

## What Is The Church's Work Today (Part One)

What the Church Is

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I am going to begin the message this afternoon in Psalm 11. This is going to be a two-part sermon. At least, I planned it that way. I think that we need to understand what we are, what we are involved in, why we are doing what we are doing—so that you have a clear understanding of the Church of the Great God and why it is doing what it is doing.

**Psalm 11:1** In the LORD I put my trust; how can you say to my soul, "Flee as a bird to your mountain?" For look! The wicked bend their bow, they make ready their arrow on the string, that they may shoot secretly at the upright in heart.

Now think of this in terms of what has happened in the church over the last ten or so years—actually a longer period of time than that. Think about it in terms of, let us say, demons, Satan, those who are critical of the church of God, those who are on the outside of it, or whatever. And so we have trouble heaped upon trouble upon the church, and we cannot avoid it because we are a part of that church. It seems as though people are taking potshots at us all the time because we want to be faithful to the things that we have learned in the past. So here we find the church falling apart.

What is happening here is that David was in trouble and his friends were counseling him to flee. "Get out of there!" Well, David responds in a very interesting way. Now, he does not say verse 3; but verse 3 applies very much to us.

**Psalm 11:3-5** If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do? [David responds, in verse 4.] The LORD is in His holy temple, the LORD's throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, his eyelids test the sons of men. The LORD tests the righteous, but the wicked and the one that loves violence His soul hates.

What *can* we do when the foundations are shaken? That is what happened in the Worldwide Church of God. Many of you were involved with the church for many years of time. It took up large portions of your time—in keeping the Sabbath, in attending Bible studies, Y.O.U. activities, choir practice, organizing church activities, personal Bible study and prayer. Its teaching dominated the way you look at the world. It gave you your world views. You look at the world, in a way, through eyes that were given to you largely by Herbert W. Armstrong. It affected the way that you drive your automobile, the way that you dress, the way that you conduct your marriage, the way that you reared your children. It had great impact on your life. And you made many *changes* as a result of the teaching that you received in that church.

Now, all of a sudden, the foundations are shaken. Where is our faith in what we were taught? Are we thrown into confusion? Do we begin to think that what we were taught is no longer valid? That because the foundations are shaking—and, in this case, "the foundations," in applying to a church, have to do with the doctrines that formed the structure of what we believed and what we taught—well, many of us, I am sure, felt as though our world was collapsing. And we wished that this thing that we feared was happening was not, because it did throw us into doubtful confusion as to what to do. We may even have wished that we could have done something like David felt like doing here in Psalm 55.

**Psalm 55:6** Oh that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest.

"Get me out of here! If I could just turn my back on it and not think about it anymore, then maybe I'd have some peace and I wouldn't be worrying about what was going on." Maybe you had thoughts like that, and maybe it has affected you so deeply that you are distrustful yet of many things.

Many people left the Worldwide Church of God because of that—because of the fear and the distrust that they would once again fall prey to deceit. Our foundations appeared to be destroyed. In the church, our *fellowship* rests upon those foundations.

So our faith was shaken as God brought this test upon us, and many of us were no longer sure what we believed. Our conviction waned, and, in many,

to a very low ebb. Friends parted and went into different fellowships. Some of those people have not been seen to this day. Others that you might have had contact with from time to time parted in a very angry way because they could not convince you—and you could not convince them—about the way you saw things and the way they saw things. A traumatic time! Certainly it is understandable that those things go through our mind.

Psalm 11 assures us that God is still on His throne and that He is aware of what is going on. What that psalm implies very strongly is that He is in control. Power has not been wrested from Him. His eyes are testing. They are penetrating our hearts to prove where we (and others) stand in relation to Him by faith.

That psalm says that His eyelids *test* the sons of men. What He is testing, brethren, is *the reality* of our godliness. He is patiently observing us as we go through this test of faith. Where do we stand? What should we be doing? Understand always that, when God tests, it is never intended to destroy. It is always intended to test *our attachment to Him*. He is testing our loyalties. And He is going to use this period of time to correct deficiencies that would keep us out of His Kingdom (were they allowed to continue).

Now, as I mentioned before, this is going to be a two-part series that I hope will firmly establish in our minds what I perceive has happened in the greater church of God; what I feel the church's work is today as a result of what has occurred; and therefore why the Church of the Great God is doing what it is doing.

I feel that there is a need to do this because I know that there are great numbers of people who may be aware of us, but they dismiss us out of hand because they perceive that we are not preaching the gospel to the world, and therefore we are of no account.

Just before this Feast of Tabernacles, I heard that we were secretive, clandestine, hard to get to know, and that we put people through *very rigorous* questioning before we allow anybody to attend. You chuckle because you know that is not true. When people inquire, we take it for

granted that they are of the church of God; that they have the same spirit that we do; and that they are looking for a place to fellowship. That is understandable to us.

We have found in our brief, almost five-year history that, if people feel very uncomfortable with us, they generally leave very quickly. We do not chase them away. We just preach the things that we have learned in the past, and if they are really not of the same spirit they feel so uncomfortable that they leave.

This subject is one that we have taken for granted in the past. There is an assumption in almost all of us—because of our being, for many years, in the Worldwide Church of God and hearing Mr. Armstrong and almost every minister (including yours truly) confidently *asserting* that "the work of God is the preaching of the gospel around the world." So, we take it for granted. And I can understand why people would dismiss us out of hand.

But because of what has happened in the church in the last number of years, I also think that many of us are being forced to reconsider whether we have some aspects of that assumption wrong. It is my strong conviction that preaching the gospel to the public is *not* what is needed at this time.

Now, we are not ignoring preaching the gospel to the world. It may appear that way to some. But we are getting ready. When Earl Henn was with us, that was his job. He was preparing basic booklets for us. So he has prepared quite a number of them—*Does God Exist?*, *Proof of the Bible*, *Why Were You Born?*, *What Do You Mean Born Again?*, *What Is the True Gospel?*, *Just What Do You Mean Kingdom of God?*. So, we are getting ready—just in case. These booklets are not ready to publish—I do not mean that at all—but, in many cases, more than a rough draft is already done.

Before we go any further, I want to go on record as saying that the approach that we now see in the church of God—not just the Worldwide Church of God, but the church of God in general—the greater church of God—in regard to preaching to the world is something that came out of Protestantism. Despite the large number of times that the word "work" appears in the Bible, nowhere does the combination of words "preaching the gospel to the world is the work of God" appear in the Bible. It is nowhere in the Bible.

It would be far more accurate to say that "the preaching of the gospel to the world is *a* work of the church that God allows us to be involved in." The work of God, brethren, *is something God does*. Now what does God do? You need to know the simple answer to this. What is God employed at? **He creates**. And just so that we would understand that, He begins the Bible by presenting Himself in His employment. God creates. That is His work!

The concept that is now in the greater church of God grew out of a combination of factors, not the least of which is a doctrine that is very important to Protestantism. It is the one that we call the "once saved, always saved" doctrine—that concept simply being that all one has to do is accept Jesus Christ, and—*presto change-o*—one is saved. That is at the heart and core of the Protestant concept of preaching the gospel to the world because, to them, *justification* equates with *salvation*—that once one's sins are covered by the blood of Jesus Christ, it is a finished work from that point on. In practical application, then, the preaching of the gospel is perceived by them to be of utmost importance so that people can utter those magic words, "I believe in Jesus Christ."

Now compare that with the way that God reveals Himself in the Bible. He is the Creator. Is *His creation of man in His image* done—finished, completed—at the moment of *justification*? Or, is there more? "Justification" and "salvation" are not synonyms for one another. When a person is justified, that is only *the beginning of a process of creation*. There is much, much more to come, so that God can do His thing—create Himself in us!

The preaching of the gospel to the world, when viewed in that light, brethren, is just a very small part of His operation. In fact, it is the smallest part. It is the easiest part. The hard part is *to change us into Him*. That takes time! Every once in a while, He has to get out that 2 x 4 and slap us over the head. It takes an exceeding amount of patience on His part to create circumstances that He can put us into that will bring tests upon us to create the result that He wants as a part of our character.

Now we are in a situation where we are going through something together. In many cases, it has been a painful situation.

While we are in the book of Psalms, let us go to Psalm 74. I am going to read 12 verses in this psalm so that we get a good feel of the context.

**Psalm 74:1** O GOD, why have you cast us off forever? . . .

"Yeah, God. Where are you?" The church is falling apart. The foundations are shaking. People are scattering in every direction. People are coming up with doctrines that are taking them off into technical twigs that maybe have hardly anything at all to do with what God is drawing us toward.

**Psalm 74:1-11** . . . Why does your anger smoke against the sheep of your pasture? Remember your congregation, which you have purchased of old; the tribe of your inheritance, which you have redeemed—this Mount Zion, wherein you have dwelt. Lift up your feet unto the perpetual desolations; even all that the enemy has done wickedly in the sanctuary. [Is this appropriate, brethren, or what? Is this timely, or what?] Your enemies roar in the midst of your meeting place; they set up their banners for signs. They seem like men who lift up axes among the thick trees. And now they break down its carved work, all at once, with axes and hammers. They have set fire to Your sanctuary, they have defiled the dwelling place of your name to the ground. They said in their hearts, "Let us destroy them altogether." They have burned up all the meeting places of God in the land. We do not see our signs; there is no longer any prophet; nor is there any among us who knows how long. O God, how long will the adversary reproach? Will the enemy blaspheme Your name forever? Why do You withdraw Your hand, even Your right hand? Take it out of your bosom and destroy them.

And now the psalm takes a dramatic change, and a note of positive assurance begins to creep into his thinking because of what he remembers:

**Psalm 74:12** For God is my King. . .

He is the sovereign over everything. He cannot be shoved aside. Nobody is going to convince Him to do something that He does not already agree with or He has not already thought about.

**Psalm 74:12** My God is my King from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth.

There is *God's work*. He is working salvation. "Working salvation" is much bigger than preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

You have probably figured out by this time that this psalm is—at least, at first glance—a national lament over the destruction of the Temple. It is written as though the Temple—or perhaps we might broaden that out, and say the nation itself—is speaking. But I think that we can see, in *the duality principle*, that it applies to the church of God at this time in spades. So the author describes our predicament as we see the external supports of our spiritual life crumbling. So the psalmist laments, "God, look what's happening. God, are you looking in the other direction? Where are you God while this is going on?" When will He again have compassion on His church on which His judgment of anger has fallen? How long will He remain silent while the church is being destroyed?

As we go on, God's sovereignty becomes the issue, because the psalmist knows in his heart of hearts that "all things work together for good to those who love God and who are **the** called according to His purpose." Therefore, God will save. But *when* and *how* is not yet seen. We have got to determine, by faith, what our course is going to be while He, seemingly, remains silent.

The *Book of Common Prayer* of the Anglican Church says, about verse 12 (this is just the way they have chosen to translate it): "For God is my king. The help that is done upon earth, *He does it Himself*," which is an interesting twist. It adds a note of confidence to the psalmist that God Himself will personally intervene to turn things around. So he states that God's work is to deliver. *He works salvation in the midst of the earth*. Do not forget this. The alternative translation (the one that the *King James* has decided to take) is

very important, and that is he is saying that God is right in the middle of everything that is going on. He is not standing aside watching the church fly apart. He is engineering it!

That is hard for us to conceive. We do not like to think of God in those terms. That He would actually move to (seemingly) destroy something that He loved so much that He gave His Son for it. But when we come to understand that He is in control of everything, we can have confident assurance (that He is in control of everything) and, despite the way it looks to us humanly, things could not be better. This is just the medicine His church needed to get us through this sickness that we are experiencing. It might be rough to take. It might be scary. We might be confused. We might be in the midst of distrust. But wait on God and remain faithful. He will pull us through it if we will just allow Him.

At the time of justification when we first respond, God is just beginning His creative work. Now understanding this, at a time the church is being destroyed, one should understand (or think about) "Is the preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom of God the most important thing *at this time*?" We will think about that as we go along.

God's work of salvation includes preaching the gospel to the world, but it is most assuredly not limited to it. There is much more than that. Is He going to deliver His church by having it preach the gospel? Tell me something. How will that heal our sickly spiritual condition? The church was doing that (the preaching of the gospel to the world) while it fell apart.

Back in Genesis 1 we have what I consider to be the specific purpose statement of the Bible, and, that is what God Himself is doing.

**Genesis 1:26** Then God said, "Let us make man in our image."

That is a simple statement. (Sparse.) There is not a great deal there. There is not a lot revealed there. Only that He is creating mankind in His image. The first step was making us physically in His image, giving us life and setting us on the path. God is the Master Potter. He is creating. He is forming. He is shaping us in His image. And far more time consuming (and far more important) is *creating us in His spiritual image*.



Now, which one takes the most time? The preaching of the gospel or the feeding of the flock? I think that the one that requires the most time and an infinite amount of care and focus of attention (the creation of things that we have to go through) involves the feeding of the flock.

I think that we can get even more specific in regard to what God is doing. At least, specific in terms of you and me. Back in the New Testament, in John 6, Jesus was asked, "What can we do that we might do the works of God?"

**John 6:28-29** Then said they to Him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said to them [Here comes Jesus' answer as to what the work of God is:], "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."

I am going to take that last phrase there—"that you believe in Him whom He sent"—and I am going to take two translations (two modern translations); and I am going to put them together. The first phrase is going to come from *The Knox Translation* and the second phrase is going to come from *The Amplified Bible*. But these two together catch the essence of this verse as sharply as I have ever seen it.

(From *The Knox Translation*) "This is the service that God asks of you. . ."

(From *The Amplified Bible*) ". . . that you rely on His messenger."

"This is the service that God asks of you, that you rely on His messenger."

What is God doing in you and me? He is a Creator. God's work is creating trust inside of you and me in His Son, because His Son is both Savior and Lord. Our sins are not only forgiven by the stripes and blood of Jesus Christ, but it is our trust in Him as our Boss that makes possible the creation of God's image in us. If we do not trust Him, we will not submit. If we do not submit, then His image is never written in our heart. So God works to produce faith in you and me, so that we will make the right choices. God creates circumstances that will force the issue, if we are not responding the

way that we should. And, most of the time, I guess, we do not. You wonder what your God is doing? That is what He is doing.

If we take what I just said, we can begin to understand why the church of God fell apart—why it blew apart. What happened? We were losing our faith. You can understand now why Jude wrote that we have got to get back to "the faith once delivered to the saints." Salvation is by grace through faith. Faith is the key spiritual element in our life! And when faith weakens and wanes, our trust in God disappears, and we start sinning! Slowly at first, but it picks up speed until it gets to the place where we sin with abandon—because we lose our bearings.

What is *the work of the church* right now? By my thinking, we ought to be doing whatever we can to restore that faith that we once had. Now maybe what Mr. Armstrong said—and I quoted last night—might make a little more sense. One of the things that he said was that *there was a time when we **knew** who the Leader was*. It was Jesus Christ.

What Mr. Armstrong was saying (way back in 1978)—he was warning us was that we were losing our faith and relying upon intellectualism. ("We're so smart," you know.) He saw it coming. Maybe God blinded Mr. Armstrong to the extent that he just did not have the words, or God did not respond, or whatever, because God was just going to let it drift in that direction because He had something else in mind. Believe me, it is tough medicine. But the goal that lies before us is so great that we need it, and we had better be willing to take it.

I have begun this way because I want to unbutton our minds a bit by reminding us that God's work is much greater, much bigger, than merely preaching the gospel to the public. God's own Word testifies that *His work involves salvation*—not merely accepting Jesus Christ. Salvation is by grace through faith. But this faith (incidentally) is not merely believing—it is trusting. That is why I read that verse from the *Amplified Bible*. That God is working that we might rely on His Son. Not just believe that He is our Savior; but rely on Him. "Trust" is a more specific word than 'faith' because trust is the continuous operation.

Turn with me to James 2, where James compares two different kinds of 'believing' (or two different kinds of faith).

**James 2:19** You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!

If we believe that Jesus is the Christ, that puts us to the same level as demons are capable of. It is *grace*, combined with *trust*. Or it is grace and faith *in the form of trust* that saves.

**James 2:17** Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

Just comparing these two verses, we can see that faith can be passive and dead, producing nothing towards salvation.

**James 2:21** Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?

So faith (in the form of trust) is active and producing. It is this faith that God is working at producing. This is the kind of faith that John 6:29 is referring to. And, brethren, this kind of faith takes time—to grow, to develop, to become mature. It is this kind of faith that we have lost to a great extent over the last fifteen or twenty years.

Hearing the gospel message plays a great part—a major part—in producing that initial faith. But then, the kind of faith that saves just does not appear instantly. Even the world believes that. You can look in the commentaries. But if a person trusts, that kind of faith (or that trust) will reveal its existence through *change* of the person who has it. And it is this which gives witness that God is working in that person's life! That person begins to take on the image of God.

**I Corinthians 3:6-9** I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that plants anything, nor he that waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he

that waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.

I read this verse because I want us to see that the preaching of the gospel and the feeding of the flock are both *works of the church*—works that God permits us to work with Him on. Paul preached the gospel and God worked with and through Him. But He also worked with Apollos. God worked within him and through him. If God had not worked with Apollos, then it is very likely that the work that God originally did through Paul in the preaching of the gospel would have been of no avail.

**John 21:15-17** So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, love you Me more than these?" He said to Him, Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He say to him, "Feed my lambs." He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

It seems like He wanted Peter to get the point, did He not? For Him to do something (Bang! Bang! Bang!) three times over, for emphasis—He wanted to get something across there. But I wanted us to see that the feeding of the flock is just as much a responsibility of the church as the preaching to the public. Maybe brethren, if the ministry had spent better time (more time) living God's way and preparing better sermons, maybe we would have had the faith because we would have been fed the kind of material, the kind of food, that would have given us strength.

I do not want to destroy last night's sermon, because it was not just the ministry's fault. Maybe a great deal of the problem was in the ministry, but we were not alone. We have *all* had a part in what has occurred.

**Romans 1:7** To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I only wanted to read that verse because I want us to get the picture. Paul was writing to a group of people (while they were not, let us say, "firmly established" in the way that the Worldwide Church of God was "firmly established"—with congregations, you know, all over the place) yet he was writing to a group of people who were already converted. They already had God's Spirit. Somebody had already preached the gospel to them and baptized them.

**Romans 1:11** For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established. ["To be filled fuller," would be a good way of putting it.]

**Romans 1:15** So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.

Do you get the picture here? Paul wanted to preach the gospel to *already converted people*. This was not their initial conversion. They had already heard the gospel, and that is why they were converted.

This word established—I did not quite give you the right meaning of that word in the Greek. It means, "to set resolutely in a direction; to strengthen." That is why this is the most heavily doctrinal book in all of the Bible (at least all of the New Testament anyway). Though they were converted, there were many 'technicalities' that were important to their conversion that they did not yet fully understand. And so this book sets them in the direction that is correct—so that they can get the most (if I can put it that way) out of their conversion.

His purpose, then, was to go to them and confirm them of the faith—to give them practical understanding of the gospel for growth in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. He framed it in terms of "preaching the gospel."

Now, why? Well, you should begin to get the picture that the preaching of the gospel is not only for the unconverted. The preaching of the gospel is more for those who are already converted than those who are unconverted.

Do any of you remember that Protestant song, "Tell Me The Old, Old Story"? Do you think that we need to be reminded? Do you think that we need to understand details? Do you think that we need to have expanded our vision of what is coming? Is that not what we are doing here at the Feast of Tabernacles? Expanding our vision—giving us hope, giving us encouragement. And where is that coming from? It is coming from the gospel. In Acts 20, Paul was speaking to the Ephesian church as he went through there.

**Acts 20:27** For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.

Now does the world, in the hearing of the preaching of the gospel, get the full counsel of God? No. They just get a tiny portion of it. Enough to spark the interest. Enough to get them moving. Enough to produce a bit of hope. To give vision—so that they will come to understand the place that Jesus Christ occupies in their life; and that they are sinners. To get them to the point of *justification*, so God can begin to give them "the full counsel of God" through the ministry. So that maturity might be attained. That maturity is built through the continued preaching of the gospel—only in infinite detail.

Do you think, brethren, that you would grow "in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ" if you were fed on milk all the time? Now, we need strong meat. But where does the strong meat come from? It comes out of the same gospel, but it is given in a much heavier dose in far greater detail, and usually with a great deal more intensity as well.

This may be almost an over simplification, but I think that it is worth mentioning. Would you say that a child is ready for birth at the moment that it is conceived? That is illogical, is it not? It does not compute. And so at justification (when we are forgiven and we are baptized and we have hands laid on us) we are conceived. We are not ready for birth. There is a long, long trail ahead of us before we come to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. And that is where the preaching of the gospel of the

Kingdom of God comes in. It takes the full counsel, which works to produce saving faith and holiness, without which no one shall see the Lord.

Let us look at Ephesians 4. Mark Schindler was just in this, but I want to emphasize something different.

**Ephesians 4:11-12** And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers [For what reason? You know what it says.], for the perfecting of the saints. . .

The ministry is a gift from Jesus Christ, to the church. Those who are converted by the initial preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom of God can then receive the full counsel of God through "the feeding" that is given, through the church to enable them to be perfected. In order to do, as it says,

**Ephesians 4:12-14** . . . the work of ministry, for the edifying [or, for the building, the establishing] of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children . . .

Are we ready for *birth* into the Kingdom of God upon conversion? No. We are not supposed to be children, because God is going to put **mature** sons into His Kingdom.

**Ephesians 4:14-16** That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

The full counsel (the gospel in all of its glory and beauty) is exceedingly deep and complex. It is intended by God to bring a person to the fullness of

preparation for the work of service to God. We cannot work for (or with) God until we come to the place that we trust Him. And our trust has to go beyond trusting Him for initial forgiveness. It has to come to where we trust Him implicitly—in obedience to His Word. This is necessary or we will never be in His image.

This is how His law (His instruction) is written in our hearts. It is not book learning all by itself. It is book learning. It is fellowship with God and with one another. It is **experience** in applying it. Somebody could tell you how to play a piano, but how good would you be if you did not experience it? Yet, somehow or another, people want us to believe that we can be the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ without receiving full instruction and experiencing the application of that instruction.

There needs to be two questions addressed at this time. They are drawn from I Corinthians 3. At least part of the answers can be derived right from this context, with the addition of a couple of others. Those two questions are these: (1) Does everybody in God's church do exactly the same function all the time? (2) Does the entire church always do the same operation, over and over again, with the same intensity? (There is a little bit of a change there.)

We can begin to see the answer to the first question right in I Corinthians 3 where Paul says specifically, "I have planted; Apollos watered."—two separate functions. Paul (the apostle) *planted* through "the preaching of the gospel." Apollos (the pastor) took over the much more extensive and time-consuming operation of *watering*. Both of them were preaching the gospel but the area of their operations were different.

Now (just picking up on that principle) let us expand this out to the entire church; and turn to I Corinthians 12 where Paul uses the body analogy, comparing the church to a human body.

**I Corinthians 12:12** For as the body is one [in other words, it is a unity] and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.



**I Corinthians 12:14** For in fact the body is not one member but many.

**I Corinthians 12:17-18** If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now has God set the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He pleased.

You can see where this is headed. Paul is teaching us that everybody in the body, though there are similarities because we are all part of the same body, every person does not have exactly the same function.

**I Corinthians 12:21** And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."

**I Corinthians 12:28** And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.

Is everybody an apostle? Is everybody a prophet? Is everybody a teacher? Is everybody a worker of miracles? Does everybody have the gift of healing? Does everybody speak in tongues? Does everybody interpret? The answer to those is obvious by the time you get here. He does not even have to dogmatically answer it. It is so obvious. He is saying that (just like the human body) every part (member) in the church does not perform exactly the same function. There are similarities; and there are differences. Everybody is needed, but everybody does not do exactly the same things. Otherwise why would God say that there are different offices? There would be no need for Him to say that if everybody performed the same function.

Let me give you an illustration that kind of adds to this. I think that you will recognize this as being true. I am going to show you that a member's place and function in the body is not always static. That it does not always stays the same. I am going to use myself as an example.

In September, 1959, I was baptized; and so I was a lay member of the congregation. But my function in the congregation was gradually changing, because in April of 1965 I was ordained as a deacon. My function had shifted gears somewhat. It was not done changing, because in April of 1966 I was ordained as a local church elder. Now my function changed considerably over what had been before. The changes were not stopping, because in 1968 I became a full-time Ambassador College student. Now I was an elder and I was also a student at the same time. In 1969, I became a full-time (on the payroll) local church elder, but I ceased being a student of Ambassador College. A little bit later, in 1969, I was ordained as a preaching elder; and I became the pastor of the two congregations that I was in at that time and assisting in.

Do you see how *the changes* are occurring? Not only at that time (it was 1969), but by 1975 Evelyn and I were on the move; and it never stopped. We were changed from one place to another—from Columbia to Chicago. (We moved three times in Chicago alone.) Then in 1982 I was ordained as a pastor rank minister. So our function changes, and our place in the congregation is subject to change. Maybe most of you will not undergo something as dramatic as I did; but I wanted you to see that God is moving people around as He sees fit.

The answer to the second question—"Does the entire church always do the same operation over and over, especially with the same intensity?" is this: In the same manner, the church's operations are not static either. Let me give you an extreme example. Then we will turn to some scriptures; and I will show you place after place in the Bible where this is shown.

Suppose there was a widespread persecution on the church. People were being scattered all over, not because we broke up from within, but rather because an intense persecution was coming on the church from the outside, creating a tribulation. Do you think that the church (the whole body) would still be on the radio preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God (or, on television)? Well, I will tell you dogmatically, the answer to that is (probably about at least 95% to 99%) that the church would *not* be doing that. There is already a pattern established in the book of Acts: When that happened before, the people went out on the street corner and preached the gospel. It says that the gospel spread as the persecuted people fled from one place to

another. Thus the operation would shift from public radio and television to a more direct person-to-person approach.

Now, what if the persecution got so bad that we had to flee into the hills and mountains or into caves in order to save our lives? Are there not records of the church being in the catacombs in Rome and meeting secretly? There certainly are records. Then, probably, they would not even be out on the street corner proclaiming the gospel. You see, *circumstances change* the operation of the church.

I said I could give you a number of them of examples but we will limit it, because of time.

**II Peter 2:5** And did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly.

Everybody knows what Noah's work was. At the very least, Noah's work was building an ark. But he is called here a preacher of righteousness. We have two alternatives to this. One is that he preached through *the work that he did* (in the building of the ark). The second one is that he literally *spoke* to people. We will assume that the second one is what the reference really is to—that he spoke to the people, warning them of their sin. The Flood came and Noah's work was done. A year later, the flood is over. What was Noah's work then? Had it changed? He was still God's servant, but *Noah's work changed*. He was no longer warning the people of God's wrath that was going to come in the form of a flood.

How about Moses? Was his work different from Joshua's? It certainly was. The work that God had Moses do was to get the people to the Promised Land. The work that God gave Joshua to do was to get the people in (and settled in) the Promised Land. Are you beginning to get the point? The work that God has His servants do changes. Was Isaac's work the same as Abraham's? Was Jacob's work the same as Isaac's? Was David's work the same as Jacob's? No they were not. Amos went to Israel. Those other men went to Judah.

Are you beginning to get the picture? *The work that God has men do shifts gears according to what God wants accomplished, not what we think "the work" ought to be.*

Now what should the church's work be when the sheep are scattered? Anybody ought to be able to tell that. First you have to go out and begin to gather the sheep. Once the sheep begin to be gathered, you have to do something about what caused the sheep to be scattered. If you do not do anything about what caused the sheep to be scattered, then the sheep are going to be scattered again! And nothing will have been accomplished.

Let us go back to the book of Numbers and we will finish for today here. To me this is quite dramatic, because it illustrates how God's covenant people *are led by Him* into what He wants them to accomplish.

**Numbers 9:15-17** Now on the day that the tabernacle was raised up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the Testimony; from evening until morning it was above the tabernacle like the appearance of fire. So it was always: the cloud covered it by day, and the appearance of fire by night. Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, the after that the children of Israel would journey; and in the place where the cloud settled, there the children of Israel would pitch their tents.

Do you see what God is doing here? He is describing how He directed His work (His covenant people) to accomplish His will. He did it through the pillar of fire. He did it through the cloud. Those were the signs that they looked at as to what they were to do.

**Numbers 9:18-23** At the command of the LORD the children of Israel would journey, and at the command of the LORD they would camp; as long as the cloud stayed above the tabernacle they remained encamped. Even when the cloud continued long, many days above the tabernacle, the children of Israel kept the charge of the LORD and did not journey. So it was, when the cloud was above the tabernacle a few days; according to the command of the LORD they would remain encamped, and according to the command of

the LORD they would journey. So it was, when the cloud remained only from evening until morning: when the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they would journey; whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud was taken up, they would journey. Whether it were two days, a month, or a year that the cloud remained above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would remain encamped, and would not journey; but when it was taken up, they would journey. At the command of the LORD they remained encamped, and at the command of the LORD they journeyed; they kept the charge of the LORD, at the command of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

So when the children of Israel, after coming out of Egypt, did God always lead them in the same direction? Did they always stay at the same rest area the same number of days? Is there something that we are to learn from this? Yes. That *God is sovereign*. He determines when (and in what direction) His church moves, or camps, or what they do.

One of the most amazing things about this is that (somehow or another) He manages to do this without taking away our free moral agency. All of this is part of His operations as Creator. He creates circumstances in order to create His image in us. We are going through a difficult one now, but He is in charge.

If you learn anything at all from this half of this sermon, it is that everything is under control. Be encouraged. This is a time that God is testing us. He is testing our resolution, our faith, our conviction in *His* faithfulness (that He will lead and guide us). That He will work the problems out of us if we will use our faith in Him and our free moral agency to make the choices according to "the faith once delivered to the saints"—that *faith* that we were rapidly losing, and that *faith* that He wants to restore in His church.

The next time I speak I will pick up right here, and we will go on to begin to cover more thoroughly what I think that the work of the church ought to be at this time.