

GOD'S CALL

Major themes in the Scriptures

Quality of being (11)

Quality of being and church life

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The Lord willing, today we will consider the subject, “Quality of being”, the eleventh message, in seeking to appreciate major themes in the Scriptures.

A short summary of today's message:

God seeks to work out His purposes through healthy and effective church life. All areas of healthy church life bear a direct relationship with the quality of being of all who are involved.

We will seek the Lord to appreciate more of what this means.

When God created man, we know that God created man with a very major, significant and important principle: He had many things He wanted to accomplish and He wanted man to be able to become what would bring great joy to Himself and also meaning to what God has created. So God created man in His image so that we can know him, we can know His values and not only that, we can be transformed to become like Him.

But God's intention was not just to bring about isolated, individual, separate human beings who develop well. God's purpose is to bring about a community of people who would love Him, who would be good, who would know how to relate with one another in the right way, and that would bring meaning to all the things that we do together.

And so the apostle Paul tells us that God had purposed this from eternity: that the manifold wisdom of God would be made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly *places*. God wants to manifest His wisdom through the church.

What then should we do as we seek to fulfil what God desires in His heart to manifest His wisdom? Knowing the character of God, we know that God is not seeking just to manifest wisdom. His wisdom comes in association with, together with, His moral perfection – His holiness, His love, His kindness.

So God made it possible for us to develop healthy and effective church life. How did He do that? He made provisions and if we seek to appreciate the principles of church life, we will understand that God has made all the provisions necessary for us, so that we can effectively work out His purposes. And if we look at the way that He has made the provisions, it will become clear to us that in order to fulfil His purposes, we must, we have to, develop quality of being.

God provided and God has provided many gifts of people in order to fulfil the ministry of church life. And how is this to come about? We see the thrust in the Scriptures, basically, primarily is to help all believers to become mature and perfect in the Lord Jesus and in that context, to have deep fellowship with God and in the body of Christ, and to express divine love from God in the whole process.

There are many major aspects of church life and from time to time, we have sought to appreciate, to consider various of these principles. Today I want to concentrate on the relationship between quality of being and church life. And a very helpful passage for us to concentrate upon is **Ephesians 4: 11-16**.

Ephesians 4: 11-16

- 11 And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers,
- 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;
- 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.
- 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;
- 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ,
- 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

This passage is very rich and includes many major principles of church life.

First, let us concentrate on the goal and the central aspect that the apostle Paul refers to here. He tells us that God, through the Lord Jesus Christ, has given various people to fulfil this calling of church life. And there is a direction.

This leads to **verse 13**, when he says, "until..." The "until" tells us that God wants to bring about something very important, that it is to lead to this. All these various functions, whatever we are seeking to do, must move in this direction.

So he says, "...until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ".

So we can say that the goal is to become like Christ. All these various aspects are related to this whole meaning of the being of Christ, His moral and spiritual perfection. We are to develop to become a mature man or it can also be translated as "complete" or "perfect" man, "to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ". This is the goal.

God wants us to develop this and if in church life we do not concentrate on this, then we have failed in the very basic direction and purpose of what God is seeking to do. We can be preoccupied with many other things and miss the central issue.

Unless whatever we do will contribute towards the development of our becoming more and more like Christ – "to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ" – unless we do that, then what we do will be in vain.

So therefore, it is very clear that quality of being is central in what God seeks to work out in church life and without this, all the various areas cannot be effectively worked out.

And so the apostle Paul tells us the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Paul laboured very hard. What was he seeking to accomplish?

As he preached to the people, as he sought to help them, as he laboured for them, as he agonized over them, what was it that he was concerned about? Love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

He also said, in the proclamation of the gospel, he said, "We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ". The word "complete" is the same word here as "mature" or "perfect". This is his goal. He worked very hard to bring this about: "Christ in you, the hope of glory", Christ being formed in us. These are central aspects of the labour in the gospel.

So church life must help us in this direction and if that is so, then each one of us needs to pay great attention to this: No matter who we are, no matter what we are doing, no matter what we may be occupied with, we must be very conscious that this is what God wants to bring about.

So if we are careless in our lives, if we allow the world to influence our hearts, if we are drawn to the things that bring pleasure to the flesh and not helpfulness for our spirit and our moral character, then we are going against what God is seeking to bring about.

But of course, development of the quality of our being takes place in the context of the many things that we do in life. God wants us to develop quality of our being in the midst of this world and all its attractions, all its pressures, difficulties and pain. It is in this context that we can develop well. God knows that and that is why He places us in this world for us to grow well.

It is true if we are involved in situations that are not helpful to us, we can be destroyed. If we choose to be involved in situations that have a negative influence on our being, then the outcome can be disastrous.

But if we seek to be faithful to God, prayerfully seeking to understand His will and His ways and in the midst of that, we go through difficulties, pain, problematic situations, great obstacles, we can thank God that in these situations, we can grow and become like Christ.

So the question we need to ask ourselves is: If we want to work out effectively God's purposes in church life, do we really want to be like Christ? So it is very easy for us to say, "Yes, I want Christ to be formed in me. I want to be like Him - He is so good, He is perfect. I want to be like Him."

If that is so, then spend time to consider: What does it mean to be like Christ?

How did He come into this world? He gave up the glory of heaven to come into this world.

What are we pursuing in this world? We are seeking the glory of men. Many people are doing the opposite of what the Lord Jesus did. He came into this world to suffer. He came into this world from a place of glory. But many Christians are still pursuing the glory of this world, what the world can offer us. Are we seeking to be like Christ?

The Lord Jesus came into this world and He was born in very difficult circumstances: poor and also unrecognized, not learned, despised by people.

But do Christians find it meaningful to be like Him in this way or is it that we are very concerned about status, about position, about wealth, about recognition by others? Are these the things that we are more concerned about?

If that is so, we are not learning to be like Him.

The Lord Jesus came and He was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. But his sorrows and grief were not the result of His own failures, His own sins, His own selfishness, but they were the result of His love and compassion for us; seeing us in our great need, going astray, His heart was pained. Is our heart like that? Do we really care for those who are going astray, whose lives are not right? Do we have that kind of compassion that He has? The Lord Jesus Christ came into this world specifically with a mission: to go to the cross. And we know that the cross is the place of the greatest suffering that is ever known.

And yet, we know that Christians very often seek to run away from all kinds of suffering. We do not want to go through suffering because it is unpleasant. We seek for a life that is pleasant.

It is true we should not go through suffering that is not necessary, suffering that is not helpful to us. We should keep away from suffering that comes about because of our own sinfulness and selfishness.

But we must be prepared to go through whatever suffering that is good and meaningful in the eyes of God that is a result of our walking with Him, of being faithful to Him. We must not shrink back from that. And this can require much discipline, the denial of our self, the giving up of the things of this world, that in our heart we can truly pursue God.

So we need to recognize that this is the goal and central aspect of the transformation of our being: to be like the Lord Jesus Christ. When God created us, He did not make us morally good. He made us in His image, not in the sense that we have the character like His, but with the potential to become like Him. He created us so that we could choose this direction, to become like Him. And He would help us, He would give us His life to enable us to become like Him.

But that is up to us. We can choose to go our own way just as Adam and Eve did, and so all mankind have chosen to go his way and fallen short of the glory of God. But God has given us the opportunity to repent, to find forgiveness, to find new life through Christ. Do we appreciate that? Do we value and treasure that so that we will build our lives in this direction, we will be conscious to concentrate on this whole direction of what God is seeking to bring about? This is what will have eternal meaning for us.

So having seen that this is a central aspect for every single one of us, let us consider how God wants each one of us then to work it out. As we develop quality in our being, God wants us to manifest that quality in the way we conduct ourselves, in the things that we do, the things that we pursue and concentrate on, work at, seek to accomplish. What is it that the Lord wants of us?

Verse 16, the apostle Paul says:

“...from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”

It is critical for the proper working of each individual part to be present, in order for healthy and effective church life to be manifested. If we neglect our part, we will affect the total direction and meaningfulness of church life. Church life is not done by one person or two or three. Church life is to be manifested by a community.

The Scriptures refer to that as the body, the body of Christ or the temple of God. The proper working of each individual part emphasizes the importance of quality of being of each individual.

How can we work out properly if our being is not in a good condition? If our hearts are not right, if we are not transformed to be like Christ, then the things that we do will be tainted by selfishness, by wrong motives and desires, by wrong emphasis and approach. How can we do our part properly? In order to work out our part properly, each one must develop quality of being.

And the proper working of each individual part means we do not all have the same part. Each individual part is an individual part. Each one of us has a part and it will be wrong of us to look at others and see how we compare with them.

Some may say, "I am doing a great part; I am doing so much in the body of Christ. Others are not doing their part. Since they are not doing their part, I will also not do my part." Are you doing your part as you ought to?

Then there are others who say, "I see others doing their part so well. They can contribute so much, but I cannot. I have so little ability, I have hardly any gift." And so they hide their talent and they do not exercise themselves. They say, "I cannot do it." How can there be proper working of each individual part if we approach life this way?

So we need to recognize that every single member of the body of Christ has an important part, an important place in the body of Christ. But the critical thing is that we must develop quality in our being. If we develop quality in our being, we will not be comparing with other people - "Are they better than me? Is the thing they are doing more important than mine?" We will not be concerned about that. Our concentration will be to be good and faithful to God. We want to develop quality so that we can take our place properly as God so desires of us.

We may think that the part that we contribute is very small. But just as the little boy with a few loaves and fish can contribute to the needs of so many thousands of people, so too the little that we contribute can have a very great impact when our lives are properly offered up to God and God has the freedom to work in us and to work through us.

What is important for us is to recognize that we have a part and we must not become passive, we must not just leave it to others to do it. We must not consider we cannot contribute and we just passively watch and worse still, criticise – watching and criticising.

We should be praying; we should be looking to the Lord to consider: “What does He want of me to contribute my part?” Not by comparing with others but what is appropriate for you at this stage of your development.

And bear in mind this applies to the young as well as the old. Do not think: “Because I am less than ten years of age, there is nothing I can contribute.” Even a five year old can contribute something meaningful. Even younger than that, if your heart is right, by coming to worship God together with the right spirit, you will be contributing something positive in the spiritual realm. The proper working of each individual part is directly related to the quality of our being. If you love God, you are transformed to be like Him, then you will contribute your part.

The apostle Paul tells us in **1 Corinthians 12: 7**:

But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

In **1 Corinthians 12**, the apostle Paul explains how the different members of the body can function well together.

And he tells us that the Holy Spirit is the One who brings us together into the body of Christ. He is the One who baptizes every believer into the body of Christ and all of us will partake of the Spirit. And in that context, the Holy Spirit will grant gifts, enabling, to help each one of us to do our part.

And so he says, "But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." "The common good" tells us it is not self-centred, it is not selfish. Any degree of selfishness will hinder the effective working out of church life.

Selfishness can manifest in many different ways. It sometimes can appear as if we are contributing to others. But if our motive is not truly for the common good, then we will be missing the major thrust and intention that God has. God wants to help us so that we can properly contribute to the well-being of the whole body of Christ, for the common good, that the body can be properly built up.

But if you want to be more able than others, you want to be doing more than others, you want to be more prominent, you want to be more capable, you want to accomplish more, then you are not concentrating on the right direction to bring about the common good.

If you are coming for our gatherings together, it is just so that you can benefit something, then you are not concentrating on the right direction. Certainly, we want to benefit, but it is with this direction that we can contribute to the common good as we develop, as we grow, as we become what God wants us to be.

So these two aspects are very central in terms of effective healthy working out of church life.

Each one must develop to the highest level of quality to become like Christ. And each one must then do his part properly according as God has assigned to us.

As we walk with God, if our lives are healthy, we will know what is appropriate. The Lord Jesus knew the will of God throughout His life. He said, "I can do nothing of My own initiative", not because He could not think, He had no choice of His own, but because He understood that the will of God is perfect; He identified with Him, He would not do anything just by Himself, of Himself, apart from God.

So too, if we develop to be like Him, we will be conscious of God, we will be prayerful, we will look to Him, we will walk with Him and God will show us the way. It is in this context that we can effectively work out the major principles of church life that God wants us to be aware of and to concentrate upon.

The third aspect that we can consider in church life is the primary importance of the absolute and final authority.

In church life, we know ultimately, we submit to God. God is the final authority. He is the One who is morally and spiritually perfect, and so we look to Him, we submit to Him. He is the One who is sovereign over all creation and we trust Him to undertake for whatever is necessary, whatever is good and meaningful in His sight.

And so we see **Ephesians 4: 11**, the apostle Paul says,

And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets...

"He gave..." The word "He" in this context basically refers to either the Lord Jesus Christ or to God the Father. In the context, likely it refers to the Lord Jesus Christ who "gave gifts to men".

But we know that the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ comes from God. He is always submitted to the Father. And so we see here the importance of recognizing: that in church life, our submission is always to Christ as the head of the body, and ultimately to God – the Creator and sovereign Ruler of all creation. He is the One who gave all these people in order to fulfil what is necessary.

The problem with much of what we may be doing is that we are not looking to God, we are not looking to Christ, to make the provision, to provide the people to fulfil His will and His calling. Instead, we may use our own natural wisdom: We look at people who are more able, people with status and capability in this world or perhaps those who seem more aware of the principles of the Scriptures. We may look to these people primarily.

But the Scriptures make clear that ultimately, we must submit to Christ as the head. We must be conscious of what is in His heart, what He requires of us, what is important to Him.

Verse 15 of Ephesians 4:

but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ,

Christ is the head of the body, the church. And if we are to work out church life meaningfully, we must submit to the head. If the body does not listen to the head, we may be going in opposite directions. If the body is not under the supervision and control of the head, we can have many problems. In church life, this is not uncommon. The Lord wants us to move in a certain direction but we have our own ideas. We move in various different directions and this can cause conflict, problems, distress, and disunity.

One of the aspects that the apostle Paul talks about in the development of our lives is to “attain to the unity of faith”. We need to develop so that there is a oneness in our whole heart and direction, the quality of our lives; we move together in the same direction. And in order to move together, we must all be submitted to the head, to Christ.

Colossians 1: 15-18 tells us who the Lord Jesus is and why it is so important for us to submit to Him.

Colossians 1: 15-18

- 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.
- 16 For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created through Him and for Him.
- 17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.
- 18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

We need to have the right understanding and appreciation of the Lord Jesus as the head of the body and in that context, to recognize He is the image of the invisible God. And the meaning of Him being the image of the invisible God is very different from us being created in the image of God. When we were created in the image of God, we were created with the potential to become like God.

The Lord Jesus is the image of the invisible God in that He is God. His moral character and moral perfection is the same. It is God. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. He is the head of all creation. By him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created through Him and for Him. So this includes the creation of the whole universe, including the principalities, the powers, the angels and those who rebelled to become evil spirits. The Lord Jesus created all these as God. God created through Him.

By Him all things were created, that is, the Lord Jesus before His incarnation. He is before all things and in Him all things hold together. He sustains this universe by His power.

This is the Lord that we believe in and He is the head of the body, the church. Do we appreciate this or do we ignore Him? Do we neglect paying attention to what He has to say? Do we go our own ways, doing our own things?

We need to take care, to listen carefully to what He has to say. And in order to do that, we need to spend time to listen to Him, to consider how He lived his life, what He has commanded and what the apostles have taught about Him to help us understand the way we should live.

While it is true that we must concentrate on the Lord Jesus Christ and God as the final authority, we see in the Scriptures that God also does want us to recognize secondary leadership and functions in the body, so as to contribute in this whole direction.

Throughout the Scriptures, we see God calling people to fulfil various functions. God did not do all these things by Himself. He called Moses and Aaron to lead the people of Israel. He called Daniel, He called Elijah, Elisha, David - various people - He called them. So too, He called Peter and the other apostles and Paul.

But that is not all. God has called all of us into the body of Christ but different ones have been assigned with different functions. And so we need to recognize the functions, the responsibilities that God has assigned, so that we can work together and fulfil His calling.

And so we see in **Ephesians 4: 11**, the apostle Paul says:

And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers,

So there are different functions, different people that God has called to contribute in different ways.

The Lord Jesus while on earth called upon various ones to become His apostles, so that He could teach them how to live and to send them out on His behalf. So after His death, His resurrection, He commissioned them to labour for Him in the context of the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

And so in **verse 11**, we see the apostle Paul tells us that apostles are given by God in order to contribute to the working out of church life. So too others have their functions as prophets, evangelists and some as pastors and teachers. They can contribute their part for the total well-being in church life.

In **Acts 14: 19-23**, we seek how God through the apostles appointed secondary leadership in the local churches, so that they can fulfil a supervisory role for healthy working out of church life.

Acts 14: 19-23

- 19 But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.
- 20 But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe.
- 21 After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch,
- 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and *saying*, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."
- 23 When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

God called Paul and Barnabas for the work. The Holy Spirit sent them out as apostles to preach the gospel, to help the people to understand what was necessary to become children of God.

But there was opposition. “Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.” There was opposition to the work of the gospel.

Just as God called people to fulfil His work, so too the evil one calls people to do his work. Those who love righteousness, those who want to be good like God will come to God and God will teach them and help them to become what they ought to be, and He can then equip them to honour Him and serve Him. Those who are selfish, who seek their own interest, who desire the things of this world, the evil one will come and draw them to follow him and they can then be opposed to what God is seeking to do.

So we must understand that while we can say that the spiritual battle is in the spiritual realm and there are principalities and powers at work which we must oppose and fight against, let us not think therefore that it means human beings are simply the tools of the spiritual forces – it is up to them to decide who to use and how to use them.

That is not true. The Scriptures are very clear. We must submit... to God and resist the devil and he will flee from us. It is up to us. If we are prepared to submit to God, if we are prepared to follow His ways, if we are prepared to be transformed by the power of God, we can take our stand to resist the devil and he will flee from us.

It is not that they can simply do whatever they want with our lives. It is only when we give place to the evil one, when our hearts are not pure, when we desire things that the evil one can offer to us, that is when they will be able to work effectively.

They can then generate greater desires in the wrong direction, they can encourage us in the wrong way, and then they can manipulate us to work against God's purposes.

And so this can come in many different forms. False apostles, false prophets, false teachers are only a category that we readily recognize. But this principle, this reality exists throughout the world.

As long as we seek our own selfish interests, we will be opening our hearts to the evil one at work.

So bear in mind that for God, His heart is totally set on righteousness. For the evil spirits, their hearts are totally set on evil and self-seeking.

Human beings generally are in a stage of development. Sometimes they long for what is good, sometimes they long for what is evil. And in this state, we can move in either direction. If we allow ourselves to be tempted by the evil one, if we give in to the things we recognize to be not good, then the evil one will have greater and greater influence in us and we will become more and more like him. And when it goes to a serious stage, then it can become a very significant opposition to what God wants to do.

On the other hand, if we choose the path of righteousness, we call upon God to help us, to teach us, to lead us, the Holy Spirit will come. He will guide us, He will enable us; He will bring life to us. In that state, we can grow to become like Christ. Our lives can be transformed.

Why do we preach to human beings? It is because even though they may have gone astray, there is a hope that they may change; they can repent.

Why do we not preach to Satan and to the evil spirits? Because they are not in a position to change their ways – they have set their hearts in that direction and God does not give them further opportunities.

We concentrate on human beings because generally, there is room for them unless they have so hardened their hearts they refuse to listen anymore.

So we must be careful. Although we love God, it is possible for us to be drawn away by the evil one. We must set our hearts to concentrate on what the Lord desires of us.

So we see here the Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and they won over the crowds.

There are many people who follow the crowd. “Majority is right”, they think: “The more the people, the greater the strength.” So, many people will follow the crowds: What is popular opinion; more people means better. And so, when more and more people join, it is easier for others to just join in.

Are we like that? Are we prepared to stand with the Lord – even alone, even when all others choose to go another direction? This is something each one of us must determine. What are we committed to? What do we want to give our lives for? What is the meaning within our hearts?

And so these people stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. They were prepared to kill him. But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe.

We see God's sovereign hand. God protected Paul. God did not allow Paul to be killed at that point of time. God had a work for him to do. So even though they stoned him – and generally in that kind of situation, he could easily have died – God in His sovereignty watched over Paul. There was a work not yet done and so He kept him.

And while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. And the next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe.

The apostle Paul was not deterred. He was not stopped by this opposition. He carried on because this was a mission that God had given him. The Lord Jesus had told him he would be an apostle to the Gentiles; he must be faithful to proclaim the glory of God, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, to set people free from darkness, from the dominion of Satan to God. He must fulfil his mission.

And so we are told:

After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch

He preached; the people responded. And notice that he went back to Iconium and to Antioch. Iconium and Antioch were the places where the Jews came from who stoned him with the intention of destroying him. He went back. We are told they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and *saying*, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

The apostle Paul, in the midst of his suffering, the persecution that he endured, maintained his stand in his loyalty to God and he was able to strengthen the souls of the disciples because he spoke from what he knew: There was a reality in his life and he could encourage them to continue in the faith and to exhort them, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

We must not run away from tribulations and difficulties if we are walking with God and it is the path that He desires of us.

But let us not enter into dangerous paths that are not of God's calling, that are not necessary, that are the result of our own foolishness, recklessness and seeking the things of this world. We must be careful with that. But where the Lord calls, let us move together with Him.

And so then, we are told:

“When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”

Why did they appoint elders for them in every church? That is secondary authority, secondary leadership that God desires, to help in the effective functioning of the local churches. While Paul and Barnabas may preach and move around, there was a need also for leaders in each congregation to supervise, to guide and to help the believers, to protect them, to guard them from false teaching, to care for their needs, help them grow.

And so, secondary leadership and functions in the body are intended by God to help us work out effectively: Just as we know in any human organisation, there are different people with different responsibilities.

In a company, you can have a Chairman or a President, you can have a Chief Executive Officer, and you have many others: Directors, Associate Directors, Managers... There are many people needed to fulfil different roles, to contribute. If everyone wants to be the President or the CEO, the company cannot function. All must understand what is suitable and appropriate.

In a school, you have one Principal but you have many teachers. Some are Senior Teachers, some are Heads of Departments, but they have to fulfil their responsibilities. If every teacher wants to be the Principal, wants to make all the decisions, the school cannot function. How good the school will be very much depends on whether the Principal understands his or her responsibility, fulfils it well; it depends on how the teachers cooperate, whether they appreciate what is going on and whether they will do their part.

If you have a good Principal who cares for the school and seeks to do whatever is possible but the teachers are not interested, they just do whatever they feel like, nothing is accomplished, the students will not benefit.

So in church life, we need all of us to do our part.

If the Principal is not a good Principal, the school will suffer. If the teachers are not good teachers, the students will suffer. If the students are not good students, the teachers will suffer, the Principal will suffer. So the whole school will not progress – same thing with the whole nation. It works that way.

So in church life, all of us will need to do our part and as God appoints, as we recognize that it is meaningful, then we look to God together to contribute, to fulfil what is needed.

The Lord willing, we will consider further aspects of church life and its relationship with quality of being.

What I want to emphasize today is to help us recognize that while we know that church life is primary and major and central in how God wants to work out His purposes, it cannot be effectively worked out unless we all learn to develop quality in our being – each one of us.

Each one of us must move in the direction of becoming perfect in Christ, to be like Him, that Christ is genuinely, truly formed in us, that our faith is not just an idea, a principle that we agree with but there is a reality developed in us, that we know the Lord whom we believe and we are prepared to follow Him and walk with Him.

And as we do that, as we understand that we are members of the body of Christ, then we are to do our part to keep the body healthy.

Every part must contribute. We must not become passive; neither should we become critical with a negative spirit.

But we still need to be objective, we still need to be discerning. When things are wrong, we need to recognize when it is wrong. When things are not good, we need to know what we can do about it to correct the situation. When the body has disease, we must understand what causes it; is there something that we can do to correct the situation?

So it is not that if we want to contribute to the body, we just each one do our part without consciousness of what others are doing. We should be aware of what is going on, we should care and if things are good, we promote it. If things are not good, we look into that.

So God has made provision for all that is needed but God cannot make us good unless we choose that direction.

If God can just make us all good, then we are not moral beings and there will be no problems.

God can control all the animals as He wishes. They will obey Him. The raven can feed Elijah just because God says so. The fish can just bring the coin to Peter because the Lord commands it.

But human beings, we can disobey God. God says, "Move", we say, "No" - and He will let us. So this is very serious. Whether we choose to obey God or not is up to us, but there will be consequences either way. We choose what is good, we become good. We choose to go our own way, there will be judgment. But God will allow us to make those choices.

So if we learn to develop quality in our being, we can move in the direction together, to work out church life as God intends it to be. We can then fulfil His purposes.

The Lord Jesus Christ became the head of the church not just because God decreed it - "The Lord Jesus Christ shall be the head of the church." No. He went through the cross and because of the cross, He has bought us, He has saved us, He sacrificed Himself for us; He leads the way, He is the head of a new race and we come to Him willingly; in repentance, in faith, we acknowledge Him as our Saviour, our Lord.

Are we going to live by this? Are we going to be true to that? If we do, then church life will work out well. If we do not, then there will be many problems, difficulties that can hinder what God wants to do.

So then, let us come before the Lord and ask Him to help us understand how He desires of us to work out His purposes, how we can be effective in doing our part, how we can develop well and then we can move together meaningfully.

Let us thank Him for all that He has done for us and ask Him to help us to become good and faithful servants, faithful friends that He can trust.