

Christ's Plan for the Church - Part 1

by William MacDonald

The church is a mystery, a spiritual gathering of people, entered by spiritual birth, and conducted on a spiritual basis.

Duration: 45:27

Scripture: Ephesians 4:1

Topics: "Church"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of the New Testament assembly, stating that it is important to the heart of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. He challenges the notion that the Church may not fulfill one's needs, stating that one gets out of the Church what they put into it. The speaker reads from Ephesians 4:1-6, highlighting the importance of unity and love within the Church. He also emphasizes the need for the Church to be a light in a dark world and to have a living faith that reaches out to others. The sermon concludes with a reminder that following the divine pattern is not enough, but the Church also needs the divine power.

Transcript

The subject of our studies together will be the New Testament Assembly a subject that I believe is very important to the heart of God Certainly very important to the Lord Jesus Christ He loved the church and gave himself for it It should be important to us as well People today have the attitude that the church perhaps does not fulfill their needs I Went there, but it didn't do anything for me. I Say such people are foolish That misses the whole concept of the church You get out of the church what you put into it and we'll be saying a lot more about that in their classes to come We'd like to read with you Ephesians chapter 4 1 through 6 I Therefore the prisoner of the Lord beseech you to have a walk worthy of the calling with which you were called with all lowliness and gentleness with long-suffering bearing with one another in love Endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace There is one body and one spirit just as you were called in one. Hope of your calling one Lord one faith one baptism One God and father of all who is above all and through all and in you all First of all, let's think about definition definition of the church Definitions are very important in the study of the Word of God Was a man years ago named Bengal David told me his first name was Johan Johan Bengal and he he made a list of 20 words 20 New Testament words And he said if you knew if you could define those 20 words you were well on your way to becoming a good theologian I Have searched for those words for years and have never been able to find them.

The result is obvious Now I could tell you that the word church as it's translated in the New Testament Comes from a Greek word Ecclesia, but that wouldn't help you a bit. I don't think you'd be any of the wiser if I told you that so I Won't tell it. I won't say it You can live a very normal life without knowing that but let me say this that the word that is translated church really means Assembly, it really means a gathering of people It's used in different ways.

It's a neutral word. It doesn't necessarily mean a church as we think of it today When we think of church we think of a building with steeple perhaps and maybe stained-glass windows and a pulpit and the like But the word really is a gathering of people. That's really what it means And that's why some of us like the word assembly better than church.

I say it's a neutral word It's used of Israel wandering through the wilderness the church in the wilderness wasn't the church as we think of it But it was the church and the assembly in the wilderness the crowd in the wilderness It's also used of a heathen mob in Ephesus in Acts chapter 19 a heathen mob you say well, where did it get the religious connotation? Well, you have to check the Context in order to find that for instance, if it's a Christian church, it would say like the Church of God or the Church in Christ in 1st Thessalonians chapter 1 verse 1 it speaks of the Church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ There the word means the assembly an assembly of people in Thessalonica who acknowledge God as Father and Jesus Christ as Lord Now we don't want to make a man an offender for a word But for instance if somebody should say to you are you going to church? I suppose technically the right answer would be no. I'm in the church. I'm going to a meeting of the church Because if you are saved you are already in the church, but you go to meetings of The church it's a gathering of Christian people There are two forms of the the church the assembly in the New Testament is what we think of as the universal church and There's the local church as well The universal church is made up of all believers from Pentecost to the rapture and really a large segment of the church is already in heaven People who have died in faith and have gone To heaven enjoying the glories of the Lord Jesus at the present time all believers From the day of Pentecost to the rapture.

We believe the day of Pentecost was the birthday of the church That's when the Holy Spirit was given as the permanent indweller of the church and of all true believers This universal assembly is called a mystery in the New Testament mystery Once again definitions are very important mystery in the New Testament doesn't mean what it means in language today when we think of a mystery we think of a story usually with a murder in it and It's woven in such a way You really don't know who the murderer was until you get to the end and it wasn't who you thought it was That's a mystery today.

It's not that at all in the New Testament a mystery in the New Testament Is a truth never hitherto known A truth that you could never come to by your own intellect unaided But a truth that has now been made manifest to the church by the Apostles and prophets The church is a mystery Paul speaks of it oftentimes in that way a mystery In other words God had a secret from all eternity that after his dealings with Israel down through the Old Testament and into the Gospels as well and the rejection of Christ at Calvary that God would establish a new society known as the assembly a Society with a heavenly calling and a heavenly destiny There was never anything like it in the history of the world and never will be again So we live in that church age today where Israel has been set aside nationally the church is now the people of God and Then when the church is taken out at the rapture God will resume his dealings with the nation of Israel The church is a mystery therefore it did not Exist in the Old Testament Don't look in the Old Testament for any Mention of the assembly it isn't there Don't look in Matthew Mark or Luke For any mention of the assembly it's not found in those Gospels that will shock some of you I know and I think I'll

probably get sparks from that but it's not there.

It's not in Matthew Mark or Luke It is in John it is in John very clearly taught in John the truth of the assembly that is We might look in Ephesians chapter 3 verses 3 through 5 To show that the church is a mystery that did not exist in the Old Testament Paul Is speaking about his ministry He says verse 3 how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery as I wrote before in a few words By which when you read you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ Which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men as it has now been revealed By the Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets Well that says it very clearly doesn't it that the truth of the church?

Was not made known to the sons of men in other ages but it has now been revealed to by his spirit to his holy apostles and prophets and also in Colossians chapter 1 verse 26 some people argue from Ephesians they said well It wasn't made known in the Old Testament as it has now been made known but turned to Colossians chapter 1 and verse 26 Colossians 1 26 He says the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations But now has been revealed to his saints It just says that it doesn't qualify it as it has now been revealed.

It just says flatly it was not revealed The mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to his things Now a lot of people think that the church today is just a continuation of Israel They use that word a continuum they say well Israel is going along here and all of a sudden it just metamorphosized into into the Church in the New Testament. No Israel and the church are very distinct if somebody were to ask me what are Two of the subjects that probably would open up the Bible more than any others One of those subjects would be the difference between Israel and the church Because as you might know there are many Christians today that believe that that we are the Israel of God and all the Promises made to God in the Old Testament apply to us and God has no further dealings with the nation of Israel The nation of Israel blotted out as far as God is concerned all the promises made to Israel are for us today They don't say all the curses made on Israel are for us today That's very convenient for them to leave that up let me give you some differences between Israel and the church First of all Israel is not a mystery From Genesis 12 right down to the end of Malachi. It's all told out there Israel Nothing secret about it at all, but the church as we've already emphasized is a mystery a truth never hitherto known Israel began with the call of Abram the church began with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost Abraham is the head of Israel Nominal head of the nation of Israel it all began with him Christ is the head of the church You entered Israel by natural birth You became an Israelite by having the blood of Abraham flowing in your veins at least some portion of it But church is entered by spiritual birth quite different, isn't it? entered by spiritual birth remember Jesus said Except a man be born again He cannot see or enter the kingdom of God and there is a phase of the kingdom of God which is contemporary with the church But we can't go into that now Israel is God's earthly people Now don't misunderstand me I don't mean that Israel didn't have a heavenly hope it says that Abraham looked for a city which has foundations whose builder and maker is God there was a heavenly hope but the the emphasis in the Old Testament with Israel is Christ's reign here on earth the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus on earth There are very few passages in the Old Testament which speak Clearly about for instance life after death or the heavenly hope very few Job had it Dave had it but I couldn't name ten verses in the Old Testament clear verses that speak about The heavenly hope of the nation of Israel They were God's earthly people.

The church is God's heavenly people Heavenly people Christ is going to come and take his church home to be with himself But where he is there may be also where is that the father's house where there are many? Mansions as far as the future kingdom is concerned Israel will be subjects of the kingdom whereas

the church will reign with Christ over the earth at that time and in these and other ways the church is distinguished in the scriptures from the nation of Israel the Universal Assembly There's only one body. This is interesting. There's only as far as God is concerned There's only one church the Universal Church as I said made up of all true Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and that one of the marvelous features of This church is Jew believing Jew and Gentile.

I made one new man in Christ You know, that's marvelous. We think of some of the racial strife in this country We think of that's probably the biggest chasm in human relations But it isn't the biggest chasm in human relations with the difference between Israel and the Gentiles in the Old Testament Israeli and if you told a Jew in the Old Testament that by believing in the Messiah He would become a fellow heir with Israel where he would laugh at you ridiculous Couldn't be so but that's the truth of the gospel that when a Jew believes in Christ and a Gentile believes in Christ They become one new man in Christ Jesus and I could take you over to Haifa Israel to a little assembly there in Haifa and you'll see converted Arabs You'll see converted Jews and they're all worshipping the Messiah together. It's really beautiful The it's the solution to all the problem of the Middle East and it's right there in Haifa But they don't want it the people in general don't want it.

Well this truth of only one body is something that we have to bear witness to and we do we believe that there's only One true church and that's why we don't like denominational names We don't like any name that separates us from other believers in the Lord Jesus Christ We feel this is good to testify to the unity of the body of Christ It's interesting I could take this expression Roman Catholic, you know that word Catholic means universal but Roman It's not so Universal is it Roman? That narrows it and so the two words are contradictory Well, some other words that are contradictory would be Plymouth brethren. I mean Brethren is pretty expansive, isn't it? It takes in all the people of God But the minute you put Plymouth before it you'd almost have to put Plymouth car to make it applicable, wouldn't you to most people today? Plymouth brethren A Christian brethren usable Christian brethren sounds pretty good to me. Yes It's good as long as you don't use it to separate yourself from other believers.

It's good I think if you have brethren with a small B instead of a capital B And you say well, what do you say to people when they ask you what you were? Well, I say I'm a Christian if of course you're a Christian, but I'm sorry I'm a disciple of the Lord Jesus. Well, of course you are We're all that but what else are you and you know They can never rest at night until they get you into some pigeonhole some Denominational pigeonhole, but frankly I refuse to be put into one of those denominational pigeonholes. They say well your brethren Well, I see if you're a believer you're a brethren, too You know, I like what Ironside used to say when they asked him what what? Denomination he belonged to he said he said I'm a companion of all those who love you and who keep your priest I'm a companion of all of those who love you and who keep your Precepts sometimes when people try to get me in a corner as to what denomination I belong to I say well What denomination did Paul belong to? That rather stops people because I mean if you read your New Testament Paul didn't belong to any denomination Did he there's only one church and that's the church made up of all true believers all born-again Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and we want to bear witness to that thing No denominations no denominational headquarters Where do you find that in the New Testament denominational headquarter? You don't find it at all But in that fact you see the wisdom of God the wisdom of God in not having denominational headquarters for instance when an oppressive government comes Like the communist government and One of the things they want to do is close down the church Well, all they have to do is get hold of the denominational headquarters.

Isn't that right if they can control the denominational? headquarters Then they control all of the churches in that denomination And that's been the history that was the history under Hitler under communism and and so forth Whereas in China today All through China probably the healthiest church in the world today is in China You have these little house groups you have these little assemblies meeting in homes. They're meeting quietly They're meeting underground. They're meeting secretly and You know the government could never root them out might catch one or two But that doesn't do it.

They can catch one or two, but there's still Thousands more meeting that way in China the wisdom of God in not having denominational headquarters And not only does it hinder government control But it also hinders the spread of error and this comes right back to our own assembly Most of the mainline denominations have their own Seminaries and those seminaries are the ones that provide ministers for their churches all the forces of liberalism and modernism and apostasy have to do is just seize those seminaries sometimes this takes years for them to infiltrate the faculties of these seminaries with modernistic men and It's like communism. It's a timeless struggle that pretty soon. They've taken over the denomination and Once again, we see the wisdom of God and not allowing this to happen and having the church independent and not under one rule And that brings us to the subject of the local church that you have the universal church But you also have a local church and a local church should be a representative a representation of the universal church It should do new it should do or say nothing that would deny the truth of the universal church You say well now you said definitions are important what is the definition of a local church and For instance, what is a meeting of the local church? Well, frankly, it doesn't give a definition in So many words in the New Testament of a local church But I'd like to suggest two passages of Scripture to you which if you take them together Will give you a good definition of a local church the first is in Philippians chapter 1 and verse 1 if he Philippians chapter 1 and Verse 1 Paul and Timothy Servants of Jesus Christ to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi With the bishops and deacons here you have the composition of a local church saints bishops deacons nothing else Saints of course that means those who have been set apart to God from the world through the new birth Bishops here are the same as elders They're the same as overseers the same as presbyters all refer to the same persons elders This is different from the current Concept in the world today a bishop in most church circles today is a man Who presides over? Several parishes not just one church for instance, but over several parishes a bishop it never means that in the New Testament a Bishop is an elder and there are always a plurality of elders There is always a plurality of elders in a local church Deacons the word here is a minister's servants Servants of the church.

This is the composition of a local church in the New Testament now just turn to Acts chapter 2 42 and you'll find the activity of a local church Acts chapter 2 and verse 42 You'll find what the local church is engaged in in doing Acts 2:42 I think it says they continued steadfastly they continued steadfastly in the Apostles Doctrine Fellowship in the breaking of bread and in prayer the Apostles Doctrine would be synonymous with the teachings of the apostles as Found in the Word of God today Fellowship would mean gathering together as Believers and enjoying the company of fellow believers holding things in common the breaking of bread of course refers to the communion service the Lord's Supper and prayers Now put that verse together with Philippians 1:1 and you'll find that a local church is a an assembly made up of saints elders deacons who gather together for the Apostles Doctrine for fellowship for breaking of bread and prayers Seems quite simple Doesn't it? That's a definition of an assembly somebody else has defined an assembly this way an assembly is a group of nobodies who gather to exalt somebody and somebody is spelt with a capital F an Assembly is a group of nobodies who gather together to exalt somebody and somebody else has said that our an assembly a New Testament assembly is a fellowship

of forgiven sinners Very good, isn't it? fellowship of forgiven sinners Let me emphasize here That an assembly is not to be thought of in terms of an amusement center It was not designed to amuse God's people To a moot amuse means to think away doesn't it or non? Think a is negative muse is thing non think and of course, this is the world's Activity to amuse people on their way to hell listen to what Leighton Ford said Jesus did not intend his church to provide bigger and better amusement for bigger and more upscale audiences His vision vision was of a church that would inject his light and life into a dark and dying world So we had better take the vision of Jesus seriously, or we won't just be amusing ourselves to death We'll be amusing people to hell The church is not intended to be an amusement center. The church is not to be run on business principles today There's been an awful lot of talk in recent years about applying market principles to the church and many of the many of the strategies of the world have been transferred into the church it quite misses God's Intention for the church. This church is a spiritual gathering of people and it's to be conducted on spiritual basis Again I say a local church should be a miniature and display of the universal church people should be able to look at that local church and say that's the way the Universal Church is as well It should say or do nothing that would deny the truth of the universal church in the New Testament every Church is autonomous That means self ruling self ruling.

It's independent of any other church This is very important. It's not only autonomous as far as self-governing. It's also self-financing and Self-propagating this is very important to emphasize this.

I believe self-governing Self-financing Self-propagating in Revelation chapter 1 you find the Lord Jesus Standing in the midst of seven churches, and there's nothing between him and the seven churches There's no intermediary body at all. They're responsible directly to Him and this is what's meant by the indigenous church Indigenous there you go McDonald using big words. Well, we don't have to be afraid of the word indigenous Indigenous really means native for instance if I say to you Orchids are not indigenous to the Arctic Circle Well, that means they don't grow naturally, you know there in the Arctic Circle If you see one there, it's a surprise.

You don't expect to see it there must be in a hothouse Native well, this is God's plan for the church that every church should be individual should have its own elders Should have its own propagating Evangelizing as the church in Thessalonica was and should be Self-financed and directly responsible to the Lord Jesus Christ himself But the New Testament also suggests that while each church is independent there is such a thing as inter-assembly fellowship inter-assembly fellowship we recognize other Believers and join with them as far as we can in Accordance with the principles of the Word of God as we see them. I rejoice whenever I meet another Christian When he's a true believer, I rejoice I rejoice when I come across other Christian churches It doesn't mean I can do everything they do I have the what I have to do is be faithful to the Word of God and to go by what I See in the Word of God Let me emphasize this. Let me emphasize this that the test of An a local church is not the number of people in it But the holiness of Its members.

I think that's very good to remember Because in the United States today, there's such there's such Emphasis on numbers, you know, and the bigger the church is the more successful that isn't true in the Word of God God doesn't emphasize numbers He can use the weak and the poor and the base and despise to bring to naught the things that are that no flesh and glory In his presence. So let me say that again the real test of a New Testament Assembly is not the number of its members But the holiness of its members. I think it's marvelous to remember that the local church The church is the only society on earth Where it's your unfitness that makes you eligible Isn't that wonderful? That isn't true with the fraternities and the sororities of this world is it They want you to be somebody they want you to have something in the

bank.

You have to have these assets to your account But God takes sinners lost hopeless helpless sinners saves them by his Marvelous grace Makes the members of the church to be with him and like him for all Eternity, it's surprising. We aren't more surprised The church is used in there are types various types of the church in the New Testament I'll just go over them rather quickly First of all, it's a temple Paul says in first Corinthians chapter 3 you plural are a temple of God Temple is a place of worship speaks of the church as being a gathering of people who worship the Lord And that's true because you know The Lord gets precious little worship. Did you know that? Precious little thanksgiving and Precious little worship and I'm interested when I come across a group of Christian people who are worshippers Who can pour out their hearts and love and praise and adoration To the Lord Jesus Christ for who he is and for what he has done The church is a flock to be shepherded.

The Lord Jesus is the Good Shepherd He gave his life for the sheep that he might have not only one full but one flock and the church is that Flock it's a garden pot plot to be useful for him to be fruitful for him a Tilled field is really the word that's used in first Corinthians 3 9 a tilled field a garden plot for the Lord That's a beautiful picture of the church. Are we bearing fruit for him? It's a building a building to be enlarged and A Building to be added to all the time until the last stone is added the last believer is saved and the rapture takes place The church is a new man Abolishing differences between Jew and Gentile as we've already said it's a habitation of God Through the spirit. I Think that's interesting.

The church is a gathering of people where God may feel at home isn't that wonderful a habitation of God Through the spirit and of course the church is spoken of as the bride of Christ How can you have anything that speaks more of affection and intimacy than that? we Believers are members of the bride of Christ That was never said of Israel in the Old Testament And we're going to reign with him Over the earth for a thousand years come back with him and reign over the earth for a thousand years the church is the house of God where God teaches order and Discipline you have that in first Timothy 3 15. It's the pillar and ground of the truth The pillar was used in those days for making notices for propagating Facts and the church is the pillar and it's the ground of the truth. It holds fast to the truth of God making Sure that it's not attacked Is the assembly important? I say yes, the assembly is very important It's the only society on earth to which the Lord has promised Perpetuity he said what do you mean? I mean, it's the only society on earth that the Lord has promised It will never vanish.

I know that was a marvelous prophecy when you think of all the church has endured Down through the years. It's a marvel. It hasn't passed long ago, isn't it? He said you are Peter and upon this rock I will build my church and the gates at Hades shall not prevail against it the church will Endure the only society on earth to which the Lord has promised perpetuity The importance of the church secondly can be seen in the amount of space that's devoted to it in the New Testament I think this is a valid test How much time is devoted a great deal? Ephesians Colossians all through the Old Testament you find truth concerning the church The church is an object lesson to angelic beings That's marvelous.

I mean the angelic beings are looking down and they're seeing the manifold wisdom of God in the church That's a subject I can't Go into in detail tonight, but just think of it this way We're all kind of rough stones in a way that we need a lot of polishing and God brings them together brings us together in the local church and we're rubbing against one another and Studying the Word of God and seeking to obey the Lord and pretty soon. A lot of the roughness is gone and we're melded and unified together and Singing the praises of the Lord in unison. I think that's one way in which the church is a witness to angelic beings The the

church forms the capstone of scriptural revelation in Colossians chapter 125 Paul uses a strange expression.

He says to fulfill the Word of God Colossians chapter 1 verse 25 to fulfill the Word of God. Well, you'd think well then Colossians is the last book of the New Testament But it wasn't really he says of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God Which was given to me for you to fulfill the Word of God in what way? And does the truth of the church fulfill the Word of God? Well, it's the last great truth to be added here in Colossians and The church is the unit on earth that God has chosen to propagate the first the faith The church is the unit on earth that God has chosen to propagate the faith Somebody has said Everywhere the Apostles went they planted assemblies Everywhere we go we start organizations missions or organizations That's been the history of the church, hasn't it? Everywhere the Apostles went they founded assemblies everywhere we go we establish missions or Organizations God loves the church. God Loves the assembly his purpose in this age is to call out of the nations a people for his name.

I Take that very seriously at 1514 God's present purpose is to call out of the nations the Gentiles of people first name Listen, if I'm going to be walking with God, that's what I'm going to be doing Right if I'm going to be walking with if I'm going to be on the same wavelength as God That's what I'm going to be interested in Seeing people saved and gathered into local New Testament Christ loves the assembly God loves the assembly Christ loves the assembly a friend of mine wrote this if we could but realize that the dearest object in this World to our Lord Jesus is his church We would spend less time on peripheral activities and concerns our efforts would then be Directed toward the upbuilding of the local church where we fellowship and our love would reach to every member of the body Thus we would be caring for that which he loves most in this world God loves the assembly Christ loves the assembly. I love the assembly too. I've been Attending an assembly long before I would say my father used to carry my brother and myself on his shoulders through snowdrifts to get to the assembly My first memory is of a little assembly meeting in the living room of a home a few elderly ladies And maybe one or two brothers But they knew God They knew God and I tell you that had tremendous impression On my life, I love the assembly We should all love the assembly and we should be enthusiastic about the assembly I noticed down through the history of the church that men God has used in planting churches are men who were enthusiastic about it I think of boxing in India.

I Don't know exactly. I think that man saw at least 250 local fellowships planted I Think a watchman knee in China. He was enthusiastic about the assembly.

He saw great work done in China before he was imprisoned I think of JN Darby Traveled for 23 years over the over the continent of Europe and everywhere. He went he left New Testament assembly planted his writings filled 34 volumes a Man whose life was all for God and he was enthusiastic about it and they're in our own time There are men like that who have who have the work of apostles on their hearts I don't say they're apostles, but their their ministry is apostolic and they're going throughout the world and they're seeing Assemblies planted we should all love the assemblies. I want to tell you tonight an Elder in a local assembly means more to God than the ruler of a great Empire So why do you say that? Because I find more devoted in the New Testament to elders 1st Timothy chapter 3 Titus chapter 1 I don't find chapters devoted to kingship.

Do you? To presidents. I don't see that in my Bible an elder in the smallest most despised assembly means more to God than ruler of an Empire You know parents say now eat your Cheerios and someday

you may be president I say eat your Cheerios someday. It may be an elder and If we could see from God's standpoint, that's the the burden of the emphasis we would have in our hearts I Tell you tonight that the weakest assembly on earth means more to God than the greatest Empire God speaks of the nations as being a drop in the bucket.

That isn't much is it? But he speaks of the church as being the body and bride of Christ that's something isn't it That shows you God's view of things But having said all of this, I just want to close with this and you'll hear me say this again in our meetings It isn't just enough to follow The divine pattern you have to have the divine power to it It isn't just enough to go through the proper routine You've got to have a living faith. That's reaching out to others. We must never lose sight of that fact Shall we pray Father tonight we feel that we've felt something of the heartbeat of yourself and of your lovely son forgiving us forgive us father for Treating the church the assembly so lightly Help us to be renewed in the spirit Lord That we might have a desire not only for evangelism to see people saved But that they might be gathered together on New Testament principles with New Testament power to honor glorify Your great name We pray in your peerless name.

Amen You

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