

Authority of the Word, the Ministry, and the Local Church

By Leo Harris

How can we make God's Word come to pass? How can we make it WORK? This was the problem that was pressing upon my heart and mind during the winter months of 1953.

As mentioned in our previous chapters, we had experienced seasons of great blessing in our ministry. Yet I was to face another crisis – another period of dissatisfaction and feeling utterly inadequate and frustrated.

Again and again I would read the startling promises and declarations in the Word of God concerning us as believers – our position in Christ, our victory, our power, our freedom from the carnal nature, the promises of healing and deliverance, of the supply of all our material needs, but were they happening in my life?

In brief - the New Testament portrayed a life of glorious reality in Christ, while I personally was confronted by such a lack of supernatural power in so many facets of my own life and ministry. As a pastor, I was too well aware of my own inability to meet the challenging needs in the lives of many people in my assembly.

If only the mighty truths of the Word of God could be made effective, all this would be changed.

But why didn't the Word work?

For weeks this debate went on in my heart and mind. I would stop the car, pick up my New Testament, and read and read again - and then lift my heart to the Lord and ask, "Why doesn't it work?"

I would awake during the night, take up my Bible and read again the tremendous promises and declarations for every believer and for the Christian church in general. Then I would hold the Bible up toward heaven and ask the Lord why his Word was not in evidence in my life and in the lives of my congregation.

Then one night, after I had left my bed and was pacing the floor with my Bible open on my desk, I was asking the same old question - "Why, why, WHY?"

Suddenly, something changed inside of me, a river of faith and assurance seemed to well up from my innermost being, a veil seemed to be torn away from my understanding, and from my lips broke forth, not the old question of unbelief, but the expressions of faith and conviction.

"The Word works! It works by faith, and I HAVE faith! What the Word says about God is TRUE! What the Word says about ME is true! What the Word says I am in Christ, I AM! What the Word says I can DO through Christ, I CAN DO!"

And so, in these and similar expressions, I gushed forth the deepest convictions of my heart. I believed, and I KNEW I believed.

God Works By His Word - Through Faith!

What a difference it was to preach now. I wanted to open my Bible and shout from the housetops. With boldness I could say to the people, "What God says about you is true - you are

born of Gad, a new creature in Christ, indwelt by Christ, and you can do all things through Christ! Your feelings may tell you that you are defeated, frustrated, struggling against overwhelming odds, but the WORD says you are more than a conqueror, a devil-defeater, master in all circumstances, and standing on the threshold of unlimited possibilities - in Christ - and through faith in the WORD."

Instead of looking to the old Adamic nature with its hopeless futility and frustration, and asking "WHY doesn't the Word work," I now saw myself as a new creature in Christ, and taking hold of the immeasurably vast and powerful declarations of God concerning my identity in Christ I boldly cried, "AMEN! Thy Word is TRUTH! Hallelujah!"

And how true it is that "faith cometh by hearing the Word of God," for the preaching of the positive truth of God's Word wrought mighty results in the lives of those who heard it.

Now let me set forth a few of the great fundamental facts concerning the Word of God and how it works for all who can believe it.

1. The Word Has Divine Authority

In Genesis 1 God spoke authoritative words - "*Let there be . . .*" and there *was*. This world about us is the product of *the authority of the Word*. Evolution is not so much a challenge to God's power and ability as it is to the authority of his Word.

God made man and brought him immediately under the authority of his Word . . . "*And the Lord God commanded the man*" (Gen. 2: 16).

In the coming age Christ will rule by the authority of the Word . . . "*Out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations*" (Rev. 19: 15), and "*he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked*" (Isaiah 11: 4).

Between Eden and the Millennium, however, there is being waged a fierce contest over the authority of God's Word. To Eve Satan questioned - "*Hath God said?*" (Gen. 3: 1). Today, in this hour of earth's deepest spiritual darkness, that question is well established in the minds of the masses. It is a subtle, Satanic challenge to the authority of the Word of God.

But the authority of God's Word is backed by his very being, his very character, his eternal throne. It stands unshaken and unshakeable by the onslaughts of devils or men. Though heaven and earth pass away the Word of God will prevail throughout countless ages to come. Hallelujah!

2. The Word Has Divine Power

Not only did the atoms come together at the authoritative command of God, but they LIVED by the power of that Word. Behind all creation there is the mind, thought, word, power and life of God.

The words of the angel to Mary (Luke 1: 37), "*For with God nothing shall be impossible,*" read in a literal translation as follows: "***No Word of God shall be void of power.***"

Little wonder Mary responded, "*Be it unto me according to thy WORD.*" The angel had declared a promise requiring supernatural fulfilment, but the *Word of God* has in itself the supernatural power to materialize!

3. Jesus Combined Both the Authority and Power of the Word

When Jesus cast out the unclean spirit from the man in the synagogue, the people were amazed and exclaimed - *"What a word is this! For with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out"* (Luke 4:36).

The words of Jesus contained not only the *authority* of God, but the power, life, energy and ability of God.

We see the *divine authority* of his words when he cursed the fig tree - and it obeyed and died. Again, when he commanded the wind and waves to hush and be still - and they obeyed and gave place to a great calm.

Then we see *the power of his words* when he took the five loaves and two fishes - sufficient only for a little boy's lunch - and said to his disciples, *"Give ye them to eat!"* Acting on those words, which were so powerful and pregnant with creative energy, the disciples found sufficient to feed five thousand men and gather up 12 baskets full of left-overs!

Jesus claimed both *authority* and *power* when he said, as he looked down upon the palsied man, *"Whether it is easier to say . . . Thy sins be forgiven thee (authority), or to say, Arise, take up thy bed and walk (power)?"* (Mark 2:9).

Yes, Jesus personified the divine Word of authority and power.

4. The Word of Authority and Power Is Given to Us

Jesus spoke God's words. *"The words I speak unto you, I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works"* (John 14: 10).

Moreover, Jesus *gave* those authoritative, powerful words of God to us. *"For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me"* (John 17:8).

What words do *we* speak?

Jesus said - *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God"*(Luke 4:4).

Solomon said - *"A man's belly shall be satisfied with the fruit of his **mouth**; and with the increase of his **lips** shall he be filled. Death and life are in the power of the **tongue**: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof"* (Prov. 18:20-21).

Again Jesus said, *"For by thy **words** thou shalt be justified, and by thy **words** thou shalt be condemned"* (Matt. 12:37).

Jesus lived and ministered by the power and authority of the words the Father gave him: Little wonder, then, that the people were amazed and said, *"What a word is this!" And in awe and bewilderment the officers of the chief priests and the Pharisees, sent to seize Jesus, came back and said, "Never man spake like this man"* (John 7:46).

My friend, these words of God are given to us. We, too, may speak them. We, too, may *live* by their authority and power.

As those words of God dwell in our hearts and are spoken by our lips they become bread and fruit to us. We shall be filled with their power. We shall be changed and transformed by them. They will justify us, heal us, empower us, and give us victory.

5. When We Unreservedly Accept The Authority of God's Word We Shall Also Prove Its Power

Why doesn't the Word of God work?

Surely the question should now be - "*How does the Word work?*" "Why" seems totally irrelevant! Almost like an echo from Eden - "Hath God said?"

That night, as I paced the floor with an open Bible, it seemed God was saying to me, "The moment you unreservedly accept the *authority* of my Word, you will experience its *power*."

Mentally I accepted the authority of the Word, but my heart had struggled and staggered before its challenge.

But now I knew that the moment our hearts unreservedly accept the *authority* of the Word, *it will work!* It may not immediately materialize -but it immediately becomes a creative and productive factor in our lives.

The God who, with authority and power said - "***Let there be light, and there was light . . .***" *has also said -*

"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature" (2 Cor. 5: 1 8). I am in Christ - *therefore I am a new creature!*

"Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" - *and it is so!*

"I am crucified with Christ . . . Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). *I accept the Word of God to me . . .and it is so!*

"And they that are Christ's (and I am Christ's) have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. 5:24). I accept the authority of the Word of God and I experience its *power!*

Yes, my friend, the God who said - "***Let there be a firmament . . . and it was so***" (Gen. 1:6-7), *has also said -*

"The prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up" (James 5: 14-1 5).

"They shall lay li1lds on the sick, and they shall reco1ler" (Mark 16: 18).

"I am the Lord that healeth thee" (Exodus 15:26).

And the God who said - "***Let the earth bring forth grass . . . and it was so***" (Gen. 1:11), *has also said -*

*"The God of peace shall bruise Satan **beneath your feet shortly**"* (Rom. 16:20).

*"We are **more than conquerors** through him that loved us"* (Rom. 8:37).

*"I wish above all things that thou mayest **prosper and be in health**, even as thy soul prospereth"* (3 John 2).

And so, on and on, promise after promise, declaration after declaration, assurance after assurance, truth after truth , revelation after revelation!

Bow humbly before the authority of the Word, then arise and go forth in its power. God declares that your "old man." the old sinning nature, with all its bondage, and limitations, and deception and de- feat . . . is *dead, crucified with Christ*. Believe it! *It is so.*

God declares that you have been *raised to new life in Christ, complete in Christ, indwelt by Christ*. Believe it! *It is so*.

God declares you can do *all things* by the inwrought power of Christ. Believe it! *It is so*.

A thousand thoughts may arise in rebellion against the authority of His Word . . . but God said . . . it is so!

This is the key to victory, to healing, to deliverance, to the supply of all your needs.

No longer ask, "Why doesn't God's Word work?"

Wholeheartedly accept its authority, *"And God said . . ."* You will surely prove its power, *"AND IT IS SO!"*

THE AUTHORITY OF THE MINISTRY

We have considered three important keys of authority, namely - the authority of Christ, the authority of the believer, and the authority of the Word of God. These represent our *authority of access* to the abundant provision of God for all believers, and, on the other hand, *authority over Satan and his works of darkness* that we might release captives from the works of the devil.

However, while all believers in Christ have the privilege of taking hold of and using these three keys of authority we cannot escape the fact that there are certain ones whom the Lord has called and equipped for a specific ministry, both to the church and to the unsaved .

This is more than a personal witness. It is the ministry of Christ in and through certain chosen vessels that he might continue to build his church and prepare a people for the day when he will come again.

A Challenge to the Ministry

Every God-called minister must sooner or later come to a time when he will be challenged with the need for equipment from on high to fulfill his commission and the purpose of God in his ministry.

Faced with this challenge he will either harden his heart and close his ears to the cries of the bound , or he will seek from the Lord the supernatural ability that he needs to reproduce the ministry of Christ and to set the captives free.

Such a challenge came to my own life in 1955.

We had been seeing some encouraging results in the ministry. Many testified to the reality of God's healing power, and some had been delivered from demons which had afflicted the body and tormented the mind. Yet it seemed that whichever way we turned we were confronted with people whose problems seemed to defy solution and for whose deliverance we seemed to lack the necessary power.

In those days we almost continuously had people staying with us in our small rented home, so that we could minister to their needs. Consequently, I could not escape the challenge, I came

face to face with it day by day, and I met with it at meal times when people whose lives were so bound sat at the same table.

The Pressure of Human Needs

It was at this time in 1955 that the Lord so wonderfully provided for the purchase of "Sunrise House" so that we might have better facilities with which to conduct this work, and to enlarge our ministry. Yet, despite the blessings of God and his miraculous provision for the work, I continued to live each day under the pressure of the needs of men and women, and with a consciousness of the inadequacy of my ministry.

Looking back at that time, it seems that for more than a year I spent as many meal times away in my "den" seeking the Lord, as I spent at the meal table; and it seems I spent as many nights in that "den" as I did in my bed.

It was not a matter of counting meals missed or nights spent in prayer, but a question of how to live with the burden, which was not sought nor even desired, but seemed to be laid upon me by the Spirit of God.

It was obvious to me that one could not live in this state indefinitely. Very necessary work had to be completely neglected. The demands placed upon me by a rapidly growing work of God had to be deliberately ignored.

It was apparent that this was yet another crisis in my ministry, and looking back over the years, it is now clearly seen how the Lord was preparing me to receive another key of authority, not only for myself, but also to be shared with others in the revival that is coming.

The eternal truths of the Word of God which were unfolded to me and impressed deeply on my spirit during those hours and days spent alone in my "den" have become a part of my ministry ever since. Space forbids a detailed exposition of all these gems of truth. Neither is it possible to tell of the searching and exacting tests that I was called upon to accept, of the somewhat rash vows I at times made to the Lord if only he would honor the ministry he had given and make it an effective force for his glory.

Revelation of the Authority of the Ministry

I would like to take space, if it were possible, to tell of the very real conflict with the powers of darkness and of the glorious victories won through faith in the Word of God and by the anointing of the Holy Spirit. But one thing I do wish to share with you at this time, and that is this concept of *the divine authority of the ministry* - not of a professional ministry nor of a self-appointed ministry, nor of mere skillful preaching, or great oratory, but the authority of the ministry that is appointed by Christ in his church today.

This concept of the divine authority of every God-called ministry was impressed deeply upon me during those hours and days spent alone with the Lord.

I hope I can share with you just a little of this revelation of the authority which God has vested in the gifts of ministry that have been imparted to the true servants of God in the church of Jesus Christ.

This is not authority over people's lives, nor authority of office in an organization, but the authority of Christ over the devil and all his works, the authority to do the works of Christ and to build his church, perfecting the saints and preparing them for the day they will be presented to the Lord.

It is an authority that makes the ministry effective and productive. It is an authority that makes each different ministry fruitful in its own sphere.

The Ministry-Gifts of Christ

These Christ-given ministries are listed for us in Ephesians 4: 11 as follows . . . *"And he gave some, **apostles**; and some, **prophets**; and some, **evangelists**; and some, **pastors and teachers**."*

Here we have a complete list of the ministry-gifts of Christ bestowed on certain persons in his church. There are many other gifts which may be embraced by those listed here and which may serve to equip them, but this list covers the major types of ministry which stem from Christ himself for the benefit of his church.

Let us consider them in a little more detail:

Apostles: the word means "a special messenger," a pioneer, one who is called of God to restore some new facet of truth, to inspire a new vision, and to establish and oversee local Christian churches.

Prophets: this ministry conveys the mind of God to the church to meet the need of specific occasions, exercising the gifts of the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge, and exhorting the church with inspired utterance.

Evangelists: those who bear this ministry gift are called to proclaim the gospel of Christ, bringing men and women to salvation, with a message confirmed by supernatural signs.

Pastors and Teachers: these ministry-gifts are so closely linked together that some consider them to be one gift. Whether one gift, or two closely allied gifts, the outworking of these ministries is seen in the effective shepherding and instructing of local churches.

While these gifts overlap and dovetail with one another, each is distinct in its own nature and each is the impartation of divine enablement by the living Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

These gifts of ministry represent the full-orbed ministry of Christ himself that his works might be continued and his blood-bought victory enforced over Satan and all his evil power.

Gifts Won For Us At Calvary

Now these ministry-gifts were won for us at Calvary. This is what we read in Ephesians 4:8-10 . . . *"Therefore it says, when He ascended on high, he led captive a host of captives, (he led captivity captive) and He gave gifts to men. Now that he ascended what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things."*

Thus it was by his death and burial, by his invasion of Satan's domain and by his rising again with the keys of death and hell, that Christ gained the victory, the spoils of which he now shares with men by means of the gifts which he distributes to those whom he has called to his service.

Verse 8 (he led captivity captive) is a quotation from Psalm 68: 18, reference to which will provide us with a better understanding of the truth that is presented. It is a picture of a warrior-king who, having won a mighty victory, returns in triumphal procession to the hill of Zion, dragging in his train a host of captives, some bound in chains, others tied to the wheels of the chariots, all showing miserable and fearful evidence of their defeat. Now seated on the conqueror's throne the warrior-king calls to him those who shared in the pain and blood of battle, and to them he distributes the spoil he has gained.

All this is applied to our warrior-king - Jesus Christ - who ventured forth into the enemy territory of sin, sickness, of the curse of death itself - who shed his blood in death but rose again saying, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for ever more, amen; and have the keys of hell and of death" (Rev. 1: 18).

The angels of heaven, baffled by the mysteries of his redemptive work, gathered in their myriads to welcome the victorious warrior back to heaven's throne. Satan and his hosts of demons and all their destructive works are bound by the cords of Christ's blood-brought authority, defeated by one who achieved the victory at so great a price.

Christ Shares the Fruits of Victory

But with whom does he share the fruits of victory? Not with the angels, for they have no part in the battle. The spoils are shared with none other than those who by faith have identified themselves with Christ. He shares the spoils with those who fought the battle with him.

But we were not there! We had no part in his sufferings or his victory - except for the grace of God who has identified us in his Son. This is the marvel of divine grace!

All that Christ did was not for him, but for us. It was in our name that he died. In our name He was buried and rose again. The victory He won was on our behalf He was the representative man going forth as our substitute to defeat our enemy and to win our victory.

For this reason he calls on us to share the spoil, to sit with him in the conqueror's chair, to be a partaker of his authority over the enemy and all his power.

Authority Over the Enemies of Mankind

Some have assumed that the words, "he led captivity captive," mean that Christ led captive souls from hades to heaven at his resurrection. Whether or not that actually happened, it is difficult to read it into this verse. The Amplified New Testament renders that verse this way - "*Therefore it is said, when he ascended on high, he led captivity captive - he led a train of vanquished foes - and bestowed gifts on men.*" The A.N.T. has this foot-note quoted from Matthew Henry - "*He conquered those who had conquered us; such as sin, the devil and death.*" This is true to the picture presented to us in Psalm 68 from which this verse is quoted.

Therefore, those to whom the gifts are given share the victory of Christ and possess his delegated authority over all the foes of mankind - the devil , demons, and all their evil works.

It is an authority to loose men from sin and from sickness, to release them from all illegal captivity.

It is a key to unlock prison doors and to announce freedom to those who have been enslaved by the enemy.

It is the privilege of heralding the good news of deliverance throughout the land.

The devil hates and fears a ministry of authority.

Is it not high time that every bearer of a ministry- gift of Christ, every apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor or teacher, should recognize the authority of his ministry and go forth as one who is an ambassador of our conquering warrior-king?

Training the Saints for Ministry

Not only is this authority enjoyed by those possessing ministry gifts, however, but it is in a measure shared by all the saints of God.

Ephesians 4:12 tells us that the ministry-gifts of Christ are *"for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."*

Modern translations have presented a clearer understanding of this verse by omitting the comma after the word "saints." In this way the verse is made to read - ***"For the perfection of the saints for the work of the ministry . . ."***and so it becomes clear that the ministry-gifts are not given for the purpose of monopolizing the ministry, but rather for the *reproduction of ministry.*

In much the same way as military officers are chosen and trained that they may later train the soldiers of an army, so God has selected certain persons and imparted to them fragments of the super-natural ministry of Christ, that these men might in turn prepare and equip the saints of God to continue the work of the ministry.

So the authority of Christ is channeled through the ministry-gifts to the entire body of Christ.

Men and women of God , let us arise in faith, grasp this concept of the authority of our ministry, lay hold of the key that is offered us from the hand of Christ, and go forth enforcing his blood-bought victory and bring deliverance to men and women bound in the captivity of Satan.

What a wonderful key of authority is offered to the church in the ministry-gifts of Christ! May God raise up a powerful ministry of authority that will in turn produce a victorious church.

THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

It seems that it is in times of difficulty and of testing that God breaks into our consciousness with a new concept, or a new emphasis on an old familiar truth. The pressure of problems or of adverse circumstances cause us to lay bare our hearts before God , and in such times the Spirit of God has opportunity to impart to us a deeper understanding of the plan and purpose of God.

For many years I have held to the New Testament revelation of the church as a universal, living organism, organized into local churches, which are self-governing and self-propagating.

However, it was not until a time of adversity in the work God has raised up in Adelaide, South Australia, that the Lord showed me *the authority of Christ in the local church* and how it may be used as a key to a real revival in our day.

My personal desire was to go out into evangelistic ministry in Australia and overseas, but the Lord compelled me to continue in this work and to establish this great principle of the New Testament church - *every local church an autonomous center of full gospel revival, and yet not independent, but rather interdependent, using its freedom in a dedicated unity and co-ordination of activities.*

It was at this time that there were impressed upon me the five rules for revival in the local church, and this five-point program has since become an inspiration to many other local churches, both in the Christian Revival Crusade and elsewhere.

Seven Golden Lampstands

In Revelation chapter one, the apostle John records his vision of seven golden lampstands, with the risen Christ standing in the midst. These seven lampstands, we are told, symbolized the seven local churches of Asia Minor. However, students of prophecy agree that they also symbolized seven successive stages of the history of the Christian church throughout this age. Moreover, seven being a perfect number, they also represent the *entire church on earth.*

Now back in Exodus 25 we read that Moses was told to make a seven branched lampstand, beaten out of *one piece of gold.* This symbolized the witness of Israel in the Old Testament, and Israel being a united, centrally-governed nation, a seven branched lampstand of one piece of metal was chosen.

In the New Testament however, the Christian church is symbolized by *seven individual lampstands,* for God never intended the church should be a universally organized and centrally governed institution, but an association of locally-governed congregations.

Christ Deals Directly With Local Churches

In chapters two and three of Revelation we read the messages of the Lord to the seven churches, and we discover that he deals directly with each church, commanding, exhorting, rebuking, warning and rewarding.

So it is today. The Lord does not deal with the church as organized denominations, nor as a universally-organized body, but sees his mystical body comprising all Spirit-born believers expressing itself in the form of local churches.

It is in the local church that he has established government, ministry, fellowship and discipline.

The church universal is likened in the New Testament to a building into which we, as "lively stones," are built. It is described as a household in which we have the rightful privilege of sons. It is called the body of Christ of which we are members in particular.

But how can one enjoy his privileges and bear his responsibilities as a member of this universal church except as he takes his place in the local church?

The Church Universal and Local Churches

In Matthew 16: 18 Jesus said, "will *build my church*," - referring obviously to the church universal, comprising all who, like Peter, receive and confess the revelation that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

However, in chapter 18 verse 17 of Matthew, the person who has been offended by another, after seeking reconciliation, alone and then with witnesses, is invited to tell the matter to "the church." But which church is this? Surely not the church universal, and certainly not any particular denomination, but obviously *the local church*, for it is there that we find fellowship and the disciplinary measures necessary to maintaining that fellowship.

Thus we see that in the first mention of the church in the New Testament it is a reference to the church universal which Christ is building. But in the second reference to the church it is the local assembly. And these are the only two ways in which the word "church" is used in the Bible: either the *church universal* of all born again believers, or the *local church* into which such believers are organized.

Turning back to Revelation chapter one, let us observe that John makes only a passing reference to the seven golden lampstands, and then takes four verses to eloquently describe the glories of "one like unto the Son of man" standing in the midst of the lampstands.

It was not the glittering gold of the lampstands that impressed John, but the indescribable glory of Christ, the risen High Priest, walking amongst them.

The Victorious Christ Amongst the Local Churches

And so it is today. Jesus, the glorified head of the church universal, walks amongst the local churches, ministering to them, commanding, rebuking, correcting and blessing.

And the Christ who moves amongst the local churches is the same one who said to John that day on the isle of Patmos, "*Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen: and have the keys of hell and of death*" (Rev. 1:17-18).

Every local church stands as a witness to the risen, triumphant and glorified Christ. He has died and been raised and ascended and all authority is given unto him in heaven and in earth. He has defeated the devil on what was his own territory. Christ snatched from his hands the keys of hell and death and is now enthroned in victory. His authority is supreme.

He it is who turns to each lampstand, that is, to each local church, ready to pour in new supplies of oil, to clean and trim the wick that a bright and constant witness may be given to the glorious victory and supreme authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Every local church can have victory. Every local church can have revival. Christ knows each local church and speaks to each one and ministers to each one.

Let us visualize this world dotted with golden lampstands, with the risen High Priest, Jesus Christ, walking amongst them. That is heaven's view of the church on earth.

There are four ways in which the local church can give faithful witness to the victory of Christ.

Firstly, the Victory of Christ Is Seen in the Unity of the Local Church

Great emphasis is laid upon unity in the New Testament. Even before he ever mentioned the church, Jesus said, "*Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift*" (Matthew 5:23-24).

Then in his first reference to the local church in Matthew 18:15-17 Jesus speaks of the need for reconciliation amongst brethren and of discipline for those who refuse to be reconciled.

The apostle Paul exhorts the local church at Rome "*to be like-minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: that ye may with one mind, and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Romans 15:5-6).

To the Philippians he wrote, "*Stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel*" (Phil.1:27).

And so, throughout the New Testament, we find repeated exhortations to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the local church. *Without it the Holy Spirit is grieved and the glorious victory of Christ cannot be experienced or demonstrated.*

Secondly, the Victory of Christ Is Seen in the Charity of the Local Church

While the King James Version uses the word "charity," the word is in the Greek one that expresses *a divine love*, a supernaturally imparted love.

And so we find the apostle Peter writing: "*Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, **love as brethren**, be pitiful, be courteous: not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing; but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.*"

It is in the local church that we find abundant opportunity to give expression to the Love of God shed abroad in our hearts. We do not find the same challenge and incentive to demonstrate this divine love as members of the church universal for we are far removed from the vast majority of fellow members; *but it is a different situation in the community of a local church.*

Furthermore, the test of our love for the brethren is the demand that we should love *our brother*. In I John 3:14 we read, "*We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.*" Many of us can read those words and say "amen." We love *the brethren*. The bigger the crowd the happier we are! We enjoy the fellowship! But then we complete that verse and read these words, "*He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.*" You see, it is impossible to love *the brethren* if we fail to love *that particular brother*. And we shall most likely meet that particular brother in the local church! We may be able to forget about him if he is on the other side of the earth, or even on the other side of town, but we shall have to learn to love him with the divine love of God in our hearts if we meet with him every week in the local church!

It is as the love of God is shed abroad in the hearts of believers, and as it permeates the atmosphere of the local church, that the power of Christ is revealed, and the glorious victory of Christ is demonstrated in the midst.

Thirdly, the Victory of Christ Is Seen in the Authority of the Local Church

I shall never forget the time when the profound truth of Matthew 18: 19-20 was strongly impressed upon me by the Lord. There Jesus said, *"Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."*

Christ was not referring to a casual, superficial agreement between brethren that a certain thing should be done or a particular need should be met. People have come to me at times and said, "Would you agree with me that this or that should be done." I have usually replied that I cannot agree with them unless I share their deep conviction and am uniting with them in faith.

The word "agree" is from the Greek "sumphoneo" which means *symphony*, or a perfect blending of thoughts and hearts and purposes. A friend of mine recently told me that he once played in the symphony orchestra of a certain city in New Zealand, and that the conductor was known to have stopped the music and mention that a certain violin was out on a particular note. The violinist protested that he was playing according to the music. Again the conductor stopped the orchestra and told the same violinist that he was out of tune on a certain note. Finally the conductor checked the music and found that the copy this violinist used had a misprint, and although the right note was being played according to the music, it was out of harmony with the rest of the orchestra! *Such was the sensitive ear of this brilliant conductor.*

How much more sensitive is the ear of our Father in heaven, who not only hears our words, but knows the motives of our hearts.

Jesus said that if two or more can find a perfect harmony of spirit and mind and desire and motive and purpose, the Father will spontaneously respond.

But how can this be done? Verse 20 tells us. There we read, *"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."*

This is what someone has called the master-mind of Christ. When the minds of two or three or more believers are in a perfect blending with each other and in accord with the mind of Christ in the midst, the answer to their request is inevitable.

Here is the secret of authority and of successful prayer and of spiritual achievement, which should be discovered and exercised in every local church. Here is a key that is placed in the hands of officers and members of every local assembly.