

# **The Ministry of the Church**



**by Charles Wages**

**T**here is more confusion concerning the mission and message of the local assembly today than ever in history. Such Satanic issues as social and financial support for extremist groups as the Black Panthers occupies the concern of many large religious bodies. Others are expounding political views of the far right or left or philosophizing as to man's origin and destiny. All of these keep God's people from really fulfilling the eternal purpose of our Lord.

Among "enlightened" believers there must be a distinction between the church which is Christ's Body and the churches or local gathering places of the saints. It should be noted that the apostle Paul addressed his epistles to the saints of the various areas of the then known world. He taught the truth concerning the Body of Christ, but never addressed a message in this manner.

In II Corinthians 11:28, Paul is led of the Lord to state among his many tribulations, this, "Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches." It must be emphasized that God will take care of His church. We can't run God's business in heaven from the earth, but He surely can control heaven and earth as He desires. In God's great plan, He does instruct His children in their worship here on earth. Believers are given ample instruction in carrying on God's work in the local assembly.

Redeemed people should distinguish between preaching and teaching. Granted, there is much overlapping of these two important functions, yet they serve the cause of Christ in different ways to fulfill God's purpose. Many people think the manner in which a message is delivered distinguishes between preaching and teaching. It is not

the manner, but the matter that is important. Preaching is simply announcing a joyful message. It has to do primarily with evangelizing or proclaiming the gospel to the lost. In I Corinthians 1:18-25, we have a clear exposition and explanation of the purpose of preaching, “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.” The message is Christ, and Him crucified.

Teaching tends toward perfection or maturity. It seeks an end or ultimate for the individual believer. In Colossians 1:28, we are shown that Christ is preached (“whom we preach”), and then that “every man” is taught in wisdom, and “every man” presented perfect in Christ Jesus. The latter part of the verse is the purpose of teaching. II Timothy 2:15 and 3:16 are familiar but important verses in regard to teaching.

Really interested believers will make an honest effort to distinguish between order and organization. It is often said that the Body of Christ is an organism and not an organization. This is true, but it must also be remembered that an organism has organization. Take for example, the human body. It is truly an organism, yet it has structure and function. In I Corinthians 12, God compares the human body to the Body of Christ. Religious bodies that pay too much attention to their organization are like people who pay too much attention to their physical bodies. They become selfish, and neglect the real purpose of life—to honor and love the Lord and not self. We are instructed “to let all things be done decently and in order” (I Cor. 14:40).

Those who are saved by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ have such a wonderful opportunity today to serve the risen Sav-

iour and Head. God has given us the means; He has given us the message. Let us pray for a real mind to follow His will in this dispensation of the Grace of God.

It has been stated that there is more confusion and lack of understanding about the ministry of the local assembly today than ever in history. Many “churches” are becoming entertainment centers as they copy the world. While others are trying to fight the world system in the flesh. We all need to constantly evaluate the work God has charged us with in the light of His Word.

### **The ministry and message of the Church must be positive.**

In II Corinthians 1:17-20, the apostle informs us that he did not desire to purpose “according to the flesh,” that with him there should be “yea, yea, and nay nay.” Contrariwise, he said, “For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.” Anytime Christ is preached it is a positive message. Anytime Christ is preached in a positive manner, it will be a personal message. The ministry of the church must be involved in telling individuals about (1) God’s love, (2) God’s forgiveness, and (3) God’s future. It must be understood and believed that all people have needs. The familiar story of one shoe salesman who went to Africa and reported back that the people didn’t need shoes because they all went barefooted while another salesman went and announced that “everyone needs shoes” because the people were barefooted, vividly points up that we all should see the need in a positive and personal way.

## **The ministry of the Church must be purposeful.**

In I Timothy 2:3-4, it is stated, “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” This double purpose is at once evident. We must fit our ministry into this holy purpose. We must preach the Word that lost souls will be saved, and teach the Word that all may “grow in grace and knowledge” of our Lord and Head, Jesus Christ.

## **The ministry of the Church must be practical.**

Ephesians 2:10 states, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” To become and remain strong and vigorous, we must all work in some capacity for the Lord. Physical work was given to man for a reason. Surely we can see that spiritual work was also intended of God. The local assembly should be a place where people have an opportunity to give and serve. It is said that Socrates would hold his students heads underwater when he wanted to teach about living and breathing. The only way God’s people will learn about working for the Lord is by actually giving and serving. The book of Titus, chapter three, teaches us that we are “to be ready for every good work” (verse one), “to maintain good works” (verse eight), and “to learn to maintain good works for necessary uses” (verse 14).

The church should offer the opportunity for redeemed people to serve the

Lord. Everyone should know “that the fields are white unto harvest,” therefore let us pray and provide that the laborers will not be too few.

**The prime purpose of the Church must be for worship.**

The first five verses of Psalms 105 are very appropriate to read and study in regard to worship. They teach us that worship should be active and not passive. Too many people are just spectators in the service and often times not very interested spectators. Someone has succinctly said, “Many are on the salvation train, but too many are in the sleeping car.” At least nine things could be enumerated from Psalms 105:1-6 that speak of an active worship: (1) give thanks, (2) call upon His name, (3) make known His deed, (4) sing unto Him, (5) talk of His works, (6) glory in His name, (7) let heart rejoice, (8) seek the Lord, and (9) remember His works.

Out of the above thoughts, we can gather the fact that the mind should be involved in worship. We are constantly told to remember in the Word. We are instructed to remember His words (“judgments of His mouth,” verse 5). When we hear the Word preached, we should have active minds thinking of the meaning and how it can be applied in our lives. Don’t let the preacher do all your thinking.

It should be acknowledged that the heart be active in worship. Words brought out in Psalms 105, such as *sing*, *rejoice*, *glory*, and *give thanks*, all speak of an emotional response. We should be moved by the Word, especially when it speaks of God’s great love for us through Jesus

Christ. The Word can bring conviction and it can bring comfort. The Word can stir us and it can quieten us. We should never be afraid of the emotional responses that worship brings to us.

It must be realized that the will is involved in worship. The word “seek” implies that we need to search for right decisions. Sometimes decisions in God’s work and worship are optional. God wants us to seek and search what is best. The closer we get to the Lord and His Word, the more likely we are to make the right or best decision. Man is a responsible creation of God. He is responsible first to God, then to other persons, and then to himself.

The ministry of the church in the above matters is of greatest importance. The local assembly must be tuned and turned to God and His will. The church must honor our Lord in everything (Colossians 3:17) and fulfill its mission to the people it serves.

It must constantly be kept in mind that the ministry and message of every assembly should be to “people” about the Person of Jesus Christ.

*“For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour: Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.” (1 Tim. 2:3-6)*

When we see that God desires “all men to be saved and come unto the knowledge of the truth,” how can anyone of us do less than present the glorious gospel of God’s grace to the unsaved and His

Word “rightly divided” to the saved. We must plant and water the seed, but God will give the increase.

*“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” (Eph. 2:8-10)*



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