

# What Is the True Nature of the Local Church

by Ralph Sutera

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*The true nature of the local church is to exalt Christ, edify believers, and evangelize, while also equipping the church structure with the potential of refreshing.*

**Duration:** 1:10:20

**Scripture:** Proverbs 11:14, Matthew 18:20, Acts 2:42, 1 Corinthians 14:26, Ephesians 4:12, 1 Timothy 4:13, James 5:16

**Topics:** "Local Church"

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## Description

The video discusses the topic of world evangelism and the three ways to witness to the world: love, unity, and joy. The speaker emphasizes that these are the only three ways God has outlined for us to share the message of the Gospel. The video also mentions a study manual that includes a worksheet for groups to use in applying these principles to their own lives. Additionally, the video touches on the importance of revival preceding evangelism and the role of the congregation in shaping the church's direction and ministry.

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## Transcript

I want to make it very clear that when I talk about maintaining the unity of the body, compacted together, that that does not preclude the fact that there could be, and there are some times where divisions in churches or churches being divided are essential, such as heresy, doctrinal distinctives that cause people to have to separate because they no longer can worship together in areas of doctrine about which they do not agree. I mean basic doctrines. So I do not want to give the idea that that kind of unity is all-inclusive.

There are times where God calls some people to come out from among others and be separate, and touch not the unclean faith. Remember what I said when we started. It's whether or not divisions over personalities and little kind of pettinesses between us, and whether or not we part our hair right or wrong, wear the right color suit, or it may not be that petty.

We evaluate the kind of things that we allow to separate us. Keep in mind what I said to you would not separate our church because we are committed to the unity of the body. I want to clarify, unless anybody got the impression that I am suggesting that you just stay in a church with all kinds of theological heresy.

I'm not trying to imply that in any sense of the word. Now, the true nature of the local church. What is the true nature of the local church? And as you look at your manual, if you look at your manual, just glance at the manual before we actually begin to discuss that page called The True Nature of the Local Church.

The rest of the manual is made up of reference items. And aren't you glad we're not going to go through them all tonight? You see, this is designed as a study manual. And this is primarily for you to take home, personally and with groups.

Notice about three pages past The True Nature of the Local Church. There's a page that has some lines on it that says, In summary, we will. See the lines there with blocks in it? Turn it sideways, In summary, we will.

All right? What that means is it's a kind of a worksheet that any group of people who want to take this and use it as a worksheet in the light of the truths that we're dealing with will do so. You see, there are three columns, Principles, Objectives, and Means. And there's on the left-hand side, it's A, B, and C going down.

You see, A, the believer, B, the church, C, the world. I mean, C, world. Now, notice the top, the words Principles, Objectives, and Means.

So, under A, when we talk about believers, what are the principles that we believe? And then what are the objectives? We should. And then what are the means? We will. So once we settle what the principles are that we believe, the objectives are that we should be doing, then the means, how are we going to go about it? Then we relate to the church, letter B, same way.

And then letter C relates to the world. And in the light of this whole study, here's a simple worksheet where groups of people can get together and come to grips with some issues and discuss them and put some concrete thoughts down as to what we're going to do about believers, what we're going to do about the church, what we're going to do about the world in recognizing what the true nature of the church is and what the true nature of the body of Christ is. Now, if you'll turn to the back side of that page, there should be an article on the back side that says responsibility... Now, what does it say? Spiritual responsibility does what? Necessitates what? Accountability.

That's it. See, I don't have one here. You don't either.

You don't either. Okay, well then don't worry about it. You don't have to study about things.

Here's one of those. Okay, it has a diagram on it, but basically it's saying this, that unless you are accountable to somebody, then your spiritual responsibility is nil. It's good for us to sit here tonight and say, this is wonderful what we're learning.

And some of you are going to say that. And it is wonderful to learn. But a year from now I'd come back and say, what have you done about it? You say, well, well, I really didn't know what to do about it.

You know why? Why? Because you weren't accountable to anybody. Spiritual responsibility necessitates accountability. And we discussed the importance of getting together with people and saying, look, one month from now we're going to sit together and we're going to go over these principles.

We're going to spend a weekend on them. And then we're going to lay out something on paper. And then a month later we're going to get together again.

What progress are we making? And we're going to keep on assessing what is going on in the light of these principles and our objectives and the means. And we're going to make every necessary adjustment as we go so that we'll not merely hear about these things and say, wasn't it nice? Now we have another manual.

Well, you think you have a nice manual tonight.

By the time the week's over you'll know you've been there with all the manuals you'll have. And you're not going to be able to digest it all this week. And if you take it and just lay it aside you might as well forget it.

You're just wasting your time. But if we are committed to the principles we're hearing about then we're going to get serious about it. That's why I'm asking you to get all the boards out here this week.

Your church board should be out here all week. And every church leader should be out here. Every Sunday school teacher should be out here.

Everybody who has any part in the actual life of the leadership capacity of the church should be here every night this week so that we understand the importance of ministering and what it is to be one, together. All right? Now all of these articles are going to relate to what we're going to talk about even now in the second half of The True Nature of the Local Church. Now take a look at that page, The True Nature of the Local Church.

Look at three Roman numerals. The first one is the program of the church. See, it's the white page called The True Nature of the Local Church.

The first one is the program of the church. The program is to exalt Christ and edify believers and evangelize. Exalt Christ, edify believers, evangelize.

And then letter D is most important. To equip the church structure with the potential of refreshing, coming time after time from God. To equip the church structure so that the church structure will make room for times of refreshing to come from the presence of God.

That's a subject in itself. Look at the priorities of the church. Worship and praise, top priority.

Ministering one to another, right underneath it. And then to maintain a climate, maintain the climate, so that both of those two things can take place. Worship and praise can take place.

Ministering one to another can take place. The climate is wholesome so that can happen. Then letter D says outreach.

And there are question marks there. Not because I'm not interested in outreach, but because after I wrote the word in, I was not sure it should be written in there. Notice that letter C under Roman numeral I says evangelize.

So I'm not trying to make light of evangelizing. But I'm not sure it should be under Roman numeral II as a priority of the church. I'm not sure.

Maybe it should. And my uncertainty is revealed by the paragraph right underneath it where I suggest that I believe that continuous corporate evangelizing will take place when letters A, B, and C are right in a local congregation. When worship and praise are top priority, when ministering one to another are kept in sharp focus, when maintaining a climate that all of that can happen is real, then I believe the world will see that kind of a church and God will bring to that kind of a church people to be ministered to.

Evangelism results when believers are free in Christ. And I can tell you many instances of people who never could share Christ, never had any power and witness until God touched their hearts in Revival, and

now have a freedom to be able to share Christ with others that they never knew would ever be possible in their Christian experience. Actually, energy, not the program, is the result of letters A, B, and C above.

Spiritual energy results when worship and praise is top priority, when ministering one to another is given its rightful place, and when maintaining a spiritual climate is such. That's where spiritual energy results. Now, the program of the church is the outgrowth of the energy.

This statement is not in your notes, but I believe the program is the outgrowth of the energy, and the program is that which is used to harness the energy and to service all the energy that the Holy Spirit has produced. It's not to create energy. Many of us look for a program to create energy, and that's why it goes flat.

But when God ministers to us, and the Holy Spirit energizes us as we walk in the Spirit, then the church must find the program to harness the energy that God the Holy Spirit has created. And when that happens, you watch the long-range effects of a program that has been born out of Holy Spirit-empowered energy. And that's even true in evangelism.

Some of you remember Otto Koenig making the statement when he tells how when he finally met God in the jungle, after all his playing around with his carnality, he finally met God in a deep way in the jungle, that the nationals saw what a tremendous change there was in his own life, in his life. And do you remember what they said to him? You know his name. They call him Tuon.

What did they say? They said, Tuon, what happened to you? You've become a Christian, haven't you? Remember that? Well, that must be hard for a missionary to take. Here he's out there sponsored by your churches, and he goes out there, and the nationals couldn't even see him as a Christian because of his carnality. And when God broke his heart and dealt with him over his sin and self-life and filled him with the Spirit, the nationals, even the unconverted nationals said, you must have become a Christian, haven't you? You see what happened? Now he has a ministry.

And he tells how God gave him the ministry after he was thoroughly right with God. So I believe the priorities of the church must be such that outreach and influence to the world will come, resulting from our meeting God. Now along that line, when you talk about ministering one to another, there are all kinds of articles that you'll want to read.

The one Let's Be Friends, Cosmetic Christianity, and Superstar Christianity. You won't want to read them now, but those are the ones that relate to the whole truth that we need to minister to each other in witness, in sharing, in testimony, in giving of ourselves. Now look at number three, the plan of God.

The plan of God for the church. Romans number three. The plan of God for the church is, first of all, that God has called out certain men with a ministry of the Word.

Certain men in the ministry of the Word. Then he calls out other men into a ministry of oversight and feeding the church. I believe that both the Apostles Paul and Peter called them elders.

And even St. Peter classified himself with those men as an elder on the same level with them. The note is very important. And I'm not making any attempt to delineate titles.

Whether you're calling elders or deacons or trustees or whoever you may have, board members, you fit the principles into whatever your framework is in your own local congregation. And don't squabble over it

in words. Number, letter C says that there's another plan of God.

He calls other people in a congregation into a ministry of helps. A ministry of helps. And those are all kinds of ministries.

And it's beautiful when God begins to work in such a way. If you want to make a note or take a look at the article, hold your place there. Look at the article called The Church with 900 Ministers.

Take a look at that article. The Church with 900 Ministers. And I'm just going to pinpoint a few statements on my copy.

Don't try to read my copy, but I'll merely show you where it is. The Church with 900 Ministers. It tells the story of this church in California.

John MacArthur's church. This was written in June of 1972 when he was 32 years of age. He said that two previous pastors had died of heart attacks.

A 16-year-old congregation. Both of the pastors died of heart attacks. And it goes on to say that he would have been the third one to go the same way had he followed the same pattern.

But he learned something about how the church had to minister. On the second page, he tells about, at the bottom of the first paragraph, he tells about the fact that his people, he started to preach the word, and that he would preach through the text of the word of God as his own textbook. And then in Ephesians, he saw the principle that his job was to perfect the saints to do the work of the ministry and to cause them to be mature people.

And he goes on to say that the church is nothing but a training place to equip believers to be full-grown saints. We are interested only in maturing believers. We believe God would have us stripped down to this bare minimum of maturing believers.

We're not attempting to do all the work ourselves. We just are trying to interpret from the word of God what the church, how it's to minister and function. And then he talks about how many young men are getting involved in the ministry, how he preaches doctrinal sermons and expository sermons through the word of God and what's happening to the congregation.

And then on to the third page. You'll see some interesting notes at the top of the third page. He says, is the objective to equip believers so that they might do the work of the ministry being realized? Well, he says, the people need in particular areas, see needs in particular areas, so they make suggestions to the pastor.

And then he says, I say to them, it's your church, go to it. And then he says, look what happens. The ideas, most of the ideas of what the church should be come from, they do not originate with, they originate with a congregation, not with a pastoral leadership.

Then he says, on Saturday they get together for small sessions where people get together and decide. From these studying planning groups, they evaluate the entire life of the church, follow up the Wednesday night meetings, the prayer cells and so on. As a result of it, look what happens as a result.

Eight to nine hundred people now involved, eight to nine hundred people are now involved every week in that ministry of that church. No shortage of volunteers to a staff of a Sunday school of fourteen hundred,

and they have no shortage of volunteers. Would anybody like to candidate in a church like that? Not surprisingly, he talks about the young men now being called into the ministry.

He says that he as a pastor meets with these young men, not to talk about the direction the church is going, but to pray with them and to believe God to lead them on. Look at what happened to prayer meeting. Prayer meeting was thirty-five and now is what? Five hundred a week.

The attendance, four hundred people on Sunday morning, to what? Nineteen hundred every Sunday morning without contests, gimmicks, or prizes. The church averages seventy visitors every Sunday. Then he goes on to talk about the training.

He says, can this be reached by other places? He says he believes it can if other churches would get back to the biblical principles. Now please, let me warn you about playing a numbers game, which it's easy for us to do. Say, well, if we go back to biblical principles as I was going to jump from thirty-five to five hundred and four hundred to nineteen hundred.

By the way, you'll be interested to know that this man's church is now over five thousand. This was in 1972. Now it's over five thousand people.

In this congregation. And it's a most beautiful, most beautiful thing to see how it's run by elders who are appointed for life. Or, and then they become, some become ministering elders as well.

And by the way, you can write into that church and get a manual that he has. It's called leadership. It's a notebook manual that he uses to train the leaders of his congregation.

Now please, don't play a numbers game. I don't know what God wants to do to your congregation. But I believe that we need to be committed to some principles.

And if we're committed to principles, I believe God will do what he wants to do. So we'll, at least we'll be certain there'll be nothing, nothing in our lives hindering what God longs to do in the congregation. You'll be fascinated when you read that article.

It will stimulate your heart as you read it. Now, look at where that's under letter C. Calling others into a ministry of help. And letter D. Calling of every believer.

That's why I'm relating to that article. Every believer to minister through his exercise of his God-given gifts. Everyone to do so through God-given gifts to minister in the body.

To find the creative abilities that God has given to all kinds of people in the congregation. To be able to minister in a very powerful way. When I, a little later this week, I'm going to discuss the possibility of that when I talk to the board level.

On the basis of people in our congregations being given the responsibilities to seek out the spiritual gifts that God has given others in the congregation. Rather than let people sit by with gifts totally unused because they have never had a sense that there was a divine urgency on the part of the church for them to exercise those spiritual gifts. Apart from a few sermons they heard and apart from the fact that nobody else wanted to volunteer for a certain job.

And I'm going to talk about how that can come about later this week. But then letter E. The scriptural basis of God's plan for these things to happen. God's plan, A, B, C, and D. What is the scriptural basis for this to

all happen? Well, you'll notice the scriptural basis is basically threefold as it's given there.

One, the diversity of spiritual gifts and ministries that God has given to the church. That's one way it's going to happen. That God has given many, very spiritual gifts and ministries to people.

And then secondly, the body function. The body function. And thirdly, God's plan for world evangelization.

Now I'd like to go to that first of all, and then come back to the body function. That's the one we want to discuss for the rest of our time, the body function. But let's discuss number three, first of all, on the bottom of the page.

God's plan for world evangelism. Now, you ought to order the tape, Lou's message titled, Three Ways to Witness to the World. Three ways to witness to the world.

And that relates to that very, there's the outline. You see, what it takes him one whole hour to say on tape, I can say in ten seconds, love, unity, and joy. Five seconds.

That's what it is. He opens the Bible, and he shows from all those references that those are the only three ways he sees. God says, are God's ways to witness to the world.

Notice, all men are going to know. How? By the divine love, by the unity, and by joy in the Holy Ghost. He said, by this, you'll be approved of God and accepted of men.

All those references relate to it. Acts 9.31 is the verse in the book of Acts that relates to the same truth of it coming out in the book of Acts, the early church, by the same principle, seeing it very clearly. Now, if you'll go from that page in your notebook, and turn to the next page, you'll notice there are, there's an article titled, What About Revival? And I merely suggest that the, or let me just put up these references as well, so you might make a note, I just referred to that.

The heart of world evangelism is growth through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. And it's Acts 9.31 and Acts 6.1 and 7 and Acts 11.21.24. You can just jot that on the bottom there, God's plan for world evangelization, how it happened in the New Testament church. Acts 9.31, 6.1 and 7, Acts 11.21 and 24, the heart of the matter about world evangelization in the book of Acts.

Now, in the midst of that all, how does revival relate to world evangelization? You'll notice the article, What About Revival? In that article, it is a letter from a pastor in Surrey, B.C., to the editor of Christianity Today. One and a half years after we had a crusade in that man's church, and God blessed in such a powerful way. He wrote to the editor to share with him the dramatic changes that took place in the congregation.

Now, even though I'm ahead of myself by going to number three before we do number two, yet I want to pinpoint out, he first of all said, you'll notice it near the bottom of the first page of that letter, where there are two or three stars. Number one says, the worship patterns have changed drastically. And he discusses that.

Secondly, he says, there's a greater awareness of the needs of other Christians. Now, just watch all the things that took place a year and a half after the revival in that local congregation. Number three, on the next page, there's a new honesty.

And if you don't have three in your notebook, just put three in there, just write number three, and just put a new honesty. A new honesty. And what he went on to say in it, that now people could express things that

before were very sensitive.

Now they could discuss things openly, candidly, in a willingness to be right. Now the pastor could preach on things that before would be very offensive. Now the people are ready for him to share all kinds of things, because they have a whole new honesty one toward another.

He remarked about that being an earmark of what God did in Revival. Number four, he said there was a greater expectancy from the people for God to work. And he goes on to say that now God's working was the rule rather than the exception.

Whereas before it was the exception, not the rule. And he discusses that tremendously. And then, he, number five, he talks about the laity more actively involved in the spiritual ministries.

People-to-people ministries. True people-to-people ministries. And he tells in that paragraph how people now come and they say, Pastor, will you pray with someone or will you come and pray with someone? We have led him into the reality of God's law and make sure we dealt with him properly and all kinds of laymen involved in the spiritual ministries.

That's what he's talking about. Isn't that what we want to see happen in the church? He's saying that's exactly what happened. And then, look at this, people are less aware of the clock, number six.

And he tells, now they worship God not by the clock but they worship God in spirit. Now they start at eleven o'clock sharp but never end at twelve o'clock dull. That's what advanced heaven says.

Many churches are like that. Start eleven o'clock, ten to eleven o'clock sharp but end at twelve o'clock dull with people worshiping God between the second hands of their clock. And then, in summary, look what he said.

In summary, he said, I would have to say that since revival there has been a marked change in everything from our music to our personal relationships with Jesus Christ. So, when you take a look at all of that, the six things he pinpoints, you see, clearly, the church being the church, worship, awareness of the needs of others, transparent honesty, expectancy for God to work, laymen involved, and now worshiping God in spirit and in truth. And when he talks about laymen involved, he talks about evangelism coming out of that church, out of those people.

Everything changed from the music to the personal relationship to Christ. And then he goes on and gives a second hand. The bottom of that article, I must be as truthful as he was to tell you that there are some bad effects to revival in a local church.

And he discusses them. And he says, he gives us the reason why. And it's interesting to note the reason why.

He says, I think we must expect some of these things because of the grip that our culture and pattern of living has on us. Do you know what he's saying? He's saying we are such victims of our own culture and our own pattern of living, we're in such a rut of the way we've done it for so long, that we must expect there are going to be some problems when there's such a dramatic, drastic change that has to take place when God touches us deeply in revival. And that's true.

And he gives the two basic areas that were problematic. One, polarization. He says that the people who step out into real honest experience with God tend to amplify the complacency of others.

Just because they moved out, it makes others look more complacent. It's hard for people to remain neutral when God works in a deep way in revival. And that's true.

Along the same line, there's always the problem of spiritual superiority complex. And that is a problem of those who think that we've arrived, we have it, we have the answers, and nobody else has anything good but us. And we look down at other people around us.

And that becomes as severe a problem as the other. And we must all be on the alert for that kind of an attitude. And secondly, he said, the people became more aware of the reality of Satan.

When God works in a deep way, then you must get ready for Satan to blast in a real way. So he said, that's a real sign of revival. Now, as you look at some of the other articles, as you go home, you'll see clearly they basically relate to all the things we long to see happen taking place.

The article titled Superstar Christianity is a classic of an article on the problem of always having the expert in town, always having the expert giving a testimony, and losing sight of the man who lives right next door or the man, the people he rubs shoulders with day after day. He said, I think it's about time we say a word for the ordinary Joe, the one who is the ordinary kind of a person, and let him share with me the reality about showing the importance of sharing in a very real and personal way. Now let's get back to that number two, the body function, the body function in the church.

You know, the rest of the articles relate to evangelism, whether or not true evangelism can come when there's no revival, the cart before the horse, we've had it all backwards, that all relates to whether or not evangelism can precede revival. In continuation, right in order, if I were going through in order, that's the way we'd be going in all those articles, in perfect sequence. But back to number two, the body function in the church to prepare us for tomorrow night's ministry on how do we minister to each other.

But under the body function, you see, the references given are the ones that I shared earlier that relate to the unity of the body. See that? 1 Corinthians 1.10, Ephesians 2.19, 22, and 4, 15, 16. The fact of the matter is I didn't even notice that those were the references I put there until just now.

So what is it saying? Don't expect the body to function unless the unity problem is straightened out. That's what it's saying. Don't expect, by human means and by human ability and by putting together some kind of a human program to be able to see these things happen unless it is done by the Spirit of God ministering to us and showing us what we are and what the church is all about and giving us that kind of deep-seated concern to be committed spiritually to maintain that kind of unity.

Then the body function may cause or create more problems than it solves if you're trying to do it by human means or legislating it. Now look at the body function. Letter A, peacemaking.

Letter B, spiritual foot washing. Tomorrow night we will give you the principles of spiritual foot washing. Letter C, burden bearing.

D, provoking to love and good works the body function. Peacemaking, first of all. What is that all about? Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall do what? For they shall do what? Inherit the earth? No.

They shall what? They shall what? They shall be what? Called the children of God. The peacemakers are called the children of God. The meek inherit the earth.

The pure in heart see God. But the peacemakers shall be called the children of God. Peacemakers.

Now the idea of peacemaking, primarily, is twofold. There is the connotation of being an arbitrator. Those who make things right with everyone they've wronged.

That means I make something right, I'm a peacemaker in that I want to make everything right with those I've wronged. Basically, it's threefold. Secondly, the connotation of those who become arbitrators or the in-between man between two warring factions.

That's the second connotation. And they're needed. But the third is even more important as far as tonight is concerned.

It's under number two. You see, number two, body function. Letter A, peacemaking.

Then there's a one. And look at that number one. Spirit-filled believers alone are capable of lovingly maintaining unity in the body of Christ.

So you say, if you're walking in the Spirit, then you're the only one capable of maintaining the unity in the body. A carnal Christian cannot. He is too self-centered, too self-sufficient, too demanding of his own rights, and he's out to prove that he's right.

He has rights. But a Spirit-controlled believer is one who has surrendered all of his rights and who has now learned what it means to have the love of, the Spirit-filled love of 1 Corinthians 13 pouring out of his life. So now it's love that does not look for anything in return, love that even can be misunderstood but doesn't care and bears all things.

It's divine love. It's a copy love. So the Spirit-controlled believer is the only one capable of maintaining unity in the body.

Keep that in mind. You say you're walking in the Spirit, then you're going to be one maintaining the unity, not being divisive in relation to the unity of the body. But look at number two under that.

Spirit-controlled believers alone are capable of making peace for those who are distressed and not capable of making it for themselves. Now what does that mean? In every congregation there are some people who are distressed, disrupted, some emotionally, some physically, some because of circumstances of life. There seem to be some families in every congregation that are always on edge, always up in the air, can never seem to become stabilized.

They don't seem to have the ability to make peace for themselves, to be able to find the stability of life and family that they must have if they're going to make it in their Christian experience. And God is looking for people to be peacemakers. Take the word literally.

Making peace for those who cannot make it for themselves. Literally meaning those whose lives have found a stability and a source of strength and a power in their experience to now be able to take on the responsibility of all kinds of people in a congregation who need the undergirding and the strengthening and the stability of another family. Somebody who will become the support and the strength of one who cannot make it.

And all of our churches have those people. Both kinds. But most of us are too self-centered.

I know of a godly man who is now in heaven. I greatly admire him. But you know, this was an area to him that seemed to be somewhat of a blind spot in our congregation.

He would say to me, you know Ralph, you know I really don't need any of those interpersonal relationship ministries. I don't need sharing. I don't need testimony.

All I really need is to come to church and sit in a regular Sunday morning formal service or a service that goes in order and hear it take place and enter in and worship, hear the preaching, enjoy the preaching, revel in the truth, and go home absolutely fed and satisfied in my Christian experience. I don't need any fellowship gatherings. I don't need any testimonies.

I don't need this. At least that's what he says. And I'm not questioning about that.

I had a hard time completely understanding that. But I turned to him and I said, I called him by name, I said, Brother, you know you've been a great blessing and inspiration to a lot of people by the stability of your lifestyle, the way in which God has used you. Did you ever stop to think that there are people in this congregation who need your undergirding, who need your arm around them, who look up to you as a spiritual leader, who need your support, who need your encouragement, who need you to say a word to them, who need you to say amen to their testimony, who need you to be on your knees praying with them, who need you for their needs.

I said, Brother, what you somehow have lost is the body function of the true body of Christ. Do you know that's so real? Do you notice how God says it when it talks about having the mind of Christ? There's a little simple verse in 1 Corinthians 2.16 that says one statement, there's one statement made in it, the end of the verse, after it talks about the carnal man, the natural man, and it talks about the things of God are hidden from their eyes. The last statement, does anybody have it already? 1 Corinthians 2.16, where does that last statement read? But we have the mind of Christ.

What is the key word? We. It's never I have the mind of Christ. It's we have the mind of Christ.

Corporately, collectively, I know a man needs to have the mind of Christ for his own individual life and know the will of God for his own individual life. I'm not stubborn. Or am I? But when it comes to the body of Christ, don't you ever listen for one moment to one lady who stands up and says, folks, I want to tell you what God has told me to tell you that this church has to do.

I've had a divine revelation from God. I had a vision last night and I had a voice from heaven speak to me and unless all of you do it, you're condemned to this. No, don't believe it for one moment.

Don't waste the time of day with it. In fact, the church leaders ought to deal with it. Don't allow it.

The mind of Christ for the body of Christ is always corporately known. There will be a unity in plurality. There will be, we have the mind of Christ.

Together, collectively, corporately, it is in perfect accord with every principle that relates to the body of believers. Now there's another statement that relates to that, Ephesians 3.20. And God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask, all that who? We ask or think according to the power that works in me. In what? Us.

You see that? Corporately, corporately we release the power of God. We untie God's hand so he can work. It's in us.

The tremendous importance of a body functioning is one. No wonder the unity of the body, maintaining that is so essential. If you see me putting up my hands more than once this week, you'll know what I mean.

Those who are not here tonight will wonder and think I'm ready to be committed. You'll know what it means. That's true.

And then there's another connotation. It's 1 Corinthians 11.29 where it talks about the Lord's suffering. And it talks about eating and drinking unworthily.

And it says if we do so, we are eating and drinking what? Damnation unto ourselves. Why are we eating and drinking damnation unto ourselves? Why? What is the reason given in chapter 11, verse 29? What is the reason given? Why? Not what? Deserting what? The Lord's what? Body. Oh, you thought that only meant Christ on the cross, didn't you? You didn't get a right view of him on the cross.

And it does mean that. But in the truest sense, what is the Lord's body? ...of the Lord's body. Letter B says, spiritual foot washing.

It's not only peacemaking, but it's spiritual foot washing. And tomorrow night, we're going to discuss that. I was in a pastor's meeting one night, one day, and there were about 50 pastors there and I was just a guest.

We were holding a crusade in town, we were just guests, not speakers. And the man said, Brother, why don't you just get up and tell us a little bit of what's happening in town? And I just got up and made a simple statement. I said, You know, it's just wonderful to see the spiritual foot washing that's going on among God's people.

How God is ministering to people, how we're relating to each other, and how the spiritual foot washing, we're just getting all kinds of things straightened out. I sat down. Ten minutes later, the speaker of the evening, the speaker of the morning got up to speak, and he kind of got the pulpit, like this, and he rocked back and forth, up a little bit like this, you know.

And he said, Well, you know, we hear a lot these days about foot washing. He should have said this morning, we just heard about foot washing. And he was the kind of man that everybody respected because of his stature, his reputation.

And he is a friend of ours. P.S., he still is. He said, Now, I want to tell you what I think about it.

Before you let anybody wash your feet, make sure of three things first. One, make sure that the water isn't too hot. And those pastors just roared.

That was one. Two, make sure that the person who is washing your feet has clean hands. And they roared louder the second time.

And then three, make sure before they're done washing your feet or before you let them wash your feet, you get permission to wash their feet in return when they're done. And that brought the house down. And then he said, And now, let me get on with my text.

I want to speak to you this morning on the subject, the true nature of the Christian ministry. Lou and I were sitting there. Listen to this.

Say, where were you sitting? Underneath the chair by then? And he said, Turn with me to Romans chapter one. And he started in on the true nature of the Christian ministry. And here were the words.

Paul, Paul, Paul, what? Servant of Jesus Christ. Called to be an apostle. Separated unto the gospel of God.

And he went on from there. And I don't want to take the time for it. Paul, a what? Servant.

Called to be an apostle. And the wheels began to turn. Oh, oh, what is the truest connotation or concept you have of a servant? As soon as I say servant, what do you think about? What? One who serves.

What else do you think about? What? Obedience. What else? What picture? What mental picture do you have? Under-authority. Under-authority.

What? So you were getting it. What's that? One that shackles? Slave? No, not in this case. Not in this case.

Even though, oh, he's bound because he's under-authority. But remember last night about the right kind of bondage? All right? What picture do you get? A what? Responsible someone. Okay, so I save the time.

It's this. A king has servants. King has servants.

has slaves, servants. The connotation, king with the servants. When you see that mental picture, where do you see the servant? Where? At his feet.

The purest definition or connotation of a servant is one who is right at the feet of his master, right at the feet of the king. Whatever it means, right at his feet, to obey at that point. I couldn't help but think, well, if he's right at his feet, he's ready to wash his feet, isn't he? If that's what the master says, wash my feet.

I said, thank you, Lord, for giving me the privilege of being there to hear that man, or else I'd never be able to share with you. While he was speaking, I began to think, where in the Bible do I ever see any place where God says that whenever anybody is to be a rugged elbow to wash my feet spiritually and minister to a blind spot in my life, I am first to get a thermometer and check the Celsius, and make sure it's not 120 degrees Fahrenheit, make sure I'm not going to get burned, scalded. I don't see anywhere in the Bible that says, check the temperature first of the water.

But I remember Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, he said, Father, if it be thy will, let this cup pass from me, but nevertheless not my will, but thine be done. And what a picture of the temperature being hot. Christ going all the way through all that suffering.

What an example. And then I began to say, I wonder if there's any place in the Bible where it says that you are to check the other man to make sure that he has clean hands before he washes your feet, to make sure he's a perfect angel before he washes your feet. And all I could remember was a time in the Old Testament where God couldn't find anybody to get his message across.

No prophet available. And God was so absolutely committed to getting his message across, that all he could use was a filthy old donkey, bale and sass, smelly old animal to preach his message. I said, thank

you, God.

It's not for me to even look at whether or not it's a rugged joint or a ragged joint or a smooth joint going to rub into me. Whether I like him or not, it's not the vessel that I'm to be concerned with. It's whether or not I'm going to be willing for that to happen to conform me to the image of thy Son, the Lord Jesus.

And then I tried to find whether or not there was any place where I should get permission not to let him do anything to me until he gives permission for me to do to him. And all I could think of was the verse where God says, vengeance is mine, saith the Lord. I will repay.

God's saying, you leave the vengeance up to me. It's not for me to set it up in such a way so that if he gives it to me at 120 degrees, I'll give it back to him at 130. Not at all.

But what is the mind that's to be my mind? Philippians chapter 2, let this mind be in you. Which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal to God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of flesh and became flesh. Why? So that he might go all the way down to the cross.

And it's at the place of death that God steps in and God says, all right, now I can highly exalt him. Where? At the place of the cross. That's the place of exaltation.

And God does it. And when you and I allow the cross to be applied to every area of our life, and we're not going to be concerned where it comes from, and how hot the water is, and whether they were clean hands or dirty hands, and with no concern for revenge, oh, it's then we're allowing the principle of crucifixion to function. And as we do so, God has his own way of exalting those who live the life of death.

And then there's burden bearing. We'll talk about that tomorrow night. And then provoking to love and to good works.

Spiritual foot washing, then the burden bearing, we'll discuss that tomorrow night when we talk about how to minister to each other. And then provoking to love and good works. So I asked the man, I said, any provoking going on in you? He said, lots of them.

I said, but not that kind. The kind that God sends. Look what it says.

Provoke means to inspire and to incite. That means really to encourage. Needling on to good works.

Oh, I said, not needle or push. Not needle, but needling. How do you do that? You needle without him knowing he's been needled.

How do you do that? Provoke to love and to good works. I just really believe that God would be so thrilled if every church had a bunch of provokers who were committed to a provoking ministry. I've often encouraged young people how they could provoke deacons.

I say they do it all the time in our church. Now I mean the right way. If some young people, you want a program for a youth group? Call your youth group the provokers club.

Committed to provoking everybody who is lax in his spiritual life in that church. How do you do that? Well, if you have about three deacons who are not deaking, then you get some young people committed to provoking them. How do they do that? Well, they size them up.

They know they're not spiritual people. They know they're not in prayer meeting. They never hear them give a testimony.

Never hear what God's doing in their life. So they know something's wrong. And you have some spiritual young people.

So they go after them. So here's a young fellow. He goes to one deacon.

Say, Brother Jones, Mr. Jones, you know I admire you. One of the reasons I admire you is because you've been elected as a deacon to our church. Or you've been elected as an elder to our church.

And that's a high position that has a spiritual connotation to it. And you know, I'm a young person. Someday in the future, I expect to be a deacon or an elder in the church.

And I want to be prepared to be a deacon or an elder, a spiritual one. And you must be a spiritual person because they elected you to that position and our church wouldn't elect anybody but spiritual deacons and elders. By the time the week's over, you might have the answer how not to elect anybody but spiritual deacons and elders.

But in the midst of it, I want to find out what it's all about. Now how about if you and I get together, Mr. Jones, and how about if we meet next week and for about four times this month, once a week, you share with me what God is doing in your life and what it's like to be a deacon, the responsibilities, the spiritual obligation, and share with me how real God is in your life. Or share with me some dynamic things that happen in your life.

I want to learn from the faith that God has given you. Guess what would happen to that deacon? Sure you know, he'd have a heart attack. When he recovers, he'll say, Oh, I'm sorry, son, I appreciate your coming to me and all like that, but you know, this is income tax month and I'm a chartered accountant, I've got too much to do this month.

Well, if that's so, Mr. Jones, next month is the month of May. How about if we do it next month, the month of May? Oh, I'm sorry, after income tax time is over, I need a holiday. I've been so busy.

My wife and I are going for a trip to Europe. If he didn't think of it before, he probably thought of it right on the spot. And, well, that's all right.

You deserve that, Mr. Jones. But then how about the month of June? Now he has heart failure. Do you know what happens to him? Sure you know what happens to him.

How is a deacon going to keep saying no to a young person who wants to get close to that deacon to find out what God's doing in his life and still be respected? The young fellow says, that's all right, Brother Jones, I'm going to go after somebody else. No, no, he doesn't say that. He says, I'm going to be with Mr. So-and-so to see what God's doing in his life.

And he goes around the deacon board. And he's going to keep provoking all the deacons. Why? Because he wants to grow in grace himself and he wants to keep those deacons on their toes spiritually.

Do you know what's going to happen to Mr. Jones who's on to Europe and Asia and the Orient and wires back that his trip was extended? Do you know what's going to happen to him? He'll probably use those two or three months to get caught up on his prayer life and to do some heart searching, but God searches

hard, and to bring the account up to date because he knows he has a day coming. He's got to meet with a teenager in that church. See what that teenager's doing? He's provoking that deacon to good works.

And we are commanded to provoke one another to love and to good works. So much, notice that reference is right where it says, and so much the more as you see the day of the Lord appearing, approaching. The closer we get to the end times, the more provokers we need in the church.

That's exactly what we need. So if you're seeing a deacon who's not deaking, then you're going to deak him up so he's going to deak right. And if you see a lady in the church who's not the spiritual woman she ought to be, then some young ladies are going to go after her.

And they're not going to let her sit still without... You know why? You know why? Guess what? I'm already back to it. This is why we're committed to the unity of the body, and we cannot stand that there's any one part of the body that's ailing, because the whole body's affected. And we're committed to ministering to each other in a body function of not allowing any dissipation.

And if you have two or three deacons on your deacon board who are not deaking, then the rest of you deacons ought to start deaking spiritually and provoking that deacon to good works. I've heard of some boards, some pastors have told me, and some have said almost every place they've gone, there's been one man or two men on the board who are opposed to everything they want, everything. In fact, one pastor told me, he said, you know, I believe that one man, if I were to encourage the church to vote for motherhood, one man would vote against it.

But the importance of ministering to those who have deep needs, and later in the week we're going to talk about that when we talk about spiritual leadership in the church. Well, whatever way it is God wants you to minister, let's be committed to it. It's the plan of God for the church.

Let's start sharing with each other. Let me just give you a beautiful illustration as I close. Here's a letter that came out of the Hamilton, Ontario crusade.

Some of you who are there will remember a couple that came from Missouri. You remember? Young couple, came from Missouri, Phil and Diane Bounds. They were about, she was about 21, he was about 23.

They took off about two and a half months of work just to come to our crusades, and just to be a part of them, just to learn, and just to experience, just to enter in, marvelous to see them grow. One Sunday morning, we asked them to go to a church in Hamilton to share what God had done for them. And what happened was, and what God was doing to us, what happened was, on the way to that church service, they had a little spat between each other in the car.

A little feud. And before they got to church, they made it right. And when they got to the church, she shared in the public service how that even that morning, God had to deal with them in their car about having to make things right.

Short while later, they get this letter from a lady in that church. Dear Diane, whenever I see you, this was while the crusade was still going on, whenever I see you in the meetings in Hamilton, and see the beauty of the Lord Jesus in your face, I feel a little bit guilty. I must tell you about it before you go back home.

Remember that Sunday when you came to Buchanan Park Church and shared with us? I was disappointed our own pastor did not preach. I really did not think a young couple like you two had anything to give us. Doesn't that sound critical? Then when you told of your little tiff with your husband that morning, I turned off more.

When the pastor said, you and your husband would be glad to counsel with any of us who needed help, I figured you were not mature enough to help me. Ever since that Sunday morning service, it has been bothering me. At least you were open about your struggle and confessed it.

I didn't think I was critical or was hiding sin. Ever since the Lord has been uncovering my heart, you little realized that your openness helped me to see my heart as God sees it. Whenever I think of these meetings, I will think of you two and of how the Lord brought conviction to my heart through your honesty.

May he continue to lead you both and make your lives truthful. May Christ always be magnified in you. As the Lord brings you to my mind, I will remember you in my prayers and in sight.

That's the body function, how we need each other, how we need to minister to each other, we need to provoke each other, to inspire each other, to wash each other's feet, to bear each other's burdens. And when you go home, you'll want to read the article, Cosmetic Christianity, and the other one on the same page, the opposite side, Let's Be Friends, that relates to the very truth that I've just now shared. How a woman said she felt closer to the apostles in the Bible than she did to the people in her own Sunday school class, because they are willing to speak freely of their problems, whereas all of us do nothing but hide ours and wear masks when we're supposed to be ministering one to another.

The body of Christ, the true nature of the Church of Christ, and the true nature of the local church, by this shall all men know that you're my disciples, in that you tolerate each other, no, but you love one another. By this shall all men know, how? In that they see that you're one, just like I am one with the Father, so they see that you are one with us, and by this shall all men know that I love them too, and that I've come from the Father, because the world sees an expression of the body of Christ functioning as one. Amen.

Let's pray. Dear Lord God, I pray that Thou will just bring us to the end of our selfishness, and our self-sufficiency, and I pray that Thou will teach us what it really means to know the true nature of the Church of Christ and the local body of believers. May we never lose sight.

May we understand that when we injure and do not discern the Lord's body, or when we do not care for the Church of Christ, we are injuring that which Thou didst die for, and that which Thou dost love passionately, and Thou didst give Thyself for the Church. O God, show us the seriousness of an offense toward the body of Christ. Forgive some of us who need to repent.

Have Thy way. While we're praying, where are those who want to be included in prayer? You know there are areas that you need to make right, and tonight we're just going to have closing prayer.

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