

## THE PRIMACY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH I

# Primacy of the Local Church in World Evangelization

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When we examine Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, we find some of the clearest statements on the nature of the church. We find:

1. *The primacy of the Lord Jesus Christ.* Jesus is the head, the cornerstone of the church (Ephesians 1:22–23).
2. *The primacy of the Scriptures.* The apostles and prophets are the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20), but the Scriptures are still the only rule for our faith and practice (2 Timothy 3:15–17).
3. *The primacy of connective unity.* The church is a single body of living members, a single temple of living stones (Ephesians 2:21; 4:13,16).
4. *The primacy of the local church.* There are many references throughout the New Testament to locality, including that of the saints in Ephesus, which indicate the significance of locality for identifying the church. Each local church visibly represents the whole church. When we call for "The Whole Church to Take the Whole Gospel to the Whole World," we are calling for each and every local church to take the whole gospel to the whole world.

The churches at Jerusalem and Antioch provide a biblical model as we face the challenge of the primacy of the local church in world evangelization. Four distinct lessons may be learned from the Jerusalem church model: gathering, anointing, teaching, and witnessing.

### The Challenge of Gathering

*Ekklesia*, the New Testament word for *church*, means "assembly," with the action of gathering being primary. The *ekklesia* at Jerusalem gathered often (Acts 1:4,8,12–13; 2:1,44,46). The church gathered for worship as a large group (Acts 3:11; 5:12) and in small groups from house to house (Acts 2:46; 5:42). Togetherness as expressed in regular gatherings for worship, was and is a power source for world evangelization.

The whole church today faces a crisis of individualism which threatens to splinter the church, and thereby reduce our effectiveness in evangelization. Gathering for worship as local churches is one key remedy. Gathering provides an atmosphere for spiritual anointing, a crucible for sound teaching, and a platform for bold witnessing.

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## The Challenge of Anointing

As Jesus had promised (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8), the church received the anointing of the Holy Spirit for world evangelization (Acts 2:1–4; 4:24–31). The anointing of the Holy Spirit was evident in their devotion to fellowship (Acts 2:42,44–45; 4:32–35) and in their devotion to prayer (Acts 2:42; 4:23–31). The power of the Holy Spirit is evident in Korea in the prayer life of the Korean churches. Each morning we gather in local churches for pre-dawn prayer meetings (*sae byuk kido*). These include singing, preaching, and extensive prayer. One of the most powerful features of our prayer life is our intense, simultaneous prayer (*tong song kido*). We intercede as one great voice, asking for God's power to be poured out upon us.

The whole church today faces a crisis of misplaced emphasis. With modernization comes materialism, which causes our emphasis to be placed on visible material blessing, rather than on the invisible spiritual blessing of the Holy Spirit. We can learn a great deal from our brothers and sisters in Christ who are suffering under the hand of persecution. Patient endurance and evangelization in the face of persecution is an indication of the power of the Holy Spirit at work in the church.

## The Challenge of Teaching

The anointing of the Holy Spirit upon the Jerusalem church was also evident in their devotion to the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42). Sound teaching is based on the infallible and inerrant Word of God. Even as inspired men of God, the apostles based their entire ministry on the Word of God (Acts 2:16–21,25–28,34–35; 4:25–26; 6:4).

Apostolic teaching set the standard for sound doctrine (Acts 4:25; 5:3,9; 4:2; 5:25,42; 6:2; 8:25). Early response to the gospel, at times numbering into the thousands, resulted from authoritative preaching and teaching of the Word of God (Acts 2:41,47; 4:4; 6:7; 8:4,12; 12:24). Sound teaching kept the gospel and the church pure as the Jerusalem church grew.

The whole church today faces a crisis of authority. We are in danger of losing our identity if we compromise on the infallibility and inerrancy of the Scriptures. We will no longer be the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15) if we fail to meet this challenge. Unwavering reliance upon the Scriptures within each and every local church is the key. As pastors stress the authority of God's Word in the local church, the direct result will be a movement of evangelization. Sound teaching is the basis for bold witnessing.

## The Challenge of Witnessing

In the same way that the Scriptures are for the whole church, so also the Great Commission is for the whole church, for each local church, and each member of the church.

Witnessing in Jerusalem was based upon the Word of God, supported in prayer, accompanied by wonders (Acts 2:43; 5:12), and expanded geographically and cross-culturally (Acts 1:8; 8:1; 11:19). This witnessing resulted in increasing numbers of converts to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, sometimes by the thousands, sometimes by daily increases, but always by the power of the Holy Spirit which filled their evangelism.

The whole church today faces a crisis of priorities. Witnessing the gospel must be maintained as our top priority, with ministries of education and compassion working in support of our witnessing efforts. Local churches play the key role, especially each local pastor and the trained laity. We owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Thomas Wang for his

unending emphasis upon the role of the local church in world evangelization. If this one man can accomplish so much, how much more could be done if we all would carry the burden of world evangelization to each local church represented here.

Church extension is often the result of spontaneous evangelism. Such was the case in the development of the church in Antioch. God had prepared the church at Jerusalem to act as a "mother church" to the church at Antioch. Spontaneous preaching to the Gentiles in Antioch led to a great number of converts (Acts 11:19–21). Barnabas was then sent from the church at Jerusalem as an organizing pastor in Antioch (11:22). Four additional lessons may be learned from the Antioch church model: training, praying, calling, and sending.

## The Challenge of Training

The church at Antioch developed from a daughter church into a sister church under the ministry of trained leaders. Five ministers are listed in the Antioch church (Acts 13:1). These men are gifted—prophets and teachers. They are tested—leading worship on a regular basis (13:2). It was from among these trained ministers in this local church at Antioch that the Lord chose two, Barnabas and Saul, to go on the first missionary journey.

The whole church today faces a shortage of trained leaders. This decreases our ability to train local laity, as well as to send trained laborers into the worldwide harvest field. Tested service and ministry within the local church are still the best methods for recognizing those whom God has gifted and chosen as whole church leaders.

## The Challenge of Prayer

We must continue to pray the Lord of the harvest to raise up workers for his harvest. The leaders in the early church were selfless, sacrificial, cooperative, forgiving, loving, morally noble, and they possessed international vision. This is the type of leader which is still needed today.

If prayer is neglected, then fasting is even more neglected. The ministers of the Antioch church prayed and fasted on a regular basis (Acts 13:2; 14:23). Fasting prayer increases sensitivity to the Word of God and to the leading of the Holy Spirit, and is a great resource for power in evangelism. The Antioch church matured through prayer and fasting.

The whole church today faces a crisis of commitment which threatens to dilute our evangelism. Our commitment must include obedience before activity, quality before quantity, power before effort, the eternal before the temporal, and the historical facts of the gospel before theories. Prayer and fasting within the context of the local church will bring about spiritual renewal. Local pastors are the key in calling for such a renewal.

## The Challenge of Calling

In one sense, every Christian is called to evangelize. However, the Holy Spirit still leads local church leaders to recognize God's call on the lives of those whom he wishes to send as evangelists. Within the Antioch church the call came for Barnabas and Paul.

Barnabas and Paul were called to plant churches (Acts 14:23). The local church is primary both in terms of the call and the task of workers in the harvest field. The call is issued from within the local church and the task is to plant more local churches.

The whole church today faces a crisis of consecration. Regionalism, racism, and even denominationalism, threaten to reduce our efforts for world evangelization. Motivation for world evangelization should come from no other source than the pow-

erful conviction of God in our hearts—by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God. Let us issue a call for repentance to pastors, seminarians, and laity—a call which challenges them to fasting and prayer, evaluation, confession of sin, repentance, and renewal. In this atmosphere we will be able to recognize those who have been truly called as evangelists, to lead the way in taking the gospel to the remainder of the world. The purpose of our training, praying, and calling is that we might be involved in sending.

### **The Challenge of Sending**

Those duly sent by a local church have been sent by the Holy Spirit himself (Acts 13:3–4), such is the primacy of the local church in world evangelization.

Barnabas and Paul preached the gospel and planted churches until their work was completed. Upon returning they gave a full report to the sending church (14:26–28). Our missionaries today should do the same.

The whole church today faces the challenge of sacrificial sending. It is much easier to sing, “We will give, we will pray, we will witness every day,” than it is to actually accomplish these tasks. This is why we need to re-emphasize the power of the Word of God, the power of the Holy Spirit, the power of prayer, and the power of evangelizing. World evangelization calls for sacrificial giving, sacrificial praying, and sacrificial witnessing. May each and every local church rise to the occasion, based on the authority of God’s Word, and fulfill the responsibility to pray for, to send, and to support laborers in the worldwide harvest field.

Let us pray and set goals under the direction of the Word of God and the leading of the Holy Spirit. And let us expect the Lord to do more than we could ask or imagine! May God be glorified in the church, in each local church, and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations.

## THE PRIMACY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH II

# The Importance of the Local Church to World Evangelization

Eduardo M. Maling

I represent thousands of pastors from small local churches scattered in different parts of the world. I used to think small local churches were insignificant because large churches have all the attention and we were seldom noticed. But this is not true today. Large and small local churches are equally significant and important to world evangelization. As a matter of fact, it is the *key* to world evangelization.

According to David B. Barrett, the total world population in 1989 is 5,200,782,100. By the year 2000, the total will be 6,259,642,000. Today the total number of Christians is only 1,721,655,700. And the total number of practicing Christians is even lower at 1,193,073,400. It has been claimed that 2.5 billion souls have never heard the gospel of salvation. Who will reach them for Christ?

People are important to God. He is a people-seeking God. The Bible says God is “not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). God loves people.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him (John 3:16–17).

This is the gospel of the kingdom: In Christ alone, there is hope and salvation. “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

The entire world must hear the Good News of God. The gospel of the kingdom is “the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). But,

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? (Romans 10:14).

God is calling the whole church to take the whole gospel to the whole world—proclaiming Christ faithfully until he comes.

The church is the key to world evangelization. The church is a gathered and scattered community of God’s people throughout the world in different situations and