

## **Session I: Introduction to the Dispensational Church**

Greetings saints. It's the Lord's Day and therefore a great day to gather as the Lord's people from different parts of the world to worship God and to remember His Son and our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Illustration:**

The story is told of a man who had gone to church for several years but suddenly stopped attending. His elder dropped by one evening unannounced. The man answered the door and invited him in. Of course, he knew why his elder was there.

They went and sat in two chairs in front of a roaring fire for it was a cold winter's evening. Neither man said anything. After a few minutes, the elder picked up the fire tongs, took one of the logs out of the fire, and laid it on the hearth (floor of a fireplace). The flames died down and flickered a few times before going out. They watched in silence as the log started to grow cold.

After a while, the elder once again picked up the fire tongs and put the smouldering log back with the other burning logs. It immediately burst back into flame.

The elder got up and said, "Well, I need to go now. But I've enjoyed our visit." The man rose too and said, "I appreciate your message, elder. I will be in church on Sunday."

Well dear friends, you may have guessed right, we are going to spend time this morning reflecting on the subject of 'the church'.

### **What Is the Church?**

The first question to be asked is: what is the church? The New Testament uses the word "church" to describe two distinct entities. One of these is the dispensational Church. The other is a local assembly gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus (*1Co 1:2 To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:*). The focus of our reflections this morning is the dispensational Church.

O Niles, you must be gnashing your teeth now. I've heard of the universal church, and I've heard of the local church but what is this dispensational church.

Thankfully for some, this is not the first time we have heard the word dispensational or dispensation(s). A quick recap if we may please.

Many definitions of the term dispensations have been given but for me the simplest and best is (listen carefully): a dispensation is a period of time during which a human is tested in

respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God. We are speaking of God administering a certain plan within a specific period of time for a specific reason. Authority on the part of God is involved. Responsibility on the part of humans is involved. Accountability on the part of those who live in that particular period of time is involved.

You may not find the word dispensation used in your translation of the Bible. It is something used in the KJV, NKJV, ASV, AKJV. Other words used instead of dispensation include stewardship, economy, commission and administration. For example, let us turn to Colossians 1:24-29:

*<sup>24</sup> Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, <sup>25</sup> of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, <sup>26</sup> the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. <sup>27</sup> To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. <sup>28</sup> Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. <sup>29</sup> For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.*

Notice in verse 25 the word stewardship or *dispensation*. That's one of the words, as you already realize. Then notice in verse 26 the word *ages*. That's the second word. Notice again in verse 26 the word *generations*. That's the third word. These three words—*dispensation, ages, and generations*—are the three words which describe the periods of time in which God deals with humans according to certain regulations.

The word *dispensation* is a translation of the Greek word *oikonomia* (*oi ko know mia, household*). Very literally rendered, it is “the management of the house”—the administration, the responsibility, the plan. So when we are speaking of a dispensation, as is suggested in the original definition that we gave, we are speaking of God administering a certain plan within a specific period of time for a specific reason. Authority on the part of God is involved. Responsibility on the part of humans is involved. Accountability on the part of those who live in that particular period of time is involved.

Let us look at a verse or two as to how this word *dispensation* is used in the Scriptures to bear out what we have said. Turn, please to I Corinthians, chapter 9, verse 17. In this verse, we realize that Paul uses the word *dispensation* as an illustration of the responsibility which he accepted from God in relation to the preaching of the Gospel. He is speaking of the manner in which he preaches the Gospel, and in verse 17, he says:

*<sup>17</sup> For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship (or dispensation). <sup>18</sup> What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.*

Notice the phrase, “a stewardship or dispensation of the gospel is committed to me.” Paul says, “If God has entrusted me with the responsibility (that's the meaning of the word *dispensation*) of preaching the Gospel, then I ought to preach it whether anyone likes me or not. I ought to preach it whether people say it is a good sermon or not. I ought to preach it if people say, ‘I hate your message and I hate you, too.’ It's a responsibility.” There is no way in the world to get out from under that responsibility. We need to fix that firmly in our minds, because the word *responsibility* is critical in relation to dispensation.

In summary there are 4 characteristics in a dispensation:

1. We have God in authority
2. We have the plan of God, and this is outlined to humans. Authority is delegated to humans to carry out something that God wants for a specific reason.
3. As human beings we have a responsibility to obey or disobey God. This is fundamental to our beliefs and view of the Bible. We have been made stewards or managers. Specific responsibilities are assigned to us. And the same principle is fundamental to the doctrine of salvation. God does not save humans against their will. Humans must come to Him Who said: I am the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6). This is the human side of choice, will and responsibility.
4. There is accountability for human behavior and actions i.e., we must give an account to God of the way we have handled that which was entrusted to us.
5. With disobedience comes the end of the dispensation and so changes are made by God in relation to responsibilities.

Let us examine these 4 characteristics in relation to the Dispensation of Innocence – the Garden of Eden story.

1. We have God in authority – He creates the universe and Adam and Eve.
2. We have the plan of God and this is outlined to humans. Authority is delegated to humans to carry out something that God wants for a specific reason. Adam and Eve are placed in the Garden of Eden and told to look after it. They are the first zoologists and botanists and are vegetarian.
3. As human beings we have a responsibility to obey or disobey God. We have been made stewards or managers. Specific responsibilities are assigned to humans. Adam and Eve are told that they may eat of the rest of the plants except from the fruit of the tree of good and evil.
4. There is accountability for human behavior and actions i.e., we have to give an account to God of the way we have handled that which was entrusted to us. Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit and sin. They fail in keeping God's command. God keeps them accountable and pronounces consequences for these acts of disobedience.
5. With disobedience comes the end of the dispensation and so changes are made by God in relation to responsibilities. God puts Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden after an accounting, these stewards are removed from responsibility. And God

instituted a new method of dealing with humans including the penalty of sin and how it can be atoned.

Let's stop there and fast forward to the church thousands of years later – another dispensation.

## **The Character of the Church**

When the word “church” is used in the New Testament, it never describes a physical building but a body of people. The Greek word *ekklesia* (ek a leez ia) is a compound of the preposition *ek* (meaning “out of”) and the verb *kaleo* (meaning “to call or summon”). The various contexts in which *ekklesia* is used show that it always refers to a company that has been called out for a particular purpose.

This is the word Stephen used to describe the nation of Israel in the wilderness (*Act 7:38 This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us*). It is also used to describe a riotous crowd in Ephesus, and in the same passage, a body of citizens called out to discuss the affairs of state (*19:32,39,41: <sup>32</sup> Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together; <sup>39</sup> But if you seek anything further it shall be settled in the regular assembly; <sup>41</sup> And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly*).

Apart from these four references, this word is only used to describe the dispensational Church (*Eph 1:22: And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church*) and the local church (*1Co 10:32: Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God*).

## **The Characterization of the Church**

There are a number of beautiful figures which are used to describe the Church. It is referred to as a bride (*Rev 21:9 Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.”*), a body (*Eph 5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour*), a building (*Eph 2:21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord*), and is alluded to as a battalion (*Eph 6:10-18 – the whole armour of God*). In the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Church will be presented as a bride without defilement, a body without decay, a building that will never be destroyed, and a battalion that will never be defeated.

Following are a few thoughts of what the Lord Jesus thinks of His church.

- Acts 20: 28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. *“... the **church** of God, which He hath **purchased with His own blood.**”*
- Eph. 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, as *“... Christ also loved the **church**, and gave Himself for it.” [Christ died for the church. The Holy One died to make the sinful holy. We are saved and called to live for Christ. Are we doing that? And are we living for the church? Are we able to spare the time to attend to the fellowship meetings of the church, especially now when the meetings are at a click of a phone button? We don’t have to dress up, we don’t have to commute. We don’t have to make refreshments for the youth or the Sunday school. What are we doing for the church now? How are the spiritual gifts that God has given us being expressed in serving the church, the people of God? These are good questions to reflect on]*
- Eph. 5:29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, *“... but nourishes and **cherishes** it, even as the Lord the **church.**”* How are we nourishing and cherishing the church?
- Eph. 5:31,32 Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, ... and they shall be **one flesh**. *This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning **Christ and the church.**”*

We will stop here today and continue the next time.

#### **Take away Messages and reflection points:**

1. What do I think of the church, the body of the Lord Jesus Christ?
2. Do I know the value and importance of the true church?
3. Do I view the church as God’s master design in this world today?
4. The church means everything to the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ died for the church. Does Christ and His church mean everything to me?

**Shall we pray:**

Gracious, loving and long suffering God, let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth!  
His anointing oils are fragrant;  
His saving Name is oil poured out;  
Draw me after you; my Lord and Saviour and let us run.

My king has brought me into His chambers.

Behold, you are beautiful, my beloved, truly delightful.

He brought me to the banqueting house,  
and His banner over me is love.

His left hand is under my head,  
and His right hand embraces me!

He is altogether desirable

Come, Lord Jesus, and fulfil your gracious promise to us, Your bride, to receive us to Yourself.

Come, Lord Jesus, for every time we take the bread and the wine we anticipate Your coming again.

Come, Lord Jesus, and help us to live for you as we wait, watch and work, so that we shall not be ashamed at Your coming.

Come, Lord Jesus, for we are waiting to see You as You are, and to be changed into Your likeness.

Come, Lord Jesus, for only then will our union with You and our vision be one of sight and not just one of faith.

Come, Lord Jesus, come, we pray in Your blessed Name.

Amen.

**Benediction:**

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore, Amen." (2 Cor 13:14)

## **Session II: The Mystery of the Church**

Last session we began looking into some detail on the doctrine of the church. The focus of our reflections last session was on the dispensational Church.

**What is a dispensation?** A dispensation is a period of time during which a human is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God. We are speaking of God administering a certain plan within a specific period of time for a specific reason. Authority on the part of God is involved. Responsibility on the part of humans is involved. Accountability on the part of those who live in that particular period of time is involved. With disobedience comes the end of the dispensation and so changes are made by God in relation to responsibilities.

When the word “church” is used in the New Testament, it never describes a physical building but a body of people. The Greek word *ekklesia* (ek a leez ia) is a compound of the preposition *ek* (meaning “out of”) and the verb *kaleo* (meaning “to call or summon”). The various contexts in which *ekklesia* is used show that it always refers to a company that has been called out for a particular purpose.

### **Take away Messages and reflection points:**

1. What do I think of the church, the body of the Lord Jesus Christ?
2. Do I know the value and importance of the true church?
3. Do I view the church as God’s master design in this world today?
4. The church means everything to the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ died for the church. Does Christ and His church mean everything to me?

I’ve asked some men to provide some reflections on the above. Let us hear them and then move on with today’s session. There will be some questions at the end for our review later.

### **The Concealment of the Church**

The subject of the dispensational Church, or to use the scriptural term “the Church which is His body” (Eph 1:22-23), was not revealed in the Old Testament. It was hid in God (Eph 3:9) and was a mystery that was first revealed by the Lord Jesus (Mat 16:18), then through His apostles (Eph 3:3-5).

#### ***Ephesians 1:22-23***

***<sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.***

***<sup>22</sup> And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, <sup>23</sup> which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.***

If we read these verses carelessly, we might understand it to say that Christ is the Head of the church. While that is true enough, the verses say a lot more. It says that the church is closely associated with Him who has been given universal sway. In verse 21 we learn that the Lord Jesus Christ is far above every creature in heaven and on earth, in this age and in the coming age. In verse 22 we learn that all things as well as all created beings are in subjection under His feet. We also learn that the unique calling of the church is to be associated with Him in His boundless dominion. The church will share His rule. All the rest of creation will be under His rule.

In verse 23 we learn how close is the relationship between Christ and the church. Two figures are given: [<sup>23</sup> ***which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.***]

- the church is His Body;
- it is the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

No relationship could be closer than that of the head and the body. They are one in vital union and indwelt by one Spirit. The church is a company of people called out from the world between Pentecost and the Rapture, saved by marvellous grace, and given the unique privilege (benefit, advantages) of being the Body of Christ. No other group of believers in any age ever has had or will have this distinction. It is worth reflecting on the privileges we have as the body of the Christ.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> description of the church is the fullness of Him who fills all in all. This simply means that the church is the complement of Christ, who is everywhere at one and the same time. This implies two things which when brought together constitute a whole. Just as a body is the complement of the Head, so the church is the complement of Christ. What does complement mean?

The church, as His body has features or characteristics that emphasise the qualities of the Lord Jesus Christ. For e.g., most non-believers or even believers know that God is love and that Christ loved the world. As His body and complement how is this demonstrated by the church? Well, we live in relationships that are loving and show practical examples of love. This should be seen by those outside the church and the world. Our actions emphasise what God or the Lord Jesus Christ already is. We reflect this in our behaviour and interactions with one another. And so, it is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who fills all in all, Who permeates the universe and supplies it with all that it needs. Our role and core business as the body of Christ is to reflect Him – we have no other identity, and we have no business to seek an identity of our own. The prosperity of the church is to do and reflect the will and behaviour of the Lord. Anything else and the church is not living up to its role and will not prosper.

Let's see this in the institution of marriage where husband and wife are to complement each other. The marriage relationship models the way God relates to His people. A couple puts aside selfish desires by first serving our Creator and then by serving each other and providing for each other's needs. As they do this, we see the couple working as one



even though they might have different personalities, interests and backgrounds. This oneness is seen in how they relate to each other in public as this oneness is on display. They emphasise each other's qualities, strengths and in doing so individual weaknesses are diminished or reduced.

Therefore, marriage is more than just a contract between two people. It is a mirror of the relationship between Christ and the church. In the marriage relationship the husband reflects the Lord Jesus Christ while the wife reflects Him as the Church. This was always God's plan for marriage and in creating men and women. And sadly, a marriage is a reflection of how couples behave and display and emphasize Christ in the church. If the marriage is not reflection of the Body and Head complementary relationship, then it will be hard to do much for the Lord as part of the church. Final thoughts on this: it is interesting that Eve was created from the rib of Adam. It is worth reflecting on the significance of this.

This is too much to understand. We can only admire the infinite mind and plan of God while admitting our own inability to understand.

Moving on,

#### ***Ephesians 3:3-5***

***<sup>3</sup> how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. <sup>4</sup> When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, <sup>5</sup> which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.***

#### ***Ephesians 3:9***

***<sup>9</sup> and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things,***

The second part of Paul's ministry was to make all see what the "administration of the mystery" is. What is mystery? Something unknown or not understood. Something that is unexplained or kept a secret. In other words, "administration of the mystery" is to enlighten them as to how the mystery is being worked out in practice. God's plan for this present age, the dispensation of the church is to call out of the Gentiles a people for His name (Acts 15:14), a Bride for His Son. All that is involved in this plan is the administration (dispensation/ stewardship) of the mystery (1 Cor 2:14). This mystery had from the beginning of the ages been hidden in God. The plan was itself in the mind of God eternally, but here the thought is that He kept it a secret throughout the ages of human history. Once again, we notice the care the Holy Spirit takes to impress us with the fact that the assembly or the church universal is something new, unique, unprecedented. It was not known before to anyone but God. The secret was hidden in God who created all things. He created the material universe, He created the ages, and He created the church. But in His wisdom He

decided to withhold any knowledge of this new creation until the first advent of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Matthew 16:18**

*<sup>18</sup> And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

The question is who or what is the rock? Part of the problem arises from the fact that the Greek words for Peter and for rock are similar, but the meanings are different. The first petros, means a stone or loose rock, the second petra, means rock, such as rocky ledge. So what the Lord Jesus really said was "...you are Peter (stone), and on this rock I will build my church. He did not say He would build His church on a stone but on a rock. If Peter is not the rock, then what is. If we stick to the context, the obvious answer is that the rock is Peter's confession that Christ is the Son of the Living God, the truth on which the church is founded. Ephesians 2:20 teaches that the church is built on Jesus Christ, the chief cornerstone.

*<sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, <sup>21</sup> in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup> In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

That we are built up on the foundation of the apostles and prophets refers not to them, but to the foundation laid in their teachings concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is spoken of as a rock in 1 Cor 10:4:

*<sup>4</sup> and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.*

In Hebrew Scriptures rock always symbolised God or deity. The Lord Jesus Christ is named here as the spiritual Rock of Israel in their exodus from Egypt to Israel.

By definition, a mystery in the New Testament is something that was not previously revealed but has now been made known. We can see pictures and illustrations of the Church in the Old Testament. We appreciate and delight in these, but the revelation of the Church is presented to us in the doctrine of the New Testament. This is a significant piece of information and has implications for how we interpret the Bible. Basically, the OT is the history of the world and Israel. The NT is about the life, teachings and work of the Lord Jesus Christ and the church. We cannot see the church in the OT.

We will stop here this week.

**Take away Messages and reflection points:**

1. The church was in the plan of God.
2. God kept this plan a secret or mystery until the First Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ.
3. The church is the body of Christ. Christ is the Head of the body or His church. Christ died for His body and bride, the church.
4. The church or body is a complement or feature of the Lord Jesus Christ that emphasises His qualities or characteristics.
5. When we understand who we are in relation to Christ and His body then we will learn to live out our roles or behave in the way Christ wants us to.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. Am I part of the body of the Lord Jesus Christ or the church?
2. What part of the body am I? How can I find out if I don't know what part I am?
3. Am I fulfilling my role in the Body of Christ?
4. How can I improve my role in the church or the body? What can I do?

### **Shall we pray**

King of Kings, Lord of Lords, thank you that You are great and abundant in power. Your understanding is beyond measure. In your wisdom, You have created the church, described as the Lord Jesus Christ's body. May we work together as members of one body, using the gifts and abilities You have given us to faithfully love and serve one another. May we find our strength from the Lord Jesus, the Head of the body. May the Lord make us increase and abound in love for each other. May You establish our hearts as blameless in holiness before you. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.

### **Session III: Attacks on the Church I**

#### **Review: Session 1 = Introduction to the Dispensational Church; Session 2 = The Mystery of the Church**

So far, we have spent time studying the Bible on what it says about the church. Key learnings and messages include:

1. The church was in the plan of God.
2. The New Testament uses the word “church” to describe two distinct entities. One of these is the dispensational Church. The other is a local assembly gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus.
3. When the word “church” is used in the New Testament, it never describes a physical building but a body of people. The church is not a social club or recreational facility. It is a group or company of believers and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ that has been called out for a particular purpose.
4. God kept the plan of the church a secret or mystery until the First Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ.
5. The church is the body of Christ. Christ is the Head of the body or His church. Christ died for His body and bride, the church.
6. The church or body is a complement or feature of the Lord Jesus Christ that emphasises His qualities or characteristics.
7. When we understand who we are in relation to Christ and His body then we will learn to live out our roles or behave in the way Christ wants us to.

Based on these facts we need to ask ourselves a few very important questions

#### **Reflective Questions:**

1. Do I view the church as God’s master design in this world today?
2. What do I think of the church, the body of the Lord Jesus Christ?
3. Do I know the value and importance of the true church?
4. The church means everything to the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ died for the church. Does Christ and His church mean everything to me?

Let us move on now.

## The Composition of the Church

The Church is composed of every person who is saved in this era or dispensation or age from the day of Pentecost (Act 2:1) until the Lord comes for His saints (1Th 4:14-18). That day is called the rapture.

### Acts 2:1

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.

### 1 The 4:14-18

<sup>14</sup>For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. <sup>15</sup>For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup>For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup>Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. <sup>18</sup>Therefore encourage one another with these words.

In the environs of Caesarea Philippi, the Lord Jesus announced, “I will build my Church” (Mat 16:18). At this point, the formation of the Church was yet future, the day of Pentecost was still in the future.

*<sup>18</sup> And I tell you, you are Peter (stone), and on this rock (Christ is the Son of the Living God, the truth on which the church is founded.) I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

We went into some depths on the first part of the verse and looked at what the words Peter and rock meant. We need to consider the second part of this verse: and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

What does this mean? The church will survive all attacks upon it. We usually tend to think of attacks as coming from external sources. And indeed, persecution is very much based on attacks from the outside. However, attacks can be internal as well. Here are some things to think about:

- **Family breakdown.** We discussed this at length last week and what marriage is supposed to represent. When marriages are not living up to Biblical standards this will affect the fellowship. When we don't know what role, we have in the marriage and family, we will not know and play the role God wants us to in the church. This is quite a devastating factor. Be encouraged to set our lives and houses in order. We cannot hope to be used by God when we are not faithful in the things, He has called us to. *What is the way back to Christ?*
- Make Him Lord of my life, family life and relationships.

- **False teaching.** You may say to me but we this is not an issue for us. We don't speak in tongues and other such things. Let me encourage you to think differently. False teaching is more subtle than we think. Most if not all false teaching has some element of truth in it. For example, someone will say I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Well, praise the Lord and this is a true statement. And then the next sentence may be, but I believe if I don't keep the sabbath I will not go to heaven. So there was an element of truth when we started and now we see how we have deviated on the doctrine of salvation. I can assure you there is enough false doctrine floating around the place and willingly people in our church have exposed themselves to it and even believe it. When we don't know our Bible well and how to study it and we depend on those outside the local assembly to teach us the basics, we have opened the door to a very grave danger. A hallmark of those caught in false teaching and counterfeit believers is that they despise authority. This stems firstly from not recognising the authority of God and next, His word. If this fundamental is absent then they will not have respect for anyone else in authority and will seek to undermine and cause division. Saints, there is nothing positive and good about false teaching. Only moving backwards, chaos and disaster.

*What is the way back to Christ?* Pray and work towards being like the Bereans, knowing how to read and study the word of God, rightly dividing the word of truth. Confess and forsake involvement with false teaching. Ask God to show me what are the areas of erroneous teaching and beliefs in my life?

- **Hidden sin.** We know the public sins of sexual immorality, drunkenness, anger, quarrelling, stealing, lying and so on. But some of the hidden sins we don't think about or pay attention to include jealousy, hatred of others, gluttony (lack of self-control), pornography, coveting what others have, manipulating others, murmuring (complaining), wanting control (this plays out in various ways), seizing control, competitiveness, secret and small group drinking of alcohol and other substances, not being content with our lives and so many others. Proverbs 27:4 – Wrath is cruel, anger is overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy? Somehow, these sins seem to be categorised as respectable sins or not sins at all. I say to us this morning, many hidden sins abound within us and among us. Which is why the assembly is not growing, our individual hidden and public sins are a great stumbling block and factor. Like Daniel (1:5,8)

Luke 6:45: The good person out of the good treasure (a sizeable quantity) of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. By their fruits they shall be known. No good tree will bear bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit. But you may ask me, what is all this talk of fruit about. Are we to become a fruit market? The point is this: what I am is more important than what I say or do. The final result of service is determined by what I am in myself. God is not mocked or fooled. We might be able to fool a lot of people for a little time. We might be able to fool some people for a lot longer. But we cannot fool God any time. And sooner or later the truth of what we are in ourselves will be made visible and clear to all.

Let us repent and turn to the Lord to change us. There is no such thing as hidden sin. Trying to hide sin from God is like running from your shadow you can never get away. You can't run away from God because he knows everything. Your family and friends might not know about your secret sin, but God knows.

*What is the way back to Christ?*

Psalm 90:8 You have placed our iniquities before You, Our secret sins in the light of Your presence.

Proverbs 28:13 "If you hide your sins, you will not succeed. If you confess and reject them, you will receive mercy." He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion.

[Psalm 32:3-5](#): For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah

Cleanse me from these hidden faults." Lord, you have promised, If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

Let us pause here today as time has caught and pick up the study next session.

Shall we pray.

### Session III: Attacks on the Church II: Sin, Confession and Forgiveness

#### **Review:**

We have been studying the doctrine of the church for some three sessions now and last session we focussed on the attacks on the church. We usually tend to think of attacks as coming from external sources. And indeed, persecution is very much based on attacks from the outside. However, attacks can be internal as well. And we focussed on two aspects of these attacks:

1. inability to maintain relationships within the family, marriage and with work colleagues and this flowing into the church. When marriages, parenting and sibling relationships as well as those at work and the community are not living up to Biblical standards this will affect the fellowship of the saints. When we don't know what role, we have in the marriage and family, work and community, we will not know and play the role God wants us to in the church. Be encouraged to set our lives and houses in order. We cannot hope to be used by God when we are not faithful in the things, He has called us to in our everyday relationships.
2. False teaching. Most if not all false teaching has some element of truth in it. This is why we gravitate to it in the first place. When we don't know our Bible well and how to read and study it and we depend on those outside the local assembly to teach us the basics, we have opened the door to a very grave danger. And many have been swept away by this tsunami, even now.

A hallmark of those caught in false teaching and counterfeit believers (this is another term for those subscribing to false teaching) is that they despise authority. This stems firstly from not recognising the authority of God and next, His word. These are flip sides of the same coin and only follows that if you don't recognise and accept the authority of God in our lives then we will do the same to His word. Thus, if this fundamental is absent, then they will not have respect for anyone else in authority and will seek to undermine and cause division.

Secondly, those caught in false teaching whether they believe it or teach it, do not take kindly to Biblical correction. They resist and resent the word of God and it speaking to our lives. And they will resent and hate sound Bible teachers and those who rightly divide the word of God. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 tells us, and we have heard it many times:

<sup>16</sup> All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching (*what is right*), for reproof (*what is not right*), for correction (*how to get right*), and for training in righteousness (*how to stay right*), <sup>17</sup> that the (wo)man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Those caught in false teaching, take time to get out of it. Some take many years or not at all. Sometimes to learn the truth we need to unlearn what is false and acknowledge it. This is a big blow to our pride and ego. To admit that we have been believing a lie and for years and decades can be hard to stomach. But unless we



acknowledge and confess this there is no real turn around. Often the pride is about well that brother or sister was right all along. Why should they be right and I be wrong?

Saints, there is nothing positive and good about false teaching. Only moving backwards, chaos and disaster. Romans 16:17-18 tells us in sobering words: <sup>17</sup> *I appeal (serious, urgent and heartfelt request) to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.* <sup>18</sup> *For such persons **do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites**, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.*

3. **Hidden Sin.** I had a very interesting chat and discussion with one person who called after the message last Sunday. I valued that call and iron sharpens iron.

Some takeaways last week and the discussion afterwards:

- Sin is sin – hidden or private or public and exposed. Trying to hide sin from God is like running from your shadow you can never get away.
- We then talked about confession and how this act plays down the evil of sin and its impact. While we all can quote 1 John 1:9 we need to be very specific about our confessions of sin. Many if not most Christians pray the general lines: Lord I confess my sins today to you. Please forgive me. Well, what sins specifically? Why is it wrong? When we pray generally, we have no intent to repent. What is repentance? A complete turn around from that sinful behaviour. The act that looks like repentance but is not repentance is called remorse. Remorse is feeling guilty for a while but not really with the intent of forsaking that sin. If I use 1 John 1:9, I can keep doing this. *Romans 6:1-5 clearly tells us:*

*<sup>1</sup>What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? <sup>2</sup>By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? <sup>3</sup>Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup>We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*

- **What does God want us to do?**
- We need to look at what sin is and what its impact is. Sin is anything else but the holiness of God. Sin always misses the mark of God's standards. We've got to recognise that and face up to it. Sin does damage to self and others. Sin has consequences.

Like seeking forgiveness, we need to confess:

- What am I sorry for? Name it!

- Why am I sorry? – departure from God and His standards, poor example, shameful act. It has impacted someone, might even have drawn them into evil and harmed them.
- Have we apologised to the involved parties? How can we confess to God when we haven't taken care of the horizontal?
- What is the root cause of this sin? Not someone else and other forces. It is my own evil desires, my own defiance of God. I don't care what God thinks and says in the Bible. I will do it. What will he do to me? How depraved and wicked is the human heart?

I also had some other calls where people talked about these private sins and we prayed for this. I thank those individuals for their courage and honesty to face up to these things. These things included, overeating, no control over food intake, smoking, drinking alcohol and kava, filthy jokes and there was some sexual immorality. Praise God that He has brought them to the point of conviction and confession. These are the signs of revival. Praise the Lord!

We find the reality of confession/forgiveness difficult, especially where there has been personal hurt and even damage. In likeness to our God and Father, we ought to possess the disposition of forgiveness, looking for the opportunity to lovingly demonstrate and liberally dispense this blessing to others. "They don't deserve it," we may mutter. Maybe if I examined my own dark heart, I would admit that I deserve a lot less than I have received too. The person that cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over which s/he must pass themselves; for every person has need to be forgiven."

Sin is serious business. The Bible instructs not only about acts of sin but even the appearance of sin. *1 Thess 5:22 Abstain from all appearance of evil.* It's not about the act itself but about our associations.

A few questions for us. In participating and engaging in these behaviours:

- Is this act, behaviour and attitude demonstrating separation from the world to the things of God? If so, how?
- Is this act, behaviour and attitude something the Bible promotes?
- Is this act, behaviour and attitude bringing glory to God? If so, how?
- Is this act, behaviour and attitude edifying or building up the body of Christ, which is the church or causing discouragement, disunity, and leading people to stumble and sin? If so, how?
- Is this an act, behaviour and attitude in God's light or is it the way of darkness?

[Ephesians 5:11](#) tells us: *Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.*

[1 John 1:6](#) If we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

## **Session IV: Attacks on the Church III: The connection between personal sin and the assembly – the case of Ananias and Sapphira.**

### **Review:**

Last session we focussed more on the attacks that come from the assembly from false teaching and sin.

- A hallmark of those caught in false teaching and counterfeit believers (this is another term for those subscribing to false teaching) is that they despise authority. This stems firstly from not recognising the authority of God and next, His word. These are flip sides of the same coin and only follows that if you don't recognise and accept the authority of God in our lives then we will do the same to His word. Thus, if this fundamental is absent, then they will not have respect for anyone else in authority and will seek to undermine and cause division. Those enticed or caught in false teaching have a low regard and poor understanding of God and His word, hence God's authority as well.
- Secondly, those caught in false teaching whether they believe it or teach it, do not take kindly to Biblical correction. They resist and resent the word of God and it speaking to our lives. And they will resent and hate sound Bible teachers and those who rightly divide the word of God. Why? Because they themselves are outside the word of God – so they will hate anyone who point them to the word of God.
- Those caught in false teaching, take time to get out of it. Some take many years or not at all. Sometimes to learn the truth we need to unlearn what is false and acknowledge it. This is a big blow to our pride and ego. To admit that we have been believing a lie and for years and decades can be hard to stomach. But unless we acknowledge and confess this there is no real turn around. Often the pride is about well that brother or sister was right all along. Why should they be right, and I be wrong?
- On sin and confession, we need to say:
  - What am I sorry for? Name it!
  - Why am I sorry? – departure from God and His standards, poor example, shameful act. It has impacted someone, might even have drawn them into evil and harmed them.
  - Have we apologised to the involved parties? How can we confess to God when we haven't taken care of the horizontal? Call the person or parties up to confess, apologise for sinful behaviour and to seek forgiveness.
  - What is the root cause of this sin? Not someone else and other forces. It is my own evil desires, my own defiance of God. I don't care what God thinks

and says in the Bible. I will do it. What will He do to me? How depraved and wicked is the human heart?

- Sin is serious business. The Bible instructs not only about acts of sin but even the appearance of sin. 1 Thess 5:22 tells us: Abstain from all appearance of evil. It's not about the act itself but about our attitudes and associations.

Let us move on:

**What is the connection between individual sin and the assembly?** Personal sins cannot be separated from corporate/ assembly sins. We each belong to the body of Christ. We are a new creation. If there's sin in the camp, it needs to be dealt with immediately, lest it spread to others and affect the entire body ([Joshua 7:10-13](#)).

### **1 Corinthians 6:19-20**

*Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*

#### **Reflection and to do:**

- Confess our sins specifically to the Lord and request the Lord's forgiveness and cleansing.
- Keep short accounts with God on these matters and with others.
- Develop a relationship with a mature believer that can counsel and pray for you in these matters and keep you accountable.

Let us explore further the connection between individual sin and its linkage to the corporate body of Christ. Whether as individuals or as part of the group, we are still the body of Christ. 1 Cor 6:19-20 still applies to Nilesch as an individual Christian or Nilesch as a member of SGC. Nilesch, as an individual Christian is part of the body of Christ, as is those part of Samabula Gospel Chapel. So Nilesch as part of SGC is still a part of the body of Christ – the church. The individual and the church are inseparable in a corporate sense.

#### **Text: Acts 5: 1-11**

*<sup>1</sup> But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, <sup>2</sup> and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. <sup>3</sup> But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? <sup>4</sup> While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God." <sup>5</sup> When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. <sup>6</sup> The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.*

*<sup>7</sup> After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. <sup>8</sup> And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you<sup>[a]</sup> sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." <sup>9</sup> But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your*

*husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.”<sup>10</sup> Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.<sup>11</sup> And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.*

The story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 is difficult. It strikes many readers as harsh, a return to Old Testament retribution. “Why this swift act of judgment? Why no opportunity of for repentance and restoration?” Here are some perspectives for consideration

1. It’s easy to forget the first word in the story: “But.” So, lets’ go back to the context. What is going on in the early church? Ananias and Sapphira’s deceit and greed stand in contrast to the sincerity and generosity of the community of faith (4:32–37). Let us go back and read the paragraph before, 4:32–37 and a sense of sadness may come upon us all.

*<sup>32</sup> Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.<sup>33</sup> And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup> There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold<sup>35</sup> and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.<sup>36</sup> Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, <sup>37</sup>sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.*

These are exciting times. The church is growing and there is much common vision, mission and purpose and actions towards it. Everyone sees and acts towards the greater good rather than individual needs.

Come in Chapter 5 verse 1: “**But** a man named Ananias . . .” A dark cloud invades the scene. Greed and deceit enter the community like a virus. Amid the glorious expansion of the church, Ananias and Sapphira sneak in as a threat.

Note, too, that Sapphira falls down dead at Peter’s feet (5:10), whereas Joseph brought all his money and laid it at the apostles’ feet (4:37). The generous disciple held God’s authority in high esteem and showed it by laying his possessions at his appointed messenger’s feet. Ananias and Sapphira did not, and God made his authority known by laying *them* down.

2. The story of Ananias is to the book of Acts what the story of Achan is to the book of Joshua. In both narratives, an act of deceit interrupts the victorious progress of the people of God. In [Josh. 7:1](#) where it is said that the Israelites (represented by Achan) “broke faith” by retaining for private use property that had been devoted to God.

*But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things, for Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things. And the anger of the LORD burned against the people of Israel.*

Some parallels between the two stories:

- Both events happen amid new beginnings: Israel just coming into the promised land and the New Testament Church taking root in Jerusalem.
- Both events concern greed and possession. God had commanded the Israelites not take any devoted things into the camp ([Jos. 6:8](#)), and the budding church had made it a practice to sell all that they had.
- God swiftly and corporately punishes both parties. A notable difference is that Achan's whole family is punished with him, whereas Ananias and Sapphira are punished individually.

And so it seems reasonable to postulate that one reason for God's swift judgment here is to guard the holiness of His people and their growing community.

Passages in the New Testament command guarding the church's purity ([1 Cor 3:16–17](#); [5:1–5](#); [2 Cor 6:14–18](#)).

### **1 Cor 3:16–17:**

<sup>16</sup> Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? <sup>17</sup> If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

### **1 Cor 5:1–5; Sexual Immorality Defiles the Church**

<sup>1</sup> It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. <sup>2</sup> And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

<sup>3</sup> For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. <sup>4</sup> When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, <sup>5</sup> you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

### **2 Cor 6:14–18**

<sup>14</sup> Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? <sup>15</sup> What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? <sup>16</sup> What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,

*"I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

<sup>17</sup> Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you,

<sup>18</sup> and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty."

3. Ultimately, this passage is not about Ananias and Sapphira lying to the assembly and keeping back a portion for themselves. It's about them lying to God (5:3, 9). Satan was trying to thwart the Spirit of God.

Peter himself indicates that the two could have just as well kept back a portion for themselves; it was theirs to do with as they pleased (v. 4). It was not mandatory for everyone to sell their property. Instead, they presented it as all they had (in context, the phrase "laid it at the apostles' feet" in verse 2 makes this clear). They were pretending. It was an appearance of belonging to the group but really their heart was not fully with the purpose of God. And the question for us all, today and now is, is that so with us? Why are we coming to Samabula Chapel or wherever it is we are part of? What is our motivation? What is our agenda? I'm finding out more and more that some people see Samabula Gospel Chapel as some kind of money tree. And they think they are entitled to that money, which is really God's and so they pretend. So, they are not members because they love God and want to serve Him and are called to labour alongside us – rather they are looking for opportunities for what they might get. Also, giving and taking care of some, is causing jealousy and people think, where is my share, why not me? How very sad. Not only is this ungodly, it is simply satanic and demonic.

Satan is trying to get a foothold because he sees how powerfully the Spirit is moving. Whereas the community was "filled" with the Holy Spirit (4:30), Ananias was "filled" with Satan; "he has become Satan's plaything."

If the devil's first tactic was to destroy the Church by force from without (outside), his second was to destroy it by lies and deception from within (inside).

And so, this is not simply a story of greed in the early Church. It's about an attack on the church from within—an enemy scared and trying to stop the great momentum of the gospel. Are we filled with the Spirit of God or are we the plaything of the devil?

4. The assembly's response matters most.

The message is repeated in verse 5 and 11: "Great fear came upon all who heard it / the whole church". This is the important point. Do we have the fear and awe of the Lord? Or are we pretending to? In fact, this is not the only time awe is inspired in Acts (2:43; 9:31; 19:17), which reinforces this message.

The phrase "and the word continued to spread" functions this way in Acts, too (6:7; 12:24; 19:20; 13:49). Throughout Luke and Acts, Luke often ends stories with such summative statements (see [Luke 1:12, 65; 2:9; 5:26; 7:16; 8:25, 35, 37; 9:34, 45; 21:26](#)).

### **Conclusion:**

Saints, our individual sinful actions, however great or small have an impact on the fellowship of God's people and on Christ's body. Our takeaway from the Acts 5 text is that the people witnessed the event with fear and awe. God is a holy God who destroys evil and zealously defends His holiness. His judgments are His, and He only makes some of them known. Let



us not be foolish enough to test Him. We might think that I am not as deceptive as Ananias and Sapphira. But what little lies, and deception have we practiced, or are planning to practice. God is stripping off the veneer of holiness in all of us. We have been exposed as an assembly and individuals and have been weighed and found wanting. 1 Cor 11 warns us to examine ourselves before we appear before Him. How can we break bread when we harbour and commit acts of sin and then we want to pretend by appearing before a holy God? This is not worship or fellowship but an act of lies and deceit. Let us not test the Lord but be a people called to be holy as He is holy. *James 3: 14-6 says: But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. <sup>15</sup> This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. <sup>16</sup> For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.*

### **Shall We Pray/ Conclusion:**

Gracious and Almighty God, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ will survive all attacks upon it. No one can destroy the church. Why are we so privileged? Because the church is the body and bride of Christ that He is perfecting to present the church to God. The Lord Jesus Christ died for the church. No one can and could kill Christ because He is God and indestructible. He gave up His own Spirit.

Our Father, you have told us 1 Corinthians 3:17 that: If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are. We confess that we ourselves are to blame for trying to destroy Your temple within us. This is how wretched we are. All our alibis, pretences and excuses are exposed before You. We repent Lord that: in thought, word or deed, we have committed serious offences against You and our brothers and sisters in Christ and even unbelievers.

In laziness, selfishness and lust for power and self-advancement Lord, we have provoked hatred, division and hurt within our assembly, homes and communities.

In greed, deceit and indifference, we have caused serious damage, unnecessary conflict and aggravated destruction to our brothers and sisters in Christ and even unbelievers.

In selfishness, insensitivity and bias, we have encouraged and emboldened those who inflict hurt, pain and sorrow on our assembly, loved ones and families.

Dear Lord as Romans 13:12 tells us, the night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore, help us lay aside the deeds of darkness, even discard them and put on the armour of light, Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 13:12). Purify our hearts Lord, let Thine own self be enthroned in our hearts and nothing else. We humbly seek your forgiveness, cleansing and healing in the saving name of our Lord Jesus Christ., amen



Two more attacks on the church:

- **Self-dependence and self-interest.** These saints and churches operate in their own strength and ability. These churches may speak passionately about the “power of God,” they rely more on their own power. The church is dying but saints unwilling to change. Self-interested saints are only concerned about their own welfare. Their philosophy and motive is what can the church, Christians and others do for me. They are not interested in what they can or might be able to do for God or the church. For such people, church is just a cultural thing we do on Sunday and we walk away and live our lives as we wish the rest of the week. For such people, their sole motivation for speaking and serving is to draw attention to themselves and how great they are. That’s it, that’s all they care about.
- **We see church as a place to be served rather than to serve.** **We** argue about preferences? Preferences about the style of music in worship. About the order of worship. About the colour of the carpet. About the time of service. The list could continue. When service is an expected part of church membership, God can use service to shape our Christian lives into what He wants us to be.

- **We fail to see that the local church is God's plan A to do his mission on earth, and that he has no plan B.** The New Testament, from Acts 2 to Revelation 3 is all about the local church. It is clear that God means for local congregations to be the focus of his ministry. When we minimize the local church, we minimize the work of God.
- **We have let culture dictate our schedules.** If Christians would stop letting their kids play Sunday-morning sports, the leagues would soon get the message. Instead, on this matter and others, we let culture tell us what's really important. In doing so, we are communicating to our children what is and what is not important.
- Such people are not really committed. They are not really making a difference. To all of you who say you are connected to a local church: Are you really? Are you really gathering without excuses? Are you looking to serve rather than to be served? Are you willing to give up the trappings of culture to be a growing disciple in your church? Are you really so committed that you would put your church first, only after your Lord and your family?
- **What is the way back to Christ?** The Bible tells us clearly in [Jeremiah 17:9](#) "*The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?*"
- Saints, it is a heart issue. The following Scriptures have much to say on the heart.  
*Proverbs 4:23 Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.*  
*Matthew 6:21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*  
*Luke 6:45: The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.*  
 Saints, it's all about the heart. We tend to forget the first and greatest commandment which is still relevant and applicable today or maybe we can recite it but have not thought long and hard about it. In Matthew 22:37: <sup>37</sup> Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy **heart**, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.
- Note the word 'heart'. We will speak that which is in our heart. The outward expression is the fruit of the inner heart condition. *for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.*
- Therefore, as [Philippians 2:3-4](#) commands us: Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

- **What is the way back to Christ?** We have got to seriously desire and pray for a change of heart and to be transformed to have the heart and mind of Christ. Create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me.
- *Psalm 24: 3-5 Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? <sup>4</sup>He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully. <sup>5</sup>He will receive blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation.*
- **Power struggles.** I've been around a long time and seen just about everything in the church and know how these plays out. I am familiar with the inner workings of assemblies both in Fiji and abroad and have advised and continue to advise and pray for these assemblies and elders. Power struggles have a tragic end and only God comes out the winner. This issue wounds so many and discourages so many. It is an insidious cancer. For those initiating these acts I have yet to see a Christian prosper spiritually. On the contrary all I've seen is their regression, downfall, and destruction.

We would do well to take heed of King David's example. God anointed Him as King even when Saul was still around. David entered Saul's service and became Saul's comforter and adviser and confidante and eventually his son-in-law. Even Saul's son, Jonathan recognised God's anointing on David. However, Saul grew jealous, insecure and began a campaign to persecute and kill David. David spent years as fugitive and not once did he take the opportunity and there were several to kill Saul.

Even though David is God's anointed, David respects the Lord's Anointed (Saul). Let us turn to 1 Samuel 24:1-22. Saul settled the conflict with the Philistines and returned to his quest to kill David. David was in the wilderness of Engedi in a cave, and Saul's men were with him on the opposite side. During this time Saul and his men fell asleep and David's men caught him and they desired David to kill him. The son of Jesse refused, he only cut a piece of Saul's robe and later felt bad that he did that. David feels guilty for even this minor act:

<sup>5</sup> And afterward David's heart struck him, because he had cut off a corner of Saul's robe. <sup>6</sup> He said to his men, "The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the Lord's anointed, to put out my hand against him, seeing he is the Lord's anointed."

My dear saints, if we are faithful in little things, we will be entrusted with greater responsibilities. David proved faithful in caring for his father's sheep before being called to shepherd God's flock (1 Sam 16:11; 17:34-35; Ps 78:70-72).

Spiritual growth takes time. David was anointed as king by Samuel when he was about 17 years old (1 Sam 16:12-13). He would not actually rule over all Israel, however, until many years later (5:4-5). A toadstool (mushroom) can spring up overnight, but mighty trees don't

grow quite that fast.

David began and ended his ministry by acknowledging the absolute sovereignty of God in the lives of his people (1 Sam 17:46-47; 1 Chron 29:10-15). David recognised God's hand and call on his life. He gave God credit for his leadership influence. He realised that his destiny was for the nation, not for his own ego.

What is the point of this illustration as far as the church is concerned and Matthew 16:18. Christ is building His church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. When we touch the anointed of the Lord or cause division in the church, we are in essence or ultimately touching God. It is a fearful thing to fall into God's hands. Too often we do the work of the devil or his work rather than God's work. The devil's goal is to divide churches and keep people from believing the gospel. In Daniel 1:5 and 8 we see Daniel determining each day in his heart not to be defiled by the daily influence of the world. We need to take up His cross daily.

***What is the way back to Christ?*** [2 Timothy 3:1-5](#) is instructive: But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful (or ungrateful), unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty (proud), lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

#### **Take away Messages and reflection points:**

1. The church which is the Christ's body is attacked by forces outside and inside the church.
2. Believers can do the devil's work for him by attacking the church.
3. I need to spend time in the word of God and with godly people to help me serve God more.
4. Why do I attend the local assembly? Is it because I want to show others, I am a Christian? Is it because I want something from the church and God's people? Or is it because I want to grow in the Lord and His word and serve Him more.

#### **Reflection Questions:**

1. Have I contributed in some way to attacking and dividing the church of the Lord Jesus Christ?

2. Are there any hidden sins in my life? What are they and what am I going to do to turn away from them? Am I in denial? Have I confessed these sins to God? Psalm 19:12 “How can I know all the sins lurking in my heart?”

### **Shall we pray.**

King of Kings, Lord of Lords, thank you that You are great and abundant in power. Your understanding is beyond measure. In your wisdom, You created the church, described as the Lord Jesus Christ’s body. May we work together as members of one body, using the gifts and abilities You have given us to faithfully love and serve one another. May we find our strength from the Lord Jesus, the Head of the body. May the Lord make us increase and abound in love for each other. May You establish our hearts as blameless in holiness before you. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.

Gracious God, you have called us to be a unified body, working together that which you have willed for the world. In our selfishness and apathy, we fail to participate in the work you have called us to do. In our jealousies and groups and divisions, we refuse to work with others to accomplish your will. Please give us a passion to serve you alongside one another. We confess to you these and other sins. Heal us Lord we pray, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ our Lord, the very standard of meekness and humility and unity. Amen.

### **2 Sam 6 Uzzah and the Ark**

Transporting the ark on a cart was against God’s specific command. The ark was designed to be carried ([Exodus 25:12-15](#)) and was only to be carried by Levites of the family of Koath ([Numbers 4:15](#)).

God wanted the ark to be carried because He wanted nothing mechanical about the ark, representing His presence. “The ark was nothing less than the burden of the Lord, and the burden of the Lord was to be carried on the hearts of the Levites.” (Redpath)

ii. We can imagine what these men thought. “Look – we have a **new cart** for the ark of God. God will be very pleased at our fancy **new cart**.” They thought that a new technology or luxury could cover over their ignorant disobedience.

iii. “We want God’s presence very much, don’t we? But we like to hitch His presence to some of our new carts. We like to add Him to our list of organizations, to load Him on top of the mechanics of a busy life, and then drive. How much of our service is really in the energy of the flesh, I wonder! So often we put forth our hands, but not our hearts.” (Redpath)

- iv. “It is not new things we need, but *new fire*.” (John Wesley)
- v. The Philistines transported the ark on a cart in [1 Samuel 6:10-11](#). They got away with it because they were Philistines, but God expected more from His people. Israel was to take their example from God’s Word, not from the innovations of the Philistines.

**Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drove the new cart:** The meaning of the names of these sons of Abinadab paint a meaningful picture. **Uzzah** means “strength” and **Ahio** means “friendly.”

i. Much service for the LORD is like this – a new cart, a big production, with *strength* leading and *friendly* out front – yet all done without inquiring of God or looking to His will. Surely David prayed for God’s blessing on this big production, but he didn’t inquire of God regarding the production itself. This was a good thing done the wrong way.

**Then David and all the house of Israel played music before the LORD:** Judging from the importance of the occasion and all the instruments mentioned, this was quite a production. The atmosphere was joyful, exciting, and engaging. The problem was that none of it pleased God because it was all in disobedience to His word.

- i. We are often tempted to judge a worship experience by how it makes *us* feel. But when we realize that worship is about *pleasing God*, we are driven to His word, so we can know how He wants to be worshipped.
- ii.
- iii. It is hard to receive it in our consumer-oriented culture, but worship *isn’t all about what pleases us*. It’s all about what pleases God.

*(6-7) Uzzah is struck dead for touching the ark.*

**And when they came to Nachon’s threshing floor, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. Then the anger of the LORD was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for his error; and he died there by the ark of God.**

a. **When they came to Nachon’s threshing floor:** At a **threshing floor** the whole stalks of wheat were gathered, and the *chaff* was separated from the *wheat*. There was a lot of *chaff* in this production, and God blew away the chaff at **Nachon’s threshing floor**.

b. **Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it:** This was strictly forbidden. Regarding the transporting of the ark [Numbers 4:15](#) says, *they shall not touch any holy thing lest they die*.

i. Uzzah made a decision in a moment to disregard God’s command and to do what seemed right to him. Even decisions made in a moment matter before God.

c. **God struck him there for his error:** God fulfilled the ominous promise of [Numbers 4:15](#) and **struck** Uzzah. David wanted Israel to know the presence of the LORD and God showed up at **Nachon’s threshing floor** – but not in the way anyone wanted.

i. Uzzah’s **error** was more than just a reflex action or instinct. God **struck** Uzzah because his action was based upon a critical **error** in thinking.

- . Uzzah erred in thinking it didn't matter who carried the ark.
  - . Uzzah erred in thinking it didn't matter how the ark was carried.
  - . Uzzah erred in thinking he knew all about the ark because it was in his father's house for so long.
  - . Uzzah erred in thinking that God couldn't take care of the ark of Himself.
  - . Uzzah erred in thinking that the ground of Nachon's threshing floor was less holy than his own hand.
- ii. "He saw no difference between the ark and any other valuable article. His intention to help was right enough; but there was a profound insensibility to the awful sacredness of the ark, on which even its Levitical bearers were forbidden to lay hands." (Maclaren)

#### *4. (8-9) David reacts with anger and fear.*

**And David became angry because of the LORD's outbreak against Uzzah; and he called the name of the place Perez Uzzah to this day. David was afraid of the LORD that day; and he said, "How can the ark of the LORD come to me?"**

- a. **David became angry because of the LORD's outbreak:** David's anger was based in confusion. He couldn't understand why his good intentions weren't enough. God cares about both our intentions and actions.
- b. **How can the ark of the LORD come to me:** David knew it was important to bring the **ark of the LORD** into the center of Israel's life. He wanted all Israel to be excited about the presence and glory of God. Because of what happened to Uzzah, David felt he couldn't do what God wanted him to do.
- i. David's response in the rest of the chapter shows that he found the answer to his question. He answered the question with the thought later expressed in [Isaiah 8:20](#): *To the law and to the testimony!* David found the answer in God's word.

The point of this illustration is in the church of Christ there are no racial distinctions, no class differences, no social divisions and no sexual differentiation – we are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28).

### **The Confusion Regarding the Church**

We have emphasized in this series that the Church of this dispensation is a distinct entity. Some have suggested that the local assembly is a miniature, or microcosm, of the

dispensational Church. This is not the case. Clear distinctions are made in the New Testament with regard to both. They are distinct organisms and retain distinct identities.

There are those who teach that the Church has replaced Israel in God's purpose. They state that the blessings of the covenant made with Abraham have been transferred to the Church. This is patently unbiblical; the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 15:9-21) concerns the promise of a physical inheritance, the land of Canaan. It includes the promise of blessing for Abraham's physical descendants, a seed who will inherit that land. This covenant is a unilateral covenant and is different from the Mosaic Covenant, which was a bilateral covenant. Israel acknowledged this when they said, "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do" (Exo 19:8). The Abrahamic Covenant is dependent on the Lord alone and its blessings are not conditional. The fulfillment of this covenant will be realized in the future during the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus when Israel will be in its land, dwelling safely and in a right relationship with the Lord (Isa 11:12; Rom 11:25-27).

It should be noted that there are 75 references to Israel in the New Testament. A study of each context will demonstrate that when the proper name Israel is used, it always indicates the physical land of Israel or denotes its place as a distinct nation. This includes the reference at the end of the book of Galatians, "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God" (6:16). In the preceding verses Paul has confirmed that all blessings come through the cross. He invokes mercy and peace upon all who walk in keeping with this rule. However, he also desires mercy and peace upon his own nation, the Israel of God.

Some have questioned where the Church fits in God's kingdom program. God's kingdom is eternal (Psa 145:13) and His rule has been from everlasting. The Church will be linked with Christ forever. Israel and the Gentile nations will be separate entities in the future kingdom of Christ. The Church will also retain its distinct place and privilege.

### **The Calling of the Church**

We have considered the coming kingdom glory of the Lord Jesus. The Church will have a special place in that kingdom. Paul confirmed this as he wrote, "And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom" (2Ti 4:18). We will be associated with the Lord Jesus when He returns in glory, but the calling, expectation and hope of the Church are heavenly.

In summary, the dispensational Church is a unique entity, enjoying spiritual blessings. The Church has a place of unique privilege and will enjoy this in association with the Lord Jesus forever.