence. Obedience is mandatory and disobedience can be painful or deadly. Likewise, the consequences of disobedience to God’s written laws may not always be immediate but they never fail to take effect.

When we think of Jesus’ Kingdom as something other than government, it opens room for the man-made tyranny of institutions. When we see Jesus Kingdom as His Government, the false governments are exposed. There can only be one government – one authority – one Law. Christ must be Lord of all or Lord of none. There cannot continue to be one segment of society ruled by God’s Law and another ruled by another law.

God has instructed His people to come out from the ways of the world and live by His word rather than the word of the governments of this world.¹²⁰ Legitimate governments are not to be considered our masters, but God tells us that they are to be obeyed when doing so does not constitute disobedience to God.

Jesus’ instructions are:

“But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.”¹²¹

God’s law begins with the individual and permeates his entire world. It is the individual that God instructs:

- through his own creation in God’s image
- through the creation in general
- through Scripture.

¹²⁰ 2 Corinthians 6:17.

¹²¹ Matthew 23: 8-12

Scripture everywhere holds the individual directly responsible for obedience to God’s commandments. There are no intermediaries between God and man to which responsibility can be transferred. Authority may be delegated but responsibility cannot.

Obedience to any official that commands action contrary to God’s law is disobedience to God.

There are many levels or kinds of governments: self, family, community, workplace, civil and above all these, God’s government. We are subject to God’s government everywhere and at all times. God is sovereign, and there is no limit to His authority. The other governments have limited authority. These agencies may exceed their authority and often do, as we well know.

For adults, God's government must come first, followed by civil government that God said we should obey when it does not conflict with His law. This is further limited in that a civil authority should be 'feared by the evil and not the just.'

"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing." ⁷⁷ Civil government⁷⁸⁷⁹ is established by God to govern a population that includes unbelievers and, while it remains, is to be respected and obeyed, in accordance with God's conditions. In time, as godliness grows, and the people learn to obey God and live by His law, civil government will fade in significance and scope and eventually disappear. As the world becomes more Christian

⁷⁷ Romans 13:1-6

⁷⁸ For an interesting study of the difference between the state and civil government, see Bojidar Marinov's: "Axe to the Root, Reconstructionist Radio", YouTube video...

<https://youtu.be/hYvb2VyKrlY>

⁷⁹ Corinthians 15:25

and the need for external government decreases, the family will become more and more the primary agency for the dispensation of justice. So, in the fully established kingdom of God, the family is the highest government on earth. All decisions eventually come to rest with the family heads, and all obey God from their hearts. This is the goal that God has set before His people. The goal that they should keep in mind and toward which they should ever be working.

The world that is in view here is one that provides the greatest freedom possible for sinful man. It is based on voluntary obedience to God's law by a regenerate population that knows and lives that law. The only freedom it withholds is the freedom to sin, which means it is not freedom for unbelievers, those in rebellion against God and His law. It is the world God has promised and which will one day be fully realized.¹²⁴ Until then, other governments will exist and must be obeyed in accordance with God's word. Duly constituted authorities, whether in the state, school, or any other association, are to be obeyed but only conditionally; "we must obey God rather than men."⁸⁰

Discipline

Discipline within the ecclesia community is via the application of God's Word in any and every circumstance by every believer. Although elders should be respected for their better understanding, discipline is not the peculiar responsibility of elders. It is the responsibility of every member to question (with appropriate respect) any action or statement they do not see as compatible with God's Word. Just as iron sharpens iron⁸¹,

⁸⁰ Acts 5:29

⁸¹ Proverbs 27:17

freedom to speak truth, when used with appropriate discretion, can stimulate the sanctification process of the entire community.

It must be kept in mind that none of us is without sin. For that reason, in any community discipline, beginning with self-discipline, is often needed. God's chosen people should, first, learn to recognize their own sin and then take whatever steps are needed to correct themselves. With this in mind, we should be cognizant of our neighbors and their feelings. We should spend enough time with them to be able to appreciate what is truly in their hearts before we criticize their words or behavior. Questions should always precede advice or criticism.

When we believe that we have a good understanding of where a brother is wrong about something, we first need to decide whether it is our place to be the one that supplies the necessary words of correction. Only then can we offer, with love and concern, any words of advice or correction that are appropriate. Family government must always be respected. It is not any man's place to offer words of criticism to another man's wife or family members that would in any way impair his authority. Such criticism should first be offered directly to the family head so that the family order is not disrupted.⁸²

When a fellow member, after careful consideration and communication, continues to act, or supports beliefs that appear to be in contradiction to Scripture, the following, God-given procedure should be employed.

“Moreover, if your brother trespasses against you, go and tell him his fault between him and you alone. If he hears you, you have redeemed your brother. But if he does not hear you, then take along with you one or two others, so that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every matter

⁸² Ephesians 5:23,24

may be established. If he does not hear them, tell it to the congregation. If he does not hear the congregation, take him as a heathen man and as a publican."⁸³

Note again that there is no reference to clergy in this process.

The individual believer – in whom the Holy Spirit resides – must never be seen as subservient to the assembly as a whole. The central purpose of the community is the godly development of all its members. To insure against theological rigor mortis, all views even those that differ from the current consensus, must be given every consideration.¹²⁹ The individual may not be pushed aside unless he is proven to be a false Christian, one that disobeys God's commandments, in which case he should be excommunicated.¹³⁰ The offending individual is to be judged by the entire community. The final judgment does not rest with a group of elders; it is the entire community that excommunicates the offender. This must be done as an expression of love and compassion for the individual who may eventually prove to be one of God's elect. The ultimate goal of all discipline is restoration.

This may seem to be a drastic and unloving step to take. There are however reasons for this serious action.

- The purity of the community must be protected – false brethren are an evil influence and must be removed.
- For their own good, individuals displaying unregenerate behavior need to see the truth of the situation and repent. They should be discouraged from believing they are in God's saving grace when it is apparent that they are probably far from it.

The Apostle Paul's advice is clear.

⁸³ Matthew 18:15-17

“to deliver him to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your complacency is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven sours the whole lump of dough?”¹³¹

Paul’s concern here is for both the offender and the community. The former, in that he should examine himself, recognize his sinful state and

¹²⁹ 1 Corinthians 11:19

¹³⁰ 1 Corinthians 5:9-13

¹³¹ 1 Corinthians 5:5-6 NMB

repent. The latter, in that the community should not be polluted by the presence of unbelievers. The purity of the community is vital; to harbor known sin is detrimental to the development of all its members.

Excommunication should be preceded by every possible attempt to reconcile the offender, but it is a step that must be taken when warranted. To fail to do so is to court disaster. It sets a precedent that can lead to the corruption of the entire community.

Authority

Here are the Apostle Paul’s words to the Christians in Corinth:

“I would that you understood that Christ is the head of every man. And the man is the woman’s head. And God is Christ’s head.”¹³²

This verse begins a passage that deals with familial relationships. It goes beyond that and gives us the God-intended authority order for all of society. Authority flows from God, the

Father, to the Son and thence to the regenerate family heads. Within the family there is rule; children must obey their parents, and the man is the head of the wife. Above the family is Christ and above Christ is God. Just as there is no head between Christ and God, so there is no head between the man and Christ. There is no one that a man must obey unconditionally or to whom he can transfer his God-given responsibilities.

The apostle says essentially the same thing to the ecclesia communities in Ephesus:

“For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the ~~church~~ ecclesia: and He is the saviour of the body.”¹³³

Here again we see only two heads, the husband and Christ. Ecclesia is a reference to the believers, not to an institution. So, the phrase “Christ

¹³² 1 Corinthians 11:3 NMB

¹³³ Ephesians 5:23

is the head of the ecclesia” is understood as “Christ is the head of each individual believer.” God’s people need the support of other believers and normally would work with them; but they should never make themselves or allow themselves to become subservient to any man or any institution. All Christians and especially the family heads must understand and feel a direct personal responsibility to Christ and Christ alone. Authority then, in the family belongs to the man and, in the Body of Christ, belongs only to Christ.

Note that there is no mention of clergy in either passage!

The Tithe

“Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So, shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.”⁸⁴

An important part of God’s plan for the provision of mankind in its current state of sinful depravity is the tithe. It is both a means of sustenance for those that for one good reason or another are unable to fully support themselves. This could be due to a temporary or a permanent disability, but it must be real and not contrived.

“Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.”⁸⁵

The tithe also reminds God’s people that everything we have is from God and belongs to Him. This recognition of our dependence on Him helps protect us from the foolish pride we often display.

“Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed Me. But ye say, wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed Me, even this whole

nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove Me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you

⁸⁴ Proverbs 3: 9-10

⁸⁵ Acts 11:29-30

*the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.*⁸⁶

The tithe is in reality a blessing; our failure to tithe is one reason for the high taxes we pay to our Caesars today. When we fail to obey God, the tax collector takes it from us, and we end up paying much more than God's tenth and they are so inefficient that at even the higher amount in the end the needy still are stuck in want. Only when obedience to God's Tithe empties the welfare rolls, will taxes go down. The tax we pay today should be seen as a penalty for lack of faithfulness, in ourselves and our forebears; but we should change history for our descendants.

This is in stark contrast to the "conservatives" of today that want the taxes to go away but are not willing to obey God's Word in charity and the poor tithe.

⁸⁶ Malachi 3:8-10



Our Purpose

We have looked at the fall of mankind that resulted from Adam's sin, God's formation of the Body of Christ to rescue it, and something of how different Christians are from unbelievers. We then considered what God's word tells us about how we are to live as His called-out people in this world. We now investigate some of the reasons behind all of this and what specifically the Lord's chosen, forgiven, and blessed people are expected to do with the lives He has given them.

*"Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war, With
the cross of Jesus going on before!"*

*Christ, the royal Master, leads against the foe; Forward
into battle, see his banner go!*

*At the sign of triumph Satan's host doth flee; On, then,
Christian soldiers, on to victory!*

*Hell's foundations quiver at the shout of praise; Brothers,
lift your voices, loud your anthems raise!*

*Like a mighty army moves the church of God; Brothers,
we are treading where the saints have trod;*

*We are not divided; all one body we, One in hope and
doctrine, one in charity.*

*Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war, With
the cross of Jesus going on before!*⁸⁷

This hymn and others like it reflect an attitude that Christians once held and should hold with vigor. It is an enthusiastically positive point of view. Christians once looked forward to a time when the Christian faith would cover the earth. They saw themselves as God's workers, charged to bring about this God-intended result.

To be faithful recipients of the enormous magnitude of His blessings, we need to renew a once vigorous but now very faded appreciation of both the great privilege and awesome extent of the responsibility God has placed on our shoulders. As His chosen, blessed and highly privileged people, we have work to do, glorious, serious, and significant work for the Lord who lifted us up out of our previous sinful state, gave us new lives and a glorious new and eternal hope.

Yes, this old hymn shows us that this world, always has been and still is, our God-given responsibility! Only through our efforts, executed within His plan, will it reach its God-intended result. We must forsake our old negligence and reassume the

⁸⁷ Baring-Gould, Sabine, M.A., eldest son of Mr. Edward Baring-Gould, of Lew Trenchard, Devon, b. at Exeter, Jan. 28, 1834, and educated at Clare College, Cambridge, B.A. 1857, M.A. 1860. Taking Holy Orders in 1864, he held the curacy of Horbury, near Wakefield, until 1807 [sic], when he was preferred to the incumbency of Dalton, Yorks. In 1871 he became rector of East Mersea, Essex, and in 1881 rector of Lew Trenchard, Devon. His works are numerous, the most important of which are, *Lives of the Saints*, 15 vols., 1872-77; *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages*, 2 series, 1866-68; *The Origin and Development of Religious Belief*, 2 vols., 1869-1870; and various volumes of sermons. <https://hymnary.org/text/onward-christian-soldiers-marching-as>

highly privileged role we were given by the One who died that we might live, forever.

We are God's ecclesia, the called-out ones, called to be God's special agents in a world that has drifted far from His original plan. We have been given both the responsibility and the power to renew the world! We are His chosen and highly blessed agents charged to teach it to obey God and to bring it into conformity with His creation purpose.

This is indeed a huge task, but it is not beyond our ability to perform. God will supply all our needs. He knows us far, far better than we will ever know ourselves and loves us with so great a love that He would never ask the impossible of us.⁸⁸

All this may sound very difficult and tedious, but it is really very simple in principle. We, as the body of Christ will change the world, but we as individuals, are limited. The responsibility God gives each of us is with our immediate environment:

“He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”⁸⁹

Here we have the sum of it: *do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly* with God. When we do these things and continue to do them, the world around us sees our faith and is gradually changed. The unbelieving world sees these characteristics in God's people; it stirs up suppressed knowledge and reminds them that there is a God, and that He is righteous:

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the

⁸⁸ Matt: 17:20; Mark 9:23; Phil. 4:13

⁸⁹ Micah 6:8

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truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them."⁹⁰

When the world around us is as corrupt and godless as our world is today, there is often resistance and abuse to be tolerated. Godliness in these circumstances often requires additional effort and can be a challenge.

God has given us new lives, lives that He tells us should be filled with universal and eternal purpose. We will live forever, but we're not here just to eke out an existence in this meager environment we see around us. We need to lift our heads and see the reality of what lies beyond. There is a God-created universe out there and a God that is closer to us than we are to ourselves. We have been born-again and blessed, not just because God loves us but also to serve His purposes in this now sin-filled world.

Wake up Christian! The hour is late, and the time for sleeping is over.

The God that sent His Son to die for us, has forgiven all our sins and blessed us with the promise of His presence for all eternity, has given us the privilege of work to do for Him. He has made us a part of His eternal purpose, and we need to get about accomplishing it!

*"Into the inconstancy and drifting changes of this world, God introduces a steady and purposeful element, His people."*⁹¹

⁹⁰ Rom. 1:18,19

⁹¹ See "A Word in Season," Volume 2, R. J. Rushdoony ¹⁴² John 3:17

How, though, do we proceed? What specific actions are we to take? These, of course, will be different for different individuals, but there are three principles that apply to us all.

- Calling: We should have a good understanding of our calling from God.
- Preparation: We must properly prepare ourselves to do His work.
- Commission: The commission of our duties as members of Christ's body must conform to God's directions and become, far and away, the highest priority in our lives.

The Goal

Christ came to undo the damage caused by the Fall; He came to save the world, the entire world, not just a few sinners:

"For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved."⁹²

The Great Commission is His command to put into effect the consequences of the victory He won at the Cross. It cannot be limited in any way, such as by reducing it to a call to evangelism. Every aspect of man's existence on earth is affected by his response to Christ.

Jesus instructs us to baptize the nations. This certainly includes but is not limited to the people of the nations. How, though, is a nation to be baptized? It can't be dipped in water, can it? No, but baptism⁹² is a symbol of cleansing and a nation is

⁹² Baptism is a dying term to completely submerge a cloth into a dye solution so that the dye is thoroughly integrated with the cloth

baptized by cleansing its laws and its culture. God is a holy God Who cannot abide sin in any form. Every aspect of man's life on earth must be cleansed of every trace of sin and all must gleam in perfect shining whiteness before He will be satisfied. His disciples must not do this in a perfunctory manner, as if to satisfy the minimum requirement. Discipling should achieve results and bring the laws of the nations into conformity to every detail of God's law. This is nothing less than a requirement to make the nations of the world Christian nations and thereby to make the world a Christian world.

We see here that King Jesus brings with Him a complete salvation, one that encompasses the entire world population. It isn't just a rescue operation that saves a few from a perishing world. This is exactly what God commanded Adam and Eve to do and what they failed to do because of sin.⁹³ God's intentions, though, are never frustrated; He sent His Son, the second Adam, into the world to do what the first Adam failed to do. This Jesus did on the Cross by paying the sin-debt of every believer and thereby creating His Body, the new Eve. Here, in this commission, Christ commands His Bride, all the faithful, to give birth to a wholly new world, the very world Adam and Eve failed to produce. He will succeed where Adam failed, producing a world that glorifies God. The result is certain; the timeframe is in our hands.

We see then that God's people are charged, not just to communicate a message, they are charged with the task of rebuilding the world. This involves forming their own communities in which they can prepare themselves and cooperate with one another in the kingdom-building task God has assigned them. When the ecclesia is obedient and abandons the follow-the-leader, clergy-laity system, each individual believer

⁹³ Gen. 1:28

becomes an independent agent working for God's righteousness, involved in building God's Kingdom, and thereby defeating the gates of Hell.⁹⁴

This is the goal Christ has set before His chosen followers, one that needs to be taken seriously. It is nothing less than perfection. It may seem impossible! How can sinful man ever realize such a lofty ambition? On his own he cannot, but he is not alone; the Holy Spirit is within, and for Him nothing is impossible. We must put aside our fears and stop worrying about our inadequacies. We are not alone; God is with us and will never leave us nor forsake us.⁹⁵

God created man in His image and expects much from him. He has placed on him the responsibility for his own future. Adam and Eve were told that their lives depended on their obedience to God's commandments.⁹⁶ This was true for Adam and Eve and is still true today. We see from history that when God's commandments are obeyed, man has respect for his neighbors, there is peace, and prosperity abounds. Where the Ten Commandments are cast aside, selfishness reigns and society degenerates into lawless anarchy, inevitably followed by oppressive, totalitarian rule. We may have never seen the extremes but the end points of these two alternatives are life and death, respectively.

Man is given a choice: he can obey God and live or disobey and die. It's as simple as that, but without Christ he is unable to make the right choice. He, in Satan's bondage, blindly insists on being his own master and living according to his own wishes. It is only true Christians that are able to obey God and that God uses to bring the nations of the world into obedience. Their

⁹⁴ Matt:16:18

⁹⁵ Heb. 13:5, 1 John 4:12

⁹⁶ Gen. 2:17

involvement is critical to the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

The ecclesia members should be independently self-governed agents. The people of God should not be easily misdirected by false or inept leaders. They, governed by the Holy Spirit working in the hearts of each member of the ecclesia community, are thereby made virtually impervious to subversion, misguided direction and the foibles of sinful leadership. Yes, some will go in the wrong direction. As they, however, mature in the faith, more and more will do what is right. What will not happen is what has happened repeatedly throughout history, great segments of the Christian population being led in a direction contrary to God's word. Men may think they have the ultimate solution to advancement or for dealing with problems, but God's way is always the best and really, the only effective way.

Salt and Light

Jesus, speaking to those that would believe and follow Him, said:

“Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”⁹⁷

This short passage, as many of the sayings of our Lord, says so much; it speaks volumes. It instructs God's people of their

⁹⁷ Matt. 5:13-16

duties as a privileged class of His creatures. He would soon give His life as a substitutionary atonement for their sins and is here informing them of what He expects of His chosen beneficiaries. First, they are to be salt:

Salt, of course, prior to the invention of refrigeration, was the common means of preserving meat. It is also a necessary food supplement, but its primary use was as a preservative. God's people are the salt of the earth; they are the preservative, the agency that preserves the good and keeps the world from falling into utter and complete moral corruption.

Second, they are to be light:

Light is necessary for sight; we cannot see in the dark and what we cannot see, we cannot know. There is physical sight that requires the eye; likewise, there is intellectual sight that requires an understanding mind. God's people have vision the world lacks; only they can see (perceive) the kingdom of God:

“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”⁹⁸

God's people, by example and by word, can demonstrate to the unbelieving world the meaning and nature of the kingdom of God, the perfect society God provided for His new creatures.

Third, they are the sole, indispensable sources of salt and light:

Christians are not just one of many possible sources of salt and light; Jesus said that they are the salt and the light. There are no other sources of salt and light. They, as the guardians of God's truth, are the sole preservers of what is good and the sole dispensers of His truth.

⁹⁸ John 3:3

Most Christians do not have a proper appreciation of the awesome responsibilities Christ placed on their shoulders in this seemingly simple but very deep statement. In a very real sense, the future of the world is entirely in the hands of God's people.

Commissioned

Given a sense of purpose, sufficient preparation, and a thorough understanding of our task, how should we, God's creatures, apply ourselves toward fulfilling the great purpose God gave us? We have the general direction specified in the Great Commission and are to be guided by God's word but what are our specific duties? We cannot wait until we know all there is to know; that would require more than a lifetime of study. Some attempt to do this though and end up as monks living reclusively, or as students that argue the fine points of Scripture all their lives and accomplish little to nothing. Theology is important and we need theologians that study God's word as their life's work, but this is a gift and a privilege given to a few and not what God expects of most believers. Rather, His new creatures are to be His soldiers in the trenches, the world-changers that usher in the fruits of His Great Commission.

But just what is this commission? In its narrow form it is a call to teach the Gospel message of salvation and make converts. The full commission, though, is more, much more. It is a call to make disciples of those that believe, disciples that dedicate their lives to teaching the nations to obey God's Commandments. It is nothing less than a call to make the world a Christian world.

We reach out to an unbelieving world and teach it to obey its Lord. We, as the Pilgrims of old, work to establish a new world, one that recognizes Jesus' dominion. We cannot, though, as our Pilgrim predecessors did, just leave the civilized world and build God's kingdom in the new world. Our pilgrimage is to be

practiced in our native land. God's people should emulate the Pilgrims in their:

- Strong sense of purpose, the building of a godly world,
- Sense of individual responsibility,
- Recognition of Christ and only Christ as Lord, and
- Life-long and life-giving effort to do all they can to further His kingdom on earth.

Christians need to see themselves as pilgrims and colonists, foreigners in a hostile world, a world they have been chartered to subdue for Christ, their Lord and Master.

Two Tasks

The ecclesia, God's people, the salt of the earth and the light of the world, have been called to two tasks, tasks that will so change the world that it will never be the same again:

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”⁹⁹

These words hark back to the mandate given to Adam and Eve to take dominion over the earth and raise up a godly progeny that would fill it to God's glory.¹⁰⁰ Jesus says here that He now has all power in heaven and earth. Heaven and earth here denote

⁹⁹ Matt. 28:18-20

¹⁰⁰ Gen. 1:28

that His power is over men and angels; it is both spiritual and earthly. It is not limited to the spiritual only, as some seem to want to believe. He has been given all power over all people and over all the nations of the world.

Christ commissions His divinely empowered delegates to announce the good news – the Gospel of the Kingdom message: that Jesus is now the King of all kings and Lord of all lords. Everything and every person is subject to Him alone. All of man’s institutions – any hierarchy that attempts to place itself between God’s people and Jesus the King, whether a humanist state, a denomination, a priest, or an elder board, is a false authority.

It is one commission and one Gospel in which God’s disciples are given two tasks:

1. Go and not just teach, but “make learners” (Gr. “matheteusate”) of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Triune God.
2. Teaching (Gr. “didaskontes”) them to obey all my commandments.

In the first task Jesus gives His disciples the authority and responsibility to go out with the Gospel message, to bring the nations the message of His marvelous grace, and to baptize the believers into the Christian faith. The converts are to become, not just believers but “learners” and teachers of others. They are to be active spreaders of the good news of God’s salvation.

This commandment is echoed in: Mark, Luke, John, and Acts,¹⁰¹ but with a difference. It differs in that in Matthew the word nations is used, implying that not just the people but the nations as nations are to take on a Christian character. All nations are to become Christian nations in their worship, character, and the laws they uphold.

¹⁰¹ Mark 16:15,16, Luke 24:47,48, John 20:21, and Acts 1:8

In the second task, all Christians, Jesus' disciples, are commissioned to teach the nations to obey all God's commandments. This teaching is by persuasion of those ready and willing to learn and not by force or excessive persistence. It is in stark contrast to progressivism, humanism, and Islam.

This was done so well in the early centuries that the entire Western World was changed. In the ensuing centuries the great majority of its nations were converted, adopted God's law, and declared themselves to be Christian nations.

The true Gospel then, includes both grace and law. Both are necessary aspects of this commission. Baptism signifies God's grace and His forgiveness of sin. God's Law teaches the converts how to live as individuals, as families, and as nations.

These activities work toward a single result: a world of Christian nations full of Christian people. Both tasks are necessary to take dominion over the earth for Christ. He is the rightful ruler and lawgiver to the whole world. All must obey His commandments. Every aspect of life, including all the laws that govern life, must be brought into conformity with God's requirements. The second task for His disciples then is to work toward this end. All the nations are to come to abide by all His commandments; they are to become Christian nations. Jesus has assigned these two tasks to all His disciples; it is their lifework.¹⁰²

Sadly, the teaching in most of today's churches does not do justice to the Matthew passage. The first task is generally recognized, but the second task that speaks of world-wide obedience to Jesus' commandments are almost entirely ignored. The Great Commission---to make the world a Christian world---is reduced to the proclamation of a message of personal salvation.

¹⁰² Matt. 6:33

Both tasks are necessary. As we fully obey God's directions, new disciples are added, they exercise their influence at every level of society, the unbelieving world begins to pay attention, and the character of the nations becomes more and more Christ-like.

Jesus did not give us impossible tasks; they are well within our ability to perform. All that is needed to realize glorious success is that we work diligently (as unto the Lord) and faithfully (carefully following His directions). When we do so, our visible obedience will draw in more and more disciples. When we cut corners, as we have done and continue to do, we fail, lose hope, and trim Christ's Commission down to a half-hearted attempt to save a few. This kind of partial obedience (which is a form of disobedience) demonstrates that we are unfaithful servants. Full obedience (a consequence of true faith) rewards us with the knowledge that we are faithful servants and are doing what our loving Master requires of us.

Jesus says: teach all nations. What sort of teaching is it that Jesus requires of us here? Is it a superficial form of teaching limited to expounding the law so that the nations can hear God's requirements? Is it just to warn them of the consequences of disobedience? No, we are to really teach them. Just as a tutor of children is expected to continue to teach the children until they learn their lessons and cannot cease teaching until they do learn, so the nations are to be taught until they actually come to know, obey and embrace all Christ's commandments. The charge to all God's people in this commission is first, to know and obey Christ's commandments themselves, and second to teach, really teach, the nations to do so. What we are charged with here is nothing less than the salvation of the world!

The Workers

An important question here is: to whom are these words of the Lord addressed? It cannot be limited to the eleven disciples that were physically present for a) they would not be here to the end of the age and b) they were clearly incapable of teaching all the nations in their lifetimes. Some say it is only directed to the pastors and missionaries that have undergone specific training in the presentation of the Gospel message. This, however, is not supported in Scripture, nor does it begin to address the second requirement of teaching the nations to obey God's law, a societal and political task involving every aspect of life. It can only be a command to undo the damage Satan introduced and do what Adam failed to do: to make this world a Christian world.

This is a task requiring the full effort of all Christians in every walk of life. Clearly, it is every true, born-again believer to whom Jesus speaks this Great Commission. Only they, working as the salt of the earth and the light of the world, are adequate to fulfill this great task.¹⁰³

Finally, in our text Christ promises to be with His chosen people unto the end of the world. He is now seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven, so this presence is not in bodily form; He is with us in the presence of the Holy Spirit that indwells all believers.¹⁰⁴ This factor should not be trivialized; the presence of the third Person of the Holy Trinity within the believer is a source of power that can overcome every obstacle. It can make giants of the lowest and weakest of men and can

¹⁰³ Matt. 5:13-16

¹⁰⁴ John 14:16,17

empower them to conquer every enemy that attempts to impede this commission.¹⁰⁵

Dominion

The dominion mandate is found right at the beginning of the Bible, in the first chapter:

“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So, God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.”¹⁰⁶

These instructions were given to Adam and Eve, our original parents. They were to be God’s overseers charged with the care of the earth. Later, after they forsook their responsibility and were no longer able to fulfill it, the mandate was given to Christ, the second Adam, and to His Bride, the new Eve, all true Christians:

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching

¹⁰⁵ Phil. 4:13

¹⁰⁶ Gen. 1:26-28

them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."¹⁰⁷

We looked at this passage earlier with respect to the Two Tasks, baptizing and teaching. Here we wish to focus on it as a call to dominion. We see Christ, first acknowledging His possession of all power and authority on earth and then giving His instructions to His Bride.

It is a repeat of the original mandate given to Adam but with a difference: because of sin, a new element has been added. There are commandments, a law to be taught and obeyed. This wasn't needed before sin was introduced but is necessary now. The nations need to be taught to obey the rules of life, the rules they relinquished when Adam sinned. They became like children that need to learn to stop harming themselves by doing wrong and foolish things. They rejected God and His law that gives life and have been hurting themselves ever since (for thousands of years).

This is the new Dominion Mandate that Christ has given to His Bride, the born-again people. As our text tells us, this is a teaching task. It must come from a loving heart, one that is concerned with the plight of an unbelieving neighbor. It springs from a heart that wishes to provide as much help as possible to a lost and needy generation. The tools to be employed are logical reasoning and persuasion and not force or trickery. The unbelieving world must come willingly, knowledgeably, and wholeheartedly into the kingdom of God. There are no other means of entry.

We, as God's ambassadors, must remember our place. We cannot save anyone; it is God who builds His kingdom. He employs His total control of all things to bring about the

¹⁰⁷ Matt. 28:18-20

conversion of each new member at the exact point in time and in the precise way He predetermined in eternity past. Their names were written in His book before He made the world.¹⁰⁸ As His obedient children, we must remember that it is God Who saves, and that we are merely one of the means He uses to that end. That said, we must also realize that our actions, the work we do, is significant. When we keep these two facts in mind, we can focus on doing God's work His way without anxiety as to what the result will be. We may desire a particular outcome but are not cast down when it fails to appear. Our concern should be: did I do and say the right things? Did I act in accordance with His command word?

The citizens of the kingdom bear the responsibility of increasing the kingdom of God, the kingdom Christ announced when He came.¹⁰⁹ They see the Great Commission as their commission, the central aspect of the work they do for Christ. They understand that God has given them this task and that He expects them to take it seriously. It is the focus of their life's work, their primary purpose in life:

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”¹¹⁰

As they grow in the knowledge of God's purposes and begin to see the awesome responsibility God has placed on them, His people adjust their priorities accordingly. What may have seemed important to them before, dwindles in significance and pales before God's requirements for their lives. As their numbers

¹⁰⁸ Matt. 25:34; Eph. 1:4; Rev. 13:8, 17:8

¹⁰⁹ Matt. 4:17, 23

¹¹⁰ Matt. 6:33

increase, their influence grows out of all proportion to their relative fraction of the population.

Each individual acts as the Spirit leads. One may feel a particular concern for the public schools and spend much effort to shed light on their godless teaching. Another may feel the need to speak and act to expose the horror of abortion or the immorality of the media. Most, will focus on their immediate environment, touching those within and passers-by with love and godly concern.

There are many ways of service open to each believer, and the Spirit leads each one to the work He chose for that individual. Some will have a greater scope of influence, some less. All, however, work to overcome their natural trepidation and to develop a propensity to vigorously defend the faith and oppose godlessness wherever it appears.

It is this internal desire and acquired ability to promote and defend the faith at every opportunity that is the strength within each child of God. In the aggregate, it becomes an irresistible force that will, without any question whatever, conquer the world for Christ. Don't hold back, be a part of it. One day you will rejoice and be glad you did!

The end result of all this is dominion; not dominion by some elite individuals but dominion by God through His law-word. It is a dominion that has its source and is exercised from within the individual. It is one in which God is recognized as the sovereign, and His law is obeyed from the heart. It is a dominion in which each individual participates to the extent he is able and as he chooses. It is a dominion that affords the greatest freedom possible for all.

It builds societies in which the highest authority is the family, and in which each responsible adult person is free from external coercion. Only the irresponsible and the criminal element feel the weight of law as a restricting factor. This law is not one that will be imposed on the nations. Rather, it is a law that will be

instituted through democratic processes by a knowledgeable and willing population. It is a law that recognizes God as the Supreme Being. It works toward but does not require that faith of each and every citizen.

Dominion fully realized is a world absent of unbelief, a world in which God's law reigns in the hearts of all the people. It is a world that is fully prepared for the return of its King. How though, is it to be realized? How do we proceed in our efforts to bring it about? First, we must prepare:

Prepared

A sense of calling, regardless of the depth and duration of its impression, is necessary but not sufficient. The dedicated individual cannot be successful in his chosen lifework without expending the time and effort needed to first, acquire an understanding of what is to be done and second, to develop the skills needed to do the work. Likewise, the soldier for Christ must be prepared before he can successfully do His work in this world. Jesus warned us of the need for careful planning:

“Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And everyone that heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended,

and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.”¹¹¹¹¹²

When God’s people attempt to do God’s work without a proper understanding of His Word, they often run into difficulties beyond their abilities, they may become frustrated, and discouraged. They may have meant well but they did not fully obey God’s instructions:

“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”¹⁶³

Paul was writing here to Timothy who would follow him as a teacher of the Christian communities. His words are taken today as applying only to seminarians, pastors or missionaries. It should, however, be applied to every believer; all Christians should develop the ability to teach others, especially their own children, and they must teach the word of truth.

All are not equal in knowledge, but all should strive to be approved unto God. They should not be ashamed and, in order to work in harmony with God’s directions, should study His word and develop the ability to apply it correctly.

The first part of preparation is to acquire a thorough understanding of God’s word and how it applies to the world in general. Secondly, to apply it properly, we need to understand our own situation and that of the world around us. Fear not, though, you are not alone! God is with you and will supply all your needs.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Matt. 7:24-27

¹¹² Tim. 2:15

¹¹³ Phil. 4:19

To begin with a new believer can share with others the knowledge he already has. When confronted with a question or assertion he cannot handle, he may go to someone else for help, perhaps to the person that convinced him of God's truth.

Dear fellow laborer for Christ, be patient as God is patient with us and He will use you and reward you over and over again. You will accomplish much for Him, all in His good time.

Our Lifestyle

We must begin, as always, with ourselves and that means, first of all, taking stock of who we are, why we're here, and what we want to do with the lives God has given us and our families. If we conclude that our decision is to obey His command to "come out from among them" in a literal and physical sense, we must act. We must take the first steps toward a new life, toward total obedience and dependence on the God that so demonstrably loves us and with whom we expect to live forever.

If this is the true desire of our hearts, and we are ready to give without reservation our all, everything we have and are to Him, we need to take a step, a step of faith. We must replace our wayward churches with the biblically ordained, truly God-fearing, ecclesia communities that will one day constitute the Kingdom of God in this world. We, that is Christians, need to see the great responsibility God has given us, forsake our foolish worldly interests, and commit our lives to this task.

The entire concept of God's people living in close association with a secular culture is foreign to Scripture; this was true with all Adam's descendants, with Abraham, with Ancient Israel and in the Christian era. Abraham wandered in a strange land; the Israelites had to leave Egypt; the ecclesia had to come out from among the Pagan Romans. We need to follow their example and obey God's instructions.

We cannot expect God's blessing on anything we do when we blatantly disobey Him in anything. Dear brother, dear sister,

we must obey Him in this command also. If we are to be His faithful servants, we must begin with this perhaps difficult task. It was obeyed in the time of the apostles and to some extent by the early monks but apparently not in most of history.

To be obedient to God, we must “come out from among them”¹⁶⁵ and establish our own ecclesia communities. This is to separate ourselves, in our private lives, from the unbelieving world around us. It is to leave our churches, unbelieving family members, friends and all that would detract from a godly, Spirit-filled environment. If we are to be the people of God, we must obey God in all that He requires of us, including this, perhaps

¹⁶⁵ 2 Cor. 6:17

difficult, perhaps heart-wrenching need for separation from all distracting influences.

It is a step of faith, perhaps one we view with some trepidation. It is a life-style change; to leave the comforts of a life one is familiar with for a new life with Christ and with His people, can be difficult. It is similar, though, to the step we took when God gave us the gift of faith, a gift we now treasure and hold tightly. He was with us then and is just as much with us in this additional step He wants us to take. We need to obey Him in this, as we will in the future when He tests us again and again. We are weak, but our faith grows through each of the tests He, in His great love for us, dispenses to us.

As God’s people come to see that God really requires this of them and decide to obey Him, ecclesia communities will be formed and populated with His true followers. This is likely to go slowly at first but as more communities are added and the biblical basis for them becomes better and more widely understood, the process will accelerate. It will do so throughout the world, very much as it did, in the face of incredible opposition, in Ancient Rome. God tells us in His word that it is in these godly societies we can grow in the knowledge of God, and in which we develop

ourselves to become the unstoppable force that will ultimately change this world. Why is this a certainty? It is because God has ordained it so and that one day an obedient generation will arise and fulfil it.¹¹⁴ Let it be this generation that begins a new trend, true and complete obedience!

Our Activities

We are God's ecclesia, His chosen, forgiven, and highly exalted people, dedicated to serving Him in all we do. He has instructed us to come out from the surrounding world of unbelief but not to totally isolate ourselves from it. We have a message to communicate to those of God's elect that are yet enmeshed in this sinful world. We do so by communicating the Gospel/Great Commission message to the extent we can to all that will listen, and by demonstrating God's love in all we do.

In our faithfulness to this task, God uses our words and our example to draw His elect to Himself. As we do this diligently, the ecclesia communities grow and grow and eventually cover the earth. They grow into and become the people of the millennium, the thousand years of peace that God promises to His faithful.¹¹⁵

We are not there yet and cannot simply charge out on our own and attempt to right every wrong. We must first prepare ourselves for an ongoing struggle. We can only win this war with Christ as our Commanding General. His marching orders are all there in His word, but we must understand them first, before we attempt to go out on our own and conquer for Him. We must learn the art of fighting God's war God's way before we attempt to do so in our own pitiful and poor way. We do this as we read,

¹¹⁴ Ps. 145:4

¹¹⁵ Rev. 20: 1-3

study and discuss God's word together within the ecclesia community.

When we leave the security of the community as God's emissaries to this fallen world, we come in contact with both professing Christians and unbelievers. Our tasks as God's chosen people in such contacts are to:

- Demonstrate God's love, grace and mercy to all with whom we come in contact.
- Explain the ecclesia community and the faith that it represents to all that ask or show interest
- Identify those that appear to be God's people and show them the need to separate from the world
- Help them to join existing or form new ecclesia communities
- Get help for the above from other ecclesia members as needed

These are, or should become, everyday activities that we practice as God's world-changers. We do these things, not in large groups, but as individuals or possibly in pairs, where we support each other. We do it with joy and confidence, knowing that our cause is in agreement with God's purposes and that we are doing what our loving God created us and put us in this sin-maddened world to do.

Christians know that some of the unbelievers with whom we come in contact will become Christian converts and fellow believers. They also know that they have some responsibility in this process. Countering this is a built-in desire to end controversy, to seek a middle ground, one that can relieve tension and bring peace. This tends to soften the process. It always involves some give and take, some compromise. This, though, is the very thing God hates and is one reason for His having put the enmity with Satan in place to begin with:

“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”¹⁶⁸

God’s first concern is for the purity of His children; they are to become holy as He is holy,¹⁶⁹ which means no compromise, none whatever, with the world.

Our Influence

A vital aspect of the development process, both within and without the local ecclesia community, is interaction with other believers. It broadens and deepens comprehension and prepares us to be able to share our understanding of the faith with others. This is most needful when we encounter unbelievers that disagree with us but are also ready and able to defend their distorted views.

As these student missionaries for Christ gain confidence in their knowledge and understanding of God’s word, they will, in their interactions with others, both learn and teach. They will grow with time and will very naturally and ever more clearly, proclaim and defend the Christian worldview to a growing audience. In this way God’s chosen people, as the salt of the earth and the light of the world, make their contributions toward furthering the growth of the kingdom.

As their numbers increase and their message becomes clearer and more unified than it is today, the world will increasingly take notice. In time the world will hear and will be changed. There is no need for massive programs involving huge meetings and public spectacles with large numbers of demonstrators all working for a particular cause. The world can be won for Christ little by little and, when it is done in this way, there will be a

¹⁶⁸ Gen. 3:15

¹⁶⁹ 1 Pet. 1:16

support base that keeps it in place. It will represent a lasting victory and give all glory to God.

In time, Christians will become very distinctive individuals with clear and definite ideas that derive from:

- Their thorough understanding of who they are and,
- How different they really are from unbelievers or unregenerate, so-called Christians.

They will possess a certainty in what they believe about what is true or false and right or wrong. They are not proud because they know they are only what God made them; but they must hold their heads up because they are the children of the King and the delegated servants of their Lord who has all power and authority over both heaven and earth.¹¹⁶

Such individuals that see themselves as God's instruments, clearly understand the task God has given them, and have dedicated their lives to furthering His kingdom, can be a powerful, culture-changing force. These qualities, though, cannot be acquired without an investment of significant time and effort. Personal study and interaction with other believers, especially with peers in the ecclesia community environment, are essential.

This calls for a certain degree of physical separation from the world, one that diminishes as we mature in the faith. There is also a separation in terms of distinction and not physical presence that grows as we grow in the knowledge of God. Through this the world sees that we, God's people, are truly different from them.

The growth of the typical Christian today is arrested at a point very far short of its true potential. Only after this shortcoming is corrected, will we begin to see real change. They will influence one another and together become the force that topples the

¹¹⁶ Matt. 28:18

godless giants that now rule most of this world. They will usher in the kingdom of God, which in time, will consume all the nations of this world.¹¹⁷

United

The need for God's holy people to be separate from the world is not in conflict with His call for them to be the carriers of the Gospel message and the teachers of the nations.¹¹⁸ The separation God requires is one of distinction and not total isolation. There is a God-given form of contact between God's people and both the lost and His as yet unconverted elect in the world. They teach through the visible example they demonstrate and through the physical and moral support they offer to the needy outside their communities.

The development of and transition to a world consisting entirely of ecclesia communities will of necessity be a multi-generational process. Each successive generation will draw closer to the God-established future He has in store for us. The God that loves us with an infinite love, He and only He is ever and always in total control.

One favorable difference between the situation today and that of the time of the apostles is that there are now many true believers in the general population. As these godly people learn what God's Word teaches about the need for a transition to ecclesia communities, many will be drawn to it. Some will participate in their formation and population while others will form what very likely will become a highly powerful support base, one that could bring about ever more rapid changes in society. Yes, all God's people can and should play a part in the God-given task of teaching the nations and transforming the world. God in

¹¹⁷ Rev. 11:15

¹¹⁸ Matthew 28:18-20

His great mercy will bless all with blessings we can hardly imagine today.

God's people have been off mission far too long. In taking this step, they signal the end of a long period of inactivity and begin a return to the much-needed task of building the Kingdom of God. They are very much in the shoes of the early Christian converts of ancient Rome and before that, of Adam and Eve.¹¹⁹ The day will come when this God-given task will have been fulfilled just as God intended, and the world will be populated by a God-fearing and God-obeying people.

Until then, the focus will be on the establishment, development, and maintenance of these godly communities. This, without doubt, will be an uphill struggle against an enemy that will be intent on their utter destruction. America is no longer the land of the free. The once powerful supporters of Christian freedom have been neutralized by the public schools, the controlled media and the force of government. All these powerful agencies are now firmly in the hands of Christ's enemies.

God, though, will pour out His many blessings on His obedient servants and these ecclesia communities. As long as they continue to obey, they will feel His strength and will overcome every obstacle the enemy attempts to place in their paths.

*“A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never
failing; our helper he, amid the flood of mortal ills
prevailing. For still our ancient foe does seek to work
us woe; his craft and power are great, and armed with
cruel hate, on earth is not his equal.*

*Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would
be losing, were not the right Man on our side, the Man
of God's own choosing.*

¹¹⁹ Genesis 1:28

*You ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is
he; Lord Sabaoth his name, from age to age the
same; and he must win the battle.*"¹²⁰

This is the promise God places before His true children today. He is their fortress and their unfailing source of strength. They are the ecclesia, the chosen, called, transformed, and dedicated people of God. They are the force He is now assembling, a force for world renewal. Its beginning and its clearest expression are to be found in these communities where Christ's rule, through God's Law, governs the total life of His dedicated people.

As God teaches them and they learn and obey His Word more perfectly, they will grow both in strength and in numbers. This is true today and will be ever-increasingly true as more and more of such God-honoring communities are formed. Their victory over the evil so predominant in today's world will be seen ever more clearly as they grow, become multi-generational in character, and eventually predominate throughout the world.

This is the way of life that the God that loves His people with an infinite, unending and boundless love, has established for their future in this world. Blessed be His name!

Truth

God gave gifts to His people:

*"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*

¹²⁰ Martin Luther (1529) <https://hymnary.org/text/a-mighty-fortress-is-our-god-a-bulwark>

*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.”¹²¹*

The purpose of these gifts is the perfection of the saints, that they be able to do the work He assigned them, and so that they would come to a unity of the faith. What sort of unity might this be? Can it be anything other than unity in the truth? All must believe the same thing, and it must be the truth! No other form of unity will do.

Why is such perfection required? It is because God is perfect and everything around Him, to be lasting, must also be perfect. He cannot abide the slightest of imperfections. As sinful creatures, the idea of our ever coming to actual perfection might seem utterly impossible and absolutely unattainable. But because it is God’s requirement, it will one day be fulfilled. We are destined to become His perfect creatures, one aspect of which is that we come to this perfect unity in the faith. But how can millions of believers scattered throughout the entire world ever come to such an absolute unanimity? Only the Almighty, Omnipotent God can perform such a miracle. This means, it must be done God’s way: in accordance with the directions to be found in His word.

We see in the above passage the need for teachers, but we know that faith is what resides in the hearts of believers; it is they that must be convinced of the truth and they that are the de facto final arbiters of the truth. Unity in the truth is the responsibility, not of just theologians, but of the entire body of Christ. The study of theology must not be restricted to an exclusive few but must be everyone’s concern. It must be studied, discussed, and practiced by individuals, both in their families and in the ecclesia communities. It is not just about Sundays or the institution but

¹²¹ Ephesians 4:11-13

for all of life; every aspect of life needs to conform to God's Law Word.

Discord

Today, the various denominations each claim to be the bearers of the truth and act as if unity will only be realized when all the others come to their particular view. But none of them gives any real consideration to the opposing views. They may study some of them but reject them on the basis that they conflict with some tenets they hold to be essential truth. Each group trains its pastors and its future seminary professors in its particular view. These leaders go out into the world believing that they are the possessors of the truth and will certainly not be dissuaded from it by their uneducated parishioners. This is clearly a recipe for continued separation rather than unity.

Unity is the goal but until it is achieved discord must be managed. Historically this has been done through division and church splits. The opposing individuals separated from each other and formed new congregations and denominations in which their differences, instead of being resolved, were simply hardened, and cast into theological concrete, there to reside for eternity. Each side, certain that their particular view is God's truth, waits patiently for all the others to join them.

Is this God's way? Is it scriptural? It is not; there is no scriptural support for bishoprics consisting of multiple ecclesia communities or for ecumenical councils attended by bishops from different locations. True, some of the early councils have helped unify the faith, but later they also led to the hardening of divergent views. It seems that very often progress of a sort results from the employment of extra-biblical means. The cost of such progress though can be very high. The ecclesia communities turned the task of reaching unity over to the bishops who managed to agree on some very important points of doctrine—

success! What followed, though, were centuries of rigor mortis under Catholicism and subsequently the confusion of denominations. Would this have been the case if the ecclesia communities had retained control as God required? Would the successes of the early councils have been lost had they done so? However, these questions are answered, we know that we should have obeyed God in every detail and retained the ecclesia concept that He ordained.

We can see from this how important it is that the ecclesia communities resist the temptation to surrender their independence, join the crowd and play follow the leader. This of course requires that they do their homework and develop a thorough knowledge of God's will as expressed in Scripture. The only leader they can trust and follow without question is Christ; all others may be useful guides but still must be tested as the Bereans tested the Apostles.¹⁷⁶ All believers are responsible to Christ alone and must never transfer that responsibility to a leader, regardless of how godly or competent a man he may be. This does not mean that the ecclesia cannot act as a body; it can, but only because of its tightly knit character and when its families truly have unanimity of mind.

Direction

What, though, are God's directions for His people? How is unity in the truth to be realized? What does His word say about the function of the ecclesia communities with respect to His truth?

"But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the ~~church~~ [ecclesia] of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."¹⁷⁷

The word translated church here is, once again, “ecclesia;” it does not refer to a group of bishops, a presbytery or general assembly of a denomination, nor is it an interdenominational, ecumenical council of Christian leaders. It is the local, self-governed community of believers. This basic unit is described here as the “pillar and ground” or the “support

¹⁷⁶ Acts 17:10-11

¹⁷⁷ 1 Timothy 3:15

and foundation” of the truth. God’s truth is supported (proclaimed and defended) and has its foundation (its supporting base) in the local Christian communities. This passage tells us that these local communities are to be the final arbiters of truth. Only when the ecclesia communities agree internally and with one another is real unity in the truth achieved.

It is imperative that the final decision between truth and heresy lies with the community and not just the elders. Disagreements on any point of doctrine must be taken most seriously and whatever time and effort may be involved in their resolution should be expended as expeditiously as possible. Any unresolved differences should be viewed as a potential point of division and must not be merely brushed off. The life of the ecclesia and the advancement of the faith are at stake.

It is the aggregate of the ecclesia, the Body of Christ, and not a presbytery, or groups of bishops, pastors or even elders that are the final arbiters of the truth. When even one ecclesia assembly maintains a position that the others see as heretical, the unity God requires has not yet been achieved.¹²² Here again serious effort is needed to affect a resolution of the differences.

At first glance, this might seem to be a step in the wrong direction. How, you might ask, can unity be realized by

¹²² Ephesians 4:13

maximizing the size of the deciding base? Shouldn't we rather reduce the number and seek unity through agreement at a higher level? Well, that was what Catholicism attempted to do in the middle ages. It resulted in the Reformation and the explosion of denominations that followed.

Actually, this is exactly the wrong way to go; it is the people, not just the leaders that must come to unity and this is only possible when all the believers come to a settled agreement on all the issues. Again, as we look around at the current state of the body of Christ, we cannot see how this could be possible. We need to remember though, that with God all things are possible and that we must obey God and that means obey His word. This, seemingly impossible means is the only means open to us; so, it cannot really be impossible. We come to that false conclusion based on what we see today; we fail to factor in the changes that can result from persistent faith and obedience over a long period of time. When we consider how far we are from where we will eventually be as individuals, as families and as communities, the picture changes. These bodies will one day have become formidable bastions of truth. Many within an ecclesia will be competent theologians; all will have become knowledgeable Christians, well steeped in the teachings and the differing views of Scripture interpretation. There will be a world of differences between them and what we see in today's churches.

This is what the Lord calls us to. Consider the passage that immediately follows the call to unity:

“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.”¹²³*

The Body edifies itself, builds itself up, not through the efforts of specially trained individuals, but through the working of every joint or part. Childish foolishness must be put away. We must grow to a mature knowledge of the Word and be able to discern truth from error. This is far more than just the acquisition of a little knowledge; it is in-depth understanding of God’s word. It is a knowledge level that probably exceeds the knowledge of the aggregate of history’s best theologians.

As the ecclesia, the body of Christ, grows up “into Him in all things,” true unity, unity in the truth, will also grow. It will, with progressively less and less deviation, approach the perfection our perfect God requires.

Delay

Because the ecclesia communities did not continue to follow His instructions, the unity God called for has not yet been realized. They permitted their teachers to become first their leaders and then their rulers.

Instead of retaining self-government and judging the various views for themselves, they began to follow the teachings of particular bishops.¹²⁴ Unavoidably, division developed between the leaders and, while this was a necessary consequence, the mechanism for resolving the differences was no longer in place. The ecclesia communities, having attached themselves to particular leaders and no longer self-governed, were powerless to invoke the God-ordained mechanism for reaching unity, that is:

¹²³ Ephesians 4:14-16

¹²⁴ Acts 17:11

open discussion of the opposing views within and amongst themselves.

The damage thus incurred was alleviated by the early ecumenical councils that fought to define the rudiments of the true faith. Later though, as the Church of Rome gained ascendancy, the ecclesia assemblies became churches led by priests and self-government was lost entirely. Had God's injunctions regarding the structure of the body been strictly followed, history might have taken a very different course. The bishop of Rome would not have become The Pope who, with his bishops and priests, stood between Christ and His Body for a thousand years, and for many, stands there yet.

How then should we proceed today? The answer is quite simple; we should have obeyed God and adhered strictly to the ecclesia system He gave us. Two things are needed to hasten the progress to unity:

- the believer's sense of responsibility to learn the teachings of Scripture, and
- an environment that provides free access to dissenting views.

Both are key to reaching the unity of the faith God requires. The self-governed ecclesia community concept promotes the first and provides the second. It is the key factor that will break the current stagnation and revive progress toward God's goal for His people. It is the rescue vehicle for the current drifting and floundering Christian faith and for society in general. It may be a rough road at first, but it will improve as the ecclesia communities mature and become better able to distinguish between truth and error.

Perseverance

How long will the Evil One be able to retain the control over the human race he now possesses? How long will he remain successful in his bid to frustrate God's plan for a world that worships and glorifies Him? The answer fellow Christian depends on you! Will you rise to the challenge God has given or will you just sit back and let others take your place? God will not do for us what He commands us to do, but will wait in His infinite patience until a sufficiently obedient generation arises and finally defeats Satan's seed.

The struggle is not only between Christ and Satan as some seem to believe; it is also between their seeds, Christians and unbelievers; it began in the Garden and continues throughout history. Most Christians today do not seem to comprehend the great and glorious part they have been created to play in this battle against Satan for the future of the world. It involves responsibility; they are expected to play a part in the recovery process and cannot just sit back and let the world go its way. God's people need to wake up and see that they are in a very real sense at war with unbelief.

The Christian's warfare though is not physical but is rather a war of ideas. We must continue to defend the truth of God's word as against the foolishness of rebellious man's notions of reality:

"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;"¹⁸¹

We are in a war that God tells us will be won.¹⁸² There is still, though, the need to actually win the war, a long and tedious process.

Why are we not progressing as well as it may seem we should be? Why does it appear that there is so little being accomplished? One reason is that our church leaders have so neglected the teaching of the Christian's calling

¹⁸¹ 2 Cor. 10:3-5

¹⁸² 1 Cor. 15: 54-57; 1 John 5:4

and its attendant responsibilities that the great majority of Christians are very unaware of what God expects of them. Likewise, most Christians, seeing themselves as the laity, the lower-echelon members of their churches, have not spent sufficient time in the study of Scripture to develop the needed skills and to discover for themselves their God-given duties as His earthly representatives.

Many godly individuals have been discouraged and some utterly devastated by well-meaning, Christian public figures that, perhaps unknowingly, placed themselves between their followers and Christ. Such individuals can be an asset, but they need to be viewed, not as leaders, but as resources that can be employed to teach the skills and thereby facilitate the work of the individual believer.

Public figures can be a help; they can provide useful information, motivation, and direction on specific programs; but they are also imperfect and often lead astray. One example is the current pro-life movement which, instead of declaring abortion to be what it is, the murder of infants, a flagrant violation of God's law, has directed attention to the harm it does to the mother. They do so to garner as broad a range of support as possible, including non-Christian sources, but it redirects the thrust of the objection.

Instead of an outcry against the violation of the sixth commandment, they join hands with the humanists and voice their concern for the wellbeing of the mother. In so doing, they undermine the faith. When they give so much attention to humanistic concerns and simply ignore the blatant violation of God's Commandments, they demonstrate to the world their low opinion of Christianity. The efforts of many sincere believers in the pro-life movement have been co-opted and converted into something they never wanted, something that demeans the Christian faith.

This is not so uncommon an event; the leaders of a movement may start out with the right message but get so caught up in the immediate objective, in this case ending legalized abortion, that they lose sight of the greater cause, God's glory and the advancement of the Christian faith. Following the leader can be a deceptive activity and should be avoided. Serving Christ in everything one does and says is safer, and in the long run, is far more effective and productive kingdom work.

Consider also the magnitude of the effort thousands of God's people have put into the misdirected anti-abortion movement.

How much could they have accomplished had they instead focused on their own personal development as God's people?

What if instead many were shown the need for restructuring their own lives and many new ecclesia communities had been formed and populated? This is not to say that all such great movements are useless; it's just that they can be a great waste of time, time better spent on following God's directions to the letter of His word.

Christians need to see Christ as their personal Lord and see that it is He alone that they must follow. Their attitudes should always spring from their sense of personal responsibility: How can I best serve the Lord? Should I join this or that group or would I be more effective working alone?

What should the believer's goal be? Is it to end abortion, to accomplish some other great advancement of the faith in the nation or should it rather be focused on standing for God's righteousness in any and every situation? When Jesus said "seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,"¹²⁵ which attitude did He have in mind? How many Christians today donate and otherwise support the great movements but fail to speak out against the many violations of God's law they encounter every day, even among family and friends?

Yes, this must be done carefully but not with so much care that nothing is said or done. We should take our lead from Jesus; what did He do? He dealt with each situation that arose as it appeared, without delay and forthrightly. He didn't mince or excessively guard His words but spoke the truth in love. Jesus was a light in the darkness of this world, and we are to be reflectors of His light, not just useless onlookers that stand by and say nothing as God's law is trampled underfoot day after day before our very eyes.

It is important that God's people see themselves as Christ's personal instruments and always serve Him directly. They may participate in group action movements but always as individuals that view what they do as being done directly for the Lord. It is too easy to get lost in a mass effort and begin to see one's own contribution as trivial in comparison with the total effort. This can lead to discouragement, especially when the mass effort lags or is set back. Large movements often demotivate sincere believers by taking away their sense of personal responsibility. They tend to get lost in the magnitude of the task and forget that God is in control and will, when they follow His directions, employ every seemingly tiny effort they exert for His unfathomable purposes.

¹²⁵ Matt. 6:33

Humanism is prospering and the world is growing more and more wicked because most of today's Christians are not serious workers for Christ. They lack this sense of personal responsibility to Christ and need to see that Jesus really has put the future of the world in their hands. As more and more Christians become aware of God's directions, form and join ecclesia communities, and increase their skills and effectiveness as God's representatives to a sinful world, we will begin to see some real changes taking place. The nation will change, but we will also see ourselves change. We will gain confidence and take satisfaction in the knowledge that we are engaged in the work that God has given us, His faithful servants. The world will be won for Christ, not by mass movements that promise and attempt great things, but by God's faithful followers as they apply God's word in any and every situation they encounter, all their lives.

Strength Within

The many evils of our present ungodly society are visible and painful to the sincere believer. The natural tendency is to see what can be done to correct them. He chooses one or two areas where he feels he may be able to contribute and launches himself into action. In this he may be successful and actually make a positive contribution. There is, however, a downside. In doing what he did, he compromised to a greater or lesser extent his own personal development. In addition, to the extent he possesses teaching skills, he may have compromised the development of those he could have taught within the ecclesia community.

The perhaps less obvious or seemingly less urgent need is the spiritual development of the newer or less capable members of the community. Efforts in this area may seem rather humdrum in comparison to the great goings-on in the world outside. Progress is so slow, and it seems that so little is accomplished in the day

by day execution of such menial tasks. Teaching is, though, the task to which God has called His most capable people:

“The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.”¹⁸⁴

We looked at this passage earlier in connection with the responsibility of elders to be teachers and not rulers. Here we wish to note the greater importance of educating and thereby equipping the weaker members, as opposed to the natural desire to go out and do battle against the enemy.

God tells us here to take the long-term view. The most immediate need is not so much for more men in the trenches as it is for teachers to prepare and equip all the members of God’s army; so that they, as a larger and potentially much more pervasive force, can man the trenches. Why is this so? Well, obviously because God says so; He knows, as we should, that over time, exponential growth far outpaces linear growth. Effort spent in teaching others produces more teachers as well as more workers, and the rate of growth is far more rapid when teaching is prioritized. This is how God’s army increases in both strength and influence with the greatest rapidity and how the war against Satan’s forces is most efficiently conducted.

Teaching, here, is not restricted to elders or any special persons. It is a natural process that takes place in private or open discussions. All believers should be sensitive to the need to help those less knowledgeable than themselves. The teaching strength within the ecclesia communities as a whole is far more important than the external achievements of its most notable individuals.

The primary thrust of the Christian movement should be focused on building the base, which is primarily a teaching function. Every believer has, both within and without the ecclesia community, someone he can teach. The growth and advancement of the kingdom of God on earth is measured by the growth and advancement of the individual ecclesia communities. Inter-community and other external contact and

¹⁸⁴ 1 Pet. 5:1-3

communication are needed as well, but care should be taken to ensure that external activities do not detract from building the base. Lasting change is only possible when it comes from within. An order established by even a benevolent minority cannot survive without an all-encompassing base of support.

There are many examples of this in history. The Puritans of 17th century England, sincere and God-fearing Christians, while only 4% of the population, so dominated public life that they constituted a majority in the House of Commons. They employed their great influence to overthrow the monarchy and establish the Protectorate. But soon after their leader Oliver Cromwell died, the people reverted to a royalist monarchy. What did these well-meaning and sincere Christians do wrong? They took control without a sufficient support base among the common people, a serious overreach! We are to take dominion, not through partisan political action but through conversion and education, and then only when the people are ready and properly prepared.¹²⁶

The general population are taught by God's people who, in the ecclesia community environment, continue to build up their own understanding of God's word. Their education does not

¹²⁶ This is not meant to impugn the godly and long-lasting work of the Puritans in general. See...

terminate when they reach a set level of understanding. It is lifelong schooling that continues the advance of knowledge and understanding from generation to generation. God's word is a well of information that has no bottom. A lifetime of study may barely scratch the surface of all its treasures. The most knowledgeable of today's most renowned biblical expositors will one day be seen as mere beginners.

As the ecclesia communities and the people at large grow in understanding, the laws and general culture of the nations can be brought into closer and closer conformity to God's law word. The people must first be ready, willing, and also thoroughly understand the consequences, before each step toward a godly society is taken. These must of necessity be short steps. The desire to advance too far too quickly seems to be a persistent problem among God's people. As a rule, it might be best for the stronger to let the weaker lead and, rather than encouraging action, caution against moving too quickly. We need to learn to be patient and to do God's work God's way, even when it might seem to be a terrible waste of time and effort.

Scripture tells us to work to change the people themselves, not just the laws they live under. We are to declare God's truth and take those that believe out of the unconverted society. Scripture seems to say that we take dominion by depleting the ungodly society of its citizens and teaching them and especially their children to live by God's law. This is accomplished through the proclamation and teaching of God's word. The transition to a godly society is to come, not from an external agency but from within as the full force of God's truth emanates from its every level. To the God that loves His sinful creatures with an inexpressible love



The Future Here on Earth

We may not see the glorious future God is preparing in our lifetimes or even after many generations that follow us. However, as God's chosen and so very highly blessed people, we have been given the privilege of being a part of building this future. We begin by laying a foundation that others will build upon. As God's servants we overcome the world. It is written:

"to him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne."¹²⁷

We are not here to sell Jesus as 'fire insurance'. We are not here to just rescue a few into the 'lifeboat'. We are here to transform the society around us. God the Father has promised Jesus that He will make the nations His footstool. Jesus declared that He is making all things new. We are the means to these ends. We are His hands and feet. We are not called to bolt on an hour or two each week to sit and listen to an entertaining story. We have real work to do, work that will bless others as we have been blessed.

Our witness starts with our current understanding and continues to improve as we study, learn more and more of God's Word, and apply it to our own lives as well. Also, there is the

¹²⁷ Revelation 3:1

teaching of our fellow believers. This is the work of the entire body, of all its members, not just those recognized as elders. These have their purpose and function but the command to teach is to every member of the body.

The key to victory lies in our obedience to God's Word. Obedience in our individual maturity and corporate unity.

A Call to Maturity

God's people are called to maturity. The Spirit gives us a new "heart of flesh" and the faith to believe; but then we are commanded to learn from His Word, to "study to shew thyself approved," to apply His word by putting on "the armour of God". In the justification aspect of salvation, we have a passive role. In the sanctification aspect, we have an active role. If we fail to mature and to have a positive influence, we fail our children, the generations that follow, our community, and the society around us. Our personal maturity has deep purpose in changing the society around us and the course of generations to come. Mature individuals:

"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."¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Ephesians 4:14,15

Mature parents and grandparents:

“And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.”¹²⁹

Mature community members:

“admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ”¹³⁰

Mature members of society:

“Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men”^{131 132}

A Call to Biblical Eldership

‘Elder’ – Have you already done much reading and study and acquired some knowledge of God’s Word? If so, you should be teaching others. Some have more and others less knowledge, but everyone can teach someone; so, all should teach. Men that have the knowledge and skill to teach the entire community should be recognized as elders.

Teaching in the ecclesia community is to some degree everyone’s responsibility but elders especially, must be “apt to

¹²⁹ Deuteronomy 6:6,7

¹³⁰ Revelation 3:21

¹³¹ Matthew 5:13

¹³² Timothy 3:2; 2 Timothy 2:24

teach”.¹⁹¹ In recent years the Timothy Initiative¹³³ has utilized a highly successful approach. In the Timothy Initiative they are not establishing “pastors with groups of sheep” but rather what they refer to as “disciples that make disciples.” We are called to make disciples – not to forever be disciplined. Teaching is important because the community must advance. Its ability to serve God and impact society is weak at first and must grow before it is fully effective. God’s standard is very high and calls for significant effort from His servants.

If you feel the call to teach, or just feel you could teach, give it a try, perhaps with just one or two friends. God will guide you as you make the attempt.

A Call to Biblical Ecclesia

God dwells within the hearts of His faithful. We are called to be different. We embrace the difference. We live in obedience to God’s every word. In doing this we bear His image and are a light to the world. We live and serve Him as He instructed, in relatively small, closely knit communities of Godly families. These ecclesia communities have an everincreasing influence on society.

God’s people are not called to live like ‘the world’ around them. We are called to be separate, called to – “come out from among them and be ye separate”. How are we to be “separate” and yet “make disciples of the nations”? Is this a contradiction? It is not. We are separate in our private lives but outgoing in our example and our communication with the world around us. Only the weak among us and our little children are separated, protected from the evil influences that surround us in this wicked world. Capable adults seek out and welcome opportunities to explain

¹³³ <https://www.ttionline.org>

and teach God's truth. They do so willingly and eagerly to all that show interest.

Our faith is not a personal private matter only to be practiced twice on Sunday and Wednesday evening. As we read, "lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul ... bind them for a sign upon your hand ... write them upon the door posts of thine house, and upon thy gates"¹³⁴ whatever we think, whatever we do, and wherever we go we need to consider, apply, and teach obedience to our God.

We have no need for institutions other than the God-ordained family and the ecclesia community. As we dedicate ourselves to His service God provides all that we need to sustain life and obey Him. We celebrate the Lord's supper as He commands, without the need for any external agency. Our remembrance of the Body and the Blood of Jesus shed for us does not need to be administered by an institutional officer.

Home church

Why did you leave an institutional church? Was it light on teaching but heavy on entertainment? Was money going into the building fund rather than helping the hurting of the community. The Timothy Initiative,¹³⁵ a highly successful missionary effort, has seen great success with their strategy to invest in orphans, widows, and rebuilding homes, rather than "church" buildings. The purpose of the tithe is not to build buildings but to help people, specifically widows, orphans, the infirm and the poor. Conflating the modern day "church" buildings with the temple of old is an error.

The ecclesia is not 'the end' – the goal. The ecclesia is 'the means' to answering Jesus' prayer. "Thy will be done on earth as

¹³⁴ Deuteronomy 11:18

¹³⁵ <https://www.ttionline.org>

it is in heaven.” The temple was destroyed. The veil was torn. Not one stone was left upon another. God now resides in the hearts of His ecclesia members. He does not need and no longer employs a temple or house here on Earth.

Unity

Unity of purpose and direction is essential to the proper outcome of any purposeful endeavor. Any amount of disunity detracts from the mission; much disunity can destroy it. To help us, God gave gifts to His people:

“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.”¹³⁶

The purpose of these gifts is the perfection of the saints, that they be able to do the work He assigned them, and so that they would come to a unity of the faith. What sort of unity might this be? Can it be anything other than unity in the truth? All must believe the same thing, and it must be the truth of God’s Word! No other form of unity—such as agreeing to disagree—will do.

Congratulations to you dear reader. You joined us in a look at how Christians are so very different in their inner being from the world at large. We also considered what God says about how we should live as His chosen and so highly blessed people. Finally, we saw something of what our Lord requires of us as His

¹³⁶ *Ephesians 4:11-13*

emissaries to a lost and wandering world. In summary, He asks that:

- We recognize that we are very different from what we once were.
- We, grateful for all God has done for us, dedicate our lives to serving Him.
- We separate our children and our private lives from ungodly influences.
- We continue to study and increase our understanding of God's Word.
- We demonstrate God's love through compassion and generosity to those in need.
- We share the Gospel message with those that show interest.
- We bring the true converts into closer contact and then membership in the community.

Our purpose in this and in life itself is to consider God in all we do. We don't need to (although some would) do great deeds in God's service. We do what we can to serve God in whatever situation arises. Most of our work is day-to-day. We keep asking God, how do I help this person, family, or gathering of people? How can I do so in a way that will both help them and give thee the glory?

A Call to the Full Commission

“Make disciples.” Teaching is part of discipling but there is something more buried in the term ‘disciple’. To simply reduce the concept to teaching is an error. This is a case of tradition blurring the original meaning of the commission that Jesus gave to us. To further reduce it to just ‘telling people about Jesus’ is an even more serious error. To understand it fully we need to

explore the historical context of ‘disciple’. How does one go about gaining disciples? How did people become disciples?

Apprenticeship

A good way to understand gaining disciples is to look at a very similar concept, namely, ‘apprenticeship’. The master-apprentice relationship is a lesson for how we approach making disciples. One does not gain apprentices by force. That would be slavery. The way that one gained an apprentice was by being excellent in one’s particular skill. For example, a very skilled blacksmith would have others approach him requesting to be an apprentice in order to learn how to be a great blacksmith. One would not go to a blacksmith with no talent or reputation for excellence.

To apply that principle, we should be living Godly – successful lives, lives successful by God’s standards: with a “peace that passes all understanding” and a joy that is “unspeakable.” Others should look at us and want to learn from us. So, we do not gain influence by force but rather through faithful obedience, obedience that God blesses for all to see. Others will see us – “a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again: but the wicked shall fall into mischief.”¹³⁷

The ecclesia is not here just to build the ecclesia. The ecclesia members are populating the Kingdom – abiding in it and enrolling additional members. They are making disciples for a purpose.

None of the commissions given by God have been rescinded. In addition to making disciples, we are still to subdue and cultivate the earth – that is to defend and develop all of creation.

¹³⁷ Proverbs 24:16

Misguided environmentalism should be replaced with Godly stewardship.

A Promise of Victory:

The Christian faith has made a tremendous difference in man's condition. It has lifted him up from his pitiful existence in the previous pagan world. But even though God has blessed him greatly, his obedience has been far from perfect. Two thousand years have passed since Christ issued His Great Commission and it still seems a long way from fulfillment. The good progress of the early centuries faded long ago and for the last century or more the Christian West has seen regress instead of progress. It seems that whenever the kingdom of God advanced a step forward, it then suffered a relapse. This has been a persistent characteristic: the early Christians influenced the culture to such an extent that, in effect they conquered Rome. Later, though, they degenerated into churches and eventually Catholicism. The church fathers, in the first few ecumenical councils, did much to clarify and strengthen the faith; but the later bishops handed down heretical decisions.¹³⁸ The Reformers did much to correct the excesses of Catholicism but didn't go far enough; they failed to eliminate the class-oriented, clergy/laity church system. The early Calvinists made great gains in England and America but they too failed to maintain their original vigor. Rushdoony expressed it this way:

“On all sides the church answers have failed. The union of church and state has not been successful, and, however

¹³⁸ See R. J. Rushdoony, “The Foundations of Social Order, Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church, pp 148-160.

we may prefer it, the separation of church and state has not been successful either.”¹⁹⁸

Why was this the case? Why did the fervor of God’s people fade after each advance? They didn’t just run out of steam and wind down; something was, and still is, fundamentally wrong. The answer lies in our stinginess, our persistent holding back from full obedience. God cannot be satisfied with the temporary and partial obedience He has consistently been given.

How much further must the situation deteriorate before we Christians, God’s chosen world-changers, wake up to our responsibilities and begin doing the work God has assigned us, and uniquely gifted us, to do? Sadly, among Christians in general today there does not seem to be any real sense of responsibility for the condition of the world around them.

Many are ready to give nominal support on specific issues, but this is insufficient. Real support will only be given when Christians:

- Acquire a sense of personal responsibility to Christ in the entire Great Commission,
- Prepare themselves to do God’s work God’s way, and
- Take the initiative to do everything they can (as individuals!) to further God’s kingdom.

What is needed without delay is a return to the God-given formula for Christian living in today’s Pagan world. The ecclesia needs to hear and heed God’s call to “come out from among them and be ye separate.”¹⁹⁹ We

¹⁹⁸ R. J. Rushdoony, *Law and Society*, Ross House Books, Vallecito, CA, 1982, PP. 112, 113

¹⁹⁹ 2 Corinthians 6:17

need to regain an understanding of how different from our unregenerate neighbors we really are and how great a responsibility God has entrusted to us. We need to hear God's call, the call to depart from the ways of this world. We are the ecclesia of God and cannot continue to wallow in the mud with unbelievers. We need to regain a godly notion of our purpose in life and begin to respond to this heavenly calling. We must set aside all our foolish worldly treasures and dedicate our lives to the only thing that has lasting value: the service of our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, the one who died to give us life. Others have died and many are dying today in His service, but so many are sitting idly by and doing nothing.

The next key step is the restoration of the early ecclesia communities; they are "the pillar and ground of the truth."

*"But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the ~~church~~ [ecclesia] of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."*²⁰⁰

The only sure and certain truth is God's truth, and it is His people, His ecclesia, the most blessed and favored of all people, that are charged with disseminating that sure and certain truth throughout the world.

The nations cannot be taught by an elite clergy; all believers must be so involved in the effort that it is the top priority in their lives. It should be the thing they never lose sight of and constantly work toward. We are to learn, do, and teach God's Word. As more and more believers take this task to heart, we will begin to see significant changes in the nations. We will see the truth taking root. and God's kingdom on earth sprouting up everywhere.

There are many today that God has prepared to take up this challenge. All they need is to be alerted to it and to learn just what it is that God requires of them. This is the task God has assigned

to all that understand the present great need, the need to awaken God's people and stir up the sense of the responsibility God has placed on their shoulders.

Are you one of these? Is God calling you to be involved in this urgent activity at this critical point in history? Is serving Him worth the cost of

²⁰⁰ 1 Timothy 3:15

perhaps giving up something very dear to you, perhaps something you have been working to achieve? Is it worth the dedication of your life? What did Jesus say in response to just these sorts of inquiries?

“Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you”¹³⁹

As more and more of God's people hear and respond to His call, glorious victory will become a visible reality:

“And their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the LORD hath blessed... For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so, the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.”¹⁴⁰

“One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one; at the rebuke of five shall ye flee: till ye be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain, and as an ensign on an hill. And

¹³⁹ Matthew 6:33

¹⁴⁰ Isaiah 61:9,11

therefore will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious unto you, and therefore will He be exalted, that He may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for Him. For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem: thou shalt weep no more: He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when He shall hear it, He will answer thee.”¹⁴¹

Because Christ is who He is, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, His victory and ours with it are assured:

“So, when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption,¹⁴² and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”²⁰⁴

“And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.”¹⁴³

“And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and

¹⁴¹ Isaiah 30:17-19

¹⁴² Corinthians 15:54-57

¹⁴³ Revelation 12:10

marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints."¹⁴⁴

*"The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever."*¹⁴⁵

Amen

¹⁴⁴ Revelation 15:2,3

¹⁴⁵ Revelation 11:15

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