

unity by His word

THE CHURCH'S MISSION

Over several monthly newsletters (July-September), I have been talking about the importance of the Local Church in these last days. This month I want to continue on the critical purpose of the Local Church and what we need to know about the government structure Jesus provided for His church in the earth.

Many of you already know how important the Apostle Paul was in establishing the church, but do you know how important he was to helping even the other apostles get back on the right path which Christ wanted for His church. I believe he was called to complete the mystery of the dispensation of the church age by divine revelation. (**Ephesians 3:1-10**) This is why all the letters concerning the church, what we call **Pastoral Epistles**, were revealed through Paul. Look at the books of **1st** and **2nd Corinthians** and you will notice they are pastoral in their composition.

You see, the church was alluded to by Jesus in the four Gospels but the schematic for the church was not laid out for the 12 apostles who were called to walk with him. Because they knew Jesus so much through the natural side of things, they struggled to see the church age, the make-up of the church and even the fact the gentile nations were to be partakers in the inheritance as well. All of these things were primarily revealed through Paul's ministry. Read **Romans 11:25, Romans 16:25-26, 1 Cor 2:7-8**, and **Colossians 1:24-27**.

What is the real purpose of the church, which is the body of Christ in the earth? The answer to this question is not that technical, but it is life altering. The church needs to reach as many people as it can with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Now the question, how is this primarily accomplished? This is where Paul's teachings shine; we accomplish reaching the world through the witness of Christ formed within each believer.

You see, no other faith or belief can offer what Christ has accomplished. He brought mankind an amazing opportunity, to restart a new life and a promise of eternal life, He called it "born again". Though you don't know how this takes place until you accept Jesus, when you come to experience it and change begins to take place, truly old things pass away and things do become new. This Born Again experience changes everything in the life of the believer; their thinking, their speaking, their actions and their fellowship with others, that is, if they will allow Christ to be formed in them.

Paul spent his ministry establishing and writing about the church and its structure. One thing he emphasized is the importance of the

leadership's call to develop the body of Christ. They were instructed not just to teach how to develop better habits or to bring self help teachings. The Apostle Paul brought a much clearer understanding to the makeup of mankind; spirit, soul, body. He clearly defines the great responsibility the church has in helping believers establish their identity and the need that we be changed. (**Ephesians 4:1-13**) In **verse 13** he defines the ultimate goal, the end result of what needs to be accomplished, this is truly what the church is all about. The ministry gifts as defined in these verses have a responsibility in the body of Christ; to see it come to the full measure of the stature of that which is complete, the knowledge, the grace and the truth of all Christ's virtues and excellencies.

When Christ appeared to John on the island of Patmos He began to tell him the things written in the book of Revelations. He started by sending a personal message to the pastors (angels, shepherds) of seven churches to which he was the head of. We must remember that there were seven actual churches by their names existing in John's day. What the Lord says to these specific churches is what he would say to any pastor living at any period of time.

These lessons in Revelation must be carefully observed and **what he says to these pastors was good for their time, and also in ours**. Because of what was taking place at that time in the churches through their current culture, and what they were exposed to, many things began to influence and affect all the Christians in these churches. Regardless of the brand name on our church door or the reputation of our religious tradition, leaders are responsible to train and develop those we influence to the fullness of Christ; spirit, soul and body.

Next month we will conclude this topic on the local church and look at the 7 churches and what this means for us today and in these times.

JANN T. BUTLER

