What's Happening in the Workshop?

-A Syllabus for Home Churches-



by Dale Rumble

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— Introduction—

To examine what is taking place in Christendom today can be very confusing because of the many voices that fill the air.

Besides the traditional denominations, there are an ever increasing number of independent churches. Mega-churches are emerging on the scene. There are charismatic ministers who build a network of followers to their teaching using T.V. and literature. There are new revival centers, and new para-church ministries, some of which employ the latest communication technologies (satellites, the Internet) to take the gospel to people groups all over the world. In addition to all of this, there is a growing movement to small groups, to house churches, where the religious superstructure of institutional churches is replaced with open meetings that emphasize *relationship and the freedom of each believer to minister.* Finally, there is a healthy and growing increase of prayer, intercession and worship in many churches. There are new voices bringing new challenges!

We believers tend to evaluate our service for the Lord in the light of this ever changing activity. However, if we will rise up and examine the church from God's perspective we gain new revelation on what is actually taking place!

We discover that God is doing a great work for Himself! Although there are no sounds of hammers, saws or drills, God is building His house! Oh, yes, we are part of the activity, but do we really understand what is happening?

This tract has been written to reveal what the Lord is doing, and so help refocus our hearts and commitment on the work of the Holy Spirit among us.

—The Divine Blueprint—

There is a royal action plan. It is a major theme in the Bible. Here we learn that God is building for Himself a dwelling place, a place for

His eternal rest. He refers to His future abode as a house, a city and a tabernacle. And its final location will be on earth!

And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them. (Revelation 21:3)

Over the ages God has unveiled truths of His house in His word through patriarchs, prophets and apostles, so that we, who are His people, can find our calling and place in His plan and purpose.

The following are some examples of such revelation.

• God built His plan into the heart of Abraham, who was the father of all the faithful who would later follow him.

...he (Abraham) was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. (Hebrews 11:10)

• The tabernacle built by Moses in the wilderness was designed according to the pattern that God gave to him. It was a fore-type or shadow of the heavenly sanctuary that God would build for Himself. All dimensions, materials and arrangements were symbolic of what was to come (Exodus 25-40).

Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later. (Hebrews 3:5)

• The Psalms of David frequently expressed the burden of his heart for the house of the Lord. (Psalm 15:1-5; 26:8; 27:4-6; 48:1-3; 84:1-5; 87:3, 92:13).

For the Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation. This is my resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it.... (Psalm 132:13-14)

- After Solomon had built a most expensive and magnificent temple for God, he received a great revelation from the Lord.
 - But will God indeed dwell with mankind on earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain Thee; how much less the house which I have built. (2 Chronicles 6:18)
- The prophet Isaiah confirms Solomon's revelation, and he pointed to what God seeks in those He will dwell with.

Thus says the Lord, "Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a place that I can rest? For My hand

made all these things, thus all these things came into being," declares the Lord. "But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word." (Isaiah 66:1-2)

Isaiah also prophesied of the cornerstone that God Himself laid for the foundation of His house. This stone is His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

....Behold, I am laying in Zion, a tested stone, a costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes in it will not be disturbed. (Isaiah 28:16)

• Paul summed up much of New Testament teaching on the house of God in his epistle to Ephesus.

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you (Gentile believers) are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22)

The Lord's dwelling place will emerge from a divine fitting and building together of Jewish and Gentile believers.

• A key observation from scripture is that when God accomplishes His purpose among men, He fills the place with His glory. The Tabernacle in the wilderness, Solomon's temple and all great revivals are examples. The eventual completion of His house will see *all the earth filled with His glory* (Numbers 14:21; Habakkuk 2:14)!

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God... (Revelation 21:10-11)

For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are **seeking the city** which is to come. (Hebrews 13:14)

This is what we are looking for; it is our vision! Fulfilling our call in the plan of God is not a matter of finding the right method or technique; it is to seek the glory of God; for we cannot separate the glory of God from His house!

— The Architect & Builder—

When David sought to build a house for God, he was told by the Lord that the house which God desires would be built by His Son, who by the way, would be a descendant of David.

He (Jesus) shall build for Me a house, and I will establish His throne forever....I will settle Him in My house and in My kingdom forever....(1 Chronicles 17:12-14).

Jesus confirmed this truth to His disciples.

....upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not overpower it. (Matthew 16:18)

In the spiritual architecture of His Father's house, Jesus will prepare a dwelling place for each child of God. The glory of our abode may well depend on the spiritual quality of material that we send up from our life below.

In My Father's house are many dwelling places.... I go to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. (John 14:2-3)

Our destiny, as children of God, is clearly, woven into the house of God. What does this mean, and what principles are we to embrace? The answers to this question is the purpose of my tract.

Only two materials are used in constructing the house of God: stones and spiritual life.

You also, as **living stones**, are being built up as a **spiritual house** for a holy priesthood.... (1 Peter 2:5)

Stones represent we believers in our humanity; we must first become spiritually alive, and then we can be shaped and fitted together for our own personal place in the church.

Our goal is not to build some kind of "stone structure" that could contain the life of God; it is to allow the Holy Spirit to bring forth divine structure out of the life of *God. Structure must come out of His life!*

When a woman becomes pregnant, a deposit of life in her womb begins to take form. In time, organs will develop into a body; the life within her becomes "organ-ized." Life has given rise to structure. The same principle is also true for the church. One cannot organize believers into some unique structure hoping that it will produce the life of God

(even though men still attempt to do so). It is the other way around; only God's life can bring forth the structure of His body.

Just as a mother's womb is the proper environment for a child to be conceived and to form, so also must there be a suitable environment for a local expression of the body of Christ to develop and to grow. Very simply, this environment requires freedom for the Holy Spirit to move in the lives of those who have made Jesus their Lord. When believers assemble together in the common life union they have in Christ, out of the spiritual life that has been deposited in each one, structure and definition will begin to arise.

Local churches provide this environment. They constitute God's workshop; this is where He builds His house.

—God's Workshop!—

The Lord is always at work in hearts to draw us closer to Himself wherever we may be. However, His primary workshop are the localities where believers are committed to assemble in fellowship around Him.

Believers need not have the same understanding of scripture, or share the same experiences; they need only have the same divine union of life in Christ to be a living stone.

...the one who joins himself to the Lord is **one spirit with Him**. (1 Corinthians 6:17)

The first question one might ask is, "What is a church?" Churches are often seen as religious institutions whose members are united around a common belief in doctrine. However, the Bible teaches that the church is an organism of spiritual life. A local church is simply believers gathering together on the basis of a common, living union with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus expressed it this way:

For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst. (Matthew 18:20)

The reality of local church is independent of the place where the believers gather. It may be in an open field, a public building, a home or a special building chosen as the meeting place. Unfortunately, such buildings can become so important in the identity and priority of some believers that the true nature of the body of Christ is masked. In their thinking, the building can become the church.

Material is required to build God's house. The great commission of Mark 16:15 means that evangelistic outreach is an *essential ministry of every church*. A local church is not a quarry that is the source of stones. However, believers through prayer, their personal lives and testimonies are "*commissioned stone-gatherers*." Each convert to Christ becomes a stone brought into His workshop.

The building process is more than assembling an ever increasing number of stones. It involves the shaping and fitting together of each stone to fulfill a specific call that was uniquely determined by God for every believer before the world began.

Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, **but according to His own purpose and grace** which was granted to us in Christ from all eternity. (2 Timothy 1:9)

The life union that all true believers have with Christ through the Holy Spirit is how they are shaped and built together in His house. This is what the building process is all about; it is a spiritual work.

—The Building Process—

The church is not simply a collection of believers, but of saved individuals who are being built together under the headship of Christ to become His house.

In this tract we will not address all of the many ministry activities of a typical local church. We are only interested in two specific areas of growth that define what takes place in the building process. These are:

- 1. Growth in one's personal relationship with Christ
- 2. Growth in the interpersonal relationship between believers.

It is not surprising that these reflect the two great commandments (Matthew 22:36-40)!

In both instances, progress in building is expressed in terms of a growth of divine fellowship (KOINONIA), the relationship of spiritual life that bonds believers to Christ and to one another.

The process by which this growth takes place is neither by organization, technique, or method! It is an amalgamation of many principles and truths orchestrated by the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers who are *truly committed to Jesus*. These qualities are not simply passive virtues, they are attitudes and actions that build relationship; they are ministries of relationship.

Although there are many other valid ministries and disciplines in the life of a local church, the only scriptures that will be addressed are those that specifically deal with these two areas of relational growth. They form a syllabus for small group activity.

The following is a list of such principles and truths along with related scriptures.

• There can be only one true center of emphasis in all gatherings, and that is Christ Himself! It is not dogma, creeds, ministry, the charisma of leaders, programs, the sacraments, church buildings or anything else. The only purpose for every meeting is to come into the presence of Jesus; to hear His heart and to worship Him. Clearly, prayer will *always* be a key part of all meetings.

But you, beloved, **building yourselves u**p on your most holy faith, **praying in the Holy Spirit.** (Jude 1:20)

• The ultimate goal in the personal life of each believer is not attaining some level of performance in ministry; it is to be conformed into the image of Christ.

But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image **from glory to glory** (the building process), just as from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

... because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. And it was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14)

But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ. (Ephesians 4:15)

So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God. (Ephesians 3:17-19)

Regardless of who may be anointed to minister, only God Himself can cause the growth.

I (Paul) planted, Apollos watered, but **God was causing the** growth. (1 Corinthians 3:6)

Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it... (Psalm 127:1)

• The Spirit of life in Christ Jesus sets us free from the law of sin and death and unites us in Him. This life is not external to us, but has been deposited within each believer. If we walk in fellowship under His government, the life flow of His Spirit in ministry and relationship builds us up in Him, and bonds us together in Him. The very imperfections of our human nature, especially under trying circumstances, can be used to develop mercy, forgiveness and love in hearts (Romans 8:28).

Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. (Proverbs 27:17)

Body growth will depend on the depth and quality of fellowship uniting believers together. It cannot be superficial. *How many people can one have solid fellowship with? Not many.* Each member of our physical bodies is in contact with only a limited number of other parts of our body. For this reason, an important need for the building process is small group environments. This is why a house church (or church in a home) is an ideal location for a church plant; small groups, where there is freedom for the Holy Spirit to move, are key in the building process.

When we come to Christ, we bring not only our hearts, but all that
we possess, and this includes our home. Being hospitable is how
we offer it to Him!

Be hospitable to one another without complaint. (1 Peter 4:9)

...contributing to the needs of the saints, **practicing hospitality**. (Romans 12:13)

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. (Hebrews 13:2)

As the Lord leads, we can use our homes to reach out to those who are poor and needy, to the lonely who may have no home. To share one's home is to share a personal part of our lives; it is a place to share Christ! Hospitality was a way of life for many of the first believers, for the original church was essentially built in homes (Acts 2:46; Romans 3:5; Colossians 4:5; Philemon 1:2). It is helpful to recognize that the New Testament epistles were written to saints in home environments.

To be hospitable was a key requirement for all men in early church leadership (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:5). Paul's three year period of ministry at Ephesus was conducted in both public places and in homes.

...I did not shrink from declaring anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house. (Acts 20:20)

• Although the following examples of body ministry can take place in gatherings of any size, they are particularly applicable to small groups such as house meetings. When the meetings are large there will be a tendency to be "church centered" rather than "Christ centered."

The following are some of the benefits that are unique to small groups. There will be freedom for each one to share, providing a place where one can learn from mistakes. In a non-religious, informal atmosphere it will be easier to make friends; and friendship is a major, first step in building relationship. A true friend will feel free to bring correction in love when necessary and vice versa; we all need such friends!

Faithful are the wounds of a friend... (Proverbs 27:6)

Such meetings should be characterized by simplicity, informality, freedom and intimacy with the emphasis always being the Lord Jesus Christ and His love for us. This creates an environment where believers can more easily become honest with one another and remove make-believe facades. Accountability to one another will begin to develop.

An excellent activity for developing such characteristics is table fellowship, the sharing of meals together (Acts 2:46). Also times of playing board games, sports activities, going to the park, a zoo, sharing a boat ride, attending a play or concert, or going on a retreat together can be spiritual, wholesome and good!

The following scriptures reveal how specific ministries of relationship are the very dynamics of the building process. It is not a question of organizing a regimen of ministry activity; it is simply a spontaneous sharing of the word and love of the Lord Jesus with one another.

Therefore **encourage one another**, and **build up one another**... (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called, "Today," lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (Hebrews 3:13)

The phrase "any one of you" invokes concern for those who may be weaker in the faith or in their Christian walk.

Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble....see to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled. (Hebrews 12:12, 15)

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:32)

So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the **building up of one another.** (Romans 14:19)

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear. (Ephesians 4:29)

And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another... (Hebrews 10:24-25)

The following additional action verbs in scripture, when linked with the phrase "one another," express ministries of relationship in the building process: be devoted to one another; be kind to; be honest with; care for; help; honor; pray for; rejoice with; weep with; and bless.

• But beware, what one builds through spiritual ministry one can destroy by a lack of character. The Lord's goal in the building process is not simply ministry performance, but godly character! Wrong heart attitudes can destroy relationships.

And be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. (Ephesians 5:21)

Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ. (Galations 6:2)

For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think.... (Romans 12:3)

Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. (Romans 12:16)

Do nothing from **selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility** of mind let each one of you regard one another as more important than himself. (Philippians 2:3)

Above all, keep fervent in **your love for one another**, because love covers a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4:8)

And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body and be thankful. (Colossians 3:12-15)

I...entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)

These ministries of relationships that proceed out of godly hearts create the *divine cement t*hat God uses to bond stones together in His house; they build the joints and ligaments that enable the body of Christ to function.

From whom (Christ) the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which 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. (Ephesians 4:16)

...holding fast to the head (Jesus), from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. (Colossians 2:19)

• Body ministry can be most effective when conditions are far from being tranquil. The pathway to glory is frequently marked by persecusion, suffering, tribulation and even death. These are the times when words of encouragement, comfort, and direction are most needed by those undergoing such affliction (2 Corinthians 1:3-6).

For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison. (2 Corinthians 4:17)

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. and let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-4)

For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake. (Philippians 1:29)

• Implicit in the life flow of body ministry will be various manifestations of spiritual gifts. These are the word of knowledge, the word of wisdom, discerning of spirits, prophecy, various kinds of tongues, interpretation of tongues, faith, the effecting of miracles and gifts of healing (1 Corinthians 12:7-10; 1 Corinthians 14: Romans 12:3-8; 1 Peter 4:10-11). These gifts are expressions of spiritual power to thwart the enemy and to edify the saints. The body of Christ is weak without them.

But the one and same Spirit works these things (i.e. spiritual gifts), distributing to each one individually just as He wills (i.e. for the common good). (1 Corinthians 12:11)

But the one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. (1 Corinthians 14:3)

And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation.... (Romans 12:6-8)

What is the outcome then, brethren: When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. (1 Corinthians 14:26)

• There will be opportunities for systematic teaching from those anointed to do so, such as the ministries that are listed in Ephesians 4:11. The goal of such ministry is to equip each member in the word of God for their place of service; the goal is not to create clergy and laity classes of saints. The spiritual growth of an assembly will be measured, in part, by how well all members understand, obey and share the word of God with one another. This includes having the goodness and wisdom necessary to admonish one another in love.

We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. (1 Thessalonians 5:14)

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Colossians 3:16)

And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another. (Romans 15:14)

There will be a body of teaching designed to establish new believers firmly on the foundation of Christ. This is best described by the phrase, "making disciples." In addition, the teachings of Jesus in the gospels are *foundationally important* for understanding the New Testament epistles on relationship and ministry. Good examples are Matthew, chapters 5, 6 and 7 and John, chapters 14, 15, 16 and 17.

The Holy Spirit does not work apart from the word of God!

All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

• Whether in large meetings or in house churches, a necessary part of body ministry is the service of those whom the Lord anoints to "see over" what takes place. These elders, or overseers, are not to program or manipulate body ministry; they will seek to know the heart of God for what is taking place in meetings. To do so they lneed to hear the voice of the Lord, which may well come from other members, especially those who are prophetic. Their guidance in oversight is to prevent improper activities from taking place, such as gossip, legalism, cliques, false spirits, doctrinal error, humanism, pride, etc. They keep watch over the souls of those in the fellowship. A local church should not be divided into clergy and laity groups (i.e. performers versus spectators); all members are priests of God! Some members will be anointed as overseers, just as others are anointed to serve as deacons, helpers, intercessors, etc. When there is freedom for all to minister (and this includes women and children), if there is no oversight, the words of some immature believers can be destructive (Proverbs 4:23; 16:21; 17:9).

But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and these defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man.... (Matthew 15:18-19)

The words of our mouth bring either life or death!

Overseers are to be good examples of how to hear and obey the voice of the Lord. Their motivation to shepherd the flock of God among them will be their love for Jesus (John 21:15-17). They will be responsible to disciple the saints on how to hear and obey the Lord's voice (John 10:27). They will not position themselves between the Lord and His sheep as intermediaries. They will bring vision of the Lord's purpose to the body, and they will be committed to equip each member for their place of service to fulfill that vision. They will always be looking for those who demonstrate the Lord's love and grace in caring for others. Such individuals can provide leadership for new groups. They will recognize the specific grace of translocal ministries whom the Lord sends among them to help equip the saints.

They will not minister out of the authority of offices and titles; their authority will be in the anointing of the Lord upon them. They will be committed to one another as a collegial group of bondservants under the headship of Jesus. He will be the *one and only* head of the church! They will be accountable to their peers and the body. True overseers will not draw any disciples after themselves to build their own kingdom; they will pursue unity in the body of Christ. They will see the importance of building fellowship through networking with other local bodies of believers in the vicinity.

-Conclusion-

What God is building today in many workshops is destined to contain His glory which will fill the whole earth! Only God can build His house; yet each one of us are responsible for how we work with Him to build upon the foundation that He has laid. He is the precious cornerstone!

...but let each man be careful how he builds upon it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is

Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire. (1 Corinthians 3:10-15)

How we build our life and service for God is eternally important! There is an architect and builder, there are workshops and there is a building process. The quality of our work will be measured by the two great commandments that concern gold, silver and precious stones: by our relationship with Jesus and those in Christ with whom we are knit together in fellowship.

For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven; inasmuch as we, having put it on, **shall not be found naked.** (2 Corinthians 5:2-3)

The issue is not whether we are saved and going to heaven; this has been established by our faith in the death and resurrection of the



Lord Jesus Christ. The issue is whether or not we are building for the glory that is to come.

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