

CHAPTER 10

THE CHURCH GOD'S PROGRAM FOR TODAY

Today we are living in the dispensation of GRACE (**See Chapter 9**). In this present age of grace, God is doing something very special and very wonderful. Before we move ahead and study the next dispensation we need to stop and understand what God is doing in the world today.

In Matthew 16:18 the Lord Jesus Christ told His disciples about something that He was going to do in the future: "UPON THIS ROCK I WILL _____ MY _____ AND THE GATES OF HELL (HADES) SHALL NOT PREVAIL AGAINST IT." From this important verse we learn at least four things:

1. JESUS CHRIST IS THE BUILDER!!
2. THE BUILDING IS UPON A ROCK!!
3. THE CHURCH IS THE BUILDING!!
4. THE CHURCH BELONGS TO JESUS CHRIST---IT IS HIS CHURCH ("MY CHURCH")

Today the Lord Jesus Christ is building something. He is building something that is very precious to Him. He is building something that belongs to Him in a special way: "I WILL BUILD _____ CHURCH" (Matthew 16:18).

This BUILDING is a unique building. It is not like the buildings that we see when we visit a large city. This BUILDING is not made of lifeless bricks or cement or steel or wood. This BUILDING is made of LIVING STONES (see 1 Peter 2:5) and these "stones" are those PEOPLE who have believed on Christ (the crucified and risen One) and have received Him as their personal Lord and Saviour (John 1:12).

The Body of Christ

As we have seen, the CHURCH is described as a BUILDING--a building which is made up of LIVING STONES or LIVING BELIEVERS (see 1 Peter 2:5 – "lively" means "living"). Not only is the Church described as a BUILDING, but it is also described as a BODY:

1) EPHESIANS 1:22-23

"and gave Him (Christ) to be the _____ over all things to the _____, which is His _____."

2) COLOSSIANS 1:18

"and He (Christ) is the _____ of the _____ (which is) the _____."

These verses teach us that the Church is the BODY OF CHRIST. Every believer is a member of this body (see 1 Corinthians 12:27). Who is the HEAD of this body (Colossians 1:18)?

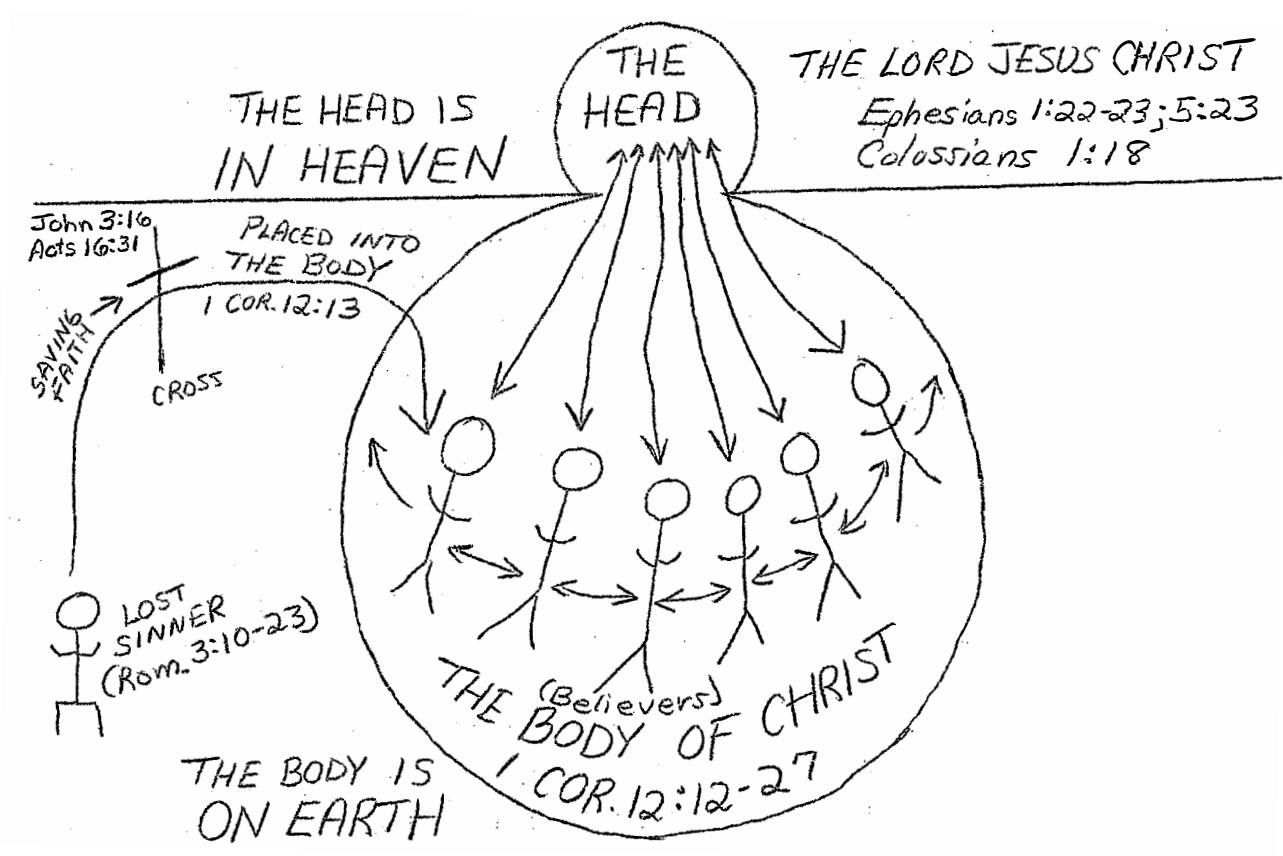
_____ The Church is a LIVING ORGANISM (a body) made up of LIVING MEMBERS.

Some Take The High Road



BEING A HEALTHY MEMBER OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

How does a person become a member of the true church? How does a person become a "stone" in this building? How does a person become a member of the body of Christ? Perhaps this diagram will help:



In the above diagram we see that the Head is in heaven (Col. 3:1-2) and the Church is on the earth (John 17:15). Each member of the Church is related to the Head and to each other member. No one can become a member of Christ's Church unless they go through the cross (by faith.) When a person does this, God places them (baptizes them) into His body (see 1 Cor. 12:13).

Are you a member of the body of Christ? Have you come through the cross (by believing that He died there for you and paid the full penalty for your sins)? Have you believed on the crucified and risen Saviour? Today all those people who are really saved are part of the body of Christ which is called THE CHURCH.

The Coming of the Holy Spirit

The Church has not always existed. When Adam was created there was no Church. In the days of Noah there was no Church. Abraham and David and Isaiah were all believers, but they were not members of the Church because the Church did not yet exist. There was no Church in the days of John the Baptist. In the days when Jesus walked on the earth there was no Church. The Church did not begin until after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

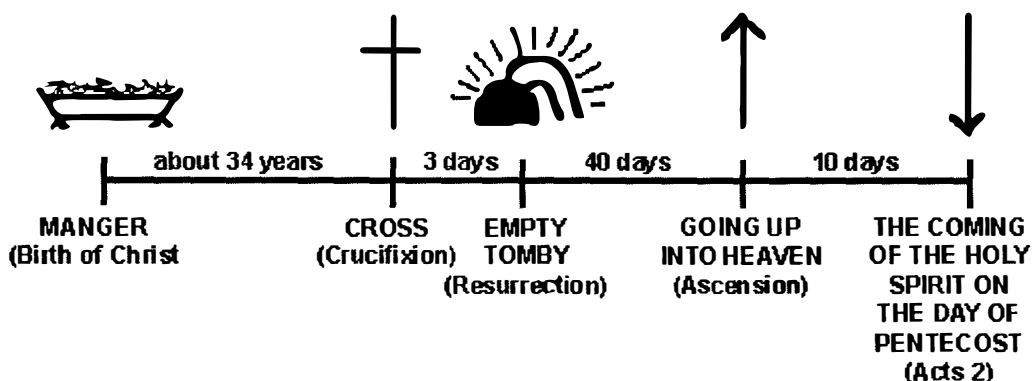
On the night before His death on the cross, Jesus told His disciples about a special day when the Holy Spirit would come to live in every believer. Look quickly through John chapters 14-16 (these are words that Jesus spoke to His disciples the night before He died). Can you find any verses that talk about THE COMFORTER? _____ The COMFORTER is another name for the HOLY SPIRIT. The word COMFORTER means "HELPER, the One who is called to your side to help and comfort and encourage you." Can you find any verses that talk about the HOLY SPIRIT? _____

In John chapters 14-15 can you find any verses that talk about the Holy Spirit being SENT? _____ Consider John 16:7,8,13. Do these verses speak about a time when the Holy Spirit would COME? _____

Jesus promised His disciples that SOMEONE would be SENT to *comfort* them (John 14:16), to *abide* with them (John 14:16), to *live* in them (John 14:17), to *teach* them (John 14:26), to *testify* (bear witness) of Christ to them (John 15:26) and to *guide* them (John 16:13). Who was this PERSON that the Lord spoke of? _____

The coming of the Holy Spirit was one of the most important events of history. It was on this day that the CHURCH began (see Acts 11:15 where the Day of Pentecost is referred to as the "beginning"). It was on this day that the Church was born. It was on this day that God came to live in His believers in a special way: THE HOLY SPIRIT "shall be _____" (John 14:17) and He will "abide with you FOREVER" (John 14:16).

The Holy Spirit came on a special day called THE DAY OF PENTECOST. We can read about the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts chapter 2 (especially the first part of the chapter). The following chart shows WHEN the Holy Spirit came:



It was on the Day of Pentecost that the Holy Spirit came and the Church was born. It was on this day that God came to live in believers in a special way.

We sometimes refer to Christmas as the "birthday of Jesus Christ." Christmas reminds us of the time when God left heaven and came to live in a human body: "the Word (Jesus Christ) was made (became) _____ and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). This is also called the INCARNATION: God *in* human *flesh* (see 1 Timothy 3:16 and John 1:14). God came to live in a human body.

THE DAY OF PENTECOST should remind us of the time when GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT came to live in *a BODY* (the BODY OF CHRIST which is the CHURCH). It was on this day that the Holy Spirit came to live in believers and the Church was born. The Church is the H _____ of God through the S _____ (Eph. 2:22).

NOTE: In Chapter 2 of this study we learned that there are some people who do not believe that the Church began on the Day of Pentecost. The Bible clearly teaches that the Church began in Acts chapter 2 (at Pentecost). In Matthew 16:18 Jesus said, "***I WILL*** BUILD MY CHURCH." He used the future tense ("I WILL") which means that the church had not yet begun but it was something that would be built in the future. In 1 Corinthians 12:13 we learn that people become members of the Church when God baptizes them into the body of Christ. The key question is this: **When did God first baptize people into the body of Christ?** In Matthew 3:11 this baptism is said to be future (it has not yet happened). In Acts 1:5 this baptism is still future. It has not taken place yet, but we are told that it would take place "not many days hence" (after a few days). In a few days (10 days to be exact) the Holy Spirit came (Acts chapter 2). In Acts 11:15-17 we learn that this baptism first took place in Acts chapter 2. It was on that day (the day of Pentecost) that God first placed people into His body which is the church. We should also notice that when we come to the end of Acts chapter 2 the church is in existence (see Acts 2:47).

[For a fuller discussion of when the church began see the paper, **When Did The Church Begin?**]

Adding to the Body and to the Building

According to Acts 1:15, about how many disciples (believers) were there?

_____ In Acts 2:1-3 we learn that the Holy Spirit came upon these people and the Church was born. When the Church began it was a body made up of about 120 members! It was a building with about 120 living bricks!

Later that same day Peter preached a message and many people believed. How many more "bricks" were added to the building (Acts 2:41)? _____ God was not finished building His church yet. In fact, He had just begun. In Acts 2:47 we read this: "the Lord _____ to the _____ daily such as should be _____." Every day new bricks were being added to the building and new members were being added to the body. Later in Acts 4:4 we learn that there were _____ men who believed. Did God continue to add believers to His body and bricks to His building (Acts 5:14 and 11:24)? _____

Today God is still building His Church. Someday the building project will be finished, but it is not finished yet. God is still saving people and adding them to the body of Christ. That which God is doing in the world today is described in Acts 15:14--God is visiting the Gentiles (the nations of the world), "to take out of them a _____ for His _____."

God's Secret

In Ephesians 3:3-5 the Apostle Paul wrote about a MYSTERY or a SECRET. This mystery was something "which in other ages was _____ made known unto the sons of men, as it is _____ revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (Ephesians 3:5). This mystery was something "which from the _____ of the world hath been _____ in God" (Ephesians 3:9). Did God make known this mystery to Paul or did God keep it a secret (Ephesians 3:3)? _____

A boy might have something in his pocket. He knows what it is but no one else does. It is a secret! It is something that is hidden and concealed in his pocket. No one will be able to know what he has in his pocket until he takes it out and shows it and lets people see it.

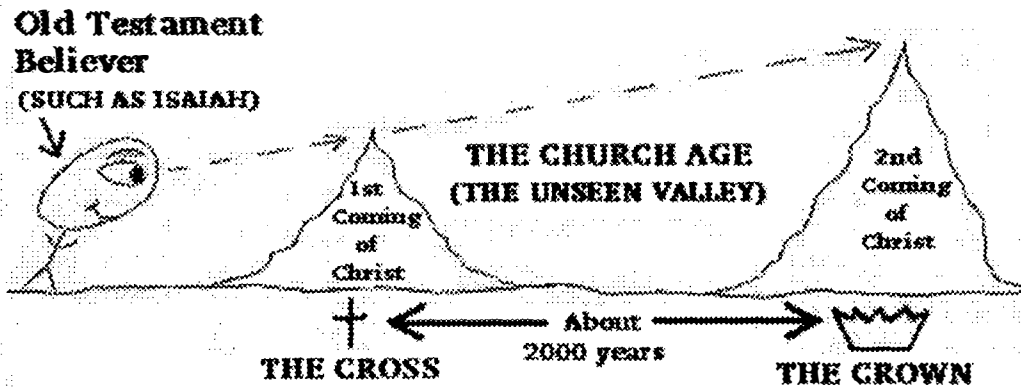
From the beginning of the world God has had a secret (called a "mystery"). God has had something in "His pocket" which He did not tell anyone about. Adam did not know about this mystery. Abraham and David knew nothing about this mystery. John the Baptist did not know what was "in God's pocket." But finally in the days of the Apostle Paul God M_____ K_____ the mystery (Ephesians 3:3). Today does God want men to SEE what was once "in His pocket" (Ephesians 3:9)? _____

What is this mystery? What is this secret which was not made known for such a long time? The answer is found in Ephesians 3:6 – "that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs and of the same _____, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel." This wonderful mystery is that saved Jews and saved Gentiles would be united together in ONE BODY! God has a body on this earth and this body is called THE CHURCH. In Colossians 1:26-27 we also learn about the mystery. In verse 27 we learn that the MYSTERY is "CHRIST _____ the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). Jesus Christ lives IN THE CHURCH! Jesus Christ lives in the hearts of His believers in a very special way. The Church is the "HOUSE OF _____" (1 Timothy 3:15). God lives there. It is His home!

The Church Was Not Seen In Old Testament Times

The truth about the Church was not made known in previous ages (Colossians 1:26). The Old Testament believer was not told about the Church. He was not told that someday God would live in a body of believers. He knew that someday the Messiah would die (Isaiah 53; Psalm 22; Daniel 9:26). He also knew that the Messiah would rule and reign on earth as King (Micah 5:2; Isaiah 9:6-7; Daniel 7:13-14; Jeremiah 23:5-6). He knew something about the first coming of Christ and he knew something about the second coming of Christ but he did not know about what would happen *between* the two comings of Christ.

Did you ever look at mountain peaks from a distance. It is possible to look at what seems to be one mountain peak, but when you get closer you realize that it was really two mountain peaks with a valley between them. This is much like what the Old Testament believer saw as he looked ahead into the future. He could see the two mountain peaks (the first and second comings of Christ) but he could not see the valley in between (the Church age):



Today we are living in the valley between the two comings of Christ. The first coming of Christ is now HISTORY (past) and the second coming of Christ is PROPHECY (future). The VALLEY in between is called THE CHURCH AGE (or the age of grace or the age of the Holy Spirit).

Where Is God's Temple?

In the days of Moses where did God dwell? Where did God make His presence known? Where was God's glory seen? Where could you find God's house? Where did God visibly express His presence? The answer is found in Exodus 40:34-35: "the GLORY OF THE LORD (the visible manifestation of God) FILLED THE _____." God made Himself known in and through a special TENT called the TABERNACLE. God filled this tabernacle in a very special way.

In the days of Solomon where did God dwell? Where did God make His presence known? Where was God's glory seen? The answer is found in 1 Kings 8:11 – "for the _____ of the LORD had _____ the house of the LORD (THE TEMPLE)." God made Himself known in and through a special BUILDING called the TEMPLE. God dwelt in this temple and filled it with His holy presence.

In the days of the Lord Jesus where was God's glory seen? How did God make Himself known? In John 1:14 we learn that God came to live in a human body and God's glory was seen. In John 14:7 Jesus said, "If ye had known _____, ye should have known my _____." To know Jesus is to know the Father! In John 14:9 we learn that to see _____ is to see the Father! God made Himself known in the Person of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. His body was God's temple (see John 2:19-21).

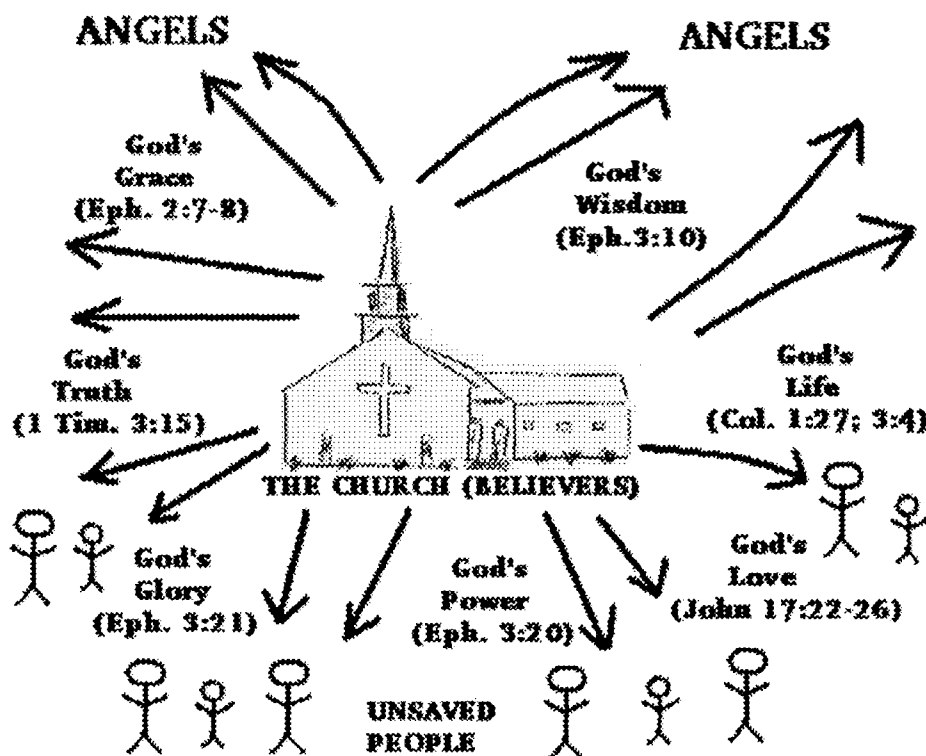
WHERE IS GOD DWELLING TODAY? WHERE IS GOD'S TEMPLE TODAY? Today there is no tabernacle on the earth. Today there is no Jewish temple in Jerusalem. The last Jewish temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. by the Romans. Today the Lord Jesus Christ is no longer on this earth in a human body. Where is God's temple today? Where is God making His presence known? Where can God's glory be seen? Where does God live and dwell today? The answer is found in 1 Corinthians 3:16 – "Know ye not that _____ (believers) are the _____ of God and that the _____ of God _____ IN YOU." Today THE CHURCH (made up of believers) is the TEMPLE

OF GOD. God fills the BODY OF CHRIST (THE CHURCH) with His glory (Ephesians 1:22-23). The Church is GOD'S HOUSE (1 Timothy 3:15) and it is the "habitation (dwelling place) of _____ through the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:22). Today God has chosen to make Himself known in and through THE CHURCH!

If God lives in all the believers (the church) then it is also true that God lives in each individual believer: "What? know ye not that your _____ is the _____ of the Holy Ghost which is _____ which ye have of God, and ye are not your own" (1 Corinthians 6:19). Are you a believer? _____ If you are, do you really believe that GOD lives in you? Does this make a difference in your life? If He is your **RESIDENT** (the One who resides and lives in your heart) should He not also be your **PRESIDENT** (the One who rules and governs your heart and your life)?

Today the Church is the place where God makes known WHO HE IS. The Church is here so that people might know that there is a living God and Saviour as seen in His living body which is on the earth, even His Church. If you saw the tail of a cat wiggling under a door, you would know that on the other side of the door is the rest of the cat! When the world sees the body of Christ (believers) living in the right way, then the world will know that there is a HEAD, even the Lord Jesus Christ who is in heaven. If there is a body there must also be a Head!

The Church is in the world to make known and to display the living God, before men and angels:



Making known God to angels and to men is something that requires **TEAMWORK!** Each member of the Church needs to stay healthy and keep growing in the Lord (becoming more like Christ every day). The healthier the members are the healthier the body is. If believers are spiritually sick then they will not be doing a very good job at making God known (because the

world will be seeing people who are very UN-CHRISTLIKE). How can a person be a healthy believer? What are some of the things that a healthy believer should do? What are some of the things that a healthy believer should not do? Are you a healthy believer? When it comes to making God known, are you HELPING or HINDERING?

The Day When the Building Is Finished

The Church was born almost 2000 years ago (on the Day of Pentecost, not long after Christ's death and resurrection). Ever since then God has been adding people to His Church. God is still building His church even today. Someday (and we do not know when) the Church will be complete. Someday the last "brick" will be in place and the building will be finished. Someday the last member of the Church will be saved (although we do not know who this is or when it will happen).

Something very wonderful is going to happen the day the Church is completed. Jesus Christ will return to take His Church to heaven. This great event is called "THE RAPTURE" and is described in John 14:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 and Titus 2:13. This great event may happen at any time. It is very possible that the Church is NEARLY COMPLETE. Perhaps God is now working on the "steeple stage" of the Building, as it were. When the steeple is in place the Church will be finished and Christ will come to take His believers to heaven.

Are you a believer? Are you a member of the Church? The best day to be saved is TODAY, especially while we are living in this age of GRACE. Are you looking for the Lord's coming for you? Are you ready for the Lord's coming for you (see 1 John 2:28)?

After Jesus comes for His Church, the world will soon enter a seven year period of TRIBULATION (a time of great trouble--see Matthew 24:21). The Bible tells us much about this future time of trouble and this will be our subject for study in the next chapter. Remember, those who belong to Christ's Church will go to heaven (John 14:1-3; Revelation 3:10), but those who do not belong to Christ's Church will enter into the time of TESTING (TRIBULATION) which will come upon the whole earth (Revelation 3:10). Which will it be for you?

Go to C H _ _ C H

What's missing?



**ARE YOU ENJOYING THE FAMILY OF
GOD?**

THE PURPOSE FOR THE ASSEMBLING OF THE SAINTS

“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.”

(Ephesians 4:11-12)

The saints assemble together in order to be equipped (perfected) for the work of the ministry. This is the genius of apostolic Christianity, but it is rarely taking place in the churches today. God's purpose is to train and equip His people by way of His gifted men (“pastor/teachers” etc.). When believers are well-fed and well-taught in the whole counsel of God, then the body (the local assembly) will be healthy, the LIFE of Christ will be manifested, and God will be glorified.

We certainly thank God for every sinner who attends a local assembly of believers, hears the gospel message and receives Christ as his personal Saviour. The main purpose of the local assembly, however, is for the saints, not for sinners. The local assembly, according to God's pattern, is to be primarily an edification center (1 Cor. 14:26), not an evangelistic center; a soul-building station (Acts 20:28,32), not a soul-winning station. Of course, if the whole counsel of God is preached and if the Bible is faithfully taught then the cross of Christ, the grace of God, justification and God's so-great salvation would be themes heard repeatedly. How can you preach the Word and not preach the gospel? On the other hand, it is possible to preach the gospel in such a way that fails to provide proper nourishment for the saints. Believers need more than a steady diet of “John 3:16 messages.”

Interestingly enough, the cults do not establish evangelistic centers. Rather they establish edificational centers to train their people to go out and do the work of the ministry. The people are immersed in a program of total indoctrination. The average Jehovah's Witness, for example, is ready always to give an answer to every man that asks him a reason of the *false* hope that is within him. The average Bible believer is horribly ignorant of God's truth. The devil knows which system really works. The cults do not lack for converts.

What do unbelievers notice as they come into local churches today? Do they see a healthy organism? Do they see well-fed members? Do they see “Christ in you”? Are they convicted by the awesome Presence and Person of God (1 Cor. 14:24-25)? The greatest need today is for a lost world to see the Lord Jesus Christ manifesting Himself in and through a healthy assembly of believers. The world needs to see Christ-like believers who understand and practice God's Word. When God's people are fully equipped for the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:11-16), they certainly will not be lax in gospel outreach, nor allow mission programs to suffer. When a church makes its priority edification, then true evangelism cannot help but be enhanced, as is well illustrated in 1 Corinthians 14:24-25.

The local church is for the glory of God. On earth each congregation is to function as a body that evidences the power and indwelling of the life of God. Each one is to be seen as a manifestation of Christ in its locality, living the truth as well as preaching it. The bulk of instruction and exhortations in Acts and the Epistles has to do with holiness and honorable interpersonal relationships in the local church (1 Cor. 11:27). Each congregation is to see itself as a “body,” and organism, and not merely as an organization....Unless this is understood and made paramount in the thinking of leaders and members, the local church will fail as a witness. But when this truth is embraced by faith unto edification, the community round about will see a witness. The unsaved who attend its services will come under the conviction of sin (1 Cor. 14:25), and the members will be fed, empowered, and equipped to properly represent Jesus Christ in their daily pursuits (2 Cor. 3:3; Phil. 2:15)....The redeemed—together as the Lord's assembly—constitute an organism to be treasured. Each believer should be helped to see what the local assembly means to Christ and should become most appreciative of the precious privilege of being part of the local testimony. --Carlton Helgerson, The Local Church