

**The Local Church: Engine or Caboose?**  
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Turn to 1 Corinthians 14:12. I received great assurance about something while I was gone. A dear brother was explaining the reason that he slept in church. Did you know that you can have misgivings about that? This dear brother was very active. He shook hands with everybody, met them at the door, took up the offering, and was very alert in seating visitors and greeting the members. Then when the Pastor stood up to preach, he bowed his head and went to sleep. People asked him why he did that, and he said, "Well, these other fellows I have to watch, but I trust my pastor." That brought great assurance to me for some of you. So some of you do not trust me quite so much? Stay awake.

1 Corinthians 14:12: *Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying (That is the building up – strengthening.) of the church.*

I want to speak this morning on this subject – it is a little unusual title – "The Local Church: Engine or Caboose?" Now, you know the difference between an engine and a caboose. One is on one end, and one is on the other end. I am not talking about the beginning or the ending, but I am talking about the fact that the caboose is pulled by all the rest of the train, and the engine does all the pulling.

The message I have this morning is a little different type of message. It will be a Bible study. Listen very carefully. This message is not an attack but an answer. I will repeat that statement. This message is not an attack. I do not use my pulpit for that sort of thing. This message is not an attack, but this message is an answer. We have subscribed to the *Sword of the Lord* for many years. We have "Sword Sunday." It is a great paper. John R. Rice was a great man of God – much my senior and mightily used of God. The *Sword* goes into many homes of our church members, but many of you new folks have not heard me preach this particular message – not this message but an emphasis upon the local church. There have been many, many articles in the *Sword* recently that I feel are contrary to what the Bible has to say. Now, I am not going to talk with somebody about that. People have a right to that. I will still call them brother, still pray for them, and still fellowship with them. This is not an attack but an answer. I believe the answer is found in the Word of God. No man is infallible, but we do have an infallible Word of God. When we turn to the Word, we must find out what the Bible says. Now, I believe the emphasis, the strength, and the teaching of the New Testament. The greatest thing in the New Testament is the local New Testament church. I believe the Bible teaches that. I want you to study with me this morning about that. Now, in these articles, it makes the preacher sometimes act like he is trying to lord it over everybody and control everything. I do not desire control over anybody. I do not have that desire. I do have a desire to what the Scriptures say. Let us turn to the Word of God to find out what Scriptures say. I believe a wrong attitude toward the local church hinders the gospel and does not help it. I think that if you are wrong on the local church, you will shorten your soul-winning ministry at home, and you will shorten your reach for souls on the foreign field. God gave a great commission. To give a great commission without any plan and to just tell everybody to do their own thing is not logical. Nothing is ever done that way. The Word of God is given us to tell us how to accomplish the most in God's way and God's blessings. I want to talk about that this morning. Now, the local church is not the caboose; it is the engine. It pulls everything, and so goes the caboose. Now, the caboose comes last. Well, you say that the big shots ride back there. That is all right for the big shots to ride back there, but they are neither pushing nor pulling. They are just riding. What does the Bible have to say about the local New Testament church?

Now, consider the meaning of the word *church*. What does this word *church* mean? The word is *ecclesia*. It does not mean the building. This is not the church – the lights, the fixtures, and the pews. This is a meeting place for the church. The word *church* comes from two words: *ecclesia*, *ec*, which means *to call out* and *ecclesiastayin* which means *to call*. This morning, I am preaching

to an assembly — people called out of the highways and the hedges and the byways and business life. They are called together to transact official business for the King. Now, the word *church* means *the called out assembly*. In the New Testament, it is used in reference to the Greek assembly; it is used in reference to the Jewish assembly; and it is used in reference to the Christian assembly that we call church. Let us look at the assembly of the Greek. I wrote a paper several years ago; in fact, it was in 1955. That is a long time ago. I did a study on the Greek assembly. I just want to read some excerpts from it. Turn to Acts 19, and let us see where this word is found. (If I have to finish this message tonight, then I will finish it tonight. I am not going to rush this morning.) In Acts 19, the Greek word for church, *ecclesia*, is used. In Acts 19:32, a mob action broke out in the city of Ephesus as Paul came and preached, and folks turned from their idols. The silversmiths' union got angry and tried to run them out of town and do violence to them. Verse 32: *Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the **assembly** (Now, that is the same word that is used for church, *ecclesia*.) was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together.* The town clerk finally got them hushed. Look at verse 38-39: *Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another. But if ye inquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly.* The word *assembly* is the word *ecclesia*. He said, "You are not a lawful assembly. You are a mob." Verse 41: *And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly.* The Greek assembly were citizens. They were called out by a town crier to assemble together to transact the official business of the Greek city states. That is how the word is used in Acts 19. Let me just read the notes I had in 1955: "But was first used of an assembly of citizens of a Greek community summoned together by a crier for the transaction of business pertaining to the public welfare. The preposition *ec* indicates that it was no motley crowd, no mass meeting of non-description, but a select company gathered out of the common mass. It was an assembly of free citizens possessed of well-understood legal rights and powers summoned for the purpose of deliberating in a lawful conclave." Now, that is the word *ecclesia*. That is the word from where we get our word *church*. It is used in connection with a Greek assembly, a political body. Turn to Acts 7:38. When deacon Stephen preached his message to Israel, he dealt with their sins and their rebellion. He declared in Acts 7:38: *This is he, (talking about the Lord Jesus) that was in the church (The word is *ecclesia*, the word *assembly*.) in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us:* The word used there is talking about the congregation of Israel assembled together. You have the Greek assembly, speaking of a political body. You have the Jewish assembly, speaking of the congregation of Israel which was basically Old Testament. Let us look at the Christian assembly. I will use one verse and many others later on. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus said: *And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my **church**; (the called out ones) and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* Look at another verse by way of introduction. Turn to 1 Thessalonians 1. You can find all three in verse 1 — the Greek, the Jew, and the Christian. If you worked for the Post Office and if you got a letter addressed this way, you could deliver it by the omission of one phrase to possibly three different addresses. 1 Thessalonians 1:1: *Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church (Now, the word *church* is the word *ecclesia* or *assembly*.) of the Thessalonians (If you put a period here, he would have taken it to the Greek city states — political, the assembly of the Thessalonians. He said, "Hey, let us take this down to the city clerk.") which is in God the Father (Well, if you would have said, "To the assembly of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father [period], he would have taken it down to the synagogue. But he continues.) and in the Lord Jesus Christ: (That is not the Greek. That is not the synagogue. That is the assembly of followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.) Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.* All three definitions and usages of that word could be used in 1 Thessalonians 1:1. Now, that is the meaning of the word — the Greek, the Jew, and the Christian. Let us consider the Christian usage of the word *assembly*. The word is used in reference to the assemblies of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The word is used 110 times in the New Testament in the Christian sense in relation to God's people, the Lord Jesus Christ's Christians. In the spiritual sense, it is used only twelve times in the New Testament speaking of a body of believers from the Lord Jesus Christ until the rapture. That is spoken of as spiritual and mystical. That body has not assembled and never has been assembled. It will be assembled when it meets the Lord in the air, which is His body of which He is the head. Now twelve times out of the 110 times this overall body comprised of believers from the time of Christ until the rapture is spoken of. It will be an assembly when it meets in Heaven. There will not be anybody missing. It will be an assembly. The writer to the Hebrews calls it "the general assembly" and "church of the firstborn" which is written in Heaven. That overall mystical body of Christ does not visit the sick. It does not carry out the ordinances. It does not carry out the Great Commission. It is a mystical union of one believer to another of all ages. The emphasis of the Bible is not the mystical. The emphasis of the Bible is on the ninety-three times in the New Testament where it is written concerning an assembly such as Calvary Baptist Church, 1945 North Florida Avenue, Lakeland, Florida 33805. That is the way the New Testament uses it. That is the way it is given. When I open the New Testament, I find out that the emphasis of this New Testament is the assemblies like this scattered all over the world. Let me give you just one verse concerning the spiritual. Ephesians 1:22-23: *An hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.* As far as God is concerned, that body and position is already in Heaven seated in Heavenly places in Christ Jesus. That is the spiritual sense. Now, ninety-three times or eighty-three percent of the total usage of the word *ecclesia* in the New Testament — that includes the Greek usage, the Jewish usage, and the Christian usage — is speaking of a visible, local New Testament body of believers, called out of their homes, called out of businesses, and called away from society, meeting together for fellowship, the preaching of the Word of God, the carrying out of the Great Commission, the establishment of homes, the edification of believers, and the honoring of the Son of God. That is the emphasis of the New Testament. The most logical thing in all the world is a New Testament assembly. In the New Testament, when they went on evangelistic tours or missionary tours, the most natural, normal thing in the world occurred when somebody got saved -- an assembly is born. Birds of a feather flock together. That is not a Scriptural verse. Somebody asked me one time where that was found in the Bible. A whistling woman and a crowing hen cometh to no good end. Well, that is not in the Bible. The lady said, "Oh, yes, it is." I said, "No, it isn't." But she said, "Oh, yes, it is." Well, she is still looking, but it is not there. Now, birds of a feather flock together. When a person gets saved, the most normal, natural thing in all the world is that they want to get together with other believers. In a heathen territory when people get saved, the normal, natural thing (not that that individual stays by himself) is that an assembly of believers is born. When that assembly is born, the first thing they want is a pastor. They want someone to lead them. What happens? They get a pastor, and then what happens? They begin to evangelize their own community. Then they begin to get interested in other communities and missions. That is the natural, normal thing when a person is saved. An assembly is established to carry out the Great Commission. That is not abnormal; that is natural. The natural thing in the New Testament is this matter. The Bible says in Acts 2:47 that there were added unto them three thousand souls. Verse 47: *Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church (to the assembly) daily such as should be saved.* Now salvation and adding to the assembly are not synonymous. He said the Lord added to the church, the saved ones, daily. When a person got saved in New Testament days, they were added to the assembly. Now, that is New Testament. The emphasis of the New Testament is not on the pastor. The word *pastor* is used one time. The word *bishop* or *overseer*, which is the pastor's responsibility, is used five times. The word *evangelist* or *missionary* is used only three times. The emphasis of the New Testament is the local, visible assembly of which the evangelist, the pastor, or the overseer is part of. The emphasis is upon the assembly. If you get the importance of this assembly on your heart and mind, then you are not going to be careless about listening. Paul said, "You that have spiritual gifts see that you

take your spiritual gifts to edify to build up the local assembly.” God gives you gifts to build up this assembly in order to get God’s work functioning properly to reach the world for Christ. God does not give you anything just for you to keep for yourself. It is to build the assembly.

Consider the preeminence of the local church. I have here every place the word *church* is used in the entire New Testament. If it was not for fear that it would become boring to you, I would read every verse to show you the emphasis. I am going to read in the book of Acts and a few other books. When you read the book of Acts, I want you to realize the local assembly is a fact. Let me begin reading. Acts 2:47: *Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.* Acts 5:11: *And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.* Acts 8:1: *And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.* Acts 8:3: *As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.* Acts 9:31: *Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.* Acts 11:22: *Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.* Acts 11:26: *And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.* Acts 12:1: *Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church.* Acts 12:5: *Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.* Acts 13:1: *Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.* Acts 14:23: *And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.* Acts 14:27: *And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.* Acts 15:3: *And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.* Acts 15:4: *And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.* Acts 15:22: *Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren:* Acts 15:41: *And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.* Acts 16:5: *And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.* Acts 18:22: *And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch.* Acts 20:17: *And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.* Acts 20:28: *Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.* Romans 16:1: *I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cencrea:* Romans 16:4: *Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.* Romans 16:5: *Likewise greet the church that is in their house.* Romans 16:16: *Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you.* Romans 16:23: *Gaius mine host, and of the whole church, saluteth you. Erastus the chamberlain of the city saluteth you, and Quartus a brother.* I could go on and on. Let me just skip here to 1 Corinthians 16:1: *Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye.* There were churches of Asia, and there were churches

of Galatia. 2 Corinthians 8:1: *Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; Galatians 1:22: And was unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ:* He begins to name the provinces. Revelation 1:4: *John to the seven churches which are in Asia:* I could go on and on and on. I could read 110 times, "The churches . . . the churches . . . the churches . . . the churches . . . the churches . . ." That is the most important thing for getting the gospel out — the local, visible New Testament church. If I was a business man, I would want to put my money in the bank where I could get the greatest dividends, the greatest investment, and the greatest interest. There is nothing comparable to the greatest dividends that you will get from contributing your energies, your times, your talents, and your money to the local, visible New Testament church. You cannot improve on it. You say, "Times have changed." God does not build things that are here today and gone tomorrow. The church is His assembly. He said, *I will build my church . . .* Saved folks were added to it. Elders were ordained. He confirmed the churches. 1 Corinthians 10:32: *Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God:* Our gifts are to edify the church. Paul talked about the care of all the churches. 1 Timothy 3:15: *But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.* Revelation 2:1: *Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;* The Lord Jesus Christ is walking in the midst of the golden lamp stands, and the lamp stands are the churches. Jesus visits the assembly, trimming the wick, examining, and telling what is right and wrong. The last book of the Bible was not a message to the individual and not a message to missions, but the last book of the Bible was written to the local, visible New Testament churches in Asia Minor. Now, I have said that to get down to this. How important is the local church? Our nation is toppling today because people have turned their guns on the home. When you destroy the home, the whole civilization comes down. When you see things coming in to destroy the home, then you had better preach; you had better build; and you had better warn. Why? The home is that which builds society. Now, when we come to the local, visible New Testament church, there is nothing that can take the place of it — no television program, no newspaper, no radio broadcast, no tract ministry . . . Praise God for everyone of those ministries. I am not attacking them, but there is nothing that can take the place of the local New Testament church — nothing. This is an important meeting. Would you go where they were discussing the stocks and bonds where all your money was down at your bank? You say, "Well, I am not worried about that." Oh, yes sir, you would be there. My friend, this meeting this morning is not just a casual meeting. This meeting is a meeting ordained by God the Son, the powerful Holy Spirit, God the Father, to reach the world. There is nothing of vital importance to compete with the local, visible New Testament assembly. How important is the local church? How important is it to the Great Commission? I want to tell you something. No individual can carry out the Great Commission. You cannot carry out the Great Commission. I cannot carry out the Great Commission. There is no individual that can carry out the Great Commission. Turn to Matthew. Let us find out what the Great Commission is. The Great Commission is not soul winning. That is one third of it. When a lady goes to the hospital and gives birth to a little baby, she says, "Praise the Lord, I have done my part." She has done some of her part. The most of it is ahead. Mothers you can say, "Amen," to that. Most of your part of doing is ahead, not behind you. When you win a soul to Jesus Christ, you have not done your part. That is one third of the part done but not all of it. Why? If we do not get the last two parts in order, we will not reach a world. You will not reach a world. Matthew 28:18-20: *And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach (or disciple, make Christians of) all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.* You cannot carry out that Great Commission. There is nobody sitting here, no evangelist, no pastor, no teacher, no radio broadcast, and no newspaper that can carry

out the Great Commission. It takes a local church to carry out the Great Commission in its entirety and its fulness. I will show you. What is the Great Commission comprised of? Going — that is winning them to Christ. Baptize them — that is identifying them with Christ. *Teaching them to observe all things* — you get them involved in going also. You involve them. It is a circle. Soul winning is only one third of the Great Commission. It is an important part. I would not minimize that, but to win a soul and not get him into the assembly and not build him up, you have won somebody who will be a deadbeat and who will not help evangelize the world. You can be a soul winner. If you follow this logical conclusion that the Great Commission was given to the individual and not to the assembly, then this is what your conclusion will be: All right, you go out and win souls to Christ. Then, you baptize them. Then, you take them under your wing; you teach them; and you take your ten percent and put it in your back pocket, because you are the one who is preaching the gospel. What happens? You kill an assembly that will reach more folks than you will ever reach in your life. Now, everybody ought to go, *baptizing them, and teaching them to observe all things*. Turn to Acts 1:8. I want to show you that you not only have to go, but you are going to have to go all over the world at the same time. That is kind of hard. A guy jumped on his horse and rode off in all directions. I have gotten up that way sometimes. I did not get anywhere, but I ran in every direction. Acts 1:8: *But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, (both in Lakeland and all Pope County) and in Samaria, (That is the neighboring county.) and unto the uttermost part of the earth.* Simultaneously, go. While you are preaching in Lakeland, you must be preaching in Hillsboro County. While you are preaching in Lakeland and Hillsboro County, you are to preach in Georgia and Tennessee and the isles of the sea and the rest of the continents of the earth. You cannot do that — both in Jerusalem and Judea at the same time. While I am preaching this morning, I am to be preaching in Africa and China and India and South America and North America and Canada. I am supposed to be preaching around the world. There is no way in the world to preach around the world except through the local, visible New Testament assembly. There is no way you can do it. Oh, you say, “I will carry out the Great Commission.” All right, tell me about your assemblies in India and China and the rest of the world. Tell me about your assemblies that you have established — baptizing and teaching and instructing. Tell me about the souls that you are winning over there. God did not give the Great Commission to tell you to just be a soul winner in Lakeland, Florida. God gave a commission to His church, to His assembly. He said, “While you are winning souls in Lakeland, you are to be winning souls around the world.” How in the world do you do that? There is no way in the world you can do that yourself. That takes cooperation to carry out the Great Commission, and that cooperation revolves around the assembly — both at the same time. Every Christian is depraved. The Bible says in Matthew 9:38: *Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest.* Every Christian is to be praying for the Great Commission for folks to get saved. Every Christian is not only to pray, but also every Christian is to give to world missions. Not only that, but every Christian is to go with world missions. God determines the geography. Everybody says, “Pray for world missions. Everybody is to give to world missions. Everybody is to be involved in world missions.” How in the world can I do that? I am involved personally in soul winning where I am. Now, I cannot be involved personally anywhere but just where I am. I am limited to where I am. I am to be involved where I am and in world missions. While I am involved where I am, I am giving so that somebody else can go where I cannot go. I am praying for others while they are there that God might use and honor them. That is the Great Commission. Only the New Testament assembly can carry out the Great Commission. You cannot carry out the Great Commission. You are knocking on doors. I am sorry, but you are not carrying out the Great Commission. You are carrying out one third of the Great Commission. You would be insensitive to all the women who had babies who went to Lakeland General Hospital, went home, and said, “Now, I have done my part.” You say, “That is ridiculous.” It is just as ridiculous to get involved in soul winning without bringing them into the assembly where they can be taught to grow and to be men and women of God establishing God-fearing homes,

becoming soul winners in their area, and getting involved in world missions. How important is the local New Testament church to missions? It is the engine. It is not the caboose. Did you hear me? It is the engine, not the caboose. Now, I have no objection whatsoever to rejoice with every paper that somebody publishes to get out the gospel. I rejoice with every project. I rejoice for every Christian broadcast. I rejoice for every Christian rescue mission. I rejoice in a tract ministry. But, those things cannot fully carry out the Great Commission, and I am going to give my time and my energies to that which gets the job done the best. Do you understand that? Some of you are trusting me; you are asleep. Listen, evangelists hold soul-winning conferences. Where do they hold them? They hold them in the assemblies. Who furnishes the buildings for the conferences? The local church does. Who furnishes the lights and the air conditioning? Who pays for the pews and the song books? Who gets the advertisements out? The local assemblies do. They are the ones that take care of the bill. When you have a missions conference, where do they go? They go to the local assemblies. Who takes care of the bill? The local assemblies do. Lights, air conditioning, pews, building at no charge — why? It is to get out the Great Commission. If you took away the ministry of the local church, evangelists and missionaries would die. I am not against evangelists and missionaries. If you take the church away, the pastor would die too. What is he doing to oversee? Preachers and missionaries come and go, but the church still lives on. Do you understand that? One of these days, if Jesus tarries His coming, this preacher will be gone; but the church, the assembly, will still be here. Jesus said: . . . *the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*. You cannot drown it. You cannot kill it. They have problems and faults. Jesus said: *I will build my church* . . . He is in the church-building business. There is no way in the world that I am trying to hold money in my hand — not on your dear life. I tried to bring about the matter of Faith Promise Missions. Why? To give to others. Now, if I was trying to hold money, I would take that hundred and some thousand that we have promised by faith this year to missions, and I would say, “Hey, we will build us some adult Sunday School rooms that we need. We will build us a gym,” which I would like to have. There are lots of things I could do or pay toward with a hundred thousand dollars a year, but those things are not carrying out the Great Commission. Every creature must hear. What happens? We have a Faith Promise missions conference, and I try to raise my faith to give and urge you to give. Why? So that missionaries can go out into the ends of the world. I am convinced that the words *evangelist* and *missionary* are synonymous in the New Testament. The word *missionary* is not used in the New Testament, but the word *evangelist* is. We give so that they can go. What does that do? The conferences are given to help support evangelists and missionaries to get where God would have them to go. If you take the giving of the local churches from missions, missions would die deader than last year’s bird nest. This meeting is important.

Consider the building up of the saints. This mystical thing does not do a thing in the world to build you up. It does not do a thing. Where do people go when they want to get spiritually fed? They go to the assembly. The pastors in Ephesians 4:11 were given for the edifying of the body of Christ. I am sorry. I misquoted that. Let me read it to you. Ephesians 4:11-12: *And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting (That is the maturing of the saints.) of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: This assembly this morning is going to get you strengthened to go out of here and do the work of the ministry. Every last one of you is in the ministry just as much as I am. When this assembly is dismissed today, you are supposed to go out and be the salt of the earth, a witness in the highways and hedges. You are supposed to be a soul winner. Whether it is at the job, in your home, in your community, in your neighborhood, or every place that you go this week, your ministry is world missions. You are to be a soul winner in Lakeland, Florida. When this ministry has dismissed, you are to win people to Christ. When you win them to Christ, bring them back to the assembly so that they can be baptized and get taught. Then, they can be sent out. It swells and swells and swells and swells and swells, and you reach world missions. Acts 20:28: *Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath**

*made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.*

Hebrews 13:7: *Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.* God calls a man to oversee, to watch after the flock, to pray with them, and to lead them. Now, the assembly is where you have Bible Conferences that stir your heart. I bring preachers in to the assembly. Why? What for? To build you up. We just finished the ministry of Dr. Dobson. I brought those seven messages in to you to build up your homes. This assembly builds homes. Many homes would be on the rocks today if it was not for this assembly. The devil would have gotten your children if it was not for this assembly. This assembly builds you up personally. It strengthens your home. It challenges your teenagers. It fills your life with inspiration. This assembly has prayer meetings to pray for you and to make our voices known to God for your needs. Somebody goes to the hospital from this assembly. This assembly is to pray for those who are sick. From this assembly a man goes to take care of funeral services. This assembly is here to marry the living and to bury the dead. In the hours of the night, the telephone rings. A man from this assembly goes to pray with a man and a woman who are discouraged and almost ready to throw in the towel. Where does he come from? He comes from this assembly who finances a staff to reach a community. This assembly is important. This is not a caboose; this is the engine. This is the engine. When you get ill, you do not call Jerry Falwell because he is on television, do you? I have never heard of anybody doing that. Good for him if he can get a million dollars. Glory be to God for it. I wish I could get a million dollars. I would like to, but I do not. Amen for that. I am not jealous of him. I am just simply saying that when you get in trouble, you do not call the editor of a paper. You do not call a television program or a radio broadcast. You call the assembly, the man of God, the staff of God, somebody. The local assembly is who you call. This is the engine. This assembly is the engine, not me. You will not find anywhere in the New Testament where a person took the fruit of the vine and had the Lord's Supper by himself. These preachers who go around with little cups to the hospital bedside — I do not find that in the Word of God. Let us find what the Bible says they did. Acts 20:6: *And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days. And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread . . .* What happened? They came together on the first day of the week to break bread. That is the Lord's Supper. What about the assembly's importance to the community? Close down this church, and there are other churches and other assemblies. I want to tell you something. If you are not that sold on this church, go find one that you are sold on. I am serious about that. If you are a member of this assembly and if you think it is poor and so forth, move your membership. Now, I am not telling you to leave. I am not doing that. I am simply saying that if you close down this assembly in Lakeland, Florida, Polk County and a world would miss it. I did not say it would miss the preacher; I said it would miss this assembly. The local, visible New Testament church is the moral voice of the community. Pulpits used to be known for thundering out against sin. Today, pulpits and assemblies are strangely quiet concerning sin. The local, visible New Testament church is a moral voice of a community. The local assembly of believers is an upholder of the police department of law and order. We teach boys and girls from the cradle to the grave that police are ministers of God. We are to obey them. Young people are to go home and obey your parents. The assembly does that. The assembly is the foundation of the school system, but the school system has rejected the ministry of the assembly that teaches boys and girls to respect that teacher and respect education. The assembly is for the elevating and enlightening of the heart and mind of God's people in the world. Consider the elevation of women. Do not let this ERA crowd tell you that Bible teaching degrades women. I beg your pardon. You go where the Bible is not taught and find how women are treated. Go to Iran. Go to Africa. Go to Mexico. Women's status in America today has come from the preaching of the Word of God and from churches that have dotted the horizon of cities and counties that are preaching the gospel. You think about children. Boys and girls, by the hundreds, are brought in every Sunday. There is a concern for boys and girls to save them from the ravishes of disease and crime and dope. The



local assembly is the restrainer of crime. The local assembly is the elevator of women. The local assembly is the lover of children. The local assembly is the inspirer of men. I have been to church when I have felt like throwing in the towel and quitting. I have sat in an assembly with the saints and heard God's people sing a song, and the song got a hold of my heart. The man of God preached a message that got a hold of my heart, and the saints gathered around me and said, "Come on, Preacher. Come on, Preacher." After the services, I was inspired to stay at it and keep on and keep on. In Psalm 73, the Psalmist said he had many questions that he could not understand. Psalm 73:16-17: *When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.* If you are faithful in the assembly, the questions and the problems that you have in life will get answered in the house of God. I believe that with all my heart. The assembly is the pillar of service. Week after week, we are urged to get out into the highways and hedges. There are homes that are going to hell in Lakeland, Florida. Husbands and wives are getting along. Children are right. Why? It is because of the ministry of this church.

Not only is the assembly for the community and the world, but also to the spirit world. Jesus said: . . . *the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* There was great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem. Acts 8:1: *And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.* Acts 8:3: *As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.* Acts 12:1: *Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church.* Herod rose and vexed certain of the New Testament church. Philippians 3:6: *Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.* Paul never got over it. He said, "I was a persecutor of the church." The object of persecution today is the assembly. Just like the attack has been on society and against the home, the attack today is against the church. The federal government is trying to put the church out of business. They want to shackle her, to take away her tax deduction, and to shut her down. They want to make a local New Testament church's ministry for the eleven o'clock hour where the assembly meets together but not allow them to carry out their transactions to the business meeting. That is their efforts today.

Let me ask you this in closing: what does the assembly mean to you? We cannot get lost in the crowd. The Great Commission is not given to a building. It is given to a people, and those people band together in assembly to transact business for God. You are part of that assembly. What is your feeling toward the assembly? Turn to Hebrews 10. I have been on vacation. I have been in Sunday School. I have preached Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night ever since I have been gone. Why? "You are on vacation!" Notice there is something more important than my vacation, and that is the assembly. The Bible says in Hebrews 10:25 to not forsake what? *Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves* (Not yourselves but ourselves – he puts himself in it.) *together, as the manner of some is; (Some forsake it.) but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.* Exhorting – "Hey, brother, missed you in the assembly." If you miss the assembly, you are going to have problems. They may not appear immediately, but you are going to have problems, problems, problems. Mark it down. If you are saved, mark it down. Mark it down. Mark it down. There are no *and's, if's, or but's about it.* *What is your attitude toward the assembly tonight? What is your attitude toward the assembly Wednesday night? What is your attitude toward the assembly when we meet together in a Bible Conference to get the assembly built up? What is your attitude toward the assembly in a missions conference? What is your attitude toward the assembly? The assembly that is manifested this morning ought to be the same assembly that is manifested Tuesday morning and Thursday night and Saturday and soul winning evangelization. What is your attitude tonight? There is no television broadcast or anything else that is more important than being here tonight, unless you are sick. You are employed. I understand that. What is your attitude towards the assembly? 1 Corinthians 11:22: What? Have*

*ye not houses to eat and to drink in? Or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not?* (Now, this is talking about the misuse of the Lord's Supper.) Do you think lightly of the assembly? I am not going to run this assembly down. Do you think lightly about it? Do you talk lightly about it? Do you castigate it? This is a great assembly. There is not another church in Polk County that I would join besides this church, and that is not just because I am the pastor. Do you despise the assembly? Do you think lightly toward it? What is your attitude toward the assembly?

Do you use your talents? Turn to 1 Corinthians 14:12. The church mentioned in this passage was "gung ho" on gifts, and they were using them for personal gratification and pride and so forth. Paul reminded them in 1 Corinthians 14:12: *Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.* If God has given you a gift of music, you ought to use it for the edifying of the assembly. If God has given you a gift of teaching, it ought to be used to edify the assembly. If God has given you a gift of giving – and there are folks who are making money hand over fist – you ought to use it to edify or build up the assembly. If you have a gift of exhorting or encouraging people, you ought to use it to edify the assembly. With whatever God has given you, seek to excel, to edify, and to build up the assembly. Why? If I build up the assembly, I touch Polk County. I touch the rest of the world. I get involved, and I get the matter of the Great Commission carried out. I am interested in the Great Commission, and I do more for the Great Commission by building up the assembly.

What about your giving? Oh, you say, "Now, Preacher, you have got that storehouse tithing." Amen, I have. Turn to 1 Corinthians 16. I believe in giving to the assembly. Why? Because it is the emphasis of the Scriptures. "Oh man, that will rob some man of God." No sir, it will not rob any man of God. You do not violate God's Word and hurt people. You carry out God's Word, and He will supply your needs. Why do evangelists go to churches to hold meetings? I stand up here, and I will say, "Now, I want to see how little you can give this guy." No, I do not do that. I urge you to give. Now, hear me. I urge you to give money far beyond what I have gotten in revival meetings. You say, "Well, you are not the preacher; they are." Well, that could be true, but I am just simply saying that I do not feel jealous and say, "No sir, I want you to give and give and give," while they make their living in evangelism. 1 Corinthians 9:14: . . . *they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.* Where does the income come from? It comes from the assembly of the saints. I urge you to give. Give liberally. Give liberally. Give graciously to them. Do not withhold. In 1 Corinthians 16, Paul writes about the collection for the poor people. Why did he not just write to say, "Now all you Christians, I want you to do this.?" But, the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 16:1: *Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, (He did not say Christians of Galatia; he said the churches of Galatia.) even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let everyone of you lay by him in store, (It has to be an individual getting into this matter of this assembly.) as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.* "Well," you say, "Paul worked for a living." He did at Corinth. He did so because he wanted to challenge the false prophets. "If you are a real prophet of God, then you work for nothing." He later apologized in 2 Corinthians 12. He said, "Forgive me this wrong." Turn to 2 Corinthians. I will show you where he got wages from churches. 2 Corinthians 11:8: *I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service.* Notice the emphasis of the New Testament in Acts 4. They sold their goods, and then they did not go distribute them to where they ought to have. They laid them down at the feet of the Apostles. Out of it came the deacons to dispense the money that was given for the welfare of the believers. The ministry and the office of the deacon came into business. In Acts 6, they brought them and laid them down at the feet of the Apostles, and distribution was made. Why did they not just take it upon themselves, led by the Spirit of God, to go find out? No sir, why would they do that? They were Spirit-filled. Folks, I am through. I am quitting, and I am through. Amen. I can preach that other message tonight. I believe in carrying out the Great Commission, strengthening the community, building homes, and trying to get a nation back on its feet. You will contribute more to all of that and the local assembly than you will any place else on the face of God's earth. I rejoice in every other ministry. Do not say, "Hey, you don't do this." No,

sir, I rejoice in every other ministry, but God has ordained the assembly. Every head bowed every eye closed. You cannot successfully refute me by your logic or by any verses of Scripture. I have saturated my mind time and time again about this emphasis of the local, visible New Testament church. If I was in a church that was as dead as dead and was not doing anything, then I would find an assembly that was. That is just that simple. There are a lot of folks that ought to bail out of dead places where modernism has crept in, and evangelism is dead.