

SELFLESS LOVE IN A SELF-CENTERED WORLD

PART I

1 Corinthians 16:13-14

August 21, 2022

Many today may be asking, “*What is the Church for? Why do we still have churches in our communities?*” We here all know that the church is the Body of Christ and the Bride of Christ in which we are being conformed into the image of Christ. It is a place where those that gather love God and love one another. However, those around us may have no clue why there’s a church in their community, having no intention of attending to find out what’s happening in that building that they drive by or walk by on a regular basis. Today the church is irrelevant to most that live within our communities!

Of course, there are many legitimate reasons for this: Christians have not been highly visible in politics, school boards or out in their community, and they may not have been there for those around them when they have gone through those times of loss, sickness, or hardships. And far too often, the Church has imitated the world rather than being distinct as salt and light, a city on a hill. And what about all of those scandals lately about residential schools, and of those high profile pastors that have been caught up

in sexual sin. But there’s nothing new under the sun when we look at Paul’s letters to the early churches that he planted around the Mediterranean. We find there are two kinds of Epistles Paul wrote to the early Church. One is, “*I always thank God for you and His unsearchable blessing in Christ.*” And the other is, “*Why can’t you sick weirdos be normal for just a minute and get your act together?*”

The problem is that there’s been this ongoing tension between our Christian walk and the world around us that’s taken place since the birth of the church at Pentecost that we are all working through as imperfect humans. Despite the painful reality of sin’s continuing power over us, the Church is still essential, not only for us as believers but for the entire world. So, despite all of the legitimate criticism against the church today, we are essential because Christ says so, and He also said that the gates of Hades will not overcome it! We’ve heard it said, “*the Church is Plan A, and there’s no Plan B,*” which means that Jesus didn’t save us and call us to merely embrace a set of scriptural doctrines and then sit back and wait for the end of the world. And it’s not also to only believe in Christ for personal forgiveness and meaning and then try to live the best moral life we can hiding behind our church walls,

because when Christ saved us, He saved us to become a movement, His Body, His redeemed people to do good until He returns. Christ unified us as His saints, faults-and-all, to transform us into Kingdom people, to represent Him, hosting His presence and changing the atmosphere wherever we go, to the glory of the Father which is in Heaven. So, we stick with the Church not because it's perfect, but because it is Christ's plan while we wait for His return!

So, here's the biblical answer to the question, "*What is the Church for?*" It's not about what the Church does for you, but what the Church does in fulfilling God's divine purposes. So, when we gather together in worship it's not about, "*was I fed today,*" but about being equipped to do what is good right where God planted me. When we come to understand our calling, we turn the corner from a compromised, self-centered Church to a God-centered, communal Church that God calls and uses for His Kingdom purposes, as we pray the Lord's prayer, "*Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.*" And only then will we begin to understand the Church as the expression of the living God in this world, which gives others a better hope, and a more God-honouring way of living than what the world offers. All

because the character of the Church reflects the character of God, and that takes being aware of the times we're living in and the schemes of the devil to get us off track!

That's why Paul tells us in **1 Corinthians 16:13**, "***Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong.***" WHY – because the times we are living in may be hazardous to your faith! Jesus didn't tell us when He would return, but He told us what we need to be doing until He returns, and that is to be His good and faithful servants by keeping watch from any attacks by the enemy, who comes to steal, kill, and destroy. And to do that requires being engaged with our communities and aware of the times so that you will not be caught off-guard, and for us to stand firm in the faith, being courageous, and staying so strong in the Lord that nothing will budge you from the task at hand in bringing Heaven to earth. While Jesus is definitely our entrance gate into Heaven, by the way of salvation, God sent Jesus to this earth for another reason as well – to commission us to do what He did and even greater things. Jesus tells His disciples after His resurrection, "***As the Father has sent me, I am sending you***" (John 20:21). Like them, we are called to participate in something that continues to extend His kingdom until Christ returns, as we live in this in-between space between

Heaven and earth as a counterculture that's not being conformed to the world but conformed to Christ. We are to be like Teflon, so the things of this world don't stick!

And that takes living intentionally ready for His appearing as wise and faithful servants. That's the warning that Jesus gave us in **Matthew 24:36-51 (NIV)** about His second coming. Jesus starts out in **verses 36-41** by describing what those days will be like. They will be like the days of Noah with everyone going about their daily business, oblivious to the signs of the times, not realizing the end is near, not expecting God to bring about His judgment on this earth. And that's why we need to keep watch and stay alert because no one knows the day the Lord will return for His faithful Church according to **verses 42-44**. And we do that according to Paul's instructions back in **1 Corinthians 16:15**, "***Be on your guard, stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong.***" And then Jesus gives us a parable on how to identify that fateful and dependable servant who is managing His house well and overseeing others in **verses 45-51**. We need to notice here that the two servants described in these verses are believers who have completely opposite ways of seeing what they are to be doing while they wait for the master's return. The contrast

here is between a wise and faithful servant and an evil servant as Jesus makes His point that Christ requires His followers to be faithful, compassionate, loving and dependable as they oversee His affairs on this earth, while Jesus is in Heaven preparing for His return!

The faithful servant in this parable is His true Church, those that are unified committed people who are on mission to bring about God's will on this earth, which means fearing God more than fearing mankind, which means a willingness to step out as a counterculture. As God used Moses to deliver His people, the Israelites, out of slavery in Egypt, He has chosen and equipped us to be His deliverer in a culture that is caught in slavery to every kind of sin imaginable, ungodliness, perversion of God's design, and all of the pleasures that this world has to offer. And even though God has put a plan in place according to **Ephesians 1:10**, "***To bring unity to all things in Heaven and on earth under Christ,***" Jesus needs a well equipped army with boots on the ground to bring about and fulfill that plan. So as Christ influences the Church, the church influences culture, bringing about God's desire on this earth through our lives, and God does that by putting Himself on display through His followers! For example: whatever your occupation may be, God will

bring Heaven through that occupation to those you work with and work for!

God does something within us so that it would flow through us to others. We are a living flowing river not a dead sea to those around us. One of the highlights of going to Israel is to float on the Dead Sea and you can float because of the high salt content; however, because of the high salt content that body of water is dead, nothing can live in it. The Dead Sea is dead because water flows in, but nothing flows out. You're not a dead sea but a flowing river, giving life wherever God takes you! What flows into us from God must flow out of us to bless others, and as Christ was anointed by His Heavenly Father to do good, we have been anointed by God to do good.

Acts 10:38, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and he went about doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him." In the same way God is with us and has anointed us to do what Jesus did and even greater things as you represent Christ to those around you!

Today, the greatest threat is to the family – the devil wants nothing more than to destroy the family, especially the God given identity of our children and grandchildren, because he knows that the Christian family is the bedrock

of resistance against the socialist agenda of our government leaders, community leaders and school boards. It's no accident that every dictatorship that has ever existed always tried to break down the family, because it's the family where you get the strength to be able to fight against the ungodly systems that are put into place. The unconditional love of fathers and mothers for their children is the seed of the Church, and that's why the Christian family is not only a good idea, its our survival strategy for the faith in these difficult times we live in. That's why Christians should stop taking family life for granted and fight for the family. Today, we cannot live as all other families around us live; Christian parents must be intentionally countercultural in their approach to family dynamics. The days of living like everyone else and hoping our children turn out for the best are over. And that's another way to heed Paul's words, "***Be on your guard, stand firm in the faith, be courageous, be strong.***"

Over the summer I have been doing a preaching series on Paul's letter to the Ephesians because it's important that we know who we are IN CHRIST and know that we've been anointed and equipped to do good as we shine our light in the darkness around us. In ending my part, Paul's prayer for the Ephesian believers is my prayer for each our

you, *“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe”* (Ephesians 1:18-19).