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THE PURPOSE

In every recognized country in the world there is an American embassy. An embassy is fundamentally a little bit of America a long way from home. Embassies are sovereign territories, meaning they do not belong to the countries they are in. They belong to the countries they came from.

If you get into trouble in a foreign land, make your way to the American embassy. Because once you cross the gate and enter the realm of its dominion, you are in America again. You are where the laws of America rule.

The church is supposed to be a little bit of heaven a long way from home. It is to be that place where the values of eternity operate in history. The church is a place where weary people can go to find truth, acceptance, equality, freedom,

safety, forgiveness, justice, and hope.

Yet how is it possible for the number of churches in our nation to be ever increasing while the impact of the church only wanes? How can we have so much preaching, praising, and programs and yet so little demonstrated power? Why does the church merely react to society's agenda rather than offering a kingdom agenda to better society itself?

The answers to these questions lie in the reality that the church today bears little resemblance to the kingdom we came from. This is because we have failed to function from a kingdom perspective. The church has stopped *being* the biblical church it was designed to be, and as a result we have limited our impact on contemporary society—both inside and outside our walls.

THE KINGDOM-MINDED CHURCH

Before heading deeper into the kingdom-minded church, I want to take a moment to go over some things about the kingdom. This will serve as the backdrop for our discussion on the church. When you understand the values of God's kingdom, you will best understand His agenda. I am convicted the message of the kingdom and the values therein is misunderstood today. This has caused much of the confusion many people face.

I like to think of the kingdom of God as the *alternative*,

because that word in particular states there is another way, another idea on the floor. As God's people we are not limited by the choices this world offers us. God has an alternative plan for us—His kingdom.

Throughout the Bible, the kingdom of God is His rule, His plan, and His program. God's kingdom is all-embracing. It covers everything in the universe. We can define God's kingdom as His comprehensive rule over all creation.

If God's kingdom is comprehensive, so is His kingdom agenda. The kingdom agenda may be defined as *the visible demonstration of the comprehensive rule of God over every area of life*.

The Greek word the Bible uses for kingdom is *basileia*, which basically means a “rule” or “authority.” Included in this definition is the idea of power. When we talk about a kingdom, we're talking first about a king and a ruler.

If there's a ruler, there also have to be “rulees,” or kingdom subjects. A kingdom also includes a realm: a sphere the king rules over. Finally, if you're going to have a ruler, rulees, and a realm, you also need kingdom regulations—guidelines that govern the relationship between the ruler and the subjects. These are necessary so the rulees will know whether they are doing what the ruler wants.

God's kingdom includes all these elements. He is the absolute Ruler of His domain, which encompasses all of creation. And His authority is total. Everything God rules, He

runs—even when it doesn't look like He's running it. Even when life looks like it's out of control, God is running its "out-of-controlness."

The heart of the kingdom agenda philosophy is that there should never be a separation between the sacred and the secular. All of life is spiritual since all of life is to come under God's rule. Therefore, every issue—whether social, political, economic, educational, environmental, etc., is to mirror God's principles related to the specific area and thus reflect and promote His agenda in history.

God has made Jesus Christ the sovereign over all of mankind's kingdoms (Matthew 28:18; Colossians 1:13–18). His rule is to be represented in history by those who are a part of His kingdom and who have been delegated the responsibility of dispensing His rule to the nations (Matthew 28:19; Ephesians 1:22, 23).

Colossians 1:13 says that everybody who has trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior has been transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, your allegiance has been changed. You are no longer to follow the world's ways, but Christ's.

In case there's any doubt, there are no in-between kingdoms. There are only two realms in creation: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. You are subject to one or the other. And as a believer and member of the body of Christ, you are to be subject to Jesus Christ in His kingdom.

This means you belong to another realm, your allegiance is in another order, and no matter where you live, work, or travel you are citizens of God's kingdom.

THE SOCIO-POLITICAL DISTINCTION OF THE KINGDOM

The problem we face in the church today is we have misunderstood the kingdom, marginalizing its authority and influence not only in our own lives but also in our land. Many in the church have so spiritualized the kingdom that its socio-political rules have become little more than an ethereal ideology to be displayed at a later date. This has led to a reduction of the vast socio-ethical implications in the church, creating an organism whose function offers little power toward the transformation of society. However, the socio-political nature of the kingdom of God is very real, biblically substantiated, and relevant to the manifestation of the church's greatest and true potential.

We first witness the socio-political distinction of the kingdom in Satan's challenge to God's rule. This challenge, while spiritual, was also political in nature in that it involved an attempt to secure a throne only God held the right to possess (Ezekiel 28:11–19; Isaiah 14:13–17). Satan said, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the mount of assembly" (Isaiah 14:13). Satan's

desire to “sit on the mount of assembly” was his attempt to hold the seat of divine government in the spiritual realm while getting Adam to surrender it in the physical realm. From the beginning, politics was an issue in the rule of God.

Other demonstrations of the socio-political nature of God’s kingdom include the command God gave to Adam that he was to “subdue” the earth under him, revealing the combination of the spiritual and physical aspects of a theocratic kingdom (Genesis 1:26).

Next, the specific institution and creation of national government directly relates God’s kingdom program to the social and political aspects of man, especially since capital punishment is instituted in this period (Genesis 9:1–7). That capital punishment was predicated on the fact man is made in the image of God (v. 6) underscores the truth God’s kingdom rule in the area of human justice has a spiritual basis.

Further, under the patriarchs, Abraham was a participant in a covenant that included both land and seed. This covenant became the basis for Israel’s spiritual as well as socio-political existence (Genesis 12:1–30). Whether in the conflict of Moses with Pharaoh, or in the time of the judges, a theocratic role in governing the nation involved social, political, and economic forces as the means of expressing God’s rule on earth.

Looking toward the millennial kingdom, Messiah’s righteous rule, we also see a reflection of the social structure of

the kingdom demonstrating the inseparability of the socio-political aspects from the spiritual. Christ's future rule will bring about changes within the structures of society. It will mean military warfare will cease (Psalm 46; Micah 4:3, Isaiah 9:6–7), political wrongs will be righted (Isaiah 2:4; Psalm 72:4), and physical disease will disappear (Isaiah 35:5–6; Isaiah 33:24).

AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL FOR THE WORLD

The contemporary purpose of the church, in light of the nature of the kingdom, is not only to reflect the spiritual but also the socio-political and socio-ethical aspects of the kingdom. It is to be a model for the world operating in the world while providing an alternative to the world. When the church functions as a community, not as a reaction to the world's social system, but rather as a divine structure operating the way God has ordained it to, the church sets itself apart as a haven, much like an embassy. This shows those who are in the kingdom of darkness a preview of what the kingdom of God is all about.

In the movies, previews advertise coming attractions. Designed to entice, the preview focuses on the hot clips of the movie such as the chase scenes, love scenes, and fight scenes. The point of the preview is to whet our appetites for the upcoming attraction.

Someday a big show is coming to town, and it's called the kingdom of God. Jesus Christ is the star, and it will be a worldwide production. But until then, God has left previews in the world. We are His hot clips. God has left His church here to provide clips of the major production to come.

Unfortunately, most of our clips have been so weak in demonstrating the power and wonder of the feature film, few people show interest in picking up a ticket. Instead of previewing an epic, we often reflect the sitcoms and soap operas around us. Until we, as God's people, intentionally embrace, apply, and reflect the Kingdom, the church has little to offer the world.

While there is war in the world, there ought to be the existence of peace in the church (Ephesians 4:3; Colossians 3:14–15) and prayer for peace by the church (1 Timothy 2:1–2). While there is oppression in society, there ought to be liberation and justice in the church (James 2:1–9). While there is poverty in the world, there ought to be voluntary sharing with the goal of meeting existing needs in the church (Acts 2:44–45; 2 Corinthians 12:12–24). While there is racism, classism, and sexism in the world, there ought to be authentic oneness in the church (Colossians 3:11). Thus the world is presented with the option of Christ by being what the church is supposed to be in the world—an alternative model for the world—a community functioning under the rule of God in the mediatory kingdom on earth.

Members of the biblical church model this alternative on the basis that we are citizens of the kingdom (Colossians 1:13), having been designated as sons of the kingdom (Matthew 13:38), promised victory by the kingdom (Matthew 5:16), will be future participants in the kingdom (Daniel 9:5, 7; Nehemiah 1:6–7), as well as inheritors of the kingdom (Ephesians 4:32). Further, the fruit of the church reveals itself to others as the “good seed” sown during the period of the mysteries of the kingdom (Matthew 13:38). The church is uniquely positioned and authorized to carry out the mandates of the kingdom under the authority of Christ (Ephesians 1:22–23) when we seek the kingdom above all else (Matthew 6:33).

Since the church is to serve as a model partaking of this universal and eternal kingdom, and since this eternal kingdom is socio-political as well as spiritual in nature, the church, as a spiritual body, also partakes of the socio-political realm. The question is what is the picture of the biblical church and its role to our society?

THE BIBLICAL CHURCH

Let me begin by saying what the biblical church is not. First, the church in the New Testament—which serves as our picture for the church age—is not a social club. It is not a place to come and be entertained. Neither is it an outpost

for an official political party. While functionally it has socio-political structures and intents, it is never commanded to impose itself governmentally on the world. The church functions as a model revealing the principles of the kingdom. The church is *a community of individuals spiritually linked together with the purpose of reflecting and legislating the values of the kingdom of God.*

The church is to function as an internally legislative and familial community with an emphasis on community. By the biblical church, I am referring to the church Jesus Christ established that is to be reflected or modeled through the local gathering of believers, a local assembly, as defined shortly before the end of His earthly ministry (Matthew 16).

Several key verses in this chapter are important for us to look at to understand who we are and what we do as a church. We begin by reading Jesus had asked His disciples an important question. He asked them to tell Him who people were saying He was. Everyone offered flattering answers in reply. Some said He was Elijah while others said Jeremiah or a prophet. While all were compliments, all were wrong. Then Jesus turned to His disciples and asked, “But who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15).

It isn't evident in the English translation, but in the Greek text we discover when Jesus asks, “who do *you* say that I am,” the “you” is plural. In Texas where I live, we'd say, “Who do y'all say that I am?” The plural form of the word “you” reveals

to us Jesus is not just asking this question to Peter, who subsequently offered an answer. This is a question to the group as a whole.

When Peter answered, he answered representatively as a leader of the disciples. One way we know Peter is a leader is whenever we see a list of the names of the disciples in the gospels, Peter is always listed first. He is a natural spokesperson. While he may be one to slip up due to suffering from foot-in-mouth disease at times, he is also one who steps up when needed. He speaks his mind and offers Jesus the collective answer, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16).

Jesus responds by affirming him and changing his name, which had been Simon Barjona, to Peter—which means “a stone.” Jesus continues by saying, “and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it” (Matthew 16:18).

THE INTERLINKING PIECES OF THE CHURCH

Several important principles are given to us in this passage. First, the biblical church is comprised of many interlinking pieces.

Once the disciples individually recognized and agreed upon who Jesus was, they were ready to come together and *be* the church. This is critical because Christ is both the foundation

and the cornerstone. Once He saw they understood who He was, Jesus esteemed their commitment to His identity by empowering them to carry out His work. He did this because their reply showed Him they were a group of individuals who could jointly make an impact on society, which is exactly what they have done. Their impact has left a legacy that is still alive today.

What we sometimes do, when looking at this passage, is make the mistake of interpreting Christ's statement as meaning He is building His church on one man: Peter. However, the word Jesus used for Peter was not the Greek word *petros*. It indicated a single stone that can be easily thrown. That is not the word Jesus used for "rock."

Jesus used the Greek word *petra* indicative of a mass, or cliff, of rocks comprised of something much larger than any individual rock. This mass of rocks interlinks individual rocks together to create a stronger whole. While there are a multitude of rocks in *petra*, they do not function as individual rocks but are intimately joined together. The best exegete of the passage would have to be Peter himself. We see his interpretation in 1 Peter 2 where he says, "You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house" (1 Peter 2:5).

It is significant Christ described the church this way. A healthy, functioning church community—unity—is an essential element used by God to manifest His power and reveal His glory. If we, as the church, are going to *be* the church

Jesus is building, we have no other choice but to embrace our call to unity.

Jesus did not place option B or option C on the table. He did not say He will build a black church over here, and a white church over there, and a Hispanic church over here, and a National Baptist church over there, and a Southern Baptist church over here, and a denominational church over there, and a nondenominational church over here. Jesus did not give us that option. When we limit ourselves to those options, we have perverted His definition of His church.

We are all individual stones coming together to form a larger, more complete whole on which Christ, serving as the foundation and cornerstone, will build His church (Ephesians 2:20–22).

THE LEGISLATIVE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

Second, not only are we all interlinking parts to one church, but the biblical church also has a legislative capacity. We learn this in Ephesians 2 when we look at the definition of the term *church*. This is where we read the Greek word *ecclesia* (sometimes translated as *church*).

The Greek word *ecclesia* essentially refers to a group of people who had been called out from the general population to serve in the parliament, congress, or counsel of the community in order to establish the governance, guidelines,

rules, and regulations for the broader citizenry. In other words, if you were a part of the ecclesia in the Greek societies, you were part of the governing counsel who legislated on behalf of the Greek population. Ecclesia wasn't a place where you came to sing a song or hear a sermon. Ecclesia was the place where you came to legislate on behalf of the nation (Acts 19:39, 40).

Most of the time when we use the term *church*, we simply mean a place where people can go to find encouragement, teaching, and fellowship. However, while those things are important, when we limit ourselves to them we have reduced the word from its intended meaning. To be a part of the church of Jesus Christ, as Jesus defined it, is to be a part of a spiritual legislative body tasked to enact heaven's viewpoint in hell's society. In the midst of a place of war and conflict, God has deposited an ecclesia: *a group of people who have been called out to bring the governance of God into the relevant application and practice of mankind.*

This legislative nature of the church is clearly evident in this passage, since what is resisting it are the "gates of hell," and "gates" are used in Scripture to refer to a place where legislative activities occur. This is reinforced by the fact that "keys" are given that gain access to heaven's authority to be executed by the church on earth (Matthew 16:19). Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father to legislate from heaven, and we sit with Him (Ephesians 2:5-6). This explains why God

decides what He's going to do in heaven tied to what the church is doing in history (Ephesians 3:10).

When the church settles for spiritual inspiration and information only, as important and foundational as those things are, we wind up with temporal encouragement with little lasting transformation. In fact, the church even influences God's involvement in the culture. Much of what God will or will not do is predicated on what He sees the church doing (Ephesians 3:10). The church is supposed to be where the values of eternity operate in history so history sees what God looks like when heaven is operating on earth. The job of the church is not to adopt the culture or assess and analyze it, but set heaven within the context of culture so culture can see God at work in the midst of the activities and conflicts of men.

THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE CHURCH

Third, the biblical church exists to advance the kingdom, not simply to defend it. Please notice the progressive nature of the language Jesus used. Jesus said He is going to "build" His church. He did not say He was going to stop hell. Rather, hell has come to stop Him. It happens this way: As Christ builds His church, hell sees Him doing it. Hell does not like what Christ is doing, so hell tries to stop it. Jesus and His church are on the offensive. Hell is on the defensive.

For too long the church has operated on the defensive side

of this battle. We've been reacting to the movements of hell rather than setting the pace of heaven. Jesus clearly says the way you will know the church is His church is hell will be trying to stop it, and hell will be failing. The reverse of that is true as well. The way you will know the church is not operating as Jesus' church is it will be reacting to hell's advances, and it will be failing to stop them.

Jesus said His church, *as interlinking pieces of individuals joined together in unity*, will be hewed together around a common vision and purpose, making it not only capable of withstanding the strongest oppositional forces on the planet—the gates of hell will not prevail—but also able to make a progressive impact. But if the church is not joined together, a rock, the reverse will occur because that is the way Christ has designed the church to function. Without unity of purpose the gates of Hades—Satan and his minions—will overpower and engulf us.

This reminds me of when Hurricane Katrina made her appearance in New Orleans. Hurricane Katrina was bad, but she wasn't the ultimate problem. Katrina had come into town, done her thing, and she was on her way. The trouble didn't come from Katrina. The trouble came when the levy broke. That's when the city flooded.

The job of the levy had been to hold the waters back. Had the levy held, Katrina would have been remembered as just another strong storm in a long line of others like her, rather

than as the disaster she became.

God has placed a levy in history. He has called it the church. The church is designed to hold back Satan's forces being unleashed against mankind. The church isn't solely about choir fests, small-group bible studies, and luncheons, while those things are good. The church isn't just about feeling something, praying, clapping, singing, or saying "amen," although those things are good. The church was intentionally designed to *be* the church, because when it *is* the church, even the strongest forces cannot break it down. The gates of hell will not overpower it. In fact, when the church is *being* the true biblical church, the church will storm in and overpower the gates of hell.

But if hell is on the doorstep, in the lobby, or in the pew of the American church—which many would argue it is—it can only be the result of the body of Christ failing to join together as a unified whole in pursuit of a kingdom agenda. We know this is true because Jesus made it clear He would build His church in such a way, when done His way, the gates of hell would not overpower it.

That doesn't mean we are to ignore our different preferences in worship, music, preaching, fellowship, or how long we want to meet together on a Sunday morning in what we call "church." The kingdom of heaven where we will one day go as the bride of Christ will be comprised of diversity (Revelation 21:24); therefore we ought not to try to strip ourselves

of our unique differences now. Rather we need to welcome God's creative distinctions to make a stronger, more unified body in our land by joining church congregation and church congregation together—rock and rock together. We need to embrace an intentional strategy of edification through mutual service, impacting not only our families and churches but also our communities and nation with the transforming power of Christ.

If we could ever see the kingdom as God sees it, and if we could ever see each other as God sees us, designed to come together in a unified goal under His overarching kingdom agenda, the world would have to deal with the strength of the church of Jesus Christ. Now the world merely needs to deal with this segment over here, and that segment over there as we divide ourselves into individual buildings without an overarching, comprehensive, unifying scope.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH

Fourth, the biblical church operates with full access to supreme authority and power. The next verse in this passage in Matthew 16 tells us, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:19).

Jesus says He will give the church the “keys of the kingdom

of heaven.” What do you do with keys? You gain access (Isaiah 22:22). Have you ever been in a hurry and you can’t find your keys? That means you’re not going anywhere anytime soon. Or perhaps you are like me and you have a number of keys on your keychain, but you have forgotten what some of them unlock. Those keys are no longer of any benefit to you.

Jesus says the church He is building will have the keys to the kingdom of God, giving it the authority to bind and loose on earth and in heaven. If we could only grasp the potential of this reality, there is no end to the impact we, as the church, could have on our land and in the world.

Yet why are we not experiencing this power and authority in the church today? Because we are not operating in the way Jesus designed His church to function. We are operating according to churchdom while not operating according to the kingdom. We are trying to use our own church keys to unlock kingdom doors and finding they don’t open much of anything.

This reminds me of a time I flew from New York to Chicago. In New York I had stayed at the Marriott Hotel. But when I got to Chicago, I went to another hotel. I checked into the hotel and they gave me my keys. I made my way up to the twentieth floor and stuck my key card into the lock. A red light came on, so I tried my key again. A red light blinked again. At this point, tired from a long trip and not wanting to drag my bags all the way back down to the lobby to tell

them they had given me the wrong key, I'll admit I got evangelically ticked off.

But down I went, making my way to the front desk. When I handed the lady at the front desk my key, she apologized and let me know she would exchange it for me. Then she paused. Looking at my key card, she handed it back to me and said, "I'm sorry, sir, but this key is your problem. It doesn't go to this hotel." I had put my New York key card in my pocket, and once I arrived in Chicago I mistakenly took that key out to try to open my hotel door. Understandably, it didn't work.

In other words, the keys Jesus is giving the church are the only keys that will work. These are not program keys, ministry keys, sermon keys, or song keys. These are the keys that belong to the kingdom. So if our churches are not kingdom-minded—if we have failed to comprehend, let alone adopt, a kingdom theology, ideology, and methodology—we will not be able to open heaven's doors. We will have prayer meetings, preaching, choir songs, and seminars, but no authority. We will have no authority on earth because the authority is directly tied to the kingdom. The keys don't belong to Church A or Church B or even Church AB & The Redeemed C; the keys belong to the kingdom.

Jesus is saying the church, and only the church, has legal access to the kingdom of God and its authority. In other words, only the church (and those who are attached to it) has access to the rule of God in history. Only the church has

the authority to call down heaven to address issues on earth. Only the church can open the door of eternity to cause the keys, the authority and the access, to operate heaven's agenda in a hellish world. And since the spiritual precedes the physical, the church operating properly is the primary means of bringing spiritual solutions in history to the physical manifestations that plague humanity.

In 1 Corinthians 4:20, Paul wrote, "The kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power." So the question is, do we just talk about kingdom power or do we see the power of the kingdom operating in and through the church?

If there's anything that seems to be missing in the church today, it is the kind of power Jesus described in Matthew 16. The church has been cowering in a "holy huddle." We gather every week and call nice plays, but we don't take the plays out on the field where the real game is going on. Jesus has given the church access to heaven.

As the chaplain for the Dallas Mavericks basketball team, I often get extra tickets to share with friends or staff members at church who want to attend a basketball game.

Whenever I leave tickets at the "will call" window, I tell my guests to look for special tags in their envelope along with their tickets. They need to keep those tags handy, because those tags give them special access to things besides the game.

With those tags, they can come back to a room next to the team's locker room and eat a meal with me. The tags give my

guests special access they can't get with their tickets alone. The tickets will allow them to mingle with the crowd, but the tags open up a whole different level of access.

A lot of churches offer people a ticket to heaven. But like basketball fans who have tickets to the game but don't have the special tags, they fail to offer believers access to the real power available when we use the keys of the kingdom to unlock heaven.

I don't know about you, but I don't just want to make it to the game. I want more than a free ticket to heaven. I want access to the power Jesus promised. I want in on the power of the kingdom. I want to see heaven brought down to earth, demonstrating the power of God in history.

If we are Sunday-morning-only churches, we shouldn't be surprised if we don't see kingdom power in our lives, families, and communities Monday through Saturday. In the kingdom of God there is authority, and the church has access to it. We are to manifest the authority of heaven's kingdom here on earth.

THE KINGDOM AND THE CHURCH

Our society is not changing today because the church has settled for buildings and programs instead of accessing the authority of the kingdom and the power of the Holy Spirit. We've had church, but we haven't had transformation. Unless the church becomes Spirit-filled and kingdom-minded, we

are not being the church Christ came to build. In fact, Jesus only mentioned “church” three times in His earthly ministry, and all three times are recorded in the kingdom-focused book of Matthew. The word *kingdom* however, is found fifty-four times in the book of Matthew alone.

Yet surprisingly, we often hear more about the church than the kingdom. We plant churches rather than promoting the kingdom. Our seminaries teach our future leaders how to *do* church rather than how to *be* about the kingdom. We ought to focus on both the kingdom and the church because both are interconnected. We can’t have church without the kingdom. Yet the kingdom carries out its agenda through the church.

It is high time we become kingdom people, as a church representing something bigger than our own individualized groups and preferences. It is high time we made God’s kingdom our rule and His glory our goal. God didn’t establish the church to make us feel good. Rather, we are a people with a purpose made up of many members brought together in one body (1 Corinthians 12:20) who suffer together (1 Corinthians 12:26) and are fitly joined together (Ephesians 4:16). This is in order to allow the full expression of the diverse spiritual gifts given to us for the building up of the church for impact on society, the opposing of Satan’s forces, and the manifestation of the glory of God (1 Corinthians 12:3–5, 25–33).

Failure to recognize this broader agenda has kept churches

ingrown, divided, and fragmented. Until the church begins functioning for the kingdom rather than itself, it cannot have the voice and the comprehensive impact it was created to have in areas such as social justice, race relations, economics, education, and government.

When the church has the proper kingdom perspective, there is no division between sacred and secular. All of life is viewed as an extension of God's kingdom.

The apostle Peter told us, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). The church is to proclaim the King and His kingdom not only for the eternal salvation of people but also for the transformation of individuals and institutions in history.

Notice the word *race* is singular. If you belong to Christ, you are part of a brand-new race. You may have a different heritage than some other members of Christ's body, but we are all one race now in Him.

One reason I love the Olympics is no matter whether a winning athlete from the United States is black, Hispanic, Asian, or white, only one national anthem is played when that American winner is saluted on the medal stand.

It's the same way in the body of Christ. No matter what your racial or ethnic background, there is only one Savior and one body. We come together as the collective body of

Christ because we are part of a bigger agenda, the proclamation of Christ.

If the church is ever going to make an impact on society, we must realize we are a part of an established kingdom where God makes the rules. He has given us authority in the earth, but we are only able to exercise that authority according to His rules. Escaping those rules is as impossible as escaping the effects of gravity. Just like there are natural laws that govern nature, there are spiritual laws that govern the spiritual world. If you jump out of a window, you're going to crash to the ground. There's no way around it. Likewise, if we try to *do* church individually rather than *be* the church collectively, we're going to remain powerless and ineffective. This is because a preeminent rule for being the church is we are *unified*. That is foundational: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

Only when the church embraces diversity across racial (Jew nor Greek), class (slave nor free man), and gender (male nor female) lines will we be the haven God designed us to be in a world of lost people in search of a kingdom embassy.

Ephesians 3:10 says that the wisdom of God is made known, made visible, through the church to the powers that be. The church is a microcosm of the kingdom, which is the larger expression of God's rule. It is the church's chief respon-

sibility to introduce Jesus Christ and His kingdom to society at large. Our job as members of the church is to live in a way that shows the world a clear picture of the kingdom, and that all things are to fall underneath the Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:22, 23). The church should present to the broader culture a working illustration of God's solutions to the problems the culture faces so they can replicate these solutions in society at large. People who want to see heaven at work on earth should be able to discover it in the church.

The Bible says in Ephesians 2:21 that the church is a building "being fitted together [and] growing into a holy temple in the Lord."

What does a temple do? It houses God. That's what the temple did in the Old Testament, and that's where the presence and the glory of God resided. In the same way, the glory of God in this age resides in the church.

We should be seeing society impacted because of the church. It is a faulty eschatology and ecclesiology that has a church in history having little impact on the culture. Where the glory of God is, transformation is close by.

When the powerful reality of God's kingdom is brought to bear in society, society should be in the process of being transformed because God's kingdom institution, the church, is present in its midst mediating the blessing of comprehensive rule to the broader society. The church is to be the visible manifestation of the kingdom in history—anything less is not the church Christ died to build.