

Assignment #3 -- Principals for the Church -- October 23, 1975 -- Ann Blackwell

When the Church of Jesus Christ began it centered on the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus was the reason the Church existed; it existed in the name and power of Jesus. The Church knew itself as all those persons who confessed Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and were indwelt by His Holy Spirit. Though the world is unaware of it, the Church has always been composed of only such persons--heartbreaking as this is "pew warmers" and "religious busybodies" throughout the world have no share in the Church of our Lord! This is not to say there are not real Christians still laboring for and in the institutional church. There are Christians wherever Jesus is personally Lord and Saviour in ones life.

The world is blinded (or is it hardened) by a "false church" which exists not solely in the Lordship of Jesus Christ but for the glory of that "church! In such a "church, we are proud of "our" organization, we are proud of our membership--our organization over shadows the real reason of existence and we have to be sure that organization is successful and that everyone knows it. To keep that "false church" surviving, we have to be very organized--committees, officers, campaigns, building, official material etc. But Jesus wants to be the head of His Church (a parallel to God and the Israelites wanting the worldly kingly system!) In the institutional church, it is not possible for Jesus to be the head as He was when the Church began because we depend on what is seen in organization, our plans and abilities instead of the unseen activity of our Lord. Can we live as the Church should live? Only when Jesus is Lord and when we are not bound by the constraints of the world's structure. Only when we are guided by the creativity of the Holy Spirit. Our model is the creative, powerful Holy Spirit invading the world in the first century.

The first principal I see operating in the "Church" is that the Holy Spirit overflows in the hearts of Christians producing an evangelistic lifestyle. Overriding everything else is a passion to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Yet the witness is not

only motivated by the Holy Spirit, it is instigated by the Spirit and executed in the power of the Spirit. The witness is therefore a product totally of the creative Holy Spirit.

Immediately upon being filled with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the first 120 Christians began witnessing to the resurrection of Jesus as God gave them opportunity. God provided miracles from which testimonies could follow; imprisonment in which testimony was necessary--daily God gave them opportunity to witness and the church grew. Through persecution the Church scattered and witnessed.

Throughout the book of Acts, I see the Church with a concern for evangelism. At Antioch, the Holy Spirit led them to send out Paul, Barnabas, Mark as missionaries. And so did other Churches: Lystra sent Timothy; Thessalonica sent Aristarchus; Berea sent Sopater; Tychicus and Trophimus were from Asia, etc. Priscilla and Aquilla traveled around witnessing. Apollos also had a zeal for evangelism.

Jesus had prepared the apostles to witness for Him and this is what they did as they carried the message throughout the world. They did not organize a world system organization to carry on and preserve the message. God is not limited to and dependent upon such a system! God has given us freedom to walk in His Spirit and to be instruments of His but His Holy Spirit must be free to lead us.

The second principal I see is that the Christian's were discipled and exhorted. As Jesus disciplined and taught His disciples, so is it necessary to disciple new Christians. Acts records how the Jerusalem Christians were disciplined by the apostles; Paul made return trips to Galatia, Asia, Greece, Macedonia to exhort and encourage the Christians; Paul even stayed in Corinth two years and Ephesus three years to build and develop the Christians there. Paul sent his fellow travelers to various Churches to minister to them. The letters Paul wrote to Corinth, Thessalonica, Ephesus, Galatia, Phillipi etc. show his deep concern for discipling.

Especially was it important to guide them to continue the Christian life in grace for the pitfall of returning to legalism was ever present with the Jewish Christians

and the licentious life was the pitfall of the Gentile Christians. The need to grow in grace is an ever present struggle for the Church. To misunderstand the privilege and need to grow in grace leads eventually into the legalism of fundamentalism or the licentiousness of liberalism.

The third principal I see is extremely important for without it, even true evangelism and true discipleship will collapse under the pressure of the WORLD'S view of circumstances. It is necessary to see events that occur from God's viewpoint. Jesus told the apostles that in the world they would have tribulation and that if the world persecuted Him, it would persecute them. The apostles and disciples met considerable persecution, but they knew the nature of God, His power and they were confident of His supernatural work. When the "religious leaders" told Peter and John not to speak in the name of Jesus, they could say, "we will obey God"; when Paul was opposed by the Jews, he kept testifying; when Peter was in prison awaiting execution the next day, he could sleep; when persecution forced the Christians to leave Jerusalem, they witnessed as they scattered. The result of trusting God was that God was free to work.

The Church was different from the rest of the world and was willing to be different and willing to trust God. As the "church" today blends into the culture of the 20th century, its strength is no longer Gods. Man can handle the work of the "church"!

The fourth principal I see is the need for Christians to love and support each other. This would be the local Church that comes together because of their oneness and love for the Lord. It seems to be a natural result of the new birth--hearts overflowing with love for Jesus overflow with love for each other. Immediately upon the birth of the Church there existed love and unity of the highest level--sharing of meals and belongings. As Paul travelled, we see new Christians opening their hearts and homes--such as Lydia, Jason, Priscilla and Aquilla. However, it isn't natural to be able to maintain this love and unity for it is consistent only in the life of a mature Christian. The "church" does not exist to make Christians loving, the "church is the result of the

unity we have in Jesus. In Jerusalem Church, this unity and love resulted in strength for witnessing and support and encouragement for the apostles in their witnessing; there existed a hunger for instruction in the Word of God. That Church did not form an organization; it may have had leaders who were more mature Christians to guide and the newer Christians but they did not confine themselves to the world's structure. Discipling seems more like the way to grow as opposed to rules. It was the method used by Jesus. The Holy Spirit is creative and must be free to work in God's way--and "God's ways are not our ways."

*of the Church... with your... rules for... We'll... The... a Bible... when...*

*a deep discussion... might... confident... significant... Economy... are valid... church!*