

## **The Church—Always On ‘Call’**

October 11, 2012

Our call (the church’s call) in Psalm 40:9-10—“***I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips, as you know, O LORD. <sup>10</sup>I do not hide your righteousness in my heart, I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly.***” Two of five orders are **to be done** in the great assembly, and three more **are not to be kept** from the great assembly! We are **not to forsake the assembly**, Scripture warns, and when we do assemble, there are things God calls us to do and not do in the great assembly.

As people of God, as His church, we have been given direction in this Psalm of David to **do two things**: **proclaim** righteousness in the great assembly, and to **speak** of God’s faithfulness and salvation—relatively the same things. And then we are to keep from doing three things: we are not to seal, hide or conceal—again, relatively the same things. We are not to **seal** our lips—by failing to proclaim and speak—to **hide** God’s righteousness in our heart, failing to proclaim and speak of it, and, finally, we are not to **conceal** God’s love and truth from the great assembly. The church is the ‘body’-building work of God!

We are not to omit what we have been told to do—proclaim and speak—and we are equally not to commit what we have been warned not to do. We the church—the great assembly—are to do what’s in bold; and not to do what’s not:

**-proclaim righteousness in the great assembly**

-do not seal my lips

-do not hide your righteousness in my heart

**-speak of your faithfulness and salvation**

-do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly.

**Veering from these instructions will have disastrous consequences.** In Habakkuk 1:8a, there is warning about the “evening wolves” (referring to the Babylonians being the enemy **in** the camp of Israel) and says: “*Their horses are swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves at dusk....*” Relating to the church today, Chales Spurgeon said, “False teachers who craftily and industriously hunt for the precious life, devouring men by their falsehoods, are as dangerous and detestable as the evening wolves. Darkness is their element, deceit is their character, destruction is their end. **We are most in danger of them when they wear the sheep’s skin.** Blessed is he who is kept from them, for **thousands are made the prey of grievous wolves that enter within the fold of the church.**” Remember that Jesus’ words, “*Depart from Me...I never knew you*”, were spoken to people who’d been active in the church and thought they had eternal life, but had failed, personally, to come to know the Way—the Shepherd!

Psalm 32:10 “*Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD’s unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him.*” A good portion of that “surrounds” will be accomplished by His church, which will hold and surround us by her dedication to instruction, correction, rebuke, and holding members accountable for their words and actions. There is a lot of fellowship as we learn and grow together, yes, but there is much more *‘fellowship’* as we follow the *One* whose ‘body’ we are. Church is like a **service** station—a filling place—and we want to be sure we are ‘in service’—being filled and filling others—and not ‘out of service’!

Spurgeon again: “We have received much by means of the efforts and sufferings of the saints in years gone by, and if we do not make some return to the church of Christ by giving her our best energies, we are unworthy to be enrolled in her ranks. . . . Personal service of Jesus becomes all the more the duty of all because it is cheerfully and abundantly rendered by some.”

Scripture exhorts believers to attend the LORD’s house regularly—church. And when God tells us to do something, obedience is implied! Hebrews 10:22-25 “...let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup>Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup>And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. <sup>25</sup>Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

“C. S. Lewis wrote that God ‘seems to do nothing of Himself which He can possibly delegate to His creatures. He commands us to do slowly and blunderingly what He could do perfectly and in the twinkling of an eye.’ There is no greater illustration of that principle,” says Philip Yancy, “than the church of Jesus Christ, to which God has delegated the task of embodying God’s Presence in the world. All of our efforts are examples of God’s delegation.”

In Matthew 16:18 we see Jesus’ first mention of the church: “*And I tell you that you are Peter (rock), and on this rock (Peter’s confession of who Jesus is) I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it*” (but it will so try). Let me take a little left. The name changer—God—is the game changer: When God changed Abram’s name to Abraham, He took His friend, and made him a father to many People; and when He changed Jacob’s name to Israel, He turned that People into a Nation of People—His own! Then He changed Simon to Peter, founding His church; and Saul to Paul, declaring sinners to be saints by grace!

In Revelation, Jesus gives some statements about seven churches and how they were being and doing church—what they were doing well, and what He had against them—and then gave an invitation to those erring to return and repent.

See, if church were optional for believers, the Lord Jesus Christ would not have made such intimate mention of her in His end-times report—His final Book: *Revelation*. But He does! And the same 'deeds' He commended 6 of those 7 churches for He will be watching for in our church. See what He commended them for being and doing—following His words "*I know your deeds*".... Your:

- hard work** (Eph); **love, faith, service, and doing more than at first** (Thy)
- perseverance, not grown weary** (Eph); **afflictions, poverty, and suffered persecution** (Smy)
- endured hardship for my Name** (Eph) and **slander** (Smy); but **remained true to my Name** and **did not renounce your faith in Me** (Per)
- a few have not soiled their clothes with sin** (Sar)—Only commendation for Sardis, and notice that there will be no commendation at all for Laodicea.
- Open Door*: **kept my word, not denied my Name**; and though you have **little strength**, you have **kept my commands to endure patiently** (Phi)

◆Now for the identification and excommunication of falsehood and evil within the church: —have **not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets** (Thy)

- intolerant of wickedness—**hates the evil that God hates** (Eph)
- tested those who claim to be apostles but are not** (Eph)
- hate the practice of the Nicolaitans** (Eph) The *Liberty Illustrated Bible Dictionary* defines as an early **Christian heretical sect** holding to the OT doctrine of Balaam who taught people to "eat things sacrificed to idols" and to "commit sexual immorality". They're followers of Nicolas, one of 7 chosen as deacon in the church at Jerusalem—Acts 6:3, 5. A proselyte from Antioch, the church fathers accused him of denying the true Christian faith and founding the heretical sect known as the Nicolaitans.

So, within the church, itself, heresies can be founded and taught; Satan's so-called deep secrets can be started and spread. Things are not always as they seem on the surface, and it will take oversight and watchfulness to keep the 'body' unscathed by evil's apostles. The church is held responsible and accountable to the Lord for identifying and removing false teachers and false doctrine from within the church. The church at Ephesus was particularly active in the practice of this watchful care-giving to her assembly.

The church at Thyatira also kept their flock from Satan's so-called deep secrets, and they were commended for their love, faith and service. We want to look at the church's responsibility in the 'love' area in particular. It's all about love! In Mark 12: 28, one of the teachers of the law asked Jesus (we know he was trying to trick Jesus) "*Of all the commandments* (and we can be sure he knew them by heart), *which is the most important?*"

Verse 29 jumps in: “*The most important one,*” answered Jesus, *is this ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. <sup>30</sup>Love the Lord your God with **all your heart** and with **all your soul** and with **all your mind** and*

*with **all your strength.**’ <sup>31</sup>The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.’” We are absolutely to love God first! And we’re to love Him with everything—being filled with love for Him will allow us to love our neighbor as ourselves. We, the Church of Jesus Christ, are on ‘call’—to love with agape’ the sinful and lost; the sinful and saved, and those with struggles: For those who are hurting, doubting or dying, we must be there—and **be the Church, because there’s always a ‘call’ for God’s love!** Pastor and author, James Merritt said, “The Church of Jesus Christ must be motivated by love, marked by love, and mastered by love.”*

**I. Motivated by love:** what would that mean for the church? David proclaims his *Psalms of Ascent* in 122:1 “*I rejoiced with those who said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD.’”* It would mean that its members love God with all their heart, mind, soul and strength, and that, then, they love their neighbor as their own selves. They are faithful to the great assembly, and love what God loves!

In explaining “God’s creative and redemptive will” Jonathan Edwards said, “Once sinners experience God’s love, they begin to love what God loves.” But some have said: “You can be a Christian and not go to church.” Based upon Christ’s love for the church, and His commands concerning it, what could we say about a ‘believer’ who intentionally avoided church—they’re not sick, injured, giving care to another, or otherwise unable to go? They have decided, for whatever reason—and the reason will not matter—that they will not attend.

Make no mistake: A Christian without a church is like a sheep without a flock. **The Shepherd of our souls leads His flock!** That sheep which insists on being alone—even though she has met the Shepherd—will not be in pasture with the other sheep around it, and will not be led with them by the Shepherd. **Who would want that?** The answer is Satan! He absolutely loves it when the sheep is alone, because that is when it is 100% vulnerable to the deadly poisonous adder; to the briars and thorn bushes that entangle and strangle; to the ravenous jaws of the wolf or coyote; to wandering far away and losing sight of the Shepherd, and becoming distant from any watering hole, so that it dies from dehydration—alone—away from comfort and help. That is Satan’s plan!

So, while we can technically be a Christian without going to church, because the believing thief on the cross didn’t get to go to church, and many who are sick and injured are unable to attend, we’ll not be a growing, committed,

confident-in-the-face-of-trials Christian. We will not receive regular corporate encouragement from the other sheep; or direction, protection and provision from the Shepherd of our soul.

**II. Marked by love:** how would that play out? If we obey Christ's command to love, then we will be 'known' to be His disciples by that love. John 13:34-35—*"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."* In fact it is a proof of our salvation—passed from death to life according to 1 John 3:14—*"We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death."* Dead while we live—we are lost!

God's love for His church includes His love for each member personally. We are *"the apple of His eye"*. Isaiah 54:10 *"Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my **unfailing love for you** will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the LORD, who has compassion on you* and Psalm 90:14 *"Satisfy us in the morning with your **unfailing love**, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days."*

We must not, however, interpret His personal love for us, individually, as His excusing our abstinence from His Church. We cannot be thriving 'Christians' and not attend church regularly, because we will wander into unbelief and doubt and worldliness and sin—we will be guilty of going our own way. Isaiah 53:6 says: *"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him (Jesus) the iniquity of us all."* God calls "going our own way"—away from Him and His Pasture—iniquity. Don't go there—*away!*

**III. Mastered by love:** can that happen this side of glory? We can be mastered by love if we trust and obey God's word on it: 1 John 15:12—*"My command is this: **Love each other** (the church) as I have loved you."* Someone has said that love at first sight is often cured by a second look. And we, mistakenly, wonder if that ever happened to God: Did He look and love, and then after a second look, think better of it? Scripture absolutely assures us that God loves us every one unconditionally. Remember what God gave to **redeem** us to Himself—and our loyalty is to Him alone! John 3:16 *"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."*

See, the first time Jesus came to earth, He came to **redeem**—to endure crucifixion and a tomb. The second time Christ will touch down to defeat the enemies of Israel and to reign. This **Revealing** Book closes with grace and peace to us from the One who is, who was and who is to come 1) the faithful witness; 2) the firstborn among..., and 3) ruler of the kingdoms of this earth! That's our God, and we are His church—the great assembly! Psalm 26:12 *"My feet stand on level ground; in the great assembly I will praise the LORD."*