

Sixteenth Annual

TRUTH IN LOVE

LECTURESHIP

Theme:

The Glorious Church

May 17-21, 2006

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Hosted By The

East Hill Church Of Christ

509 E. Madison •• Pulaski, TN 38478

2006

A Product Of

Sain Publications

Pulaski, TN 38478
(931) 363-6905

INTRODUCTION

The single most important and influential institution in the history of the world is the church. Although there are numerous institutions that have done countless amounts of good (orphanages, benevolent charities, abuse shelters, hospitals, etc.), most of these organizations are rooted in Christianity and are governed by Biblical principles. In addition to the social benefits the church has brought to mankind, the spiritual blessings are incalculable.

The church is the body of Christ, over which Jesus is Head (Eph. 1:22-23). Just as there is only one God, Lord, Spirit, faith and baptism, He has but one body/church (Eph. 4:4-6) and He is the Savior of that body (Eph. 5:23), in which all spiritual blessings are found (Eph. 1:3). What other institution can provide these blessings to the world? Certainly hospitals can heal the body, but only in the church can a man find medicine for his soul. An abuse shelter may provide much needed protection from a violent spouse, but only in His body can we have shelter from Satan. Seeing that this subject is so important, it is in our best interest to understand its history, beginning with its establishment and progressing to our current day.

Contrary to popular belief, the church did not evolve as an afterthought of the disciples of Christ, but was established by God as the fulfilment of His eternal plan (Eph. 3:10-11). The prophets in the long ago foretold of its coming. Daniel saw in visions the coming of a kingdom that would never be moved (Dan. 2:44). Isaiah was much more specific, stating that it would be established in Jerusalem and that all people, from all nations would flow unto it (Isa. 2:2-3). In the first century John the Baptist would preach that the kingdom of heaven was so near it was within reach (at hand, Matt. 3:1-2). Jesus Himself would tell an audience that this kingdom would come within their lifetime and that it would

come with power (Mark 9:1). To His apostles He would say, "...upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). A few short weeks later He would keep this promise, purchasing this church with His own blood (Acts 20:28). Just as promised, the keys to this kingdom were used to unlock the doors, allowing all men to enter in (Matt. 16:19). On the first Pentecost after His resurrection, His apostles gathered in Jerusalem, which was filled with devout Jews from every nation under heaven, and they were endued with power from heaven to preach the gospel of salvation (Acts 2:1-36). Thousands of those in attendance responded to this invitation, repenting and being baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:37-38). These people were saved and added by the Lord to His church (Acts 2:47). Once they were added to the church they continued to be taught by the apostles, to pray fervently, to remember the death of the Lord by partaking of the communion and to be in fellowship with one another (Acts 2:39-46). The events of this day marked the completion of the plans and prophecies that had been made thousands of years before. It should be noted that none of these disciples "joined" the church or were "chosen" to be members, but were added by the Lord Himself when they obeyed the gospel.

From this point forward the church began to grow and spread throughout the world. Although beginning amid the nation of Israel, it quickly spread to the Gentile nations and eventually throughout the Roman Empire. With each subsequent generation the borders of the kingdom would expand farther and farther, until the entire world was reached. The book of Acts serves as an inspired history of the establishment, spread and growth of the early church.

A pattern is visible in this book concerning the growth of the church. The disciples went everywhere preaching the gospel (Acts 8:4). Missionaries like Paul and Barnabas dedicated their lives to traveling the world and establishing congregations in every city. It is important

for us to understand that they were not starting different denominational churches everywhere they went, but local congregations of the one church. The word translated "church" is the Greek word "ekklesia" which simply means, "the called out." The church is the spiritual body of Christ, made up of individual believers from all over the world who have been called out of the dark world of sin and into Christ (Col. 1:13-16; Gal. 3:26-27). We can know this because the Bible tells us in Acts 8:3 that Saul persecuted the church, and then in Acts 9:1 informs us that his attacks were aimed at the disciples. The disciples were the church, not a building or a religious service (as in, "I'm going to church" or "I'll meet you at the church"). Although a popular idea today, the concept of "choosing the church of your choice" would have been completely foreign to people in the first century. At this time only one church existed, therefore there would have been none to choose from. The Lord built, bought and heads but one church and it grew rapidly and served faithfully in the first century, despite being heavily persecuted.

The church has always had enemies, both within and without. Early on it was constantly harassed and persecuted by the unbelieving Jews. Christians were jailed, beaten and in some cases, executed (Acts 7). The attacks against the church were so vicious that many of the disciples were forced to flee Jerusalem for their own safety. Amazingly, the persecution did not stifle their efforts to carry the gospel to the world, but instead accelerated it (Acts 8:4).

Later the Roman Empire would join in the persecution of the church. Many a Christian was burned alive or torn apart by wild beasts, strictly for the amusement of the emperor and his court. Again, the attempts to eliminate the church only served to expand its borders further. Unbelievers were baffled at the willingness, and even joy, of the Christians to give their lives for Christ, whose glorious name they wore (Acts 11:26). Despite fervent attacks from her enemies, the church managed to spread even to the emperor's own household (Phil. 4:22).

Although the Jews and the Romans shed the blood of disciples, it was the enemies within that did the most harm to the church. External persecutions only strengthened their faith and resolve and caused them to lean more heavily upon God. The internal attacks began to divide the church as false doctrines and practices began to be tolerated (1 Cor. 1:10-13). In his final visit with the elders of the congregation in Ephesus, Paul warned that even from among the leadership, men would begin to depart from the Divine pattern (Acts 20:28-31). Sadly, the departures were not limited to the area of organization, but doctrinal compromises and errors soon began to plague the church as well. To Timothy Paul warned, “...in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron” (1 Tim. 4:1-2). To the church at Philippi he cautioned, “For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things” (Phil. 3:18-19). The internal attacks in the form of false doctrines and compromises, took their toll on the church. They ushered in a period of apostasy that would last for over a millenium. During this dark time virtually all of the man-made doctrines, practices and churches that exist today came into existence.

However, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Despite the attacks of enemies both internal and external, the church was not destroyed and we have received “a kingdom which cannot be moved” (Heb. 12:28). The enemies of the church still exist today. There are those in the world who hate His body and all that she stands for, and there are those within His body who wish to change it into something He never intended it to be. It is for these reasons, along with the fact that the church of Jesus Christ is a great blessing to our lives, that we enter into this detailed examination and study of **“The Glorious Church.”**

DEDICATION

A treasured privilege of the Lectureship Director of this annual series involves the dedication. Through the previous fifteen years the **Truth In Love** Lectureship volume has been dedicated to esteemed, faithful and special people, those who live near (the East Hill elders, Malcolm & Martha Jones, Duane & Elise Rost, Jack & Eunice Parks) Godly Women of East Hill, Youth at East Hill and others who live away from this area (Winfred Clark, Perry Cotham, Tom Holland, Curtis Cates, Garland Elkins, David Sain).

This year I ask your understanding and indulgence as I have departed from the normal and exercise the privilege in a personal way and dedicate this book to the “*most*” special person in my life.

God always knows best! He reflected infinite wisdom when He stated “*It is not good that the man should be alone*” (Gen. 2:18). God created a helpmeet for man (Gen. 2:18, 21-24).

She was only six years of age when my family moved to the Kentucky area to work and worship with the Union Hill congregation. She was born on the “*sixteenth*” day of January. She was “*sweet sixteen*” when we became serious and began our plans for marriage. It is appropriate for this “*sixteenth*” lecture series to be the one dedicated to this precious and treasured helpmeet.

Her talents are many (an excellent cook, yard work, home decorator). Year after year she has maintained a “*home*” ready to receive guests (anticipated or unexpected).



A grandmother extraordinaire that seven grandchildren call "Nana." Her spiritual growth in recent years has been inspiring as she spends considerable time each day in passionate study. Her fervent prayers to her Father have been humbling and then her willingness to accept challenges has been thrilling.

A preacher and his family are often viewed as if they live in a fish bowl. While East Hill has been so gracious in this area, my "helpmeet" has worked so diligently in supporting and enhancing the work of this preacher. She has sacrificed time and effort for other's needs and various works of the Lord, without considering herself. Bible studies and counseling time have often pushed aside plans or activities, without complaint. The emergency calls or visits in the middle of the night have always been received with love, kindness and support. She is my best supporter, encourager, confidant and co-worker and yes, she is also my best critic.

Of all the women in the whole world, I am so blessed that God in His loving providence has allowed this man to be married to this beautiful, godly and precious Christian servant for over forty years.

I lovingly and humbly dedicate this year's lectureship volume to my precious wife LaDon, the love and joy of my life while on earth and of all the earthly travelers, she, most of all with whom I desire to be eternally.

Paul Sain
Lectureship Director

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THEME: The Glorious Church

THE GLORIOUS CHURCH

1. The Glorious Church:
Who, What, When, Where? 13
Victor Eskew
2. The Church In Prophecy,
As Seen By The Prophets 29
Cliff Goodwin
3. Christ's Relationship To The Church 49
Dave Miller
4. The Authority Of The Glorious Church..... 53
Billy Bland
5. The Purpose Of The Glorious Church 71
Barry Grider

VITAL MATTERS

CONCERNING THE GLORIOUS CHURCH

6. The Work Of The Glorious Church 81
John Moore
7. The Worship Of The Glorious Church 97
Wade Webster
8. The Influence Of The Glorious Church.....119
Cliff Goodwin
9. The Discipline Of The Glorious Church137
Robert R. Taylor, Jr.
10. The Home And The Glorious Church.....145
Curtis A. Cates
11. The Bible School And The Glorious Church155
Wade Webster

12. Scriptural Pictures Of The
Glorious Church And Me169
Dan Goddard
13. The Glorious Church – The Place Of Safety197
Barry Grider

VITAL QUESTIONS

CONCERNING THE GLORIOUS CHURCH

14. Who Are The Members Of The
Church Of The Bible?.....201
Robert R. Taylor, Jr.
15. Who Has Authority In The Local Church?.....219
Perry Cotham
16. How Many Churches Are There?231
B. J. Clarke
17. What Obligation Does The Church
Have To Truth?245
John Moore
18. Do All Members Have A Role Of Involvement?255
Robert Hatfield
19. Who Can The Glorious Church Fellowship?273
Dan Goddard
20. Should The Glorious Church Be
Militant / Aggressive?.....289
Billy Bland
21. Must The Church Change Or
Stay Constant?301
Dave Miller
22. What Is The Role Of Preachers In The Church?317
Curtis A. Cates
23. What Is The Role Of Deacons In The Church?343
Perry Cotham
24. Is The Glorious Church
Obligated To The Wayward?353
B. J. Clarke
25. The Eternal Destiny Of The Glorious Church.....371
Jimmy Clark

***The
Glorious
Church***

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Chapter 1

The Glorious Church: Who, What, When, Where?

Victor M. Eskew



A 1982 graduate of Memphis School of Preaching. Earned a BBA from the University of Memphis and a graduate degree from Southern Christian University. For six years Victor has worked with the Brookland church in Brookland, Arkansas. He has previously worked with the Children's Home in Paragould, Arkansas and was the Supervisor of Clinical Services there. Katleen and Victor have three children and one grandchild.

Thousands of “*churches*” exist in the United States and throughout the world. They wear different names. They teach different doctrines. Their works and manner of worship also vary. Each of them, however, claims to believe in Jesus Christ. Each of them says that the Bible is their guide. Each of them believes that one can adhere to their teachings and ultimately reach the pearly gates of heaven.

Most people have been born and reared in this religious diversity. Therefore, they do not question the presence of so many religious groups. In fact, they believe that diversity is healthy. Individuals can choose a “*Christian*” group that meets their needs

and personality. The dominate thought of most is that every group acknowledges Jesus Christ as Lord. Thus, it is also believed that every one of these groups is heading in the direction of heaven. The differences that exist among the groups are viewed as minor and insignificant. The differences are viewed as nothing more than different roads upon which one might travel, but ultimately all reach the same destination.

Every now and then someone comes along and questions this religious diversity. This person has read the Bible enough to know that Jesus taught “oneness” to His disciples.

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me (John 17:20-23).

This individual also understands that this oneness is not a unity falsely so-called. It is a unity of mind and practice. It is a unity like that commanded by the apostle Paul in I Corinthians 1:10.

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all

speak the same thing, and that there be
 no divisions among you; but that ye be
 perfectly joined together in the same mind
 and in the same judgment.

With a proper understanding of the passages listed above, this individual is confused by what he sees in the realm referred to by some as “*Christendom*.” He asks: “*How can there be such division among God’s people when the Lord has commanded them to be united?*” This individual wonders whether the church of the Bible really exists today. He also wonders whether it can be found among all the “*look alikes*” in the world.

Faithful members of the churches of Christ understand and appreciate the dilemma in which some find themselves. The Bible does teach unity. It is very upsetting to see the religious division that exists in the world. It is even more disturbing to see the apathy that so many have toward this division. Fortunately, there are answers to the honest seeker’s questions. The church of the New Testament does exist today. She can be identified. In this lesson, we want to present “*how*” this can be done.

The First Century Church

The first important point that needs to be made concerns the church of the first century. The point is simple, but profound: “*There was a church that existed in the first century.*” The apostles, many Jews, and many Gentiles were members of that church.

 This church came into existence on the first

Pentecost following our Lord's death, burial, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. Peter and the other apostles were filled with the Holy Ghost while in the city of Jerusalem (Acts 2:1-4). They proclaimed the glorious gospel of Christ for the first time. The Jews were pricked in their hearts and cried out, saying, "*Men and brethren, what shall we do?*" (Acts 2:37). Peter answered their question with these words,

Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38).

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls (Acts 2:41).

When these people did as Peter instructed them to do, they were saved from their sins by the blood of Christ. Acts 2:47 reveals what happened to these saved individuals. "*Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.*" The saved were added to the church. Thus, a church existed in the first century.

The book of Acts tells the story of the spread of this church throughout the Roman Empire. In city after city, the gospel was preached. Honest and good hearts (Luke 8:15) heard the word and obeyed. They, too, were added to the body of Christ (I Cor. 12:13). The epistles contain words of exhortation to these

churches. The inspired penmen wrote to confront problems that existed in these congregations. These churches were not different denominational groups. They were local congregations that spoke the same thing and were of the same mind. Their worship, works, and doctrine were harmonious from one church to the next.

Was the church of the first century the true church of Christ? Was it the one foretold by the prophets of old? Was it the one promised by Jesus Christ? The answer to all of these questions is, "Yes." Therefore, if one examines the New Testament closely, he can understand the first century church. Once an individual understands that church, all he needs to do is to search for the identical church today. We believe that it exists. We believe individuals can identify it if they desire to do so.

The Identification Marks Of The Glorious Church

The Place Of The Establishment Of The Church

In Acts 1, we find Jesus speaking to His disciples before His ascension. *"And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me"* (Acts 1:4). In verse 12, the apostles do exactly as Jesus had instructed. *"Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey."* When the Spirit is poured out on the apostles in Acts 2, they are still in Jerusalem. Listen to the words Peter used to

address the crowd. *“But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken unto my words”* (Acts 2:14). There is absolutely no doubt that Jerusalem was the city wherein the church had its beginning. It was from thence that the seed of the kingdom first went forth. It is interesting that the prophets of old stated that the kingdom would be established first in Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3). Could it be the church and the kingdom are the same institution? There can be no doubt about it. Jerusalem is the place where the church began. Religious groups that have any other place of origin cannot be the true church.

The Builder / Founder Of The Church

During His earthly ministry, Jesus spoke of the church. In Matthew 16:18, He revealed many interesting aspects of this glorious institution.

But I say unto thee, that thou art Peter,
and upon this rock I will build my church;
and the gates of hell shall not prevail
against it.

The words that are pertinent to our discussion are the words, *“I will build my church.”* Jesus is the builder of the church. The church was constructed by a Divine being, not by a human being. The true church will always proclaim that Jesus is her founder. Churches built by men cannot be that holy and divine institution.

The Foundation Of The Church

Every building must have a solid foundation upon which to rest. If the foundation is solid and deep, it can weather any and all storms. As the temple of God (I Cor. 3:16), the church must have a rock-solid foundation, and she does. The foundation is Jesus Christ. Paul wrote, *“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ”* (I Cor. 3:11). In Matthew 16:18, Jesus had told Peter that the church would be built on a rock. That rock was not the impetuous Peter. That rock was Jesus Christ. Peter had just confessed that Jesus was the Son of the living God. As the Son of God, He creates a foundation for the church that neither man, nor Satan, can destroy. The gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Any church that has a human foundation is not Christ’s church. Such a foundation is weak. It cannot weather the attacks that will assail it.

The Name Of The Church

Churches today are named almost every name imaginable. There is no end to the names man can concoct and place before the word church. Jesus said, *“I will build my church”* (Matt. 16:18). According to Ephesians 5:32 and Revelation 21:1-2, the church is the bride of Christ. Passages such as these give authorization to the name, church of Christ. She belongs to Him. She is His bride and wears His name. Thus, we are not surprised to read the words of Paul in Romans 16:16. *“The churches of Christ salute you.”* Why wouldn’t the true church want to give honor to her builder? Why would the bride want

to honor her bridegroom? Any church that wears the name of a man, or a method, or a practice does not give honor to the divine builder. Surely, the true church would give honor to the Christ by wearing His name.

The Entrance Requirements Of The Church

Earlier in this lesson, we learned that the saved were added by the Lord to the church (Acts 2:47). Whatever one has to do to be saved will make him a member of the church. Jesus listed the things that man needs to do to be saved while He lived on earth. First, a man must hear the good news of the gospel (Mark 4:24; Luke 8:18). Second, he must believe Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God (John 8:24). Third, his faith will lead him to repent of his sins (Luke 13:3, 5). Fourth, that individual will confess his faith in the Son of God before men (Matt. 10:32). Lastly, the believer must be baptized in water, that is, immersed, in order to be saved (Mark 16:16).

When one reads the book of Acts, all five of these requirements can be found. Peter told his listeners on Pentecost to “*hear*” these words (Acts 2:22). The Philippian jailor was told that he must believe in order to be saved (Acts 16:30-31). The Jews in Jerusalem were exhorted to repent of their sins (Acts 2:38; 3:19). The Ethiopian eunuch made the good confession before Philip in Acts 8:27. Lastly, every conversion account in Acts reveals that the believers were exhorted to be baptized for the remission of their sins. Ananias spoke these words to Saul of Tarsus, “*And now why tarriest thou? Arise,*

and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).

These five steps place one in a saved condition before God. Once saved, the Lord adds that person to the church. These are the entrance requirements. Anything less than this is too little. Anything more than this is too much. Note, one does not “*join*” the church according to the teachings of the New Testament. The Lord is responsible for setting the members in the body as it pleases Him (1 Cor. 12:18). If these five steps are not required by a religious group, that group cannot be the true church. How could they be the true church when they have not adhered to the entrance requirements?

The Organization Of The Church

The earliest mention of any official organization within the local churches, other than having the apostles in the city of Jerusalem, is found in Acts 14:23. Barnabas and Paul were on their first missionary journey. They went as far north as Derbe, then they returned to the cities wherein they had preached the gospel. It was then that they “*ordained them elders in every church*” (Acts 14:23).

These men met certain qualifications laid down by the Holy Spirit (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-11; Acts 20:28). These men were known by several names: elders, presbyters, bishops, overseers, shepherds, and pastors. There were always a plurality of men over each local congregation (Acts 14:23; 15:4; 20:17; Phil 1:1). Their duty was to rule over the body of Christ at a specific location (1 Tim. 3:4-5; 5:17; Heb. 13:7,

17; Phil 1:1). The members of that local congregation were to submit to their authority (Heb. 13:7).

In addition to shepherds, the local congregation also had deacons to serve the flock (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8-13). These men also had certain qualifications they had to meet (1 Tim. 3:8-13). They were to submit to the authority of the local eldership. Various areas of work were appointed for them to do. To the elders and deacons, one could add the evangelists, the teachers, and the members. All of these individuals were also required to submit to the presbytery.

At first glance, the organization of the church may seem complicated. When understood, it is seen to be a very simple system. A plurality of men known as elders was appointed to oversee the local congregation of God's people. Deacons, ministers, teachers, and members served under this group of men. Each church was autonomous, or self-governing. Each church took care of her own affairs. The authority of the eldership did not extend to any other congregation.

The churches of the first century did not have an elaborate hierarchy of authority to govern them. There were no synods, councils, conferences, or associations that issued decrees and creeds and opinions for the churches to follow. The church of the first century did not have one man overseeing the local congregation. The one-man pastor system did not exist. More than one man occupied the position of overseers and governed the affairs of the church. This should be the organization that is found within the churches today. Any other system

does not conform to God's Word. Churches that use another system cannot be considered the true church.

The Worship Of The Church

Worship during the first century was a very solemn, but simple occasion. Each local congregation came together upon the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2). These worshippers were not interested in pleasing human wants and desires in these assemblies. They came to worship God as He directed them to do.

In the New Testament, we read of five simple acts of worship in which the church engaged. Songs were sung from the heart in these gatherings (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). These songs were sung without any musical accompaniment. Every member of the congregation participated in the mutual exchange of the words of the song. There were no solos or choirs that performed for the other worshippers. Prayer was also a vital part of the Christian's worship. Holy men of God lifted up their voices in thanksgiving and with sober requests of the Father of heaven (1 Tim. 2:9; 1 Thess. 5:17-18; Matt. 6:9). The local congregation also gave of their means on the first day of the week. The apostle Paul instituted this means of gathering money to care for the needs of the church in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2. Teaching, edification, admonition, rebuke, and warning were also part of the worship. This was done through the proclamation of God's Word (2 Tim. 4:2; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 14:3). Again, the men of the church took the lead here. The women were commanded to

keep silent and not to usurp authority over the men (1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:11-14). Lastly, the early church assembled around the Lord's Table in their worship (Acts 20:7). Each week, they ate of the unleavened bread and drank of the fruit of the vine to remember the Lord's death till He comes again (1 Cor. 11:23-30). Such an assembly could be conducted almost anywhere. It was simple enough to be understood by small children, but profound enough to stir the believer to greater faithfulness in the Lord's service (Heb. 10:23-25).

The New Testament church did not have a weekly Saturday assembly. She did not have pianos, organs, or orchestras. She did not have choirs and quartets. She did not put on an elaborate dramatic performance. She never omitted the Lord's Supper from the assembly. Women were never in position of leadership in these gatherings. Yet, all of this and more is done by many churches today. They have perverted the simple worship of God. Most of the time, the worship services are like pep-rallies instead of being assemblies where reverent worshippers prostrate themselves before the awesome God of heaven. They appeal to the flesh of man instead of appealing to his spiritual being. Such churches have long departed from the church of Christ of the first century.

The Authority Of The Church

In the first century, Jesus Christ was looked upon as the head of the church (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). As the head, Jesus had ultimate authority over

the church (Matt. 28:18). This authority was placed into the New Testament by means of men who were inspired by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:9-13; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21). Once the New Testament was given, it became the standard, the governing authority within the church (2 Tim. 3:16-17). This Book is still the authority for the church today.

Sadly, many churches do not have the Word of God as their sole authority. Creeds have replaced God's Word. Additional revelations are said to have superceded the New Testament. Continuous revelation, some claim, is still being given by God. Councils and headquarters and associations place their twists and interpretations on the Word of God. These are deemed as authoritative as God's Word. Such has led to much of the division that exists today. Individuals are more concerned with their creed than what the Bible declares. Churches that do not have the Word of God as their sole authority cannot be considered the New Testament church. The Word alone is the seed of the kingdom (Luke 8:15). It is the only thing that can be placed into the hearts of lost humanity that will bring forth Christians (1 Peter 1:22-25).

Beware Of Counterfeits

In his second Corinthian epistle, Paul warned the church of counterfeit ministers of the gospel. A counterfeit is an imitation of the original. Its purpose is to deceive and confuse. Paul wrote:

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the

apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works (2 Cor. 11:13-15).

Just as there were counterfeit apostles and ministers, there can also be counterfeit churches. They are copies. They imitate the original. They can confuse and deceive one who is not trained to look for the differences. We have attempted to help you see where some of the differences might be in this lesson. Each of the nine identification marks must be present for a church to be the genuine church. If a church has eight of the nine, it is not the true church.

Remember, the counterfeit looks genuine. It might even make one feel that it is genuine. Such is true about counterfeit money. Such is true of counterfeit churches. One can be deceived by a counterfeit for a long time. At some point, however, the truth will be revealed about the counterfeit. It is a fake. It is worthless. The one caught using the counterfeit will not be held guiltless. He will have to give an account as to why he was holding onto and trusting in something that was false.

Conclusion

In Matthew 7:7, Jesus said, “...seek, and ye shall find....” This promise holds true for all those who are seeking the one, true church. Those who will seek

after it can find it. Hell certainly has not prevailed against it. It still exists today. This search may be extensive, but those who persist will find the precious treasure.

The churches of Christ invite you to begin your search with us. We invite a thorough investigation of the things we believe and teach. We sincerely believe that we will measure up to the test of Scripture. If we do not, we want to change in order to comply with God's will. Our desire is to be just like the church of the New Testament. We want to be members of the same church of which Peter, James, John, and Paul were members. Salvation is in that church (Eph. 5:23). It will be this church Jesus will seek when He appears the second time (Matt. 25:6; Rev. 21:2).

Chapter 2

The Church In Prophecy; As Seen By The Prophets

Cliff Goodwin



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It should not be surprising at all to the diligent Bible student that the New Testament church can be read about on the pages of the Old Testament. After all, the apostle Paul revealed that, in the mind of God, the glorious church had predated even the giving of the Old Testament law.

How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same

body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:3-11; emp. mine, CG).

In commenting on verse ten above, Cates offered these remarks.

Another reason why Paul was raised up as a minister was to make known God's manifold wisdom to heavenly powers. The holy angels, who in antiquity stooped down trying to view the redemptive plan (1 Peter 1:12), would learn of God's wisdom through His church, the culmination of God's eternal scheme of salvation (67).

It is apparent from other passages of scripture that the angelic beings are interested in the salvation of man. In writing of the marvelous scheme of redemption, Peter described it as "things the angels desire to look into" (1 Peter 1:12). The Lord stated, *"I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which*

need no repentance.” And again, “Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth,” (Luke 15:7, 10).

2 Samuel 7:12-13

And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever (2 Sam. 7:12-13).

Two of the most important promises recorded in the Old Testament are termed the Abrahamic promise and the Davidic. The Abrahamic promise is initially recorded in Genesis 12:1-3 and pertains to all nations’ being blessed through Christ, the seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:16). The Davidic promise, on the other hand, is recorded in the above passage and pertains to the Messianic kingdom’s being established by a descendant of David. God delivered this promise to David through Nathan the prophet (cf. 2 Sam. 7:4-5), and one can only imagine what joy and comfort must have filled the heart of Israel’s monarch. As one examines the text of the Davidic promise, a beautiful portrait of the glorious church (Messianic kingdom) becomes vividly clear. Roughly 1000 years before the entrance of Christ into the world via the Incarnation, God offered a glimpse of the Messiah’s work to David. One is permitted to peer into this grand promise and learn a number of lessons.

First, David would not live to see the promise brought to fruition. Nathan prefaced the promise with the words, *“And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers...”* Obviously, both of these statements are poetic descriptions of death, indicating that David’s promise from God would be fulfilled posthumously. One must remember that God encompasses all eternity—past, present and future all lying open before Him as an open book. Therefore, God is not limited

in any way in keeping His promises to mankind. He may not fulfill His promises in the time that man would desire, but He does bring them to fruition in the time His Divine wisdom demands. Peter penned these inspired words.

But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:8-9).

Second, God's promise would be fulfilled in David's seed, or descendant. This descendant would be "*set up*" after His forefather David, meaning that He would ascend to the throne as the royal successor. The New Testament scriptures make it abundantly clear that Jesus of Nazareth is this specified descendant. Matthew opens the New Testament with the genealogy of Jesus, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham," (Matt. 1:1). Luke further records these marvelous words revealed to Mary through Gabriel the angel.

And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end (Luke 1:30-33).

The apostle Paul clearly attested that Christ was the fulfillment

of the Davidic promise, both with his lips and with his pen. While preaching the gospel in Antioch of Pisidia, Paul unmistakably linked Christ with the Davidic promise when he said,

And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David (Acts 13:34).

Further, he wrote to the Romans, *“Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh”* (Rom. 1:3). Finally, Paul wrote to Timothy, *“Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel”* (2 Tim. 2:8).

Third, David’s glorious descendant would build a house for God’s name. Because of this aspect of the Davidic promise, many Bible students have attempted to limit its fulfillment only to Solomon. While it is true that Solomon was David’s immediate descendant, and that he built the magnificent temple of God, the weight of evidence proves that God had a view toward more than just Solomon and the earthly temple. The Davidic promise actually continues into verse fourteen, where Nathan said, *“I will be his father, and he shall be my son”* (2 Sam. 7:14). The Hebrews writer would later make it expressly clear that such words applied to Jesus.

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat

down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son? And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom (Heb. 1:1-8; emp. mine, CG).

The natural question now arises, *“Did Jesus build a house for God’s name?”* The scriptures give a resounding *“Yes!”* Everything Jesus did while upon this earth was in order to accomplish the Father’s will. Jesus said Himself, *“For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me”* (John 6:38). And again, *“I am come in my Father’s name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive”* (John 5:43). Hence, Jesus came in His Father’s name to do His Father’s will—the only question left is, *“Did doing such include building a house?”* Christ promised to build His church (Matt. 16:18). Later, an inspired member of that church described it as the house of God. *“But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth”* (1 Tim. 3:15). Therefore, the careful Bible student realizes that Christ fulfilled the Davidic promise when He built His church, the Messianic kingdom.

Isaiah 2:2-3

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3).

Less than three hundred years after God's promise to David, Isaiah prophesied the foregoing concerning the church. The prophet Micah provides a parallel passage, almost identical in form to that of Isaiah's (Micah 4:1-2). Isaiah is commonly known as the Messianic prophet, so it is no surprise that he prophesied concerning the Messianic kingdom. A number of observations need to be made concerning this notable passage.

First, the Lord's house, the church, would be established and exist in the last period of human history. Isaiah wrote, *"And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established..."* Importantly, Isaiah was not the only Old Testament prophet to employ the concept of *"the last days."* On the very day of the church's establishment, Peter quoted the following from the prophet Joel.

But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams (Acts 2:16-17).

Joel had prophesied of the miraculous descent of the Holy Spirit which signaled the beginning of the church. He described such an occasion as happening in the last days (as per Peter's inspired quotation). Peter took his quote from Joel, first prefacing it with the words "*this is that,*" meaning that the very events being witnessed by the Pentecostians were in fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. There can be no doubt that the church (kingdom) was established on Pentecost (Acts 2), for Jesus had earlier promised that the kingdom would come with miraculous power (Mark 9:1; Luke 24:49). The Holy Spirit supplied that power, and the church was established (cf. Acts 1:8; 2:1-4, 37-41, 47). Therefore, one can say both safely and accurately that mankind has been living in the last days for roughly some 2000 years. The Hebrews author described the Christian age as "*these last days.*"

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds (Heb. 1:1-2).

Second, the Lord's house, the glorious church, would occupy a position of preeminence. Isaiah continued his prophecy, "*...the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills....*" At times in scripture, mountains are used figuratively to represent government, or more specifically, kingdoms. McClish offers these most helpful comments.

"Mountains" is used as a figure for kingdoms in Psalm 76:4. Jeremiah referred to Babylon as a "mountain" (Jer. 51:25). I believe it was so used by Isaiah. The Jews therefore identified "the mountain of Jehovah's house" with the Messianic kingdom. They looked for that everlasting

kingdom and throne God had promised to a son of David (2 Sam. 7:12-13) and that kingdom which Daniel foresaw that would never be destroyed (Dan. 2:44) (66).

In light of these comments, it becomes obvious that the concepts of “*kingdom*” and “*house*” are once again used interchangeably—as they were also in Samuel’s record of the Davidic promise (2 Sam. 7:12-13). In prophesying that the kingdom would be established in the top of the mountains, Isaiah was probably pointing both to the physical location of establishment and the spiritual position of preeminence. More will be said about the physical location of establishment later; as for the spiritual preeminence of Christ’s kingdom, it would be “*exalted above the hills.*” Hence, Christ’s kingdom would surpass all other kingdoms in greatness. Consider these New Testament statements regarding the church.

Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence (John 18:36).

Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: (Heb. 12:28).

Third, the Lord’s house would be comprised of souls from all nations—in other words—both Jews and Gentiles. Isaiah prophesied, “*All nations shall flow unto it...*” Whereas, physical Israel had been God’s chosen people under the Mosaic dispensation, for the purpose of bringing the Messiah into the world, in the Christian Age God’s chosen people would be the church. The church would be an indiscriminate institution with regard to ethnicity. Jesus declared, “*And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven*” (Matt.

8:11). Consider also this trio of passages from the inspired apostle Paul.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (Rom. 1:16).

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:26-29).

Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all (Col. 3:11).

In this way, inspired writers like Isaiah and Paul linked the glorious church with the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise. On at least two occasions, God promised Abraham that all nations (families) of the earth would be blessed through his lineage (Gen. 12:3; 22:18). This grand promise did not find its fulfillment in the law of Moses; instead, it found its fulfillment in Christ and in His kingdom, as Paul pointed out in Galatians 3.

Fourth and finally, the Lord's house would be established in the city of Jerusalem. It seems likely that this fact is alluded to in verse two as Isaiah wrote "...the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains...." Once again, McClish's comments are very helpful.

This kingdom/church was to be established “on the top of the mountains.” To those who heard these words this could only refer to their literal Zion, their holy city of Jerusalem. It was built upon the highest peaks of Judah. For this reason, therefore, from whatever direction one might approach the city, the Bible invariably speaks of going “up” to Jerusalem. When this description of topography is combined with the specific naming of Zion and Jerusalem in connection with related events in verse 3, the place at which the Lord’s house was to be established is unarguable (66).

Indeed, it is undeniable that the Messianic kingdom had its establishment in the Judean capital. Isaiah described the law, the law of Christ (cf. Gal. 6:2), as going forth out of Zion. This is exactly in keeping with Luke’s inspired historical records. Jesus clearly commanded His apostles to tarry at Jerusalem, waiting on the miraculous descent of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49). In the same regard, Jesus further explained to His apostles,

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8).

It is significant that Jerusalem is mentioned first, as Luke recorded a synopsis for the entire book of Acts in this one verse. In chapters two through twenty-eight, one may trace the progression of the gospel from Jerusalem all the way to Rome. Just as Jesus had said, the apostolic gospel would spread from Jerusalem into all Judaea, and from there into Samaria and ultimately into all the world. The historical record is both obvious and unmistakable—the glorious church (kingdom) had its establishment in the city of Jerusalem (cf. Acts 2:5, 47).—

Daniel 2:44-45

And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure (Dan. 2:44-45).

This is the first of two prophecies that will be examined in the book of Daniel. Interestingly, both of these prophecies provide critically important information regarding the timing of the church's establishment. While Isaiah provided a timetable in the broadest sense (that is, "the last days"), Daniel greatly narrows down the realm of possibility in the above passage.

These two verses follow the account of Nebuchadnezzar's marvelous dream—but even more, Daniel's marvelous interpretation of that dream by the power of God (Dan. 2:31-43). The inspired Daniel provided the key to interpretation in a sentence found in verse thirty-eight, "*Thou art this head of gold.*" From this statement one learns that each segment of the image (statue) in Nebuchadnezzar's dream is representative of an earthly empire, or kingdom. Daniel points out that that symbolism begins at the top of the image—the head of gold represents Nebuchadnezzar (and, by extension, the Babylonian empire). Then, moving down the image, Daniel describes an inferior kingdom, a kingdom which would rule the earth, and finally, a kingdom that would be as strong as iron. The purpose of this piece is not to provide an in-depth historical

treatise regarding these four kingdoms. Therefore, it will suffice to mention briefly that secular history bears out the identities of these kingdoms as the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Grecian and Roman Empires. Turner summarizes this information in a beneficial way.

Daniel thus prophesied of four world empires which would be raised up to make their respective contributions to the “fullness of time” (cf. Gal. 4:4, CG). Further, he prophesied that in the days of the fourth kingdom, the God of heaven would “set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed.” The “fullness of time” would be the time when the Messiah would make his appearance. The four empires were, namely: (1) the Babylonian Empire; (2) the Medo-Persian Empire; (3) the Grecian Empire; and (4) the Roman Empire. In the days of this fourth empire—the Roman Empire—the God of heaven would set up a kingdom “which shall never be destroyed” (51-52).

Therefore, Daniel specifically pinpoints the ancient Roman era as that window of time wherein the Messianic kingdom would be established. The lesson is clear, and the implications are obvious. No institution, organization, sect, denomination or any religious organization established before or after the times of the ancient Roman Empire can possibly be the true church! This fact alone, straight out of Daniel’s inspired prophecy, instantly refutes the existence of all Protestant denominations. Simply put, the problem with the vast majority of modern religious organizations is that they simply came into existence too late!

There are other helpful lessons also to be gleaned from Daniel 2:44-45. One, there must be noted the everlasting

permanence of the church. Daniel described the kingdom as never being *"destroyed."* History has born out the truthfulness of Daniel's inspired statement. All four of these ancient empires have fallen in the dust, but the glorious church of Christ still remains! Paul would later reveal the ultimate destiny of the church, *"Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power"* (1 Cor. 15:24). Hence, the glorious church cannot and will not be destroyed by man—she will one day enjoy the beauties of heaven forever and ever. Two, Daniel represented the church using a *"stone cut out...without hands."* This is a very significant statement indicating the Divine origin of the church. The Messianic kingdom would not be the result of human ability or ingenuity. Jesus clearly stated Himself, *"...I will build my church..."* (Matt. 16:18). This He did by shedding His blood in His death and by conquering death in His resurrection. With His blood, He purchased the church (cf. Acts 20:28). By conquering death and Hades (cf. Matt. 16:18, NKJV), Jesus conquered the archenemy of mankind—Satan (cf. Heb. 2:14-15). All of this, indeed was the Lord's doing—not man's—and it is marvelous, yea glorious, in our eyes (cf. Matt. 21:42)!

Daniel 7:13-14

I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed (Dan. 7:13-14).

This is yet another prophecy of Daniel regarding the

church, the Messianic kingdom, and it reveals an important time element pertaining to the kingdom's establishment. Masses in the denominational world are under the misconception that the kingdom of Christ has not yet come. They would assert that the kingdom will be established by Christ at His Second Coming. Daniel, however, refutes such an idea in the above passage.

What Daniel saw in these two verses came to him "*in the night visions,*" that is, by means of an inspired vision at night (perhaps an inspired dream). He saw one "*like the Son of man*" (clearly a reference to Jesus, Matt. 8:20; Mark 2:28; Luke 19:10; et. al.) coming with the clouds of heaven unto the Ancient of days (clearly a reference to God the Father, (cf. Psa. 90:2). Both the inclusion of the clouds as well as the direction of the Lord's coming are highly significant! Premillennialists aver that Jesus will come from the Father, with the clouds of heaven, and then set up His kingdom. A passage that might be misused to support such a notion is First Thessalonians 4:17. However, the careful Bible student immediately recognizes that the alleged direction of the Lord in the premillennial system is wrong! Daniel reveals Christ's coming to the Father in order to receive His kingdom, not from the Father! His inspired prophecy accords with Luke's inspired account.

And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven (Acts 1:9-11).

Jesus ascended from the earth in order to receive His kingdom, the record of such fruition being found in Acts 2. At the end

of time, Christ will not be receiving a kingdom; instead He will be delivering the kingdom up to the Father. Paul revealed this fact.

Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all (1 Cor. 15:24-28).

Another observation concerning Daniel 7:13-14 is the fact that the universal nature of the kingdom is reiterated. Whereas the law of Moses had been given to the nation of Israel (Exod. 34:27), Daniel foretold that the Messiah would be served by all people, nations and languages. One is reminded of Daniel's earlier statement regarding the Messianic kingdom "*...it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever*" (Dan. 2:44). After returning to heaven as the Victorious Conqueror, Jesus was given a kingdom containing all the saved of the final dispensation. His kingdom is not limited by human lines, whether they be racial, cultural or national.

Conclusion

The glorious church is truly a timeless entity. Though it did not come to fruition until about 2000 years ago, it has existed in the mind of God from all eternity. His plans and promises concerning that kingdom can be traced throughout the Old Testament. Each prophecy and promise finds its

fulfillment in the writings of the New Testament. Of course, its ultimate reward will not be enjoyed until the last trump is sounded, and time is no more (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

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Chapter 3

Christs' Relationship To The Glorious Church

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Deity pre-planned in Eternity to send Jesus to atone for the sins committed by humanity (Rev. 13:8). That great eternal intention was fulfilled when Jesus died on the cross. No human being may be forgiven and permitted to live with God in Heaven without the blood of Jesus. Most of Christendom would agree with these assertions. However, the role of the church in the scheme of redemption is, at best, fuzzy to most of the religious world.

The book of Ephesians generally, and chapter three in particular, expounds this extremely significant feature of God's scheme of redemption,

i.e., the place of the church. Listen to Paul's affirmation:

...to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:10-11).

These verses indicate that it was always God's intention to utilize the cross and the church as His two-pronged tool to affect human salvation. God has no other means to atone for sin than the cross of Christ. Likewise, He has no other means of communicating that gospel truth to the world than the church of Christ, and He has no other location in which to place those who submit to the Gospel than the receptacle of the church of Christ.

Ephesians provides a correct identification of the church of Christ, illustrated by a syllogism:

1. The church = the body (Eph. 1:22-23)
2. There is only one body (Eph. 4:4)
3. Therefore, there is only one church—
Christ's church (cf. Matt. 16:18)

Observe further that since the church is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:23), and since Christ is the head of His church (Eph. 5:23), it is impossible to separate the one from the other. Becoming a Christian and becoming a member of Christ's church are not separate occurrences; they occur simultaneously.

The failure to appreciate (and conform to) this truth regarding the relationship of Christ to His church results in a decapitated Gospel.

On Thursday night, April 21, 1938, in a public discussion in Little Rock, Arkansas before an immediate crowd of 1000 people and a radio audience of thousands more, N.B. Hardeman engaged the famed Baptist debater Ben Bogard on the subject—"The Establishment of the Church." On that occasion, Hardeman articulated an extremely significant truth about the church of our Lord when he stated:

The kingdom, friends, has always existed It existed in Purpose, in the mind of God; it existed next in Promise, as delivered unto the patriarchs, and it existed in Prophecy; and then it existed in Preparation; and last of all, when the New Testament went into effect, it existed in Perfection (p. 178).

More than sixty-five years have come and gone since that insightful observation. Yet it remains an accurate expression of biblical truth. Indeed, before Adam and Eve inhabited the Garden of Eden together; before the skies, seas, and land were populated by birds, fish, and animals; before the Sun, Moon, and stars were situated in the Universe; and before our planet Earth was even a dark, watery, formless mass—God purposed to bring into being the church of Christ.

This divine intention was "*eternal*." Central to

the great purposes of God from eternity has been – not only the sending of His Son as an atonement for sin – but the creation of the church of Christ, the blood bought body of Jesus, the living organism of the redeemed. This organism is composed of Jew and Gentile. Regardless of ethnic variation among us, we are fellow members and fellow partakers. *“Whosoever will may come.”*

After detailing the grand plan of God to save humankind through the Gospel of Christ, no wonder Paul exclaimed:

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! (Rom. 11:33).

No wonder Paul brought the first half of Ephesians to a close with the declaration: *“to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end”* (Eph. 3:21).

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Chapter 4

The Authority Of The Glorious Church

Billy Bland



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Introduction

The church of Christ is "*a glorious church.*" So states the Word of God. Paul wrote;

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:25-27).

It is a glorious church and it is also the avenue through which we glorify God. Again, the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write;

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen (Eph 3:20-21).

The church of Christ is so important, that when someone persecutes the church, he is persecuting Christ. When Saul was *“breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples”* (members of the church), Christ said to him; *“Saul, Saul why persecutest thou me?”* There is an obvious connection between Christ and the church. He is *“the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.”* (Eph. 1:22-23). Since Christ is the head over all things to the church, there must be some way He exercises His headship! Consequently, there must be a standard of authority by which He governs the church.

God instructs;

And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him (Col. 3:17).

What does it mean to do something, *“in the name of the Lord Jesus?”* Perhaps a Bible illustration of this will explain. In Acts chapter four, Peter and John were

called into question by some of the religious leaders because they (Peter & John) had healed a lame man. The Bible records; *“And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this”* (Acts 4:7)? Their critics wanted to know who gave the apostles their ability and the authority to heal the lame man. When they asked *“by what name,”* they were asking *“by what authority.”* The Bible records Peter’s answer;

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole (Acts 4:8-10).

Peter and John were operating by the authority of Christ. It was Christ Who had healed the man, but He did it through Peter and John. Later Peter continues by stating; *“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12).

When Paul says *“And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, [do] all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him,”* he means we are to teach

and practice all things by the authority of Christ.

What Is NOT The Authority

It is not only important for one to know what is the authority of the glorious church, but it is also important for one to know what is NOT the authority.

The authority of the glorious church is not the world. Hollywood is not the standard for the Lord's glorious church. It seems that society is being bombarded by Hollywood's influence. More and more one is seeing in the movies and television programs that homosexuality is being promoted as an acceptable lifestyle. One must remember that the ones who make such films are not our standard of authority.

The authority of the glorious church is not the multitude. In the long ago, God warned;

Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgment (Exod. 23:2).

While "*everybody else is doing it,*" is a strong appeal for some actions, it is not our standard of authority. Someone observed that there have been only two occasions when the majority were in the right. One occasion was immediately after creation and the other one was right after the flood! We need to keep in mind that Jesus said;

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to

destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it (Matt. 7:13-14).

Our forefathers are not the standard of authority for the church. While all can appreciate some aspects of our forefathers and even our immediate parents, we must realize that they are not our standard of authority in religious matters. The apostle Paul was brought up in the Jewish religion. For a while he even fought against Christ. However, when he learned the truth, he changed from the religion of his forefathers. To the churches in Galatia, he wrote;

For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers (Gal. 1:13-14).

He was converted from Judaism and became a zealous follower of Christ. Paul wrote:

Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church;

touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ (Phil. 3:4-8)

Paul gave up his fathers' religion in order to faithfully follow the Christ. A follower of Christ must love Christ more than his family. Jesus stated;

He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it (Matt. 10:37-39).

While all are to honor their parents and family, we must never put them ahead of God.

One's feelings are not the authority of God's glorious church. Many want to be guided by their feelings. To them something is either right or wrong, if they "*feel*" that it is right or wrong. However, feelings can be (and often are), wrong. Feelings are sometimes based upon certain information. This information may or may not be true, but the feelings respond to one's belief of that information. Jacob wept bitterly for his son Joseph because his other sons misled him into believing that Joseph had been killed. The Bible states;

And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him (Gen. 37:34-35).

Jacob's feelings were very real. However, his feelings were based upon faulty information. Simply because Jacob believed that Joseph was dead did not make it true. In fact, Joseph was very much alive and would later become a great leader in Egypt. Jacob and his other sons would be reunited with Joseph. People may believe they are saved. They may "feel" they are saved. Could it be, however, that they have received faulty information? Feeling like one is saved doesn't make it true! We ought to feel good because we are saved, but we are not saved because we feel good.

The world, the multitude, our forefathers and our feelings are not the authority in God's glorious church.

God's Word – The Bible – Is Our Standard Of Authority

Technically speaking, Jesus Christ is our authority. God speaks to us through His Son, Jesus Christ. The Hebrews' writer records;

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath

appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds (Heb. 1:1-2).

Jesus stated;

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth (Matt. 28:18).

Moses foretold of the coming of Christ and His authority. Peter quotes Moses' prophecy and applies it to the Christ. He stated;

For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, [that] every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people (Acts 3:22-23).

The way that Jesus speaks to us is by His Word. He warns;

He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day (John 12:48).

The Bible is the Word of God. The English translations (such as the King James Version or American Standard Version), consists of sixty-six books. There are thirty-nine books in the Old Testament and twenty-seven books in the New Testament. Christians are under the Law of Christ

which is the New Testament. The Hebrews' writer helps one understand this principle when he wrote;

And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions [that were] under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth (Heb 9:15-17).

Christ's Testament came into force after His death. Again the Hebrews' writer explains;

Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb. 10:9-10).

Christ took away the first will (the Old Testament), that He might establish the second will (the New Testament), by which will (Testament), we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Christ once for all.

Why Is The Bible The Authority Of The Glorious Church?

The Bible is the authority for the glorious church because it is Divinely inspired. Paul wrote;

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

The words "*inspiration of God,*" means divinely breathed in by God. That is why the Word of God is alive and active. The Hebrews' writer stated;

For the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb. 4:12).

The Bible did not originate with man. It is not the product of man's interpretations. Peter explained;

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (2 Peter 1:20-21).

The prophecy did not come from man's interpretation, but rather men spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

God gave men His very Word (not simply His thoughts). David stated; "*The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue*" (2 Sam. 23:2). Take note of the fact that God's word was on David's

tongue - not God's thought was in David's head. If God had simply given man His thoughts and then left it up to man to put God's thoughts in man's own words, then the Bible would not be perfect doctrinally. Man could have chosen the wrong wording for God's thoughts. God made sure there were no errors in that He gave man the very word. Again the prophet Jeremiah stated;

Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth (Jer. 1:9).

The New Testament also claims verbal (or word) inspiration. Paul wrote;

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual (1 Cor. 2:12-13).

Paul affirms that the "*words*" that he spoke were given by the Holy Spirit. The Bible is the Word of God.

The authority of the glorious church is the Bible because it is God's final revelation to mankind. God speaks to us today by means of His Son, Jesus Christ.

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers

by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds (Heb. 1:1-2).

Although God has used divers manners in the past, today He speaks to us by His Son. The Son speaks to us by means of His revealed Word. Christ promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would guide them *"into all truth"* -

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come (John 16:13).

The Holy Spirit did not leave the apostles incomplete, but rather guided them into all truth. God's word (the faith), has been once for all delivered. Jude wrote;

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints (Jude 1:3).

Paul informs us that no other message is to be preached or received. He wrote;

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel

unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:8-9).

Man is not to hear any so called revelations from any other source than the Bible. This includes the so-called revelations of Mary Baker Eddy, Joseph Smith, Robert Tilton, the Pope, and Pentecostal preachers. Since the apostles and other inspired men were guided into all truth, and the Bible stands complete, there are no more revelations being given.

The authority for the glorious church is the Bible because it is God's absolute standard. What is meant here is that God's truth is not relative, but objective, actual and real. Some wish to reject an absolute standard. They want the "*standard*" to be situational and relative. Such would tell us, one cannot know truth absolutely. They would claim that since we live in an pluralistic society, that what is truth for one may not be truth for all. In essence, they tell us that we cannot be absolutely sure. On the contrary, the apostle John records

Jesus therefore said to those Jews that had believed him, If ye abide in my word, then are ye truly my disciples; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free (John 8:31-32).

There was an objective standard that the disciples of Jesus knew. Jesus says they should "*continue*" in that standard, and that by so doing they would "*know the truth,*" and "*the truth,*" would make them free. Later this same apostle wrote;

And hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoso keepeth his word, in him verily hath the love of God been perfected. Hereby we know that we are in him (1 John 2:3-5).

One can know that he knows Christ. How can one know that he knows Christ? By keeping His commandments. God's commandments are absolute, knowable and doable. In fact one must know them and do them in order to be saved!

John rejoiced that he found certain ones walking in the truth. To the elect lady and her children, he penned; *"I rejoice greatly that I have found certain of thy children walking in truth, even as we received commandment from the Father"* (2 John 1:4). They must have known the truth to be able to walk (continuously) in the truth!

To the one who affirms *"one cannot be absolutely sure about the truth,"* we simply ask, *"Are you absolutely sure?"* If he is not absolutely sure, then he could be wrong about what he has affirmed. On the other hand, if he is absolutely sure that one cannot be absolutely sure, then he has contradicted himself, for he knows absolutely that one cannot know absolutely. Consequently, the proposition is false and one can know some things absolutely.

Truth, by its nature is absolute. One's phone number is absolutely knowable. Since one can know another person's phone number, he can phone this

person without calling anyone other than his desired party. Since truth is absolute, it is very helpful. It means that one can do the will of God and be sure about it. Regarding the Deity of Jesus, Peter affirmed; *“And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God”* (John 6:69). What a blessing to know the Christ and be absolutely sure about Him, His salvation and His church. *“And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments”* (1 John 2:3).

The authority of the glorious church is the Bible because it never changes. Man does not need a new Gospel for a new age. Although great advances have been made in technology, transportation, communication, medicines, sciences, etc., man’s basic needs have not changed. Man’s nature has not changed. Man always has been man. Peter, Paul, John and others in the first century were just as modern in their nature as modern day man. They were flesh and blood, just as today. Man’s physical needs have not changed. Man still needs oxygen, food, water, sunshine, etc. Does man today need a new oxygen, a new sun, etc? The answer of course is no.

The nature of man’s temptation has not changed. The devil tempts man today with the same three avenues he has always used. John wrote;

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever (1 John 2:15-17).

The devil uses the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life as the way to tempt mankind. This is what he used to tempt Eve in the garden of Eden and later to tempt Jesus. Jesus was tempted in all points like as we, but was without sin.

For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15).

Obviously there have been some changes in the world since the creation and the first century, but the nature of temptation has not changed. Man's spiritual problem has not changed. Man's biggest problem is his problem with sin. Sin is the only thing in the world that separates one from God. Isaiah wrote;

Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear (Isa. 59:1-2).

Paul lists the works of the flesh and it is just as current today as it was at the time he listed them:

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are [these]; Adultery, fornication,

uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21).

The remedy for man's problem is the same today as it was in the first century. Paul wrote;

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith (Rom. 1:16-17).

The Gospel of Christ is still the power of God unto salvation unto all those who believe. We do not need a new Gospel for a new age. In fact, a new gospel is condemned by God (Gal. 1:8-9).

The Word of God is eternal and never needs updating. Science and History books are ever being updated. Seemingly many books need to be updated about the time they are printed. However, such is not true with the Word of God. It is always up-to-date and is never out of date. Peter wrote;

Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you (1 Peter 1:22-25)

Conclusion

The glorious church has a standard of authority. It is the Word of God – the Bible. It is authoritative. It is the standard by which all men will be judged. Jesus stated; *“He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day”* (John 12:48). True, Biblical faith comes only from the Word of God – *“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (Rom 10:17). If one will allow the Bible to be his guide, he will believe that Christ is the Son of God (John 8:24). This faith will lead him to repent of his sins (Luke 13:3,5). He then will confess that *“Jesus Christ is the Son of God”* (Acts 8:37). Then he will be baptized into Jesus Christ for the remission of his sins (Acts 2:38, Rom. 6:3-4). Upon doing this, the Lord Himself, will add this individual to His glorious church (Acts 2:47), which is heaven bound (Eph. 5:25-27).

Chapter 5

The Purpose Of The Glorious Church

Barry Grider



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Introduction

The church of Christ is the most glorious institution on earth. Jesus purchased the church with His own blood (Eph.5:25). Furthermore, while many philanthropists, humanitarians, and good will organizations exist to aid and assist the sick and helpless, only through the church does God receive glory. Paul wrote, *"Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages world without end"* (Eph. 3:21).

Since God places such a high value on the church, every member ought to be concerned about building up the church and in no way hindering its

purpose. But, what is the purpose of the church? Unless the purpose of the church, and particularly, the purpose of each congregation, is made clear, God's people will never rise above the level of mediocrity.

Sadly in many places today congregations of the Lord's church have lost sight of their original purpose. Jesus said,

And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock, I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Matt. 16:18-19).

Jesus and His chosen apostles have given us the divine standard by which the church should be patterned. Liberalism has set aside that perfect standard and developed its own standard. Liberalism attacks everything about the New Testament pattern and those who are committed to speaking only as the Bible speaks. Change for the sake of change is what drives liberals. The "*preaching*" from such pulpits is usually very weak with a softening of what the Bible teaches concerning matters of doctrine and morality. While some of these congregations grow numerically as they become like the denominations around them, they no longer understand God's intended purpose for His church.

Radicalism is just as dangerous as liberalism because radicalism binds where God did not bind. Radicals see themselves as God, and entire congregations can sometimes be infested with this spirit. Always ready to harshly judge others who do not agree with their views in matters of opinion, those who are radical will completely tear down the good works of faithful brethren, forgetting the true purpose of the church. The "*Diotrophes*" mentality is still very much alive today (3 John 9).

Still, other congregations are beset with lukewarmness. Jesus said to the church at Laodicea,

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So, then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor I hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth (Rev.3:15-16).

Congregations beset with lukewarmness are satisfied the way they are. There is no desire for spiritual or numerical growth. Keeping house is the order of the day. The motto of lukewarm churches is "*don't rock the boat.*" Such congregations have no vision and never accomplish anything of value for the Lord's cause. The purpose of the church is totally lost with them.

Every Christian ought to do his part to help make the church glorious (Eph. 5:27). The church fulfills the purpose of God (Eph. 3:10-11). However, the church can never bring glory to God if its purpose is not understood. What is that purpose and as

individual Christians are we helping or hindering the purpose of God?

The Purpose Of The Church Is To Save

Jesus stated His purpose for coming to earth succinctly, when He said, *“For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost”* (Luke 19:10). How did He do that? He offers salvation through His death on the cross. The purpose of the cross was three fold. First, Jesus paid our sin debt when He died. Peter recorded,

Who his [Jesus] own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed (1 Peter 2:24).

Second, Jesus died to purchase the church. Again, Paul states, *“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it”* (Eph. 5:25). Third, Jesus died to provide a new and better covenant. The writer of Hebrews stated,

And for this cause he [Jesus] is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance (Heb. 9:15).

Now most who identify themselves as Christians understand that Jesus died for our sins, yet miss

the importance of the church and the new covenant or new testament of Jesus Christ. What does the church have to do with our salvation? The church is the saved (Acts 2:47). What does the new covenant have to do with our salvation? Only under the new covenant is salvation found. Such was not provided under the old covenant (Heb. 10:4). Only in the prospect view of the new covenant did the faithful who lived during the Patriarchal and Mosaic ages obtain forgiveness.

Since forgiveness was made available through the cross of Christ, what did Jesus command His disciples to do as He was about to ascend unto His Father? Remember His words,

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matt. 28:19-20).

The message of salvation was first preached on Pentecost. The good news of a risen, reigning Savior brought about the conversion of some three thousand souls (Acts 2:41). Hence, the church began on that day. What do we know about those converted?

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And

all that believed were together, and had all things common (Acts 2:42-44).

Notice, those who were converted to Christianity were united. This fulfilled the prayer that Jesus uttered, when He said,

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me (John 17:21).

The concept of denominationalism is completely foreign to the New Testament. Paul wrote,

Now I beseech you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10).

Furthermore, the apostle described the members of the body of Christ as functioning in harmony as does man's physical body (1 Cor. 12:12ff). This demands that all *"speak as the oracles of God"* (1 Pet. 4:11).

Consider the pronoun *"they,"* once again. *"Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word"* (Acts 8:4). Why did they do this? They clearly understood their purpose. When saints are converted they will convert others. How is this accomplished? The church enacts the seed sowing program of the Savior (Luke 8:5ff). As the song suggests,

If the souls all around you are living in sin,
If the master has told you to bid them come in,
If the sweet invitation they never have heard,
O will you not tell them the cheer bringing word?

Someone has said the church could best be described as an emergency room for sinners. Indeed, if the church understands its purpose is to save souls.

The Purpose Of The Church Is To Strengthen

Those who are converted need to be strengthened. Jesus said,

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold,
Satan hath desired to have you, that he
may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed
for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when
Art converted, strengthen thy brethren
(Luke 22:31-32).

Paul, in Ephesians 4:12, speaks of the edifying of the body of Christ. It is imperative that those who have been saved remain saved. Elders who are concerned about the flock realize the importance of keeping the sheep busy. Likewise, periods of edification and fellowship are necessary for strengthening and edification purposes. Hence so many congregations have a period of Bible study during the middle of the week with its primary focus centered on edifying the church. Let us

notice some areas where the church can effectively strengthen the brethren.

Assembling.....	Heb. 10:25
Teaching.....	Acts 20:32
Praying.....	Acts 2:42
Encouraging.....	2 Tim. 1:16
Helping.....	Acts 6:3; 2 Cor. 8:1f
Fellowshipping.....	Acts 2:42
Involvement.....	1 Cor. 15:58
Leading and Following...	1 Tim. 4:16

Since God uses the church as a tool to strengthen, do you as an individual member help to edify others?

The Purpose Of The Church Is To Save

Our Lord and Savior was a leader, yet He was also a servant. Now He commands, *"by love serve one another"* (Gal. 5:13). While the Christian is concerned about himself, he is not preoccupied with self. Consider these passages.

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:1-3).

Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. As we have therefore

opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith (Gal.6:2,10).

What is the purpose of serving others? Our purpose is save others by first showing them how much we care. Jesus sometimes met physical needs— healing the sick and feeding the multitudes— that He might be able to later impart some spiritual truth. The old adage may be trite, but, nevertheless true, *“people don’t care how much we know until they know how much we care.”* Once a poor, hungry little boy walked into the Madison, Tennessee church building and asked Ira North, *“Is this a church that helps people?”* Of course, brother North informed the boy he had come to the right place. Which congregation would the wounded man on the road to Jericho (Luke 10) desire to attend? Would it be the congregation of the Priest, Levite, or the Samaritan? We know the answer. Individually and congregationally do we present to the world what the Lord purposed? Are we loving, caring, and busy serving as the Lord has instructed?

Conclusion

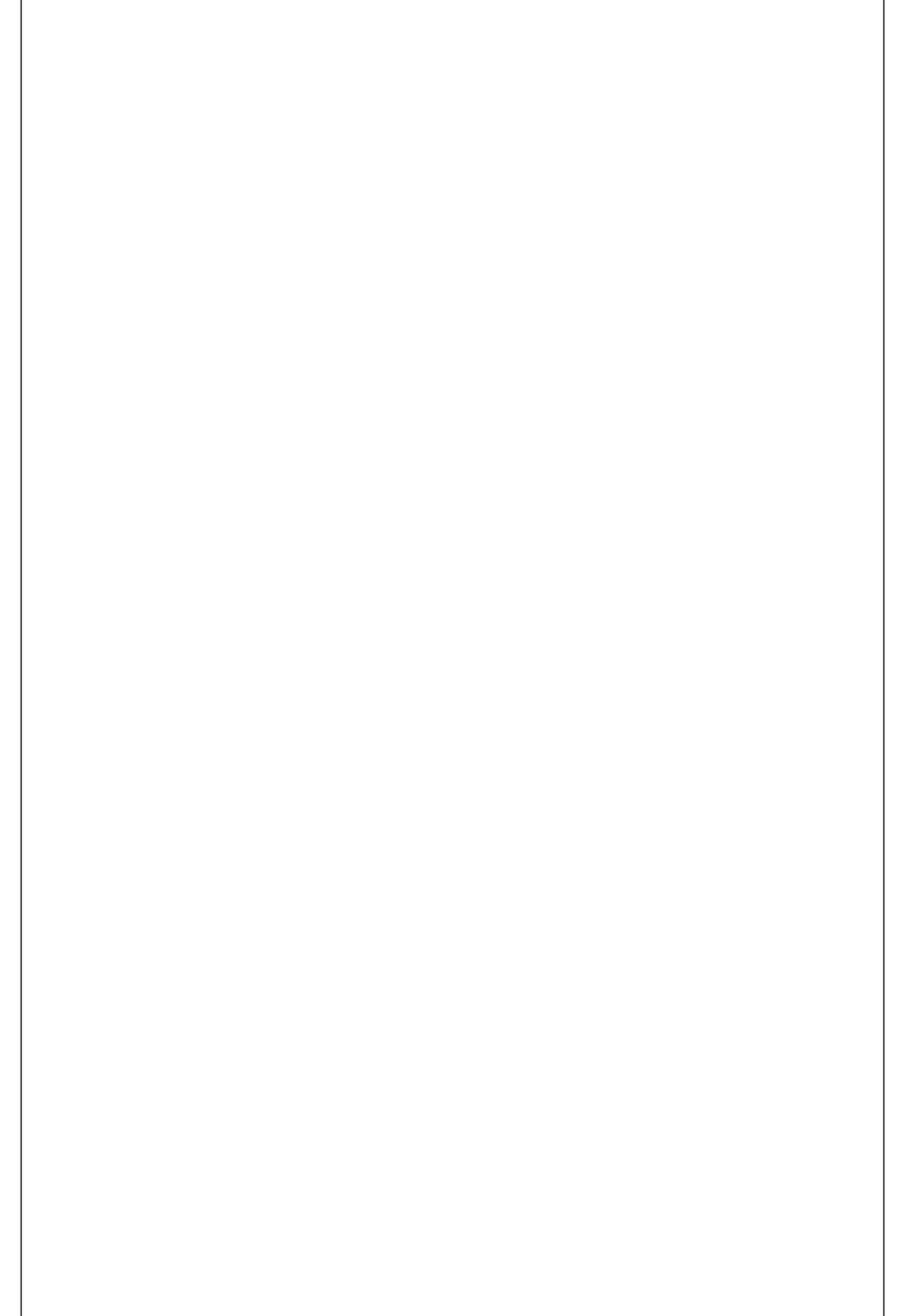
The Lord’s church understands its purpose. Such will not appeal to everybody. In fact, it is too simple for many. However, our mission of saving, strengthening, and serving is glorious. Together, members of the church have the same goal. That goal is going to heaven and taking as many with us as possible. Dear reader, do you know anyone

THE PURPOSE OF THE GLORIOUS CHURCH

who needs to be saved, strengthened, or served?
Such is your purpose and the purpose of the Lord's
church.



VITAL MATTERS
Concerning
The Glorious Church



Chapter 6

The Work Of The Glorious Church

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The church is a precious institution which was foreordained by God, predicted by Jesus, and realized on the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2. It is a spiritual institution, consisting of those who have been baptized for the remission of their sins. That church has a unique purpose, nature, and work. It is indeed a blessing to be a part of something which was designed by God and purchased by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. The church is a blood-bought institution of which sinners must be a part in order to be saved. Indeed, one cannot be saved apart from the blood of Christ, nor outside the Kingdom of God. This is why it is extremely important that we, as a

people belonging to God, realize and recognize the plan and objectives that God has outlined for the church in the pages of Holy Writ.

It is important to understand that this institution consisting of baptized believers belongs to and is owned by the very One who purchased them at Calvary's cross. When the Bible speaks of churches of Christ (Rom. 16:16) it conveys the idea of ownership. The preposition of denotes that which belongs to something or someone. Thus, the church of Christ belongs to Christ. He is the Head and the Savior of the Body (Eph. 5:23). Since we belong to Christ, we must follow the dictates and the commandments of Christ in regard to how we function, worship, and live. We must also follow His requirements in regard to our work and our mission.

Since the church belongs to Christ, and since we bear the name of Christ, it behooves us to follow the example of Christ. If a church wants to be like Christ and truly belong to Jesus, then we must emulate His example in regard to our attitude, work and proclamation of truth. In examining the life of Christ, it becomes evident that the Lord had as His main objectives obedience to God and the salvation of souls. In Matthew 28:20, Jesus said *"I came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give my life a ransom for many."* In Luke 19:10, at the household of Zacchaeus, Jesus said *"The son of man has come to seek and to save that which is lost."* Further insight into the Lord's purpose for coming to the earth is revealed in Mark 1:38, where Jesus, being sought by His disciples, noted that they must go into the next

towns to preach, for He said, "*therefore came I forth.*" Preaching was designed to call sinners to repentance by means of the good news about the Kingdom.

From the above mentioned passages, it seems apparent that the overlying mission of the Lord's presence upon the earth involved the salvation of souls. This salvation came as a result of His work and ultimate death upon the cross. His public ministry and acts of kindness were designed to point people heavenward. It was all about a spiritual purpose, recognizing that man has a soul that will live throughout eternity and inhabit either heaven or hell. God was not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, and so Jesus offered up Himself willingly to save the souls of men.

In all things, Jesus becomes our example. He was a Master Teacher, Preacher, and Worker. He was compassionate, kind, and forgiving. He spoke to people about their eternal destiny and what they needed to do to be saved. He cared for the needs of others and He sought to brighten the way for those struggling with the issues of life. Thus, if the church wants to be like Jesus, we ourselves must follow His example in regard to our work and mission. With this singular purpose in mind, that is to say, the salvation of souls, the church must continue its quest to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, to seek and save the lost, and to minister to others.

According to Ephesians 2:10, we as the church are the workmanship of Christ. As saved people, we

are to perform good works. We continue on with the ministry of Jesus. We are, in effect, an extension of Christ and His work today is to be accomplished through His people. It is a work that we do both as individuals and collectively.

The Work Of The Church

In ascertaining what the church is authorized and/or obligated to do, one must carefully study the life and the ministry of Jesus, as well as the practice of the early church as revealed in the New Testament. Within those pages, we find a number of important works in which the church was involved. Over the years, brethren typically have organized those works under the three major categories of evangelism, edification, and benevolence. In this portion of the lectureship book, we shall take a closer look at the various works within each of those traditional categories.

Evangelism

Our primary text will center upon the acts of the early church as revealed in the book of Acts. As one traverses the historical account of the events and actions of the early Christians, we will see first of all that the church had a unique obligation to spread the good news about Jesus and His Kingdom, starting with the apostles. In Acts 1:8, that good news was to be spread throughout Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth. Those disciples were to tell others about the resurrection

of Christ and to verify and validate its reality. This work of preaching the gospel throughout the world was commanded at the ascension of Jesus, when He gave what we have commonly called the "*great commission*." Throughout the book of Acts, we see the fulfillment of this commission, when individuals like Peter, Paul, Barnabus, and many others went from place to place and house to house preaching the good news. It was, for example, Paul's custom to travel from city to city, entering into their synagogues and public places for gathering, to share with others the unsearchable riches of Christ. We find also that Peter and the twelve apostles preached within the temple complex and at various places in Jerusalem. Their message was to all kindred, dialects, and nationalities. At first, it was limited to those of Jewish tradition, but by Acts 10, the mercies of God had been extended to both Jew and Gentile. In the book of Romans, we are reminded of our unique obligation of preaching the Gospel when Paul said that "*I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation*." That Gospel, he explains, is needed by everyone because all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. He further explains that there is none that is righteous, no, not one. So the Gospel is for everyone, and therefore must be preached to everyone. In the book of Colossians, Paul further reiterates this important point by saying that he was made a minister of this gospel which had been entrusted to him, of which he preached, desiring to warn every man and teach every man in all wisdom

so that on the Day of Judgment, he could present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

Apart from the Gospel, no one can be saved. Through its message, a soul can be purified. Hearts can be cleansed and salvation can be realized. The scripture is powerful enough to make us complete before God. It is the means by which men come to faith and the instrument by which we are made free. Since this is true, it behooves the church to be busy in preaching the Gospel of Christ. It was through the foolishness of preaching that God chose to save them that believe. The preaching of the cross is powerful and must be seen as an essential work of the church.

In the book of Acts we also learn that the preaching and teaching of the Gospel was conducted on an individual basis, as brethren daily went from house to house, preaching and teaching Jesus Christ. If the church is to fulfill the great commission, it must rely upon the dedication and zeal of each individual member of the body of Christ. Following the example of first century disciples will enable us to take the Gospel into the whole world. Individuals like Aquila and Priscilla stand also to encourage us in this great endeavor. Christians are instruments in the hands of Almighty God, by which the Gospel is made known to the lost. It is absolutely imperative that we understand our mission, and that what lies within our hands is truly a treasure to be shared. If we believe, we must therefore speak. We must truly labor, for all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10-11).

Edification

The second area by which the work of the church can be categorized involves edification. The word edification comes from a word which means "to build." Its Greek root word has reference to a building, or a house. The Bible describes the church of Christ as a house (1 Tim. 3:15). While Christ was the Builder of the house, and His holy apostles the foundation, we as living stones in that spiritual dwelling must seek to nurture and maintain its strength and unity.

On the day of Pentecost, when three thousand souls were baptized into Christ, the very first words describing the work of the church concerned individuals who continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine, breaking of bread, prayers, and fellowship. Continuing steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine is absolutely essential for spiritual growth. If the church is to be truly built up, its members must be grounded and established in the faith. Every Christian must desire the sincere milk of the word that they may grow thereby. Every Christian must be rooted and built up in the holy faith of God.

The building up of the church through teaching and preaching is reflected in Ephesians 4, where the apostle Paul said that Christ "*gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints*" (Eph. 4:11-12). The perfecting of the saints has reference to equipping saints for the challenges that face each individual Christian in their walk here upon the

earth. Fighting the battles of temptation, trials, and false doctrines must be met by soldiers of Christ who are properly armed. This is exactly why the apostle Paul commanded brethren to *"be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might"* by putting on the whole armor of God. By doing this, Christians will be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

The Christian armor involves adorning ourselves with the word of God. It involves a *"thus saith the Lord"* for all that we do and say (Col. 3:17). Apart from the Word of God, the church will cease to exist. Its members will be weak and their souls will be lost. The Word of God is that which purifies our souls and instructs us in all manner of Godly living and true righteousness. Faith can never be realized without the Word of God (Rom. 10:17), nor will a person be made wise unto salvation (2 Tim. 3:15). The apostle Peter, in his second epistle, commanded Christians to *"grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."* This growth comes by adding to our faith virtue, and by adding to our virtue knowledge. Being built up and strengthened in the faith comes as a direct result of our study of God's word.

Much of the growth experienced by new Christians is, in large part, dependent upon the church. As noted earlier, God established teachers, evangelists, etc. within the church for the purpose of edifying its members, so that they will not be tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine. The value of the church and its work

in edifying the saints can also be seen in what Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2:

...and the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.

At times, understanding what we read can be difficult. Therefore, just as Philip guided the eunuch into a greater understanding of scripture, so must skilled teachers of the church help to guide members of the body of Christ into a deeper understanding of the will of God. The church must truly edify its members by imparting to them the fundamentals of the faith and the deep concepts of truth.

As a part of its work in edification, the church is obligated to support those who provide such edification. Galatians 6:6 teaches that those who "*communicate,*" or have fellowship with others in the gospel of Christ with regard to teaching, are to be remunerated for their efforts. Paul expressed that he had a right to live of the Gospel (1 Cor. 9:14) and that one should not muzzle the ox that treads out the corn (1 Cor. 9:9). It is clearly evident in Scripture that Paul was financially supported as he preached the gospel of Christ. He "*robbed other churches*" to labor among the Corinthians (2 Cor. 11:8). According to Philippians 4:15, the church at Philippi became a sponsoring congregation for Paul's work on his second missionary tour. He was supported by several congregations as he labored in the vineyard of God's kingdom. Indeed, how beautiful are the feet of them

that preach the gospel of peace, and yet how can they preach unless they are sent? The church must be involved in sending preachers to do the work of the Lord. This work, by necessity, involves money. This money is often acquired through a free will offering enjoined upon the first day of the week as revealed in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2. This collection is the means by which the church finances its work.

In addition to providing teachers and preachers for edification and spiritual nourishment, the church must also be edified through programs of work as organized by its leaders. Exercising our faith unto Godliness (1 Tim. 4:7) will develop character and strength. As Christians are given opportunities to teach Bible classes, evangelize, practice benevolence, etc. they will truly be built up as they see the fruit borne from the power of the Gospel. When Christians are allowed to participate in the work of the church, their faith will truly be at work. Faith apart from works is dead (James 2:26). When a person becomes a doer of the word and not just a hearer only, he or she will truly be blessed in his deeds (James 2:25).

Benevolence

The third general category of work for the church involves benevolence. Throughout the pages of God's Word, it is easy to see that God has always been concerned for the widows, orphans, economically disadvantaged, the downtrodden, and the needy. In James 1:27, pure religion is defined by our care and concern for widows and orphans. In Galatians 6:10, a passage addressed to the entire church (Gal. 6:1),

Christians must seek to do good unto others as they have the opportunity. Benevolence was a concern manifested by Christ. He not only preached about it but lived it in His own life, as He ministered to those who were in need.

In the book of Acts, one can easily see that the church as a collective unit ministered to the needs of the poor (Acts 6:1-3; 11:27-30). Their work involved helping widows who were being neglected, as well as the poor that were among the saints at Jerusalem (Rom. 15:26). Because of a famine in Judea, Christians from various parts of the Mediterranean sought to send relief unto the brethren (Acts 11:29). Paul taught the elders of Ephesus that they should labor to support the weak, *"and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, it is more blessed to give than to receive"* (Acts 20:35). The ministry of helping others not only includes the want of the saints, but it also supplies the need of those outside the body of Christ (2 Cor. 9:13). Doing unto others is a scriptural principle which must govern the church of Jesus Christ. Going about doing good is a characteristic manifested by Jesus which must also characterize the church. Pure religion necessitates the church being involved in benevolence. Through benevolence, the church lets its light shine, showing its good works and thereby glorifying the Father which is in heaven.

The good work of the church in benevolence extends to its obligation to care for those who are sick. Jesus was keenly aware of the human illnesses

which plagued mankind. They brought unto Him people who were sick and He healed them (Matt. 4:24; 8:16). He likewise gave power to some of His disciples to heal the sick (Matt. 10:8; Luke 9:2). Not only did Jesus heal the sick, He taught the importance of attending to and visiting those who were ill (Matt. 25:31-46). The beloved James also taught that we must pray for the sick (Jam. 5:15). Truly, the church must care for its own (Gal. 6:10). It is our sacred obligation to assist those who cannot assist themselves (1 Tim. 5:3f). Through these acts of kindness, the work of the Lord will be realized and His name glorified. One cannot underestimate the power of good works, for through our good works we can cause even our enemies to glorify God on the day of visitation (1 Peter 2:12).

Conclusion

As we have seen, the categories of evangelism, edification, and benevolence are general terms which describe the work of the church. Many subcategories can be placed within this framework which are directly related to each of those main headings. One last work which must be carefully considered as an interrelated topic to each category involves the individual Christian's responsibility to the local congregation. The church cannot act apart from its members. At times, the work of the church is done by individual members and/or in a collective sense. However its tasks are accomplished, we must realize that every individual member in the body of

Christ must be busy in doing the work of God. For example, every member must be faithful in attending the assemblies of the church (Heb. 10:24-25). As the church gathers to edify its members and evangelize the lost, the Christian must see his or her work of provoking fellow members unto love and good works.

Secondly, individual members must be dedicated to giving as they have been prospered. The work of the church cannot be accomplished without the goodwill and offerings of brethren. Every Christian has the responsibility to lay by in store upon the first day of the week as they have been prospered (1 Cor. 16:1-2). Scripture also reminds us that we are to prepare ourselves to perform every good work (1 Tim. 6:17-19). This work cannot be done unless we prepare, plan and dedicate ourselves to giving liberally and sacrificially to the cause of Christ.

Third, to carry out the work of the church, individual Christians must be dedicated to the local congregation and remain in submission to qualified elders. The church must be seen as a family with obligations and responsibilities. A family cannot properly function without everyone fulfilling their tasks. As members, we must be in submission to the elders and endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. We must surrender our opinions in matters of judgment and uphold the hands of those who would seek to lead and shepherd the flock. Supporting the church of our Lord and involving ourselves in its work is the most important

endeavor to be carried out.

The work of the church must be seen from God's perspective. We must have authority for all that we do and we must be motivated by His concerns. A rival institution does not exist regarding spiritual and eternal matters. The kingdom must take first place in our lives and thereby cause us to be busy in the work of the Lord.

Chapter 7

The Worship Of The Glorious Church

Wade Webster



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Isaiah prophesied to his people of a glorious time to come when the church would be established in the top of the mountains and when men would go up to worship God. We read,

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in

His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth
the law, and the word of the Lord from
Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3).

As you know, this prophecy was fulfilled on the first Pentecost following the Lord's resurrection (Acts 2). Long before Isaiah's prophecy, and the fulfillment of it in the first century by the church, father Abraham went up to the mount of the Lord with his son Isaac and worshipped (Gen. 22; Rom. 4:12). Although worship occurred in the Old Testament prior to this momentous occasion (Gen. 4), the first time that the word "*worship*" was used in Scripture was when Abraham declared to his servants that he and Isaac were going to "*go yonder and worship*" (Gen. 22:5). Perhaps, you know from your Bible study that the first use of a word in Scripture is always special; and often, significant (cf. Gen. 6:8). A thorough study of any Bible subject should begin there.

Although no other man accompanied Abraham and Isaac to the mount, God saw fit to guide His servant Moses to record it for us that we might learn from it (Rom. 15:4). With God's help, we are privileged to walk alongside aged Abraham as he makes this climb and the choice of a lifetime. We get to hear his conversation with Isaac about the lamb (Gen. 22:7), see his relief when a substitute is provided (Gen. 22:13-14), and even read his thoughts concerning how God was going to keep His seed promise (Heb. 11:17-19). It is on this mount in the long ago that we get a glimpse of the glory that is to be in our worship today. Let's travel back and

climb that mountain with Abraham and Isaac that we may learn anew the glory of worship.

The Command Of Worship

The inspired text begins by recording the command of God for Abraham to worship. Notice the emphasis in the text on what God *“said”* to Abraham:

- *“That God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him...”* (Gen. 22:1).
- *“And He said...”* (Gen. 22:2).
- *“...unto the place of which God had told him”* (Gen. 22:3).
- *“And they came unto the place which God had told him of...”* (Gen. 22:9).
- *“And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven...”* (Gen. 22:11).
- *“And he said...”* (Gen. 22:12).
- *“And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven...”* (Gen. 22:15).
- *“And said...”* (Gen. 22:16).
- *“...because thou hast obeyed my voice”* (Gen. 22:18).

Did you catch that? Nine times in nineteen verses, in one way or another, Moses refers to what God said to Abraham. Clearly, Abraham was not directing his own steps (Jer. 10:23), but was rather *“walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless”* (Luke 1:6). Obviously, the only thing that would have moved Abraham to offer Isaac as a burnt offering was the commandment of the Lord (Gen. 22:1-2).

God was trying Abraham's faith (Heb. 11:17-19; James 1:13). God wanted Abraham's heart, not Isaac's life. This is made clear by the fact that the trial was over when Abraham demonstrated his willingness to offer his son by putting him on the altar and drawing back his knife to slay his son (Gen. 22:12). As you recall, the angel of the Lord said,

Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou has not withheld thy son, thine only son from me (Gen. 22:12).

Pay special attention to the words, "*Now I know...*" Did not God already know Abraham? Is not this why God picked him to be the father of His nation (Gen. 18:19)? Why then did He say, "*Now I know...*" (Gen. 22:12)? Had Abraham changed since Isaac was born (Gen. 18:19)? As you know, many parents do. I have known good Christian people who when they became parents couldn't tell their children "*No.*" They grew to love son or daughter more than God (Matt. 10:37). To his credit, the birth of Isaac had not changed Abraham's love for God. He loved God so much that he would give up his son when God commanded him to do so. It should be noted that in order to obey God, Abraham had to do everything just as God commanded it. Doing only part of what God commanded would have equaled total disobedience. God's instructions to Abraham contained two specifics:

- **The site** (Gen. 22:2-4) - Abraham could

not just worship anywhere. He could not choose the mountain of his choice. He had to worship in the mount of the Lord (Gen. 22:14). Today, it is not acceptable with God for men to choose the church of their choice in which to worship Him. It must be in the specified place (Isa. 2:2-3; 1 Tim. 3:15; Matt. 16:18).

- **The sacrifice** (Gen. 22:2, 9-10) – Abraham could not just offer anything. He had to offer his only son Isaac. The best lamb in his flock would not have sufficed as a substitute for his son. Today, men must offer what the Lord commands. We must employ the instrument of God’s choosing – the heart, and not the instrument of our choosing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).

Although the Lord has not commanded us to offer our only son on a certain mountain (His having done that for us), He has commanded us to worship Him in a certain mountain – the church (Isa. 2:2-3), and in a certain manner – in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). Like Abraham, to obey God, we have to do everything just as God has commanded it. To leave undone or to change even the smallest thing is to disobey entirely. Partial obedience is complete disobedience. It is “*will worship*” (Col. 2:23) and it is a waste of time (Matt. 15:9-10). Sadly, more and more are leaving the commanded worship of Jehovah for the contemporary worship of Jeroboam and others (1 Kings 12:27-31; cf. Gen. 4; Lev. 10:1-2; 1 Sam. 13:13-14; 15:19-23). Have it your way has replaced the doing it His way. I want to briefly suggest

four things wrong with the contemporary worship movement:

- **It has the wrong AIM** – The audience of worship is to be God (Matt. 4:10; John 4:23-24; Eph. 5:19-20; Rev. 22:9) and the aim of worship is to please Him (Gal. 1:10; 2 Cor. 5:9). Obviously, to please God we must come to Him by faith, because *“without faith”* it is impossible to please Him (Heb. 11:6). Since faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:17), to come to God by faith is to come to Him in the way that He has revealed in His word (John 4:23-24). It is to follow the pattern that He has given for worship (Heb. 8:5; Rom. 6:17; 2 Tim. 1:13). Sadly, I am convinced that contemporary worship is for an audience other than God and is aimed at pleasing someone other than God. In spite of all of its talk about “praise” (praise teams, choruses, etc.), I am convinced that it is more concerned with the praise of men than the praise of God (John 12:43). Although the tastes of men may have changed from the first century, God and what He desires has not (Heb. 13:8; cf. 1 Tim. 2:9-15). Thus, the worship changes that are being made by some today – applause instead of amen, performances instead of preaching, and choruses instead of congregational singing, have not been made to please God. They are based on the tastes of men rather than the truth of God (Col. 3:17). We must teach men again to put difference between holy and unholy, clean and unclean (Lev. 10:10; 11:47; 20:25; Ezek. 22:26; 44:23). Sadly, many today, like the

Samaritan woman, do not know who or what they are worshipping (John 4:22).

- **It has the wrong ACTION** – Worship is to be active rather than passive. After all, the word “*worship*” is a verb or an action word. I am convinced that contemporary worship is geared more toward watching than worshipping. No doubt, we have all been to a theatre and watched the performance of others. Sadly, some think of worship in much the same way. For sure, spectators are not just found in contemporary worship services. However, they are much more common there because it is geared toward individual or small group performances rather than corporate worship. No where is this better seen than in the area of singing. Contemporary worship features solos and choirs where more are watching than are worshipping. Yet, the New Testament teaches that singing is to be congregational (reciprocal). We are to teach and admonish one another (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).

- **It has the wrong AUTHORITY** – Scripture and not culture is to determine what we do in worship. Those who argue for contemporary worship suggest that worship must change in order to be relevant to modern man. Rather than worrying about what is wanted by man, we need to focus on what has been written by God. Let me suggest that it is man and not worship that needs to change. As Christians, we are not to be conformed to the world (Rom. 10:1-2; cf. 1 Sam. 7), including I might add, the rest of the religious world. We are to be transformed

to Christ by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 10:1-2; cf. Phil. 2:5; Matt. 26:39). As God's people, we should be easy to pick out in the religious world of today (1 Peter 2:9; Dan. 3). Our worship is distinctive. As you know, we are one of the few religious groups that doesn't use mechanical instruments of music (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16) and that observes the Lord's Supper every Lord's day (Acts 20:7).

- **It has the wrong ATTITUDE** – Contemporary worship is very relaxed in its approach to God. Often, in advertisements, it is promoted as casual both in atmosphere and attire. Basically, men come as they are and they stay as they are. True worship demands more preparation than that. It demands that man prepare to meet God (Amos 4:12), whether at the final judgment or in worship. In both atmosphere and attire, true worship is reverent (Psm. 89:7; Heb. 12:28). The worshipper must recognize that he is in the presence of Jehovah God and conduct himself accordingly (Isa. 6:1-8).

As you can see, the contemporary worship movement is just another attempt of Satan to get men to worship him rather than God (Matt. 4:9-10). May we answer him, and those serving as ministers for him, in the same way that Jesus did, with the word of God!

The Cost of Worship

There is no questioning the fact that Abraham's worship was to be costly. It was to cost him his son Isaac (Gen. 22:2). Notice how God emphasized the cost to the patriarch and to us:

- *“Take now thy son”* - God did not command Abraham to offer one of his lambs or oxen. Furthermore, God did not command him to offer one of his servants, some of whom were very precious to him (Gen. 24:2). He commanded Abraham to offer his son. Please note the emphasis that is placed on *“son”* in the context (Gen. 22:3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 16).

- *“Thine only son Isaac”* - Abraham was not just to offer any son, he was to offer his *“only son.”* He was not to offer Ishmael, his son by Hagar the handmaiden, but rather Isaac, his son by Sarah. Please note the emphasis in the context on Isaac being his only son (Gen. 22:12, 16).

- *“Whom thou lovest”* - Isaac was Abraham’s beloved Son. He had waited his whole life for him. No doubt, at this point, Abraham couldn’t imagine his life without Isaac.

It seems clear to me that God identified Isaac as He did to emphasize the cost of Abraham’s worship. Clearly, He could have expressed His command in far fewer words had He so wanted. In addition to the above mentioned cost of Abraham’s worship, there were many other smaller costs involved, including:

- **Time** - God’s command required that Abraham get up early in the morning and travel for three days (Gen. 22:3). How would you like to commit this kind of time to going to worship? Many seem to resent committing three hours or so to it on Sunday. Some complain about how far they have to drive to get to the building. Yet, they think nothing

about driving three times further to go to the mall or to a ballgame.

- **Energy** – God’s command required Abraham to expend some energy. He had to saddle his ass and get the wood (Gen. 22:3), fire (Gen. 22:6), rope (Gen. 22:9) and knife for the burnt offering ready (Gen. 22:10). The journey to the mountain and the climbing of the mountain would have also involved an additional expense of energy (Gen. 22:3-6), especially for one advanced in age like Abraham.

To his credit, Abraham was willing to pay whatever price worship required – even the price of his beloved son Isaac. No wonder he is known as “*the friend of God*” (James 2:23) and is listed in the greatest detail in Faith’s Hall of Fame (Heb. 11). Although our worship may not involve the cost of our son, it will involve costs in money (1 Cor. 16:1-2), time (Heb. 10:25), and energy (John 4:24). As you know, there are costs associated with being Jesus’ disciple that must be paid (Luke 14:25-33). Like Abraham, we must be willing to pay whatever price is required. We must not offer unto the Lord that which costs us nothing (2 Sam. 24:24; cf. Luke 21:4). Years ago, when I was in the Memphis School of Preaching, Brother Jim Dearman gave us an excellent outline on David’s statement at the threshing floor of Araunah. In the sermon, he described the following four attitudes toward giving from David’s statement:

- **I will not offer** – Some will not give to anyone or anything.
- **I will not offer unto the Lord** – Some will

give to secular causes but not to the Lord.

- **I will not offer unto the Lord that which costs me** - Some will give a token offering to the Lord.

- **I will not offer unto the Lord that which costs me nothing** - Some give to the Lord sacrificially like the Israelites who had to be restrained from bringing (Exod. 36:3-6) and the poor widow who cast in all her living (Luke 21:1-4).

Obviously, the last attitude, the attitude of David, is to be the attitude that we bring to worship.

The Culmination / Cessation Of Worship

As already noted, Abraham traveled for three days after receiving the command to offer his son on a specified mountain (Gen. 22:1-4). Although the events of these days were done in obedience to God's command, they were not worship. The text makes clear that worship had not culminated or begun yet. This point is extremely important because of the false doctrine that asserts that all of life is worship. Notice that when Abraham, Isaac, and the servants got to the base of the specified mountain that Abraham said to his servants,

Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and will come again unto you (Gen. 22:5).

Did you catch the import of Abraham's words?

- ***"I and the lad will go..."*** - The words *"will go"* reveal that worship was yet future, and

not something that they had been doing for three days.

- “...*yonder*” – “*Yonder*” suggests what was going to take place in the mount and not what had taken place on the way to the mount.

- “...*and worship*” – The words “*and worship*” suggest that worship was what they were going to do once they had gone yonder and not something that they had been doing for three days. Going yonder wasn’t worship, although it was an act of obedience.

- “...*and come again to you*” – The expression, “*and come again to you,*” reveals that worship was what was going to cease when they came out of the mount and back to the servants.

Clearly, Abraham understood that worship was something that you consciously entered into and not what you were already a part of automatically (Psm. 96:8-9; 100:2, 4). It was something that had a beginning and an end. May we understand the same simple concept today.

The Confidence Of Worship

One of the most amazing things about this text to me is the confidence that Abraham had as he entered into the worship that called for the life of his beloved son. Please consider the confidence that characterized him:

- He told his servants that he and Isaac were going to go worship and come again (Gen. 22:5). Note that they both were going to come again. The

Hebrew writer tells us that Abraham accounted that God was able to raise his son up, even from the dead (Heb. 11:19). Although a number of resurrections from the dead are recorded in the Scriptures, there is not one recorded prior to Abraham's offering Isaac on the mount. Thus, Abraham believed that God could do something that had never been done before. He must have reasoned that nothing was too hard for God (Jer. 32:17; cf. Matt. 19:26; Rom. 8:31); including, raising the dead (Acts 26:8). Obviously, if God could perform a miracle to give him a son, Abraham reasoned that He could perform a miracle to give him back his son. Faith always finds a way while unbelief always finds an excuse.

- When Isaac asked his father about where the lamb for the sacrifice was, Abraham assured his son that God would provide a lamb (Gen. 22:7-8). What did Abraham mean? Did not Abraham know that Isaac was supposed to be the lamb? Clearly, he did. It seems to me that Abraham's statement to Isaac revealed his confidence that the Judge of all the earth was going to do right (Gen. 18:25). As you recall, when the angel instructed Abraham not to slay his son, Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw a ram caught in a thicket by his horns. As Abraham told Isaac, God had provided Himself a lamb.

Obviously, to do what Abraham did on this occasion, a person would have to be fully convinced of the power and righteousness of God (Gen. 18:25; Heb. 11:13; Rom. 4:16, 18-21). I wonder if we enter into worship today with the same confidence that

Abraham did (2 Tim. 1:12; Rom. 8:38). As you know, we must come to God in faith in order to please Him (Heb. 11:6; 1 Tim. 2:8). Unless we come in faith, we seek His favor in vain (James 1:5-7; Matt. 21:22). Of course, confidence or faith is included within the inspired instructions for us to worship “in spirit” (John 4:24). Other attitudes also fall within this category. Concerning the attitude or spirit that we ought to have in worship, please consider the following definition of worship given by William Temple, the Archbishop of Canterbury:

To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, and to devote the will to the purpose of God (as qtd. in MacArthur 147).

I believe that Abraham worshipped in this way, don't you? The challenge is for you and me to do the same today. For sure, there will be some challenges present for us that were not there for the patriarch Abraham. We face the challenge of worshipping in holiness (1 Chron. 16:29; Psm. 29:2; 96:9), quietness (Hab. 2:20; Zeph. 1:7; Zech. 2:13), stillness (Psm. 46:10; Exod. 14:13), lowliness (Psm. 95:6; 131; Luke 18:9-14; Heb. 12:28), and thankfulness (Psm. 100:4) in a filthy, noisy, busy, prideful, and greedy world. For our worship to be acceptable, we must follow the example of great men like Abraham who have gone before us. We must worship with the hungriness of

David (Psm. 42:1; 63:1-2; 84:1-2; 143:6), the holiness of Isaiah (Isa. 6:1-7), the helplessness of the great debtor (Matt. 18:23-27), the happiness of the lame man (Acts 3:8), and the hopefulness of Abraham (Gen. 22:5).

The Custom Of Worship

Although the twenty-second chapter of Genesis only records one occasion of worship from the life of Abraham, it gives clear evidence that worship was a persistent practice in His life. Please note that his son Isaac knew all about worship. As they were climbing the mountain together, Isaac asked his father, "*Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?*" (Gen. 22:7). Obviously, Isaac knew something about what was needed for worship. Surely, such knowledge reveals that this was not the first time that he had been to worship with his father. Evidently, worship was a custom in his family. As you know, the book of Genesis bears this out. We find Abraham's altars all over the place (Gen. 12:7, 8; 13:4, 18). Given Abraham's habit, it is not surprising to later find Isaac and future generations engaging in the same practice (Gen. 26:25; 33:20; 35:1, 3, 7). May we demonstrate Abraham's faith and the faith of others who made worshipping God a custom. As you recall, we find that Jesus was in this holy habit. Luke records,

And he came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath

day, and stood up for to read (Luke 4:16;
cf. Mark 3:3).

Like Isaac, Jesus saw His parents set this habit before Him (Luke 2:41-42). Can you imagine God selecting a family for His Son that would not have been in this habit? I cannot. God's word makes clear that He wants us to develop the same habit in our families (Heb. 10:25). Sadly, many are not present each time that the doors are open. Years ago, the late Gus Nichols, explored the foolishness of missing services in a poem entitled, *But Not On Sunday Night*. Consider the words with me:

I love the church that Jesus bought
And know that it is right.
I go there every Sunday morn,
But not on Sunday night.
I love to sing the songs of God,
Such worship must be right.
And this I do on Sunday morn,
But not on Sunday night.
I love to hear the Gospel, too,
It gives me pure delight.
I hear it every Sunday morn,
But not on Sunday night.
And may God bless our preacher, too,
And give him power and might.
And put a sinner in my place
At worship Sunday night.
It's true, the church can save the world,
If good light shines bright.
I help it every Sunday morn,
But not on Sunday night.

Yes, all of us must one day die,
I hope I'll be doing right.
So may I die on Sunday morn,
But not on Sunday night!

I believe that you get our dearly departed brother's point, don't you? Those who love God as they should will be present at every service. A few years ago, I came across an excellent sermon outline book by Brother Delamar Owens. One of the sermons in the book was entitled, *"What Does The Sunday Morning Christian Miss?"* In the lesson, Brother Owens pointed out that the Sunday Morning Christian misses information (2 Tim. 4:2), association (Matt. 18:20; John 20:24-26; 1 John 1:7), edification (1 Cor. 14:12; Eph. 4:16), immunization (Psm. 119:9, 11; John 15:3), confirmation (Acts 14:22; 15:32; 2 Pet. 1:12; Jude 5), and jubilation (Rom. 12:15; 1 Cor. 12:26; Acts 8:39; Luke 15:7, 10). For sure, we need to be at every service because God ordained it for man's good.

The Coordination Of Worship

The text makes clear that Abraham did not enter into worship in a haphazard fashion. Please consider the evidence of his coordination:

- He packed the supplies that he would need for worship before leaving home (Gen. 22:3). Abraham didn't get a day away from home and have to turn back for something.
- He had the supplies that he needed for worship as he climbed the mountain (Gen. 22:6). Abraham didn't get to the top of the mountain only to realize that he was missing something needed to

carry out the sacrifice.

- When he got to the top of the mountain he *“laid the wood in order”* and proceeded in an orderly or coordinated fashion to offer the sacrifice that God had commanded (Gen. 22:9; cf. 1 Kings 18:33; Lev. 1:7-8, 12; 6:12). As you know, there is an art to building a good fire whether in the fireplace, on the barbeque grill, or on an altar.

How haphazard our worship must seem in comparison to Abraham’s. We often rush about looking for our Bible, our checkbook, and the other items needed for worship on Sunday morning. How often do we find ourselves at worship without what we need to worship properly? Surely, such worship cannot be acceptable to the Almighty who is ordered in all that He does (1 Cor. 14:33). For our worship to be pleasing to God, it must be done *“decently and in order”* (1 Cor. 14:40).

The Clarity Of Worship

In spite of his confidence in God, some things must have been unclear to Abraham as he climbed the mountain with Isaac to worship. Why had God commanded him to offer his only son Isaac? Why had God required a human sacrifice instead of the animal sacrifices always required before? How would God keep His promise concerning Abraham’s seed? These and other matters must have somewhat perplexed the patriarch. However, at the top of the mountain, things would become clear. Notice the emphasis upon what is seen at the top of the mountain:

- *“And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked,*

and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns..." (Gen. 22:13). Here was that lamb that Abraham had confidently told Isaac that the Lord would provide (Gen. 22:8). Here was the gift of God's grace that prefigured the gift that would take our place on the wood as well (Rom. 5:15). It was in the mount as he worshipped that Abraham saw more clearly the grace of God (Acts 11:23; Titus 2:11). In like manner, it is in our worship, as we observe the Lord's Supper, sing the Old Rugged Cross, thank God for the gift of His Son in prayer, remember the gift and express gratitude by our own gifts, and preach Christ crucified, that we see the grace of God in all of its glory.

- *"And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovahjireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen"* (Gen. 22:14). In the mount, in the midst of worship, things became clear. First, in the mount, God saw what Abraham would do. He saw that Abraham would indeed offer his only son whom he dearly loved (Gen. 22:12). Secondly, Abraham saw what God would do. He saw that God would provide a sacrifice in the stead of his son (Gen. 22:13; cf. John 8:56).

It seems clear to me that worship has a way of making things clear. Things that confuse us and trouble us are clarified as we pour out our hearts in worship. One of my favorite texts in this regard comes from the life of David. David admitted that his *"feet were almost gone"* and that his *"steps had well nigh slipped"* when he was *"envious at the foolish"* and the *"prosperity of the wicked"* (Psm. 73:2-3). He didn't

understand how that those about him were never molested though in the wrong (Psm. 73:3-12) and he was molested though in the right (Psm. 73:13-16). He admitted that when he thought to know this, it was too painful or difficult for him until he *"went into the sanctuary of God"* (Psm. 73:16-17). It was in the sanctuary of God that he could see clearly. It was there that he understood their end and saw the destruction that was awaiting them (Psm. 73:17-20). Worship pricked his heart and helped him to see how foolish he had been in envying the wicked (Psm. 73:21:22). In like manner, I believe that worship will help to do the same thing for us (Psm. 18:28; 19:8).

The Crown Of Worship

When Abraham concluded his worship, the angel of God reaffirmed the promise of blessing that God had earlier given to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). We read,

And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice (Gen. 22:16-18).

Notice the references to blessing and obedience in these three verses. Because Abraham obeyed the voice of the Lord, God blessed him and His seed. True worship not only crowns the worshipped, but the worshipper (Psm. 21:1-6; 103:1-6). As you recall, it was because of his obedience on this occasion that Abraham came to be called the Friend of God. James wrote,

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness:) and he was called the Friend of God (James 2:21-23; cf. 2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8).

As you recall, Abraham's obedient worship was one of the things for which he was noted in Faith's Hall of Fame (Heb. 11:17-19). God picked him (Gen. 18:19), proved him (Gen. 22), and praised him (James 2:23). In like manner, if we will worship and walk as God commands, we can also be the friend of God (John 15:14) and have our name found among the faithful (Luke 10:20; Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5).

Conclusion

The glory of Abraham's worship, as glorious as it was, cannot compare with the glory of worship in the church. It would be the equivalent of comparing

starlight with sunlight, as we often talk about in discussing the dispensations in personal Bible studies. What a privilege to be in the church and to offer God the worship that He deserves, desires, demands, and defines under the New Covenant (John 4:23-24). Sadly, many today are not offering God the glorious worship that He wants. The famous Baptist preacher, Charles Spurgeon, correctly summarized things when he wrote,

Many may be met with who know God, but never glorify him as God, because they never adore him, and worship him, with the love of their hearts. They go to church or to some place of worship regularly, and sing psalms and hymns, and they may even have family-prayer at home; but their heart has never adored the living God with living love. Their worship has a name to live, but it is dead. They present to the Lord all the eternal harvest of worship, but the corn is gone, only the straw and the husk are there.

We must make sure that we do not offer to God the husk of worship without the corn (Ezek. 33:31; Matt. 15:8). If we do, we will fall short of the glory of God and our worship will be found wanting (Rev. 11:1; Dan. 5:27).

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Chapter 8

The Influence Of The Glorious Church

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The beauty of Christianity is that it spreads by influence, not intimidation, and by persuasion, not pressure. Random House College Dictionary defines the word influence as *“the capacity or power to produce effects on others by intangible or indirect means.”* It then offers the words sway, direct, induce and persuade (among others) as synonyms (683). Influence is different from coercion, or compulsion, in that it affects one’s volition. It is one thing to make a person do something; it is another to cause a person to want to do something. Herein lies the mechanism for the growth and spread of the glorious church. The gospel of Christ is powerful beyond complete human

understanding (Rom. 1:16; Heb. 4:12), but it does not reduce its hearers to mere robots. Such would be the case if man were simply overpowered, or forced, to obey the glad tidings. The gospel exercises its power upon the hearts of those who hear and believe it (cf. Heb. 4:2), affecting the actual will of the individual himself. As the good and honest heart learns of God's love for him, he in turn is prompted to love God back (1 John 4:19). Such love involves the keeping of God's commandments (1 John 5:3).

One way the gospel exerts its influence upon the world is the through the lives of God's children, the glorious church (cf. Gal. 3:26-27; 1 Cor. 12:13). No better "*advertising*" can be given the church than that through the righteous lives of her faithful members. Though it is not always fair, or even accurate, many in the world will judge the church by the lives of members whom they know. Every member of Christ's church needs to remember this fact.

Further, each member of the glorious church possesses a sphere of influence peculiar only to him/her. There are those with whom one comes in contact, interacts, and even maintains relationships. These comprise the sphere of the individual Christian's influence. It is imperative that the child of God lives faithfully before the world, for he may be the only link to the truth for those within this sphere. There may very well be souls that one particular Christian could reach, while sundry others would be unsuccessful. This likely holds true for every individual child of God.

Matthew 5:13-16

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Matt. 5:13-16).

Christ's Sermon on the Mount would rank as one of the most powerful sermons in all the Bible – if not the most powerful. Though Matthew's account can be read aloud in twenty minutes or less, the sermon is replete with spiritual richness from the beginning word to the concluding sentence. The above passage is included in that great storehouse of spiritual wisdom. Therein Christ describes His people using two familiar figures: salt and light.

One of the most memorable and poetic descriptions of Christ people would likely be *"the salt of the earth."* Though this statement has been adopted into everyday vernacular, often being used as a cliché, there is still the need to ask, *"What did Christ mean by this?"* A number of observations will be helpful.

First, the salt (Christ's disciples) is set in contrast to the earth (the lost world). In this figure the salt

is providing something to/for the world which the world itself is unable to provide. There are many foods which, in and of themselves, would be very objectionable without any kind of salt, or seasoning. In the same way, one shudders to imagine this world without any traces of God's righteous remnant. How dark and distasteful!

Second, it is obvious that salt increases palatability. As mentioned above, how many foods would be refused if it were not for salt and other good seasonings? Similarly, one cannot help but understand that Christ's righteous people provide "*a better taste in God's Divine mouth*" with regard to this present world. How utterly offensive and disagreeable would this earthly realm be without the precious salt of Christ's glorious church!

Third, salt was widely used in ancient times as a preservative. In the absence of vacuum sealing and refrigeration, many foods were "salted down" in order to prevent their ruining. Do not Christ's people likewise have a preserving effect on this present world? What reason would a God of holiness and truth have for letting a world go on that was utterly devoid of righteousness and love? One remembers reading about a time in which there was not enough salt to preserve the antediluvian world (Gen. 6:5-13). Later in human history there would not be enough salt in the cities of the plain to preserve them (Gen. 18:20-33). Even so, the glorious church today stands forth in a sin-sick world, furthering both the palatability and preservation of this world before a longsuffering God (cf. 2 Peter 3:9).

Christ's description of His people as "*the light of the world*" touches upon a much more familiar New Testament concept. Light is often employed on the pages of inspiration to denote truth, knowledge and righteousness, while darkness contrastingly stands for error, ignorance and wickedness. Christ describes His people, the church, as light, because their knowledge of the truth is manifested in righteousness. Darkness characterizes the world which John warned his readers not to love (Eph. 6:12; 1 John 2:15-17). Later in the same epistle John would write, "*And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness*" (1 John 5:19).

In Matthew 5:14-16, this spiritually luminous aspect of Christ's people is spoken of in terms of its effect on the lost world. Christ urges His disciples to live godly and benevolent lives everyday – especially before unbelievers. His intention for His people is that they be a "*city set upon a hill.*" That is, their righteousness is to be unmistakable and undeniable; the world should readily recognize the church as the church. The world's attitude toward the church may be positive or negative, but the identity and integrity of the church should be without question.

Christ further teaches that His disciples negate their purpose for existence if they hide or hinder their "*Christian light.*" It makes no more sense for a Christian to hide his light (hinder his influence) through unfaithfulness and neglect, than it does for a person to light a candle, only to place it under a basket. The very purpose for which a candle is lit is illumination. Similarly, God has enlightened His

glorious church with the intent that her members would radiate the light of their Savior into a world lost in darkness (cf. 1 Peter 2:9; Heb. 6:4).

That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world (Phil. 2:15).

In the final verse of this passage (Matt. 5:16), Christ clearly explains the manner in which one lets his spiritual light shine: through good works. The faithful Christian life should be one that is readily discerned, even by an outsider. When the world sees a Christian, it should see a difference. The lives of those in the world are characterized by wicked works; this was true of the Colossians before their conversion (Col. 1:21). However, Paul urged the Romans to shirk such works of darkness and to live converted lives (Rom. 13:11-14). In fact, faithful Christians should refuse to fellowship “the unfruitful works of darkness” in any shape, form or fashion (Eph. 5:11). Such a transformation will definitely be noticed by those who remain in the world, and Peter pointed out that scoffing and persecution may ensue.

That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine,

revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you (1 Peter 4:2-4).

The void left by the casting off of evil works must then be filled with good works. Christianity has never been only about what one does not or cannot do. Christianity is active, diligent and zealous—it most definitely possesses a positive aspect. While the glorious church may impress the world with her holiness and abstinence from evil, she definitely influences the world with her diligence and industry in that which is good. All the good that is done by Christ's people is observed by somebody, somewhere. And in the event that no other human being realizes a particular good work, the child of God can rest assured that his Father knows and will not forget (Heb. 6:10).

1 Peter 2:11-15

Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.

For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: (1 Peter 2:11-15).

Peter was concerned with his readers' influence as he penned his first general epistle. In the above passage, Peter touches upon three areas in which God's children can exert a positive influence on the world and, hopefully, overcome antagonism. The first area is personal holiness, the second beautiful benevolence, and the third civil lawfulness.

Carnality is completely counter to Christianity and is destructive to the cause of Christ in more ways than one. It is obviously hurtful to the apostate living that sinful lifestyle. Peter himself stated that fleshly lusts "*war against the soul.*" Paul adds the following from two of his epistles.

That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace (Rom. 8:4-6).

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting (Gal 6:7-8).

The message of scripture is clear: deeds done in the fleshly body are able to condemn the immortal soul

to hell. Hence, the Bible is replete with warnings to abstain from all forms of carnality/immorality.

The damage done by such fleshly sins is not limited to the offender himself. Peter continued his thought by writing, *"Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles..."* When members of the church live like the world lives, participating in the sins in which the world participates, the glorious church loses its distinctiveness and ceases to be glorious. Peter understood well this fact. He knew that if the unbelievers (Gentiles) saw the same fleshly indulgence in supposed Christians as in the rest of society as a whole, then there would be no reason to believe that Christianity was any nobler or better than any other religion.

"Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles" (1 Peter 2:12) is a further elaboration of what is involved in abstaining from fleshly lusts (1 Peter 2:11). Obviously, *"conversation"* in the KJV means conduct, or behavior, and it is so rendered in other translations. By abstaining from fleshly lusts, the child of God conducts himself in a manner that is *"honest"* (KJV), or even better rendered, *"honorable."* The Greek word herein describing the model conduct of Christians is both interesting and complex. Woods wrote the following.

[The word translated "honest"] also includes that which is beautiful, harmonious, lovely, and symmetrical. Works, in order to be good in God's sight, must also be beautiful; and it matters not how much one's life may conform to the laws of morality and

right, it is imperfect unless it also measures to the law of beauty, i.e., to beautiful and lovely conduct.) We are just as obligated to make our lives attractive and beautiful to others as we are to make them pure. He who exhibits a stern and unbending disposition, though his life be an exemplary one, is lacking in the qualities which are described in the Bible as good (67).

With holiness in a Christian's life there should also come an attractiveness. A soul searching for truth, though mired down in sin, should be both refreshed and encouraged by encountering a child of God. The sinner should be able to observe the purity of the Christian's life as a spectator, while experiencing the beauty and benevolence of it as a beneficiary.

From its very beginning, Christianity has faced antagonism, and at times, fierce persecution. At times and places in history where such antagonism did not reach the point of bodily persecution, it would often manifest itself in disparaging and slanderous words. Peter prescribed a holy and beautiful life as a ready refutation of the enemies' accusations. People may say what they wish, but a person's actions speak for themselves. Peter was urging his readers to persistently live lives that were holy and happy, benevolent and beautiful, in hopes that their enemies would eventually be "*won over*." It appears that Peter even alluded to a time, or occasion, wherein Christians might help with the needs of those outside the fold of safety. In this way, the "*day of visitation*" probably refers to a day wherein the needs of the

unconverted are visited, or met. All good and perfect blessings come from God (James 1:17), but how often does God use His glorious church as the instrument of His blessing? Understood in this way, 1 Peter 2:12 becomes a very important text pertaining to the influence of the church and how that influence can be exerted for good by means of benevolence.

Finally, faithful members of the glorious church protect their influence by being law-abiding citizens. Of the sundry charges leveled against Christians in the first three centuries, those of a criminal nature often abounded. Christians were accused of being rebel-rousers, or "*turning the world upside down*" (Acts 17:6). It was not uncommon for them to be charged with treason, or disloyalty to Caesar. The enemies of the cross would do and say whatever they could to bring Christianity into a clash with the civil powers of that day. Therefore, it was vitally important that God's people were very circumspect in their daily lives, living as "*model citizens.*"

Peter commanded this of his readers (1 Peter 2:13-14). Both then and now, Christians are to obey every civil law – the only exception being a civil law which brings one into contradiction of God's law (cf. Acts 5:29). Such obedience is to be rendered for "*the Lord's sake.*" In this way Christians obey their Lord by obeying the law of the land (with the one exception above); civil government is an institution of God. Paul established this fact in writing to the Romans.

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God:

the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour (Rom. 13:1-7).

God's intended purpose for civil government was the punishment of evildoers, or criminals. How unseemly for a child of God to be found among that crowd! A Christian does harm to his personal influence, and the glorious church is given a black-eye, when one refuses to obey the laws of the land. When such is the case, then the charges of the enemy are founded—a child of God is found at fault, and the cause of Christ suffers a setback.

On the other hand, however, great good can be accomplished when God's children obey the

law of the land. No legitimate accusation can be brought against the church, and her reputation in the community remains sterling. In this way the mouths of those who would slander God's people are stopped, and hopefully, their attitudes will change as well over time (1 Peter 2:15).

Matthew 13:33

Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened (Matt. 13:33).

That the terms "*church*" and "*kingdom of heaven*" are often used interchangeably in the New Testament is undeniable. In Matthew 16:18-19, Jesus promised to build His church in one breath, and then promised to give the keys of the kingdom of heaven in the very next statement. Would Jesus build one entity or institution, only to offer the keys to another one altogether? Absolutely not! In writing to the Colossians, Paul explicitly states that they were in the kingdom (Col. 1:13), only to write later that they had been called into one body (Col. 3:15). This body Paul identified as being the church (Col. 1:18, 24). Were the Colossians so overly privileged as to be in two Divine institutions? No. They were members of the church; citizens in the kingdom; Christians. All are synonymous expressions. This fact being clearly established, one understands Matthew 13:33 to be a parable regarding the glorious church. Perhaps

no greater text can be found in all of God's word regarding the influence of that church.

The word "*leaven*" refers to the rising agent added to bread. Sain offers these helpful comments.

The word leaven is a substance for producing fermentation, and in general, signifies sour dough. What they knew as leaven in Bible times we would simply refer to as yeast. In ancient times leaven as a separate ingredient was not available as it is today. In the leavening of bread, dough was kept over from previous baking and mixed with new dough to ferment it (100).

These facts help one to realize the pervasive power of leaven. A remnant of older dough could be added to the new and eventually leaven the entire lump! At least one lesson is unmistakable in this parable: the spread of influence.

At least a couple of parallels could be drawn between the influence of leaven in a lump of dough and the power of the gospel in the lives of men. One, the actual working of both is unseen. Obviously, this is not to say the effects of such influence are unseen, but rather the process itself is hidden from physical, human eyes. In both cases, the respective processes are inward. After being "*hidden*" in the meal, the leaven spreads throughout the lump "*from the inside out.*" Likewise, once the seed of God's word is planted in good and honest hearts, the gospel transforms lives "*from the inside out*" (Luke 8:11-15;

1 Peter 1:22-23; Rom. 1:16). Paul wrote the following concerning this transformation.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (Rom. 12:1-2).

Two, both leaven and the kingdom of heaven are very powerful in relatively small quantities. Though the leaven was “*outnumbered*” by the three measures of meal, it still produced its desired effect—throughout the whole lump! One must remember the simple statement used in scripture to convey this very fact: “*A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump,*” (Gal. 5:9; emp. mine, CG). Similarly, the kingdom of heaven had seemingly small and modest beginnings; nonetheless, it swept over the first century world like a mighty wave. In choosing His apostles, Jesus only chose twelve men initially, not twelve hundred or twelve thousand! To these men the Great Commission was initially given (Mark 16:14-20), and Paul would later write that the gospel had been preached to the world of that day (Col. 1:23). Young offers these helpful observations.

A small amount of leaven is capable of influencing a much larger mass. This was Paul’s point in using the figure of leaven

to warn the church about tolerating sin in their midst (1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9). Once introduced, it operates quietly, unseen as it permeates the whole. Though it seems small in comparison to the lump, it dramatically alters all the dough with which it comes into contact, making it lighter and more palatable. In this the leaven in the meal provides a most fitting analogy for the effect of the Gospel in the hearts of men and, in turn, the world as a whole (310).

Hence, the parable of the leaven reminds one of the statement made by the country preacher, "*Little is much when God is in it.*" Elsewhere in scripture one sees this principle exemplified in the little boy and little fishes (John 6:9), as well as in the church of Christ at Philadelphia – the church with little strength (Rev. 3:7-13). Christ is certainly in His kingdom, the glorious church (cf. Eph. 1:22-23); therefore that kingdom, even in seemingly small quantities, is able to wield a mighty influence in this present world of darkness.

Another word needs to be said about influence before leaving this parable of the leaven. It is interesting to note that in virtually every other occurrence in scripture, leaven is used symbolically in a negative sense. It is used in reference to the hypocrisy of the Pharisees (Luke 12:1), the presence of immorality in the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 5:6-8), and the influence of false teachers amid the churches in Galatia (Gal. 5:9). In each of these instances, leaven is used to represent the spread of corruption

because of sin. Undeniably, sin is contagious and, if left unchecked, will spread and influence others for evil. Nevertheless the parable of the leaven is a refreshing lesson in the scriptures regarding influence. From this parable we learn that righteousness can also be diffusive, spreading throughout the world and influencing others for good. The glorious church, then, must not sit idly by as the devil and his servants continue feverishly at their work. Theirs is the work of leading men's souls to eternal perdition; the church has the glorious work of leading men to Christ and to eternal salvation. Therefore the glorious church must be ever vigilant, ever working, ever active—exerting an influence on the world for good which only the power of the gospel can accomplish!

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Chapter 9

The Discipline Of The Glorious Church

Robert R. Taylor, Jr.



A graduate of Freed-Hardeman, David Lipscomb and George Peabody College for Teachers. Preaching since 1949. Author of various excellent volumes. Involved in radio, television and prison works. Annually speaks in about a dozen meetings and two dozen lectureships. For over thirty years he has worked with the Ripley, TN church. Irene and Robert have two children and four precious grandchildren.

In current society there are “*in*” terms and “*out*” terms. The former are popular, readily accepted and include rebellion, disrespect, irreverent, immoral, unpatriotic, pluralism and hatred for the good and right. The latter are unpopular and thus largely rejected and ignored. Some “*out*” terms are authority, respect, discipline, truth, morality, organized religion and patriotism. This study will focus on discipline. Discipline has faded in the home, the school, the workplace, governmental bodies, corporate structures and religious scenes. It is still demanded in the military and the realm of athletics. Yet in these there is frequently a lapse of discipline. Look at the cheating and sex scandals

that have rocked military establishments between military men and women. The realm of sports has seen case after case of gambling, substance abuse and well publicized cases of stars deeply involved in immoral escapades. Some will miss Hall of Fame honors because of such infractions.

It ought to be different in the church relative to discipline but frequently it is not. There ought to be a fear and dread in the heart of every member that if *"I mess up my life, discipline will follow as surely as night follows day."* However, frequently this is not the case. People can sin grievously at will with the whole community knowing of such and little is said or done by way of demanded discipline.

Discipline Is Necessary For Purity

Paul proved this conclusively in 1 Corinthians 5 with the calloused Corinthian member who had taken his father's wife. Quite obviously, this would have been his step-mother since Paul did not refer to the woman as mother of the incentive thief. It was such an abominable crime that even pagan Gentiles would not stoop so low (v. 1). Were Corinthian members saddened by such? Not in the least. To the contrary complacent Corinthians were puffed up; they were proud and pleased with the tolerant patience with which they treated such heinous transgression—marital theft at its very worst. They were not mourners in the least relative to this sexual crime. Paul was appalled by such. He demanded congregational withdrawal from this fallen member. The salvation of the man's soul was

at stake (v. 5). Their glorying in this accepted decorum in their very midst was not good. Did they not know that a little leaven, this flagrant fornication, leavened the whole lump (v. 6)? They were commanded to,

Purge out therefore the old leaven,
that ye may be a new lump, as ye are
unleavened. For even Christ our passover
is sacrificed for us (v. 7).

This "*leaven of malice and wickedness*" had to be removed. The man's soul and congregational purity were both in the middle of the picture—a surely sad one in Corinth. Discipline had faded the congregational picture and needed to be restored. Other sins are mentioned in the remnant of the chapter that constituted more undesirable leaven in the lump (vs. 9-11).

Congregational discipline and congregational purity go hand in hand. Allow the former to fade the scene and the latter will soon be gone.

In the very same chapter in which Paul spoke of the glorious church he wrote this piercing precept,

And have no fellowship with the
unfruitful works of darkness, but rather
reprove them (Eph. 5:11).

Fellowshipping darkness and being the glorious church do not come wrapped up in the same spiritual package. It could not work that way with the Ephesian congregation in the first century and neither can it for congregations in the twenty-first century.

Discipline: The Forgotten Commandment

Jesus did not intend it to become the forgotten commandment in the matter of settling personal offenses where one was guilty and the other innocent (Matt. 18:15-17). Yet, how very frequently do people in such situations ignore the four prudent steps proposed by Jesus for the solving of the same. Paul did not mean for tolerant Corinth to forget discipline in 1 Corinthians 5. He told them what duty required. That they did not forget his instructions or ignore them is set forth in 2 Corinthians 2 and 7 when the problem was solved to the satisfaction of all the concerned ones. Paul did not intend for the Ephesians to sully the glorious church by extending fellowship to the wicked works of darkness (Eph. 5:11, 27). He did not intend for Roman saints to forget about the marking and avoiding of elements of error or forms of falsehood (16:17-18). He did not intend for the Thessalonians to forget discipline in 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15. He did not intend for Timothy and Titus to forget discipline requirements as this topic is on the front burner in the three evangelistic epistles (1 Tim. 1:19-20; 6:3-5; 2 Tim. 1:15; 2:16-18; 3:16-17; Titus 3:9-10). The whole counsel of God demanded proper teaching about instructive and corrective (punitive) discipline in that one-two order of emphasis.

Discipline was the strong order of the day with the elect lady and her children relative to entertaining false teachers in their home (2 John 9-11). We are made to wonder why the daring Diotrephes arose to such infamous heights of fondness for first place

and power plays. Was there no discipline exercised at any time in his past? John surely intended to take stringent measures of corrective discipline against him when he came (3 John 9-10).

Discipline was not to be the forgotten commandment as Pergamos and Thyatira dealt with the teaching and practices of Balaam and Jezebel respectively (Rev. 2:12-29). Remedial actions were long overdue in both of these Asiatic congregations.

Discipline must not be allowed to become the forgotten commandment either in whole or part. It is my judgment that we have done far better with the instructive part of discipline than we have with the punitive or punishable part of it. We need both.

Preventive And Corrective Discipline

Relative to our health it is better to prevent sickness or injury than to correct it when once contacted. Relative to travel it is far better to prevent a wreck than to remedy such when the collision has occurred. Relative to marriage and the home it is better to prevent the break-up than to correct it when the damage has been inflicted. Think of the unfaithful mate seeking to rectify the great damage and extreme hurt inflicted. The marriage may survive but who would not say that it would have been far better to have prevented the adultery? Think of the rebellious child, now penitent, seeking to mend fences when there is an elder brother or other relative unwilling to tender forgiveness. Forgiveness may be extended and yet the hurt and consequences may never be erased totally.

David found that to be the case with Bathsheba and later with Absalom. It would have been far better to have prevented the adulterous activity and later Absalom's rebellion through better child rearing than correcting such when both materialized. David never recovered from either of these great tragedies. Relative to congregational problems it is better to prevent them than to deal with division and congregational break-ups when they once erupt. There is no need to belabor this point.

Preventive discipline is very comprehensive in nature. In Matthew 18:15-17 the three prescribed steps are intended to prevent the fourth—having to treat the obstinate one “as an heathen man and a publican” (v. 17). In the two Corinthian epistles Paul wrote much about immorality and idolatry—common sins in Corinthian society. Preventing such among the members would eliminate punitive or corrective measures such as that demanded in 1 Corinthians 5 about flagrant fornication or about idol connections in 1 Corinthians 10.

Among the Thessalonians it was far superior to keep members orderly, keepers of apostolic traditions and the powerful words addressed to them in this epistle than dealing with the disorderly and the disobedient (2 Thess. 3:6, 14-15). Preventive discipline had been urged upon them when Paul enjoined them to,

warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men (1 Thess. 5:14).

Prevention was preferred over the punitive for a surety.

In the three evangelistic epistles written to Timothy and Titus it would have been far better to prevent those who made ship wreck of the faith, taught unwholesome words, engaged in ungodly decorum, overthrew the faith of some and the teaching of heretical matters than punitive measures when they developed (1 Tim. 1:19-20; 6:3-5; 2 Tim. 2:17-18; Titus 3:9-10).

In Hebrews Paul knew it was far better to prevent their abandoning Christianity for abolished Judaism than dealing with such apostasy punitively when the break materialized.

In 1 John 4 it was better to try the spirits of error and reject them properly than to accept such then having to correct such when embraced and practiced.

In 2 John 9-11 it was far better for the elect lady and her children to reject promptly purveyors of falsehood than to correct such after a home welcome had been extended.

In Revelation 2-3 it would have been far better for Ephesus to have retained her first love, for Pergamos to have rejected Balaam's doctrine forthrightly, for Thyatira to have stopped Jezebel at her first teaching and adulterous practices, for Sardis to have avoided her travels toward Tombstone Territory and for Laodicea to have stayed fervent instead of her plunge into lethal lukewarmness than punitively dealing with all such after the fact.

By a constant diet of sound doctrine and persistent encouragement for all to stay faithful we can avoid having later to take corrective or punitive measures.

But when the instructive fails we must appeal to and practice with zeal punitive procedures. Jesus knew that in Matthew 18:17. Paul knew that in Romans 16:17-18. He knew that in 1 Corinthians 5. He knew that in 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15. He was acutely aware of this in 1 Timothy 1:19-20; 6:3-5; 2 Tim. 1:15; 2:17-18 and Titus 3:9-10. Paul was aware of this throughout Hebrews. Corrective measures must follow if they fell back into Judaism—the direction they definitely were pursuing with reckless haste.

John knew this in 1 John 4, 2 John 9-11 and 3 John 9-10. He, Jesus and the Spirit of truth knew this in dealing with five of the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 which threatened future survival as congregations of the Lord's people.

Conclusion

Preventive discipline receives a major motivation when members are sure that corrective discipline is certainly in the background ready to spring forth if they remain obstinate and unrelenting in sin.

Chapter 10

The Home And The Glorious Church

Curtis A. Cates



Brother Cates has been faithfully preaching the gospel for almost fifty years. Holds various degrees from respected universities. Since 1982 he has served as Director of the Memphis School of Preaching. Author of various superb volumes. Mission work in Singapore, Malaysia, and Russia. Annette and Curtis have two sons (both are faithful gospel preachers) and four grandchildren.

Deep appreciation is expressed to the outstanding East Hill congregation, to the elders, and to brother Paul Sain, director of the *Truth In Love Lectureship*, for this great study on "*The Glorious Church*." The indescribable purchase price—the innocent blood of the only begotten Son of God—is a clear testimony of the precious value and pristine glory of the Lord's church (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:13-14; Eph. 3:21). Thanks be to God that the body of Christ was in His eternal purpose (Eph. 3:10-11)!

The Home

The home is the oldest of God's three great

institutions, the other two being the government and the church. These three institutions are so interrelated that as goes one, so go the other two. For example, the home is the very foundation, fabric, and hope of society—and of the church. As goes the homes, so goes the nation—and our destiny. The homes in America are under tremendous threat from Humanism, secularism, rampant ungodliness, ridicule of everything that is sacred and absolute, human philosophy, ignorance, apathy, worldliness, and false religion. This is a time when that which is warped, perverted, lewd, and sordid is glorified and deified.

In the minds of many persons, the home is an out-dated, worn-out, non-essential relic of antiquity. At one time it required a Godly home; now it takes "*a village.*"

Instituted by God

The home was instituted by God in the Garden of Eden, thus God is to have all authority in the home (Gen. 1:26-27; 2:24). If God is not given ultimate authority, then the home will not be truly happy nor accomplish its purpose. If the sacred pattern is followed, there is the greatest joy; if abandoned, there is dreaded tragedy and misery. As God designed the home, it is a great shelter from storms, assaults, and sorrows of the world; if it fails, then it brings the greatest pain.

Success Dependent Upon Each Member

Every member of the family is vitally important in making the home a place of beauty, happiness,

peace, and security. If any member fails, everyone in the household is affected, and happiness is marred. As the fragrance of a flower fills a room, so loving, beautiful, generous sacrificing of each mate, parent, child enriches the whole home; however, every person must honor and live according to the sacred pattern for the home. As a smooth-running engine depends upon every part, as a beautiful painting upon the combination of every color, as a pleasant musical harmony upon every note, so harmony, pleasure, and endurance in each family depend upon every family member.

The Glorious Church Supports The Foundation Principles Of The Home

In the first place, the church from the Word urges two persons contemplating marriage to be mature. Marriage is not for children. It is a serious responsibility requiring maturation as well as chronological age; some never gain the necessary maturity, stability, and common sense.

Great and sincere dedication is necessary to make marriage work (1 Cor. 16:13). The husband must realize he is no longer a child and must put away childish things; now he is concerned with food, shelter, clothing; now he is responsible for the spiritual and physical welfare of the wife, children when they come along, and himself. He now has grown-up responsibilities and decisions—the immature, flippant, and shiftless need not apply.

The wife will be willing to submit to her

husband's headship [who submits to Christ, but is not a "lord," a dictator, or a tyrant] (Eph. 5:25, 28-33), who truly loves his wife and sacrifices for her. The wife must be mature enough to accept responsibility to love her husband (Titus 2:2-5), fulfill responsibility to the children, keep the home, meet the emotional and physical needs of her husband (and he hers) and be the emotional hub of the family.

In the second place, the church from the Word urges the husband and the wife to demonstrate mutual, sacrificial love; love that is taught, not "*fallen into*" (Titus 2:4). The proper environment must be provided for love to grow.

The husband is commanded to love his wife, and she reciprocates (Eph. 5:25, 28; Titus 2:4). The husband is to build up his wife, encourage, praise, and treat her like the queen of the household she can become, and she is to support her husband in his responsibility as head of the home.

Love is to include mutual respect, love, et al (Eccl. 9:9); they are on the same team, to be best friends, share the same sorrows, joys, and confidences of life.

Children are to honor, love, and obey their parents. God placed parents as authority over their children (Eph. 6:1-4).

In the third place, the church from the Word urges the husband to provide for his wife and children. This has been true in every dispensation (Exod. 21:10; Rom. 12:17; Gen. 3:19; et al). It includes sustenance, clothing, duties of marriage; the emotionally, physically,

intellectually unprepared should not marry (1 Tim. 5:8).

Unless the husband becomes incapacitated by debilitating illness or by some other unavoidable situation, he should not shift responsibility to some other; *"show thyself a man."* Of course, it is understood that sometimes the wife may need and/or may choose to work outside the home to assist her husband with the financial area. At the same time, the wife, children, or husband may never be satisfied by what they have and may place great strain on the marriage; we must live within our income.

In the fourth place, the church from the Word urges the husband and wife to cleave to each other, the pattern of God from the beginning of Creation (Gen. 1:26-27; Mark 10:6; Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:4-5). He is married to **her**, and she is to **him**. He is to *"leave"* and to *"cleave;"* the parents are not to undermine their children's marriage—either or both sets of parents. Some parents are responsible for breakups, divorces; parents are to *"cut apron strings"* and realize that they reared their children in preparation for marriage (Eph. 5:31).

The two become one (cf. 1 Sam. 2:19); hand in hand they walk together through life. Marriage is for life (Matt. 19:6), otherwise persons are called adulterers (Rom. 7:1-4). There is only one scriptural right for divorce and remarriage (Matt. 19:9), and one who violates the sanctity of marriage is a heinous criminal (Job 31:9-12; Mal. 2:16). We must make our marriage work; divorce is not the solution. We must

teach our children God's marriage law; we must not allow them to be influenced by the Edge of Doom on television, or culture, or what is allowed by the state, etc.

Marriage partners must *"take heed to your spirit"* and refuse to be tempted by others; God hates putting away (Mal. 2:14-16).

God's law must be taken **seriously** by congregations and exercise loving discipline; else, we will fill the congregations with adulterers; and, the truth on marriage will be *"forbidden"* by worldly, compromising, no-backbone members and elders—an abomination to God (1 Cor. 5). Would someone please explain how God and His children can sanction and fellowship adulterers here but not in heaven (Rev. 21:8; cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-11)?

In the fifth place, the church from the Word urges the husband and wife to render each to the other *"due benevolence"* (1 Cor. 7:3-5, KJV). We must realize that marriage is a serious thing; those abandoning their mates need to remember their vows and their responsibilities. The withholding of oneself from the other is to be by mutual consent in times of mourning, sickness, etc., with the agreement as to when they will come back together, lest *"Satan tempt you...for your incontinency."*

Mankind was created male and female, with natural sex drives fulfilled scripturally only in marriage. The sexual relationship is an important, beautiful, rewarding part of marriage. Withholding oneself for *"punishment"* undermines, brings disaster to

marriage, a mate not fulfilled at home is often tempted to seek fulfillment elsewhere. Such seeking elsewhere is adultery, but a selfish, unwise, disinterested mate is not innocent.

Note the phrase "*due benevolence [love].*" Many marriages are destroyed because of selfishness, not seeking to fulfill the needs and wishes of one's mate. See the growth of the young lady in Song of Solomon (2:16, selfish; 6:3; still selfish, but better; 7:10, no longer selfish). When we seek to meet the needs of our mates [unselfish], it pays great dividends.

In the sixth place, the church from the Word urges mates to show tenderness to one another (1 Peter 3:7; Matt. 7:12; Eph. 4:32). One who is mistreated while dating must not think it gets better when married.

Often we are more kind to others than to our own mates and our own children (who love us the most and to whom we are the closest). Some are vicious to one another. We must not make our mates the brunt of jokes and embarrass them.

We must not be quarreling (Phil. 2:14), but tenderly affectioned (Rom. 12:10), longsuffering (1 Cor. 13:4), kind (Prov. 19:22). We must have self-control, patience; we must be sufficiently self-assured and self-respecting to be tender and gentle! If we are mean, rude, and vicious, we are not righteous. We must not provoke our children to wrath.

In the seventh place, the church from the Word urges the husband to be the proper leader in the family. The fact that God has given him the role as head (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:23) does not indicate superiority

versus inferiority, but rather different functions. He is not to lord it over his wife (Eph. 5:21). Yet, he must assume the leadership role (Gen. 3:16; 18:19; Josh. 24:15) and not abdicate it.

This role is not limited to the physical; he is responsible in spiritual matters also, and it is tragic to disobey God's command in Ephesians 6:4. The greatest bond in the family is to be the mutual love for God.

Some fail their mates, so that one parent has to bring up the children in the Lord alone. This is a tragic abdication of responsibility and is the wrong treatment of one's mate. He or she must go it alone in the most vital, critically important area—learn of God alone, serve the Lord alone, approach God's throne alone, teach the children alone. The extremely sad result will be to hear "*Well done*" alone. How tragic it is for the family not to march hand in hand into the "*land that is fairer than day!*"

In the eighth place, the church from the Word urges the family members to communicate with each other, especially the husband and wife. Do we remember our communication during dating, our desire to be together, our love for talking to one another? That must continue and be enhanced in marriage! It is not enough **not** to be bitter against or mistreat; we must spend precious time together and communicate; a garden without weeds is not enough, but there must be flowers.

All family members are to participate, communicate needs and desires, be included in planning—this

encourages, shows dignity, helps each to gain self-respect. Thereby, each is fortified for dreams and tasks ahead and for meeting the challenges of life. Each shares in the rejoicing and in the cushioning from pain.

The home must be engaged in studying the Scriptures, training the children, exercising proper discipline, building self-concept, and self-worth (2 Tim. 1:5; Prov. 4:1-9; 22:6).

Conclusion

The greatest training for children in the home is to have God-fearing, sacred pattern-obeying, loving-one-another parents in the home. Thereby, children learn reverence for God, respect for authority, God's law, respect for the sacred institution of marriage, how to treat their own mates and children, love for God's divine church, fortification against worldliness and secular humanism and false doctrine, how to serve in the church, and how to go to heaven.

We owe our children from the cradle our time and the truth of God. They are not trained by chance; there is power in example. Our tremendous responsibility cannot be transferred to others; **we** are to rear our children.

In the Second National Bank "*Business Briefs*" (Houston, TX) was the following:

It matters not how sloppy a man's coat might be, how baggy his trousers might be, if his children stand for thirty minutes with their noses pressed against

the window pane watching for daddy to
come home from work, you can trust that
man with anything in this world.

Chapter 11

The Bible School And The Glorious Church

Wade Webster



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Over the last few years in congregational work, I have spent a great deal of time studying the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. I believe that these books have much to tell us about restoring the Lord's church to the position that God's wants her to hold in this world. The problems that Ezra and Nehemiah faced, and the solutions that they found, apply perfectly to the church today. As you know, in many places, the walls have been broken down and the city lies in ruins. Our job is to do that which Ezra and Nehemiah did - to revive the stones and to remove the shame (Neh. 4:1-6; 1 Peter 2:5). Each chapter of the book of Nehemiah gives us a stone

that must be revived to restore the church to her former glory. The stones are as follows: Supplication (1), Preparation (2), Coordination (3), Dedication (4), Conversation (5), Examination (6), Separation (7), Education (8), Adoration (9), Consecration (10), Participation (11), Jubilation (12), and Confrontation (13). Obviously, our focus is going to be on the eighth chapter of Nehemiah where the stone of education was revived. As you know, a good education is essential to success in our world. The better education that a person receives, the better chance they have of climbing the ladder of success. The same is true in spiritual matters. We can't build first-rate congregations on a second-rate education. It seems clear that Nehemiah understood the need for a good education. As soon as the walls were finished and the gates were in place, he called for Ezra to come and teach the people the word of God. He knew that if the people didn't know and do God's word, the strongest walls would not keep the enemy out. In the eighth chapter of Nehemiah, we see three things that every Bible school needs to be successful:

- A required text (the Bible)
- A respected teacher (one who studies, practices, and can teach the Bible)
- A receptive throng (listeners who love the Bible).

Put on your work clothes and your gloves and travel back with me as we join Ezra and Nehemiah in reviving the stone of education.

A Required Text

If you attended college, then you are probably familiar with required texts. Required texts are texts that students must purchase because they contain essential information to be used by the teachers in the class. Spiritually speaking, we have only one required text - the Bible. While other texts (concordances, dictionaries, commentaries) may be helpful, they are not required; nor, for that matter, are they inspired. In the eighth chapter of Nehemiah, the education program that Nehemiah put into place had only one required text - the book of the law of Moses, when the Lord had commanded Israel (8:1). Today, like the people of Israel in Nehemiah's time, we must call for the Word of God from preachers and teachers. We must not accept anything less than this required text. It is the only book that can direct our steps (Psm. 119:105, 133), make us alive (Psm. 119:154), set us free (John 8:32), prepare us for judgment (John 12:48), give us an inheritance (Acts 20:32), completely furnish us (2 Tim. 3:16-17), and save our souls (James 1:21). What are the marks of a great textbook? Let me suggest some things:

- Easy to read/understand - Although some things are hard to be understood (2 Peter 3:16), most of the Bible is easy to read and understand.
- Filled with examples - The Bible is replete with examples to help us understand spiritual truths (Rom. 15:4). There are 15 specific examples in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews alone.
- Complete with reviews - Inspired writers

often brought important matters back to the remembrance of readers (Jude 5; Luke 13:3, 5).

Sadly, some congregations are using every book except for the Bible. They have traded in the doctrine of Christ for the doctrines of men (2 John 9-11; Matt. 15:9). Let's demand the book. It tells us what is right (doctrine), what is not right (reproof), what it takes to get right (correction), and what it takes to stay right (instruction in righteousness - 2 Tim. 3:16-17). Sadly, much of the Bible school material being used today has little Bible in it. Some of it even teaches error. We need to get back to using the Book.

A Respected Teacher

In addition to the right text, the right teacher is extremely important. As you likely know from school, the right teacher can make all the difference. No doubt, we have all had teachers which facilitated learning and we have had teachers that hindered learning. For sure, Ezra was the right teacher. In the book that bears his name, he is described as "*a ready scribe*" (Ezra 7:6). The word "*ready*" means "*quick*" "*skilful*" or "*diligent*" (Strong's 5106). The Hebrew states literally that he was a "*quick*" scribe, or a fast copier; however, the term implies not only speed, but proficiency in the Law of God as well" (**The Preacher's Commentary** 115). Amazingly, tradition says that Ezra had the law memorized and could write it from recall (**The MacArthur Bible Commentary** 528). Interestingly, the Hebrew word translated as "*ready*" can be used in a figurative

sense to mean *“let my head not refuse”* (Baker 714). How often do we let our head refuse to memorize the word of God? Ezra did not. That’s why, outside of Jesus, he may have been the best Bible school teacher ever. Again, in the book of Ezra, we read,

For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek
the law of the Lord, and to do it, and
to teach in Israel statutes and judgments
(Ezra 7:10).

Clearly, Ezra was a ready scribe because he had prepared his heart (cf. 1 Sam. 7:3; 1 Chron. 29:18; 2 Chron. 12:14; 19:3; 30:18-20). He made wise use of his time and was therefore ready when God needed him to teach His people (Heb. 5:12; Matt. 25:1-10; Eph. 5:16; Col. 4:5). Please note that Ezra had prepared his heart to do three things:

- **To Pursue God’s Word** - Notice that the text says that he prepared his heart *“to seek the law of the Lord”* (Ezra 7:10). *“Seek”* means *“to tread”* or *“frequent”* (1875). It carries with it the idea of wearing a path. Clearly, Ezra’s delight was in the law of the Lord and in it he meditated day and night (Psm. 1:2; 119:2, 10, 14, 16, 24, 35, 40, 47, 48, 70, 72, 77, 92, 94, 97, 103, 111, 113, 119, 127, 140, 143, 148, 159, 161, 162, 163, 164, 167, 174). You might say that he wore the pages out of his Bible. If we want to be a great Bible teacher like Ezra, and I hope that we do, then we must pursue God’s word like he did (Acts 17:11; 2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Peter 2:2; Matt. 5:6; Job 23:12). Sadly, during the time of the prophets, those who were leaders of God’s people were ignorant of

the law that they were to help the people follow (2 Chron. 15:3; Isa. 56:10; Jer. 2:8; 8:8-9; Mal. 2:7-8).

- **To Practice God's Word** - Notice that the text says that he prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord and "*to do it*" (Ezra 7:10). Ezra didn't just want to know God's word. He wanted to do it. He prepared or "*inclined*" his heart to perform God's statutes (Psm. 119:112; cf. 34, 44, 60, 69.) It greatly troubled him when God's word was not heeded (Ezra 9:3, 5-6, 10, 13; 10:3-4, 8, 12-13). If we want to be a great Bible teacher like Ezra, then we must be a doer of the word like he was (Matt. 7:21-24; James 1:22-27). We must practice what we preach (1 Cor. 9:24-27; Matt. 23:3).

- **To Proclaim God's Word** - Notice that Ezra prepared his heart to "*teach in Israel statutes and judgments*" (Ezra 7:10; cf. 7:25). While it was commendable for Ezra to pursue God's word and practice it, he determined to do more. He determined to proclaim God's word that others might also understand it and do it (Psm. 119:27; cf. 78:1-8; 105:2; 145:4-5). He understood that we have been taught of God to teach others of God (Psm. 71:17; cf. Acts 5:42; 1 Tim. 4:11; 6:2; 2 Tim. 2:24).

Would not you agree that Ezra was well-qualified to teach God's people? In the eighth chapter of Nehemiah, we see Ezra as he opens the book of the law in the sight of all the people and reads from it distinctly, gives the sense, and causes the people to understand it (Neh. 8:3, 5, 8, 12). Sadly, we have all sat in Bible classes and heard sermons where

the teacher had not made the proper preparation to teach, to seek, or to do God's word. We may have even been in assemblies where the word of God was not opened or where we left wondering what the preacher/teacher was talking about. Had you been in Ezra's class, you would have known without a doubt that you had been in a Bible class. If our Bible school programs are going to be all that they can be, then we need teachers like Ezra. It should be noted that good teachers were few and far between then as they are now (Ezra 8:15-20; Prov. 20:6; Psm. 12:1; Jer. 5:1; Ezek. 22:30). Like Ezra, we must seek out faithful men who can and will teach (1 Cor. 4:1-2; 2 Tim. 2:2; 1 Sam. 2:35; Neh. 7:2; 13:13; Isa. 8:2). We must never give into the temptation to use those who are not faithful.

A Receptive Throng

In the context of the eighth chapter of the book of Nehemiah, we find that all of the people gathered into the street to hear the law read (8:1). The context reveals that they were a receptive throng. Please consider what the text tells us about how the crowd listened:

- **Patiently** (8:2-3) - Notice that they listened "*from morning to midday.*" We struggle to get individuals to sit through a thirty minute sermon or Bible class.
- **Attentively** (8:3) - Consider that the inspired writer recorded that "*the ears of the people were attentive*" (cf. 8:12-13).

- **Reverently** (8:5, 7) – The text records that *“all the people stood up...bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground.”*

- **Supportively** (8:6) – Please note that *“all the people answered, Amen, Amen.”* How long has it been since the building where you attend rang with this sound? Recently, we had a black brother in and he started asking the walls and the lights to say it because the people in the pew were not!

- **Obediently** (8:13-17) – When they learned of the feast of the tabernacles, they began observing it again.

- **Repeatedly** (8:18)- Finally, the text records that *“day by day, from the first day unto the last day”*

Today, we need to evaluate what type of listeners that we are:

- Do we listen patiently or do we become angry when the service goes five minutes over?

- Do we listen attentively or is our mind on the affairs of this life (Matt. 13:22)?

- Do we listen reverently or do we wander in and out of the auditorium?

- Do we listen supportively or do we merely leave the speaker to wonder if we are in agreement?

- Do we listen obediently or do we just let the message go in one ear and out the other?

- Do we listen repeatedly or is one service each week enough for us?

If we want to build that which will endure, then we must hear and do the word of God (Matt. 7:24-27).

To have a great Bible school program, it takes everyone's participation.

Conclusion

As you know, the public school system has many problems. Often, our children have difficulty learning the lessons that the future will demand of them. Sadly, I am afraid that the educational system in many congregations is also plagued by problems. I am afraid that God's people today, like in times past, are being destroyed for a lack of knowledge (Hos. 4:6). Like Ezra and Nehemiah, we must revive the education of God's people and remove the shame of her present condition.

In closing, please consider some practical things that various groups can do to make it better. As you know, all of us fall into one of four categories - teacher, student, parent, or an elder. Perhaps, we may even fall into more than one category. In order for the Bible school to be one hundred percent effective, each of us must fulfill our role. Consider some things that each of us can do for our Bible school:

As A Teacher...

- I can thoroughly study the lesson that I am going to teach (2 Tim. 2:15; John 5:39; James 3:1-2).
- I can try to arrive early to class so that I can greet students as they arrive and get to know them better.
- I can set the right example for my students both in and out of the classroom by watching the

way that I talk, dress, and act (Matt. 5:16).

- I can ask for questions and comments to get my students involved in the class. The questions and comments that I receive will help me to be sure that I have communicated my point.

- I can make sure that the class starts and/or ends with a prayer.

- I can contact the students that were absent to let them know that they were missed (Heb. 10:24-25).

- I can make sure that my students are provided with an environment conducive to learning (1 Cor. 14:40; 1 Tim. 3:15). This may involve informing the parents of a child's inappropriate behavior. Although unpleasant, godly parents will appreciate the opportunity to correct the problem.

- I can welcome all new students to the class by having the other students introduce themselves.

- I can make sure that I teach the needed truth (Jude 3; 2 Tim. 4:2).

- I can make sure that I teach in love (Eph. 4:15).

As A Parent...

- I can set the right example for my children by making sure that we are always present at Bible school (Eph. 6:4).

- I can make sure that my children have a way to Bible class even when I am sick or forced to work.

- I can make sure that my child has his/her

lessons prepared for each class. (We do this with secular schoolwork and we should do it with Bible schoolwork).

- I can thank the teacher for teaching my child God's word.
- I can make sure that my child is behaving properly in Bible class.
- I can ask the teacher about the progress that my child is making in the class.
- I can ask my child what the lesson was about on the way home from services. This will ensure that they listened and that they understood the story correctly.
- I can review the lesson with my child, re-enforce it, and answer any questions that they might have.
- I can tell my child how proud I am of the work that they are doing in Bible class.

As A Student...

- I can make sure that I am always present for Bible class (Heb. 10:25; Rev. 2:10).
- I can make sure that I have studied my lesson and am prepared to contribute to the class when given the opportunity (2 Tim. 2:15).
- I can make sure that the teacher knows that I appreciate the study that he/she has put into the lesson.
- I can make sure that I always bring my Bible and workbook.
- I can make sure that I apply what I have

learned to my daily life (James 1:22).

- I can make sure that I teach what I have learned to my friends (1 Peter 3:15).
- I can make sure that I behave properly in Bible class (1 Tim. 3:15).
- I can encourage others to come with me to Bible class (Isa. 2:1-2).
- I can pray for the teacher and the class.
- I can make sure that I welcome all new students to the class and make them feel comfortable.

As An Elder...

- I can make sure that the men and women who are selected to teach are faithful in attendance, life, and doctrine (2 Tim. 2:2).
- I can make sure that the materials being studied are doctrinally sound.
- I can make sure that the teachers are furnished with everything that they need to make the most of the time that is allotted for the Bible school.
- I can thank the teachers for a job well done.
- I can make sure that the teachers are periodically given time off from teaching.
- I can make sure that each age group is receiving the instruction that they need (Acts 20:28).
- I can make sure that those absent from Bible class receive a card, call, or visit (Heb. 13:17).

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Chapter 12

Scriptural Pictures Of The Glorious Church

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By looking at different objects we can get several different pictures. For example, we get different pictures of the beauty of a diamond by looking at it from different directions. What about a sunset? Every minute or two we get a different picture or view. At times we can see beautiful cloud formations. There are so many things in nature, or the natural world, or the sky above at night that we can get beautiful pictures.

So it is in the spiritual realm. When one views the church of our Lord, he can get so many beautiful pictures. We are going to try to look at some of those pictures which will help us get a clearer picture of

how God made up the church. These pictures show us the various functions of the church. We are going to look at the church as a Family, as the Bride, as an Army, as a Kingdom, as the Body and the Pillar and ground of the Truth. As you know, sermon after sermon can be preached on each of these subjects and hundreds of articles can be written on each one of them. So we will be only able to say a little about each.

The Glorious Church As A Family

Matthew 12:46-50

While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother (Matt. 12:46-50).

One of the most important parts of the church is its family, *“But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth”* (1 Tim. 3:15). It is possibly the most attractive simple description of the church.

Being a part of the family of God is a great blessing. We all realize how important a family is. We marry, have children, rear them and cry when they leave home. Why? Because of the importance of the family.

What are some of the elements of the family that make the spiritual family work? In a family we find expectations.

A. Jesus has given different talents to different people and those talents are to be used.

His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord (Matt. 25:21).

Jesus wants us to grow, *"But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen"* (2 Peter 3:18). Jesus wants us to mature, *"Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus"* (Col. 1:28).

B. God wants us to realize our potential. He expects us to do our best. In a family we have forgiveness. Jesus is willing to forgive everyone in the family,

Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven (Matt. 18:21-22).

Jesus expects us to forgive one another. We do things from time to time that a Christian should not,

For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (Matt. 6:14-15).

In a family there is encouragement. Jesus wants us to encourage one another, *"Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do"* (1 Thess. 5:11). How do we encourage each other?

A. Properly spoken words. *"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers"* (Eph. 4:29).

B. Togetherness. *"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching"* (Heb. 10:24-25).

C. Cooperation (working together). *"For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building"* (1 Cor. 3:9).

D. Manifested love (1 Cor. 13).

In a family there is to be discipline. God's family must be a disciplined family.

If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are

partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons (Heb. 12:7-8).

If we are not disciplined, we are not God's family. Discipline helps us to become Christ-like people. God expects us to live a certain way in His family. The way we live will bring either glory or dishonor.

In a family we have a support group. God wants His family to be sensitive. *"And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it"* (1 Cor. 12:26). Studies have shown in the field of psychiatry that the most effective techniques are association therapy. We need to get together as a group.

In a family, problems are worked out. Since the church is made up of people, problems are going to present themselves from time to time. In Acts 6, there was a problem in the church. In Acts 15, there was another problem in the church. God wants us to deal with the problems and find the right solutions.

In a family there is a place of identity. God wants us to know who we are. If you were asked, *"Who are you?"* what would you say? What makes you different?

A. The family to whom you belong.

B. The name you wear. *"And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch"* (Acts 11:26).

C. The talents you have.

D. The principles you live by. *"But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf"* (1 Peter 4:15-16).

God wants us to realize that we are His children. *"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ"* (Gal. 3:26-27).

In a family we find security. God want us to feel secure in His family. *"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh"* (Rom. 8:3). A lot of the problems that are in the world are there because we are not providing security.

In a family there is acceptance. We are to accept one another.

Him that is weak in the faith receive ye,
but not to doubtful disputations.

Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ
also received us to the glory of God (Rom.
14:1; 15:7).

That does not mean we accept everything our brothers and sisters in Christ do. But we accept people in matters of judgment and in matters of immaturity. We must have the attitude of acceptance. *"For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved"* (John 3:17).

- A. In Matthew 19 - Little children.
- B. In Luke 19 - Zaccheaus and the publican.
- C. In John 8 - Adulterous woman.

In a family we find comfort. *"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort"* (2 Cor. 1:3). Therefore, God's family should be a place where His children find comfort. The world is often an uncomfortable place due to people's speech, lives, and attitudes. In God's family there is comforting care. God wants us to care for His children. *"Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men"* (1 Thess. 5:14).

God's family, the church, is a place of: expectations, forgiveness, encouragement, discipline, a place where problems are resolved, identity, security, acceptance and comfort. As the family of God, let us:

A. Be Steadfast. *"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers"* (Acts 2:42).

B. Be Responsible. *"Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me"* (Isa. 6:8).

C. Be aware of the needs of others. *"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world"* (James 1:27).

D. Be Encouragers. *"But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin"* (Heb. 3:13).

The church works well when the family of God is working well. God's family, the church, is the greatest family on earth.

The Glorious Church As The Bride

(Ephesians 5:22-33)

The fact that Israel was God's bride under the Old Testament is clearly taught in Jeremiah 3:14: *"Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion."* But Israel was an unfaithful bride. In her unfaithfulness, she committed two basic sins. She forsook God and worshipped idols. *"For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water"* (Jer. 2:13). Nevertheless, God pleaded with His Bride to repent.

Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the LORD, and I will not keep anger for ever. Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the LORD. Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion (Jer. 3:12-14).

But Israel rejected the mercy of God.

There came a time, though, when the Jews were free to remarry. The Jews, so long as the law of Moses was in existence, were married to that law as their husband. Notice Paul's argument in Romans 7:1-4.

Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.

A. If during its continuation they were to be married to another law, they would have been guilty of adultery.

B. But if the first law were blotted out, or done away, then they were loosed from the law and were not adulterers, though they be married to another law.

C. Paul therefore said, they were married to another? Unto "*him*," but what "*him*?" The answer

is, *“even to him who is raised from the dead.”* Thus a marriage was consummated between Christ and His church at His resurrection from the dead.

What is the objective of this marriage?

A. Paul teaches them that they are married unto Him who is raised from the dead.

B. Paul affirms that one of the purposes of this marriage is *“that we should bring forth fruit unto God.”*

The church of Christ, having been married to Christ, has the right to take upon herself the name of the husband. Also, the children who result from this union have the right to take on the name of the husband. The children formed in this union have become beneficiaries of the Son of God, and are members of the body. *“For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones”* (Eph. 5:30). It is our highest privilege to become and to be members of the body of Christ. It is a great honor to be a part of the beautiful bride of Christ.

All need to know and appreciate the very close relationship and the wonderful parallel between a husband and a wife and Christ and His Church. Isaiah prophesied that God’s people would have a new name, better than that of a son or daughter, but a name that would suggest a divine union.

A. *“Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off”* (Isa. 56:5).

B. *“For Zion’s sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, until the righteousness*

thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth. And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name" (Isa. 62:1-2).

C. *"And ye shall leave your name for a curse unto my chosen: for the Lord GOD shall slay thee, and call his servants by another name" (Isa. 65:15).*

In these verses we learn a new name was to be given in God's house, one better than that of a son or daughter. The name was to be an everlasting name that would never change. It was to be given to both Jew and Gentile. It would be a name given by God Himself. This new name was to be "*Christian.*" *"And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch" (Acts 11:26).* This new name would be given to any who would become married to Christ through their obedience to the Gospel.

There is One Bride. Thus there is One Church. The word "*church*" comes from ekklesia meaning the "*called out.*" The church is composed of those who have been "*called out*" of darkness and into the light of Jesus Christ. Such a called out group of people are called the church in whatever location they find themselves.

A. The church at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2).

B. The church at Thessalonica (1 Thess. 1:1).

C. The church of Galatia (Gal. 1:2).

There is only one church described in the New

Testament as is seen in the following truths. The church is the bride of Christ. John the baptizer said, *"He that hath the bride is the bridegroom"* (John 3:29). Paul told the brethren that composed the church at Rome that they had *"become dead to the law"* and that they *"should be married to another, even him who is raised from the dead."* To the church at Ephesus, Paul said, *"For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body"* (Eph. 5:23). Thus we learn that Christ is the husband and the church is His bride. There is just one husband and there is just one bride. Christ does not have more than one wife. Christ owns the church. He built one church (Matt. 16:18). He died for one church (Eph. 5:25).

The Church, as the Bride of Christ, must be pure to remain beautiful.

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:25-27).

Every Christian, and therefore, the entire church must *"...adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things"* (Titus 2:10).

The bride of Christ, the church, must be kept beautiful. We must maintain proper priorities (Matt. 6:33). We must practice the highest moral standards

(James 4:4). Preventative and corrective discipline must be practiced in the home and in the church (Titus 3:10-11). We must train our children properly (Eph. 6:1-4.) Christians must be cooperative (1 Cor. 3:9). We must know, teach and defend sound doctrine (Gal. 1:6-9). The bride must remember her wedding day and ever be faithful to it (Jer. 2:32).

The church is the beautiful bride of Christ. Let us do our best to keep it a glorious bride.

The Glorious Church As An Army

Ephesians 6:10-18

The church as a whole is called the Army of the only true living God. Are we a fighting unit? The army of the Lord must be strong in the Lord and the power of his might. Are we standing with the Lord and in His strength? The Captain of our army is Jesus and the warfare we are involved in is spiritual. This is war. We have to obey the commands of the captain of our salvation:

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings (Heb. 2:9-10).

We are involved in a spiritual conflict. We have got to stand. Three times Paul says to stand and one

time to withstand. The only way we can be defeated in the church is to lay down or run away. How can you avoid the fight? Stay off the battlefield.

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph. 6:10-12).

You must join the army of the Lord. This is a volunteer service for the Lord and it is your decision to serve or not. You don't have to get involved in the work of the Lord. In Uncle Sam's Army you were always told not to volunteer for anything. But in God's army you must volunteer. You must get involved in delivering the people from the grips of the devil.

The church must be militant. The meaning of the word "*militant*" is serving as a soldier, warlike, combative, conflict opposing evil influences. Militant is heard quite often in our world today. This is often associated with those who create riots, burning of buildings, killing innocent people, opposing police, disrupting educational process, etc. We do not mean that the church must be associated with this sort of thing. We do mean that the church must be Christ's army. "*Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ*" (2 Tim. 2:3). The church must be

aggressive in carrying out its mission in preaching. *"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned"* (Mark 16:15-16).

As an army the church faces a battle, a fight, therefore must be aggressive. In the first century the church faced religious indifferences and also the influences of the Roman Empire. Yet, the church was charged with, *"And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also"* (Acts 17:6). Also, *"But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against"* (Acts 28:22). Yet the church carried the gospel into all the known world. *"If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister"* (Col. 1:23).

Today, we are not turning the world upside down, even among members of the church. We are neither hated nor admired, so what is the attitude? Largely the church is unknown. Is it because we are not doing what the church of the first century did, the way they did it?

Just why did the first century church make such an impact on the world?

A. Their influence was great because of their attitude toward God. They did not believe the one and only true God was a God among many gods,

similar in size and nature. They declared one God, only one God, only one true God, only one true and living God. This was preached in kindness and love, yet with firmness, never compromising. They never sounded an uncertain sound about it (Acts 17:24-31; Eph. 4:4-6).

B. The church was successful because it refused to stand in silence in the face of the view that Christ was only another “*Savior*” among many saviors of like power. They preached salvation through Christ. “*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12; cf. Acts 3:19-22; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; John 8:24).

C. The church was successful because it openly declared that the gospel was the power to save.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (Rom. 1:16).

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures (1 Cor. 15:1-4).

D. The early church was successful because it preached the same message everywhere. Among the Jewish doctors and lawyers Christ crucified was preached. From the Old Testament scriptures Jesus was proved to be the Messiah. Their attitude toward the body of Christ, the church, made them successful as the army of Christ. *“And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all”* (Eph. 1:22-23).

The Glorious Church As A Kingdom

John 18:33-37

To appreciate our citizenship in the church, we need to know more about the kingdom that is not of this world.

This kingdom must have a king not of this world—not of this world in His origin. A non-earthly kingdom must have a non-earthly king. Our king existed before the world was created.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world (John 8:23).

I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world (John 17:14-16).

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:5-8).

He must not be of this world in His character. Our King walked on earth, but did not live like the world.

Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted (Heb. 2:17-18).

For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15).

He neither sought nor loved the things of the world. Pilate could find no guilt in Him, *"Pilate saith unto him. What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all"* (John 18:38). The Jews had to have false witnesses to kill Him.

He must not be of this world in the length of His kingly office. Even the greatest worldly kingdoms fade (David, Rome, Babylon). His kingdom and rule would never fail.

And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever (Dan. 2:44).

And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end (Luke 1:31-33).

His reign is consummated in victory.

Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet (1 Cor. 15:24-25).

He is now reigning.

Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36).

This kingdom must have laws not of this world. Not of this world in their Origin. From heaven not from men.

The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet (Matt.)21:25-26).

But a gospel not of this world,

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe (1 Thess. 2:13).

For our King has legislative authority, *“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth”* (Matt. 28:18). We are to listen to Him in Everything,

For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me;

him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people (Acts 3:22-23).

His kingdom is a monarchy, not a democracy. It is not governed by the voice of the people or by councils, popes, delegates, elders, or ourselves.

This Kingdom must have subjects that are not of this world. Their origin is of the world, but they must be born again into a new world or kingdom. They are not of this world in their conduct.

A. They are not conformed to the world. *“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”* (Rom. 12:2).

B. They are not to love the world. *“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world”* (1 John 2:15-16).

C. They are not to fellowship the world (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

They are not of the world in their thinking, values or objectives. They are not of this world in their destiny. They are to be delivered to God. *“Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power”* (1 Cor. 15:24). Eternal life is prepared for these citizens.

The Glorious Church As A Body

Ephesians 1:21-23

The body of Christ encompasses all the saved.

Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all (Eph. 1:21-23)

Christ's body is the church (universal), those found in the Book of Life.

And I entreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life (Phil. 4:3).

But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect (Heb. 12:22-23).

And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged

out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works (Rev. 20:12).

And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15).

And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life (Rev. 21:27).

What is a local church? A local church is a group of Christians who happen to live at the same time in the same area who have agreed to work and worship together to accomplish what the Lord has given the local church to accomplish. Examples—the church at Corinth, at Ephesus, at Thessalonica, at Antioch, etc.

The Lord adds to His body. *“Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved”* (Acts 2:47). When someone is baptized for the remission of their sins, if they are sincere God will add them to the body of Christ. But what if they are not sincere? Will God add them? Is their baptism valid? No!

Christ can also take away from His body. *“He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels”* (Rev. 3:5). This says we can have our names removed out of the Lamb's Book of life.

The Lord was in a fleshly body. *“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth”* (John 1:14). His work on this earth was done in a fleshly body. His teaching and His sacrifice for the sins of the world were done in a fleshly body (Heb 10:5).

Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: ... Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb. 10:5, 9-10).

Now the church is His body on earth. The church identifies the people through whom the Lord works. The church then functions as the body of Christ.

Christ is the head of the body. *“And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence”* (Col. 1:18). He controls the church by His word.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him (Col. 3:16-17).

So, in matters of worship, life and service/work the church is under the authority of Christ (Matt. 28:18-20). The name "Lord" denotes a "Ruler."

There is no earthly headquarters for the church of Christ because the "Head of the church" is in heaven. *"And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence"* (Col. 1:18). *"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth"* (Col. 3:1-2).

Christ is the Savior of the body. *"For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body"* (Eph. 5:23).

The Glorious Church Is The Pillar And Ground Of The Truth

1 Timothy 3:15

The title of this section can be found in 1 Timothy 3:15. *"But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."* This section is designed to allow us to realize the importance of truth in the church and the teaching of the church. Truth should be the identifying mark of the Lord's true church.

Warnings of false teachers appear throughout the scriptures. John tells us to try these false teachers. *"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets*

are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). Christ warns us that false prophets are gone out into the world. *"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?"* (Matt. 7:15-16). Many preachers that are on television and radio, in print, and in pulpits are wearing sheep's clothing. Paul mentioned this truth to the Ephesian elders.

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears (Acts 20:28-31).

We need to heed those same warnings and watch for those wolves among us.

The church must be the pillar and ground of the truth on the teaching of the church. Christ in His *"Parable of the sower"* taught that one who does not understand the Kingdom (Church) will be lost.

When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away

that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side (Matt. 13:19).

The church must realize the same truths that the apostles realized; we simply cannot teach Christ without teaching His body. We have a great example of this in Philip's teaching.

But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women (Acts 8:12).

The church must be the pillar and ground of truth when teaching on Salvation. Christ said that no man could come to the Father but by Him. *"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me"* (John 14:6). As we seek the truth in teaching on the church, we realize that salvation is in the church. Paul said that Christ is the savior of the body. *"For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body"* (Eph. 5:23). The question must be asked by an honest person--how does one become part of that body? The Bible gives us a definitive answer to the question. (John 3:3-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Gal. 3:27). We know that the Bible teaches one must believe (Rom. 10:17); one must repent of his sins (Luke 13:3,5); one must confess the name of Christ (Matt. 10:30-32); and then one must be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. This is teaching the truth on the plan of salvation.

The church must be the pillar and ground of truth on teaching about issues such as marriage, divorce and remarriage, attendance, women's role in the church, qualifications of elders, preaching only the word of God and not the opinions of men, teaching on the importance of evangelism, what moves one to be a Christian, defending the church and the truth, practicing and teaching church discipline, instruments of music, the Bible being the only authority, and fellowship. I could go on and on about the issues on which the church needs to deliver the truth. The church simply needs to be a *"store-house of truth."*

The church should be the escape from the world, a place where Christians know that only God's Word will be taught. We must be armed with God's Word to keep the church in the state that it should be.

Concerning the glorious church of our Lord, let our cry be *"Onward Christian soldiers, be prepared to restore to our Savior his bride pure and white."*

Chapter 13

The Place Of Safety In The Glorious Church

Barry M. Grider



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The Psalmist wrote, *"I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety"* (Psm. 4:8). In the midst of a world smitten with sin man needs a place of safety, security, and refuge. Such can only be found in the Lord. God has always provided such a place for those who love Him.

No one could have enjoyed peace and safety any more than Adam and Eve while living in the Garden of Eden. Not only was the garden a paradise on earth, it was also a place where the first couple had constant communion with God (Gen. 3:8). Wherever God dwells, those who live with Him are safe. After

man sinned, he lost the peace and security that he once had with God. Yet down through the centuries a loving and gracious God would provide a safe haven for those who desired a relationship with Him.

According to Genesis, because of man's wickedness, God determined to destroy man from the face of the earth. *"But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord"* (Gen. 6:8).

Hence, God would save Noah from the devastation of the deluge. An ark was prepared according to God's specifications. This ark provided a place of safety for Noah and his family when the floodwaters raged. As a child, I was blessed to have a mother who read to me from the Bible. Whenever she read the account of Noah and the ark, she would conclude by reminding me that God has an ark of safety today. This ark of safety is the church of Christ.

Those who identify themselves as Christians acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Savior. However, most fail to realize what it means to be in Christ and in His church. Hence, such individuals remain in their sins. It is amazing how many scriptures speak of the necessity of being in Christ.

Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new (2 Cor. 5:17).

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ... In whom we have redemption

through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace (Eph. 1:3, 7).

Paul would add, *"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ"* (Gal. 3:27). So the place of safety for all men today is in Christ. Free from sin, the Christian no longer has to fear its penalty. *"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"* (Rom. 6:23). To be in Christ is to be free from the condemnation of sin (Rom. 8:1). Many religious people speak of their eternal security. However, only the New Testament Christian, one who has obeyed the gospel of Christ, can really be secure. In Him, nothing can separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:39).

But what does being in Christ have to do with the church of Christ? The church is comprised of those who are saved (Acts 2:47). Likewise, God's marvelous wisdom for saving man includes Christ and the church He purchased with His blood (Eph. 3:10-11).

Those who are saved are found in the body of Christ, which is His church. Paul exhorted, *"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it"* (Eph. 5:25). How does one get into the church, God's ark of safety. He does so the same way he gets into Christ. *"For by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body"* (1 Cor. 12:13).

The church is a refuge from the world. It provides security from the devil and sin. Isaiah spoke of this safe place when he wrote,

The wolf shall also dwell with the lamb and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters that cover the sea (Isa. 11:6-9).

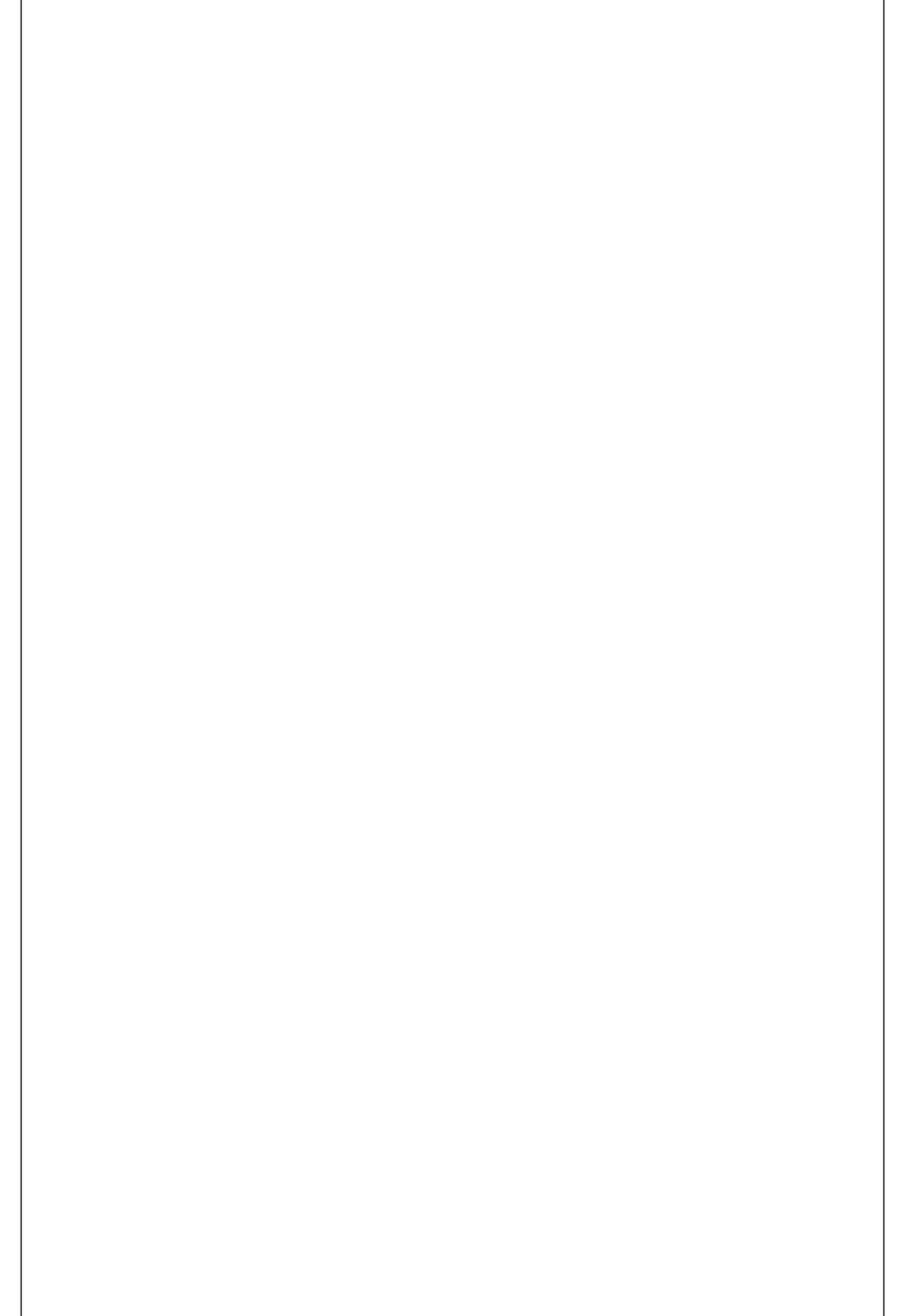
Such is highly figurative and symbolic language denoting the peaceful nature of the kingdom of Christ, which is the church.

Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and fear (Heb. 12:28).

Since the kingdom or the church is eternal in nature (2 Peter 1: 11), and only citizens of the kingdom or members of the church will be saved (1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 5:23), let us implore all men to enter quickly into the fold of safety.



VITAL QUESTIONS
Concerning
The Glorious Church



Chapter 14

Who Are The Members Of The Church Of The Bible?

Robert R. Taylor, Jr.



A graduate of Freed-Hardeman, David Lipscomb and George Peabody College for Teachers. Preaching since 1949. Author of various excellent volumes. Involved in radio, television and prison works. Annually speaks in about a dozen meetings and two dozen lectureships. For over thirty years he has worked with the Ripley, TN church. Irene and Robert have two children and four precious grandchildren.

Introduction

It is always a joy supreme to come to beautiful Pulaski, Tennessee, and speak on East Hill's excellent lectureship each spring. Genuine gratitude is expressed to the elders, Paul, Brandon and the precious people who compose this solid and sound congregation for this treasured invitation to speak and write material for the book.

The Glorious Church was on Paul's inspired mind as he wrote Ephesians 5:27 and is on our mind as we develop fundamental facets about this good, great, grand and glorious institution—the church about which we read in the Bible.

Ephesians is the Holy Spirit's and Paul's masterpiece relative to the church. One who understands and accepts Pauline teaching in this beautiful book will *never* confuse the Lord's church with Romanism, Protestantism, cultism or occultism—all enemies of the church portrayed within Holy Writ. The late and lamented Franklin Camp summed up Ephesians with three wonderful W's. In Ephesians 1-3 we have the *wealth* of the church. In Ephesians 4-5 we have the *walk* of the church. In Ephesians 6 we have the *warfare* of the church. What an excellent three word summary we have of his eloquent epistle.

Can We "Know" We Are Members Of The Lord's Church?

Truth is surely attainable and we can know with ardency of assurance that we are members of the Lord's church. We can know that the church was in the eternal planning and purposing of God (Eph. 3:10-11). We can know of its promises and prophecies in the Old Testament. Jacob knew of the coming of Shiloh (the Messiah) and unto Him would be the gathering of the people (Gen. 49:10). Here we have the promise of such. Even earlier Abraham, Isaac and Jacob received promises about the coming Messiah (Gen. 12:1-3; 26:3-5; 28:13-15). These cannot be separated from the kingdom or church the Messiah would establish. Crystal clear sayings of Nathan, Isaiah, Daniel, Micah and Zechariah all touch the sure establishment of the church at a definite time in the

future (2 Sam. 7:12ff; Isa. 2:1-4; Dan. 2:44-45; Micah 2:1-3; Zech. 6:12-13). We can know of its preparatory stages in the work of John, Jesus and the apostles (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7). We can know that it began in precious perfection in Acts 2 on that memorable Pentecost. Acts 2 has been styled the *"hub chapter of the Bible."* The designation is both attractive and accurate. By the end of the chapter obedient souls were being added to the church (Acts 2:41, 47). Did they know they were members of that church? Most assuredly they did!

Billy Graham was once asked by an individual who stated he had been saved years earlier but in the meantime had never become a member of any church since his initial salvation. Graham muddied the waters even more. The man was not helped in the least by the well-known preacher. Can you perceive of this happening in the first century? Visualize Peter, five years after Pentecost, walking the streets of Jerusalem when a man approached him saying, *"Brother Peter, I was among the 3,000 baptized who were saved on that amazing Pentecost in which you preached so boldly and beautifully. However, I have never been a church member since? Can you help me?"* Such never would have happened then. Being saved, coming into Christ and becoming members of the Lord's church all occurred at the same precise moment of time. They knew when they were saved. It was when they were baptized into Christ. Before that they were not in Christ. In that sacred ordinance they entered Christ in a saved relationship. For a

surety they knew when they became members of the church. Such was true on Pentecost. Such was true in Acts 4-6 when the number of the disciples grew with amazing rapidity. Such was true among the Samaritans, the eunuch, Saul, Cornelius' house, the Antiochians, Lydia's house, the jailor's family, the Thessalonians, the Bereans, the Corinthians and the Ephesians (Acts 8-19).

They knew they were members. There was no guesswork about this momentous matter. They knew they had obeyed the gospel and that is when the Lord added them to His church.

When we do what they did we will become what they became; we will be members of the very same church to which they belonged. They heard God's Word; so must we (Acts 2:14; Rom. 10:17). They formed faith in Christ; so must we (Acts 16:31). They repented of their sins; so must we (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; 17:30); They confessed Christ as God's Son (Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:9-10). We must do the same. They were baptized into Christ; so must we be (Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 3:27). This is the grand *how* of their knowing they were members of the Lord's church. This, likewise, is the grand *how* of our knowing with ardency of assurance that we are members of the church belonging to Christ, the one about which we read in the pages of Holy Writ. Why did not Billy Graham convey such elementary matters to the querist who asked him a very essential question? The reasons are obvious. He does not know and accept the gospel plan of salvation; he does not

know and accept the basic and beautiful nature of the Lord's church in the New Testament steeped as he is in denominationalism. He could have been such a power for good if he had been nothing but a New Testament Christian and preached nothing save the Bible. This he has not been; this he has not done.

Can One "Join" The Church Of The Bible?

For many years we have urged people to speak where the Bible speaks, be silent where the Good Book is silent, call Bible things by Bible names and do Bible things in Bible ways. Only then can we be in harmony with 1 Peter 4:11; Colossians 3:17 and Titus 2:1, 7-8.

A condition existed in Nehemiah's era in which his peers had real language problems. Jews

...had married wives from Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab. And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people (Neh. 13:23-24).

Thus, we have here impure language.

To speak of "*joining the church*" falls into the definite category of Ashdodic language. It is not Biblical language at all. Also, it conveys an entirely wrong concept. It leaves the impression that we are the one in the driver's seat and do the actual joining. Men lay down the joining demands. When

we acquiesce we thus do the joining and hence are not Biblical.

Luke wrote an entire book, Acts, telling about people who converted to Christ thus becoming members of the church. Surely, if "*joining the church*" is correct in concept and pure in practice, we should find authorization for it in the fifth book of the New Testament. Thousands were converted to Christ on Pentecost in Acts 2. Yet not a single one is mentioned as having joined the church. Is not this rather significant? More and more conversions are recorded in Acts 4-6. Yet there is no mention of their joining the church as per Luke's account. The Samaritans and the eunuch are converted in Acts 8 and still no mention of their joining the church. Acts 9, 22, 26 all three depict Saul's conversion and yet he did not join the church in Damascus of Syria, the city of his conversion. It is true that Acts 9:26 delineates his attempt to "*join himself*" to the Jerusalem disciples but he had been a member of the Lord's church for perhaps three or more years at this time (Gal. 1:17-18). He did not join anything initially.

Acts 10-11 relate Cornelius' conversion along with his family. They joined no church. Conversions occurred in Acts 11 among the Antiochians. Again, they joined nothing. Between Acts 13 and Acts 21 Paul made three missionary trips and converted men and women en masse. Yet he never urged anybody, as per the record, to join the church. And none of them did.

Joining the church was not done in the first century under apostolic leadership. God *authorized* no such thing. Jesus Christ *endorsed* no such thing. The Holy Spirit *sanctioned* no such thing. Apostles of Christ *preached* no such thing. New Testament Christians *practiced* no such thing. It would come much later when men no longer were guided and governed by the strict standards of a pure language and an authorized practice.

How was this language matter handled in the first century by inspired writers and especially by Luke the reliable historian? Luke sheds much light in four passages of Sacred Scripture. They read,

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were **added** unto them about three thousand souls...Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord **added** to the church daily such as should be saved... And believers were the more **added** to the Lord both of men and women...For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was **added** unto the Lord (Acts 2:41, 47; 5:14; 11:24—all emphasis is mine).

Be it observed that added to them, added to the church, added to the Lord, and added unto the Lord all reference the same spiritual operation. Luke is not depicting four different spiritual operations or actions; he is portraying only one.

Sometimes brethren carelessly will speak of

their having joined the church so many years ago or maybe their friends have joined the church but recently. Such language does not befit us at all. It lets people know that we are not speaking as the oracles of God direct if they know anything about the Bible at all. In 2 Timothy 1:13 and Titus 2:1, 8 we read,

Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus...But speak thou the things which become (befit) sound doctrine...Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.

Let us be content with calling Bible things Bible names. Our duty is to obey the gospel—hearing, believing, repenting, confessing and being baptized. The Lord will take care of all church additions. He did in the first century; He will do the same in the twenty-first century.

Are There Sincere, Devout Christians In All Denominations?

Brother B. J. Clarke has a great sermon which he entitles, “_____ Alone Does Not Save.” Faith alone does not save; he touches that. Sincerity alone does not save; he touches that. Devotion alone does not save could also be included. It is a massive misunderstanding of the scheme of human

redemption to single out one condition and place **only** as modifier. Article Nine of the Methodist Discipline does that with faith only. Most of us can see the fallacy of such which is false on the face of it. Why cannot some of our brethren who flirt with human denominationalism see the wrong in applying this to sincerity or devotion as denominational authorization? Can it be that they just do not want to see what is so very evident?

Years ago when he was making his treacherous transition from truth to falsehood, Rubel Shelly said there are *"sincere, devout and knowledgeable Christians scattered among all denominations."* I do not recall that he gave a *"thus saith the Lord"* for this startling sentiment! And for good reason since there is no support from Scripture and no warrant from the Word of God for such a reckless affirmation. It was a Shelly sentiment and not a Scripture concept at all. Many of us can remember an earlier Shelly who **never** would have made such a statement.

In the first place there is no authorization for denominations period! There is no direct statement authorizing such. There is no example in the New Testament authorizing denominational structures. There is no implication advocating such. Neither explicitly nor implicitly does denominationalism sustain **any** type of New Testament authority for its existence.

In the second place why would a sincere, devout person have any desire at all to enter something totally void of apostolic authority? Add Shelly's

knowledge modifier here and the case is even stronger in opposing such an erroneous view. A person is not knowledgeable who thinks Protestantism stands approved of God. The person of Biblical knowledge surely is in the know about the singularity of the Lord's church. Christ promised to build His church with no es on the end of that term (Matt. 16:18). Zechariah said the Messianic Branch would build the temple (no s here) of the Lord (6:12-13). Paul affirms one (not two or more) body in Ephesians 4:4 and 1 Corinthians 12:20. It is an inexcusable handling of Ephesians 4:4-6 to say there is no God, Lord, Spirit but a plurality of faiths, hopes, baptisms and bodies. The one body is the one church as per Ephesians 1:22-23 and Colossians 1:18. This is **all** Christ promised to build, **all** He did build, **all** that He heads and **all** that He will save come judgment day (Eph. 5:23-27).

In the third place it should be evident to a sincere, devout person who thinks at all that the One Head does not have a multiplicity of bodies. That would be a monstrosity for a surety! The One King does not have a plurality of kingdoms in which redemption is found. He is King over one kingdom. The One Bridegroom does not have a multiplicity of brides. Jesus Christ is not a Spiritual Bigamist! He does not have a harem of wives. Yet denominationalism has to accept all of these-bodies many, kingdoms a plenty and wives beyond computation. What sincere, devout person wants to get mixed up with all this accumulated falsehood?

In the fourth place we need to keep firmly fixed in mind that truth sets men free—not sincerity alone, not devotion alone (John 8:32). The gospel is God’s power to save—not sincerity alone, not devotion alone (Rom. 1:16-17). People were sincere before Christ came but that sincerity was insufficient to save. People were devout before Calvary materialized but that devotion was insufficient to save. In Acts 17 Paul found both sincerity and devotion among the Athenian masses but none was saved in such. Is this not very significant?

In the fifth place obedience to the gospel puts one into the Lord’s church—not a denomination. People in Acts 2 were not added to a human denomination; they were added to the church (v. 47). Believers in Acts 5:14 were not added to the denomination of their choice; they were added to the Lord. People in Acts 11:24 were not added to a denomination; they were added unto the Lord. Conversions permeate all the book of Acts. Not that first one resulted in any type of denominational affiliation.

In the sixth place the Holy Spirit gave all truth to the apostles and all things pertaining to life and godliness were imparted to them (John 16:13; 2 Peter 1:3). Yet they said a great big nothing about the sincere and devout being part and parcel of denominationalism. Again, is not this very significant?

No, there are not sincere, devout Christians scattered among all the denominations. The devout, sincere Christian who leaves truth and the Lord’s

church to enter a human denomination ceases to be a Christian; he is now an erring child of God in danger of losing his soul unless he walks the path of repentance, confession and prayer (Acts 8:22; James 5:16; 1 John 1:9).

What Must One Do To Get “Into” Christ?

Physical birth to Israelite parents put one into the Jewish Commonwealth under Moses. But a physical birth to Christian parents does not put one “into” Christ. Both my parents were Christians when I was born in 1931. However, I did not come “into” Christ until I obeyed the gospel in 1944 as an accountable, responsible person.

Infant baptism does not put one “into” Christ. Babies are not born in sin, Calvinism to the contrary notwithstanding. They are safe in infancy and adolescence and are bound for heaven should they die prior to reaching the age of accountability.

Saying a very convenient and humanly manufactured “*sinner’s prayer*” will not put one “into” Christ. Such is popular and is fed to the naive of our time by preachers who have not an ounce of respect for God’s real plan of pardon. Though adopted by men and women en masse, yet it possesses no support from Scripture and no warrant from the Word of God. This is not the way to enter “into” Christ.

People have been told to sign a pledge card, raise hands to signify a desire to be saved and touch the radio or television as points of contact to attain salvation. One man declared he had been saved on

the back seat of a church building. Back seats are popular but not the origination of pardon or coming "into" Christ. How could one be baptized "into" Christ on the back seat of a church building?

This actually happened many years ago at a drive-in theater in Columbus, Ohio. Several religious groups had rented this large facility and brought in a high powered evangelist. Obviously, his audience was in cars each night. One night he said,

If any of you in your cars wish to be saved tonight, when I give the signal, just turn on the headlights of your cars and I will know that you desire salvation and it will occur.

A short time later I went to Columbus for a gospel meeting and some of the brethren were telling me about it. When I heard of such I thought, "*Have I been reading the book of Acts all these years and missed headlight conversions in Luke's treatise of truth?*" This falls into the same category as a preacher on a Tennessee radio station who said Saul was saved between the time he fell from his stallion and before he hit Syrian ground. Luke put the gospel plan of salvation in Acts 9, 22, 26 but no horse! All the foregoing have **no** affinity at all with Heaven's plan of pardon or how one enters "into" Christ.

Entering Christ is the same as the new birth about which the Lord conversed with Nicodemus in John 3:3, 5 where He stated,

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of

God...Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter **into** the kingdom of God (Emphasis supplied).

Here is transition. Here is where pardon occurs. Prior to the new birth one is unsaved or outside Christ. Subsequent to the new birth one is **in** the kingdom and thus in a saved relationship with Deity. The force of "Except" here is "If and only if" one is born of water and of the Spirit can he enter "into" Christ and the Messianic kingdom. There is nothing man-made about this entrance requirement; it just needs to be "*man obeyed.*"

"Into" emphasis again emerges in Romans 6:3-4,

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Jesus shed His blood in His death. We are baptized into His death. This is precisely how we contact His precious blood. There is **no** other way of doing so. We access His blood in baptism almost the whole religious world to the contrary notwithstanding. Paul not only establishes the proper action of baptism (immersion) but also its one purpose—pardon, salvation, remission of sins, sins washed away and sins blotted out (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; 3:19).

In Galatians 3:26-27 Paul wrote,

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

The ASV for verse 27 reads, "*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ.*" Paul did not say we are children of God minus faith or minus **the** faith (the gospel). He did not say we are the children of God by faith only. He did not say we are children of God outside Christ. Salvation is locked in Him. We must be **in** Him for salvation to have occurred or for children of God status to have been attained.

Note how razor-sharp the Spirit's and Paul's logic is in verse 27, "*You did if you were. Did what? Put on Christ. If you were what? Baptized into Christ.*" The converse would be, "*You did not put Christ on if you were not baptized into Him.*"

Where does this leave the person depending on Protestant plans for pardon or Catholic concoctions for conversions? Way out in the cold of the unsaved is the logical answer!

Conclusion

These are all fundamental facets of what membership in the Lord's church entails. What a precious privilege it is to be members of the church about which one can read in the New Testament. Let us **never** lose sight of this inestimable privilege.

WHO ARE THE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH OF THE BIBLE?

Chapter 15

Who Has Authority In The Local Church?

Perry Cotham



A faithful preacher of the gospel for over **70 years** all around the world! A zealous, enthusiastic worker in the kingdom of God. Full-time evangelistic work for the last few decades. Frequently travels to foreign countries to preach and deliver Bibles. Author of various tracts and books. A regular speaker on lectureships throughout the brotherhood. Theresa (deceased) and Perry have three children.

I am grateful for the opportunity again to be with this great East Hill congregation and to be given the privilege of speaking on the topic of the “*Glorious Church*” of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In giving the great commission Christ, according to Matthew’s account, said,

All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost (Matt. 28:18-20).

The American Standard Version (1901) uses the word

“authority” instead of *“power.”* So does the NKJV, the NASB, The Living Oracles, Goodspeed, Moffat, Weymouth, and many others. The Revised Standard Version reads, *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given unto me.”*

Christ built the church. It is His one and only church. He is the one and only head of the church, which is His spiritual body (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). The Lord’s church is the saved, all of the saved, and none but the saved—the *“called out ones,”* by the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14). When a person obeys the gospel and is baptized for the remission of sins he is then added by the Lord to His church: *“and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved”* (Acts 2:38, 47).

One does not, in the modern sense of the word *“join”* the church after he is saved, or *“join some church.”* The glorious church that Jesus built is not a denomination, or all the different denominations established by men. These came into existence several centuries after Christ built His church.

Peter’s name is nowhere mentioned as the head of the church. Furthermore, there is no evidence that he was ever in the city of Rome (cf. Rom. 16).

Local Congregations

The New Testament speaks of local congregations or churches. Paul said, *“Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you”* (Rom. 16:16), in closing his letter to the church in Rome. The *“seven churches of Asia”* are mentioned in the Scripture (Rev.

1:11), and so are several others (Gal. 1:22; 1 Thess. 1:1).

However, Christ has *"all authority"* over all of these individual groups of Christians. But He has also delegated this authority of guiding, leading and teaching them unto certain, qualified men known as *"elders"* or *"bishops."* The early church had leaders in different congregations. When Paul and Barnabas started home on their first missionary journey, they visited the churches that had been established and encouraged the brethren and *"ordained them elders in every church"* (Acts 14:23). The word *"elders"* is plural and the word *"church"* is singular. Not one elder over several churches, but elders over one church. Later, Paul left the evangelist Titus in Crete that he might *"set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city"* (Titus 1:5).

The church in Philippi had *"bishops and deacons"* (Phil. 1:1). It is important then that congregations have elders, or bishops, and the same is true today. If we are going to plead for a return to the principles of New Testament Christianity and be the glorious church of our Lord, then we must emphasize the importance of good men serving in churches as the elders of the church.

Christianity is based primarily upon the authority of Christ. The church has no earthly head—not in Rome or anywhere else. Hence, to be the same true church of Christ today we must present fully the teaching of Christ, given by inspired men (John 16:13), as revealed in the New Testament (2 Tim.

3:16-17). There are no human law-making bodies.
The apostle Peter wrote:

The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away (1 Peter 5:1-4).

When men were needed in the church at Jerusalem to assist the widows in the "*daily ministrations*," the apostles asked the members to,

...look out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business (Acts 6:3),

and "*they chose*" certain men for this work (vs. 5-7). The church did the selecting, with the apostles reserving the right to approve the selection and make the appointment.

The Need Is Great

Congregations need good, qualified men as elders. Of course, in the first century, as now, there were no perfect men to select, but today, men of

high moral character, who have faithful families, and who have right attitudes are to be selected. Poorly qualified men serving as elders are to a great extent responsible for the weaknesses and liberalism we are now facing in the church today.

We have heard it said, "*As the pulpit goes, so goes the church*" and it is true to a great extent. But we can also say, "*As the eldership goes, so goes the church,*" for the elders control the pulpit.

Qualifications For Elders

The qualifications of an elder are given by Paul as he was inspired by the Holy Spirit in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-11 and Acts 20:17-35. Three sets of words, two each, describe the elders and their work:

- **Elders/presbyters** (Acts 20:7; 1 Tim. 4:14). They are older, men of age and wisdom.
- **Bishops/overseers** (Acts 20:28, ASV; Titus 1:5,7; Phil. 1:1). They are to supervise, direct and have oversight.
- **Pastors/shepherds** (Eph. 4:11; 1 Peter 2:2-4). They feed, lead and guard the flock. The preacher is not "*the pastor*" of the church. No one man can serve as an elder in any of the local congregations.

An elder is to be above reproach, sober minded, of good behavior, not given to strong drink. Today millions of people, including women, teenagers and even preteens are alcoholics. In light of such a fact, just think how bad it would be for an elder to be given to wine; setting the wrong example and

sending the wrong message to the congregation (cf. Prov. 23:29-35; 20:1; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 5:19-21).

Elders must be very careful in the use of money from the church's treasury. It is not for their personal use. Neither is it to be hoarded in bank accounts. It must be used in the right way for the Lord's work.

Elders must be patient and gentle; kind and loving. Their lives should be an example to the flock (1 Peter 5:3). They must have a good report of those who are without. They must be sound in the faith (Jude 3). We do not want people to think of the Lord's church as just another man-made denomination of money hungry and unscrupulous leaders. They must be men not given to sudden anger, not quick to "*fly off the handle*," to use a common expression, but men who will read their Bibles and try to be more and more like Jesus (1 Peter 2:21-23).

An elder should want the gospel to be preached to the whole world (Mark 16:15).

The family of the elder is very important to his qualifications. He must be the husband of one wife (this would exclude women from being elders), having faithful children, not accused of riot or unruly (Titus 1:6). One of the qualifications of an elder is "*one that rules well his own house, having children in subjection with all gravity; for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the house of God?*" (1 Tim. 3:4-5).

Unless an elder is married with a good wife and good children, he would be disqualified.

An elder must be "*given to hospitality,*" and a "*lover of good men.*"

An elder must know much about the Bible. He cannot teach others if he knows very little about God's Word. He must not be a new convert. If the elders are not knowledgeable of the Bible and the principles of New Testament Christianity, they will not be able to prevent the church's apostasy from the faith. They must "*hold fast the faithful word,*" therefore they cannot allow false teachers and preachers to lead the church into error. (This seems to be happening in many churches today, as it did one hundred years ago with the introduction of instruments of music in the worship. Division was the sad result).

Elders are all officially equal to each other in rank and authority.

Obey Elders

Although Christ is the head of the church and has "*all authority,*" and the elders serve under Him, the eldership does have some authority from the Lord in the local church. Note this important verse of Scripture:

Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you (Heb. 13:17).

However, elders are not to be lords over God's heritage; it is still the Lord's church. They are to be

examples to the flock. They are to teach, encourage, warn, exhort, and persuade with all love and kindness to all of the members of the church.

But sometimes an eldership will not be in agreement with matters of faith and doctrine. When this happens, members are obligated to *"obey God rather than men"* (Acts 5:29).

Some elderships will be divided amongst themselves on matters of faith and doctrine. If so, the faithful members who leave the congregation and go elsewhere are not the ones causing the division (1 Kings 18:17ff). It is never wrong in God's sight to worship Scripturally.

For example, over one hundred years ago, when the instruments were being introduced in the worship services, those who were opposed to this did not cause the division when they got out and started another congregation and returned to worshipping according to the Scriptures.

Also, many years ago those who were interested in worshipping and teaching as the Scriptures taught left their respective denominations to form true churches of Christ. And it was the right thing for them to do.

But an *"overseer"* does have authority to oversee. A shepherd does have authority to look after the sheep.

However, an elder, being a human being, can fall into sin and conduct unworthy of an elder. Then the other elders and members of the church, after all efforts of restoration have failed, can remove

this man from the eldership (Gal. 6:1-2; 1 Tim. 5:19-20). A congregation that can appoint an elder can also remove an elder, but only if and when sin is involved.

However, we read Paul's language:

- *"Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor..."* (1 Tim. 5:17).
- Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.
- Them that sin rebuke before all, that they also may fear (1 Tim. 5:19-20).
- *"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers (bishops, ASV), to feed the flock of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood"* (Acts 20:28).

Elders should realize how serious a matter it is to *"watch"* for *"souls"* as they that must *"give account"* for their work in the final day of judgment. Members of the church should also understand that they owe their good elders their love and respect.

Paul wrote,

And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves (1 Thess. 5:12-13).

Few congregations ever rise above their leadership. Certainly, we realize that elders are not infallible. However, we realize that the primary

part of their task is to give instruction in teaching, exhorting, encouraging, and correcting in matters of doctrine. But they have no right to make laws for the church. Christ is the head of the church; He has *"all authority."* Elders are not law makers.

If the church does not have men who are qualified to be elders then the church can meet at times in an orderly manner and make decisions for the congregation in matters of opinion, and still be at peace among themselves. The New Testament teaches that there was a time between the time the church was established and the elders were ordained (cf. Acts 13; 14).

Judgment Day

Judgment day is coming, and each of us—elders, preachers, members—must give account of ourselves unto God:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10).

So, all should realize that we have a great responsibility. Elders should realize they will be held accountable before God for the way they have shepherded the flock, or failed to do so. Elders are to guard the flock against wolves. Paul told the Ephesian elders,

For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock (Acts 20:29).

Elders need to know the men who are promoting denominational doctrines and practices (cf. Gal. 1:8-9; 2 Peter 2:1). They should not be allowed in their pulpits to teach their false doctrines. *"Therefore, watch..."* (Acts 20:31).

It will be a great day for the faithful elders when *"the chief Shepherd shall appear"* and they *"shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away"* (1 Peter 5:4). However, it could be a sad day for some elders who were not faithful in the discharge of their duties. Had all elders from the beginning of the church, remained faithful in their work down through the centuries, there would not have arisen so many religious sects and human denominations as we have today. But they did not. However, the plea to go back to the Bible and restore New Testament Christianity is a noble plea and this we must continue to do as long as time shall last (cf. Jer. 6:16; 10:23), and this includes having elders in the respective congregations.

God Bless All Of Our Good, Faithful Elders!

Chapter 16

How Many Churches Are There?

B. J. Clarke



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Introduction

The answer to the above question all depends upon the perspective of the one answering the question. Some would answer the question by counting the number of religious organizations that exist upon the face of the planet earth and then equating that number with the answer. On the other hand, some, in answering the question, would understand the question to mean, *“How many churches should there be in the eyes of God? How many churches on earth today would God count as His church?”*

There Is One Body (Church)

Fortunately, we do not have to speculate as to how God would answer the question. In Ephesians

4:4-6, Paul wrote,

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

Earlier in this epistle, Paul declared that God put all things under the feet of Jesus and *“gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all”* (1:22-23). The combined truth of these two texts is compelling proof that, according to God, there is one church. If there is *“one body”* (Eph. 4:4), and the body is the church (Eph. 1:22-23), then there is one church.

Jesus Only Promised To Build One Church

This harmonizes perfectly with the rest of New Testament teaching. After Peter declared Him to be the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus said, *“Upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell [Hades] shall not prevail against it”* (Matt. 16:18). Jesus never said anything about building a multiplicity of churches. He said, *“I will build my church.”*

Only One Church Was Established Upon The Day Of Pentecost

Did Jesus ever make good on His promise to build the church? Indeed, on the Day of Pentecost,

Jesus established His church, for we know that those who gladly received the Word were baptized and added to the church (Acts 2:41, 47). Please observe that the saved on Pentecost did not join different churches with a variety of different doctrines. They were all added to the same church. Whose church was it? It was the church of (belonging to) Christ. After all, He purchased it with His own blood when He gave Himself for it (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25).

Why Are There So Many Different Churches Today?

If only one church came into existence on the Day of Pentecost, then why are there so many different churches today? It is certainly not because of anything God has done. A little girl was walking to church services with her Daddy when she heard the church bells ringing across the way where her mother attended church services. The little girl took *"time about."* One Sunday she would go with mother to church and the next Sunday she would go with Daddy to church. As she heard the bells ringing, she missed her mother very much. She looked up at her Daddy and asked, *"Daddy, does God do all things for the best?"* Her father replied, *"Well, certainly, God does all things for the best."* With childlike innocence, she looked into her Daddy's eyes and said, *"Daddy, if God does all things for the best then why didn't He just make one church so you and me and Momma could all go together?"*

The thing that makes this story so poignant is

that God did make only one church in the beginning. But man was not satisfied to leave it the way that God designed it to be. As time went by, men began to add to and subtract from the doctrine of Christ, replacing it with the doctrines and commandments of men (Matt. 15:8-9; Rev. 22:18-19). As the doctrines and commandments of men proliferated so did the number of different religious groups, all of them denominating themselves differently from one another. This has been going on for so many centuries now that many people take it for granted that this is just the way it is. But from the beginning of the church it was not so!

Picture a mountain stream from whence at the fount nothing but pure water flows forth. Now, picture the pure water from this stream flowing down the mountainside into the river. For the sake of argument, suppose that a number of chemical plants/manufacturing plants are built alongside of the river. And suppose that these manufacturing plants are not very careful to avoid polluting the waters of the river. Now, imagine yourself standing downstream of the river. You are thirsty and you dip your glass into the river, hoping to find something to quench your thirst. However, when you pull the glass up out of the water you are mortified to see the polluted and contaminated condition of the water. You are so disgusted by the condition of the water that you refuse to drink it. But you are still thirsty! Is there anyplace you can go to secure a pure, fresh, clean glass of water? The answer is "yes," but you

must bypass the sources of pollution and go back beyond them to the location where the water is pure and uncontaminated! Go to the fount where the water begins its flow and you will avoid the pollutions!

Likewise, when the church first began, the doctrine that flowed forth was pure, clean, fresh and uncontaminated. However, as the church went down the stream of time, men began to build different denominations, which in turn began to pollute the pure doctrine of Christ by pumping the doctrines and commandments of men into the religious waters. This has continued to this present time, so much so that someone who is thirsty for a relationship with God in our day may dip their theological cup into the religious waters of our day and be so disgusted by the polluted appearance of the waters that they throw their hands up in despair and announce, *"I'm not drinking any of this stuff."* Yet, they are still thirsty for God! Is there any place you can go and discover pure, clean, fresh, and uncontaminated New Testament Christianity? Indeed there is such a place. But we must bypass and go back beyond all of the manmade religious doctrines to the pure fount of New Testament teaching.

To put it another way, the seed of the kingdom is the Word of God (Luke 8:11). When this seed was planted into the hearts of first century men and women it did not produce the system of denominationalism. It produced only one church—the one that belongs to Christ. The nature of the seed (the Word of God) has not changed since it was preached

in the first century. Consequently, the Word of God, when followed today, will not produce the system of denominationalism. It will produce the same thing it produced when it was preached in the first century! Many years ago, archaeologists discovered an ancient wheat seed in a Pharaoh's tomb. They estimated that the seed was approximately 2000 years old. When they planted the wheat seed they got the same crop they would have gotten if they had planted the wheat seed 2000 years earlier – wheat! Likewise, when we plant the pure seed of the kingdom into the hearts of men and women today, it will make them want to become a part of the one true church that Jesus built!

Would A Loving God Really Confine Salvation To One Church?

The concept of God confining salvation to one place, and to only those who obey His Will, is not a new one. The concept encompasses both Testaments.

1. There was one place where men could be saved from the flood. It was exclusively for those in the ark (Gen. 7:1; 1 Peter 3:20-21). Because the earth was corrupt and filled with violence, God purposed to destroy man from the face of the earth (Gen. 6:11-13). However, Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord (Gen. 6:8), and God established a covenant with him, promising to save him from the flood. For decades Noah preached a message of righteousness to the world (2 Peter 2:5): *“Repent or perish!”* For the sake

of illustration, picture one of Noah's hearers asking him, "Do you think that you and your little group in the ark are the only ones who are going to be saved?" How would Noah have replied? Like it or not, the one and only location God provided for salvation from the flood was in the ark (1 Peter 3:20). God's way of salvation excluded all who were not in the ark!

2. There was one way the firstborn of the children of Israel could be delivered from death. It was exclusively for those in the house(s) where the blood had been properly applied to the doorposts (Exod. 12:7-13). God forewarned His people that He would smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt (Exod. 12:12). However, God also devised a means of escape. He promised that, when He saw the blood of a lamb properly applied to the doorposts of the house, He would "*pass over*" and not destroy their firstborn (Exod. 12:7, 13). This plan of salvation was very specific, narrow, and exclusive of any other method or means. It was not one of many ways to escape the plague—it was the one and only way!

3. There was one house where Rahab and her family could be saved from the battle of Jericho. Because of the kindness Rahab demonstrated toward the spies, they promised her protection during the battle of Jericho. However, there was one important stipulation: she must remain in the house where the scarlet thread was hanging in the window (Josh. 2:18). Of all the houses in Jericho the spies specified only one house wherein Rahab and those with her

could be saved from the battle. All other houses were excluded! Rahab did not react negatively and say, *"Well if the way to be saved is so narrow, then I'm not interested."* She complied with these simple instructions and she and all her family with her were saved (Josh. 6:22-23).

4. There is only one Person in Whom we can be saved. Salvation is in Christ. It is interesting to note that Jesus was both all-inclusive and exclusive in His attitude toward the lost. He was all-inclusive in the sense that He invited *"all"* who are lost to be saved. He invited all who are weary and heavy laden to come unto Him (Matt. 11:28). He tasted death for *"every man"* (Heb. 2:9). He gave His life as a propitiation for the sins of the *"whole world"* (I John 2:2). He commanded the apostles to preach the gospel to every creature because He desires the salvation of every creature (Mark 16:15). As far as Jesus is concerned, *"Whosoever will"* may come and take of the water of life freely (Rev. 22:17).

The grace of God was designed to bring the offer of salvation to all men (Titus 2:11; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9), but Jesus made it abundantly clear that there is only one way that leads to heaven, and that many will be excluded from heaven because they did not travel that way. Jesus was an exclusivist when He said, *"I am the way, the truth and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me"* (John 14:6). Jesus was an exclusivist when He said, *"Except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins"* (John 8:24). Jesus was an exclusivist when He said, *"Ye shall know the*

truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Jesus was an exclusivist when He said, *"I am the door"* (John 10:9). He did not say that He was one of many entrances into heaven—He is the one and only, the exclusive door into heaven! Indeed,

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

There is only one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5). All spiritual blessings are in Christ (Eph. 1:3). Eternal life is found only in the Son of God (1 John 5:11; John 6:68). Salvation is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 2:10).

5. There is only one church wherein salvation may be found. It is the church of (belonging to) Christ. It is absolutely crucial to clarify that when we speak of the church of Christ we are not talking about a denomination among denominations. Some people in the religious world erroneously believe that we are saying, *"Of all the denominations in the world today, the Church of Christ is the best denomination of them all, and thus you must be a member of our Church of Christ denomination in order to be saved."* I have never believed nor taught such a doctrine. Some years ago, after a lengthy series of studies with a Methodist couple, the light went on in the mind of the wife, who said to me excitedly,

Wait a minute! You're not asking us to leave our denomination for the Church of Christ

denomination. You're asking us to leave denominationalism altogether and just be members of the church of Christ we can read about in the New Testament.

When I assured her that she was exactly right about my intentions she said, *"Shall we go to the pond?"* She wanted to be baptized immediately so that she might be added to Christ's church, the church belonging to Christ, the church of Christ (Acts 2:41, 47; Rom. 16:16).

Did she and her husband do the right thing when they were baptized that evening? Did they have to do what they did or would they have been just fine if they had remained in denominationalism? Does one have to be a member of the church of Christ in order to be saved? Let the Bible answer this question in three verses.

The first passage is **Ephesians 5:23**, which declares that Christ *"is the Savior of the body."* The passage is plain: only those in the body can be saved, because Christ is the Savior of the body—not of those outside the body. After reading this text, I will ask the one who asked the question, *"From this text, how would you answer the question, Does one have to be a member of the body of Christ in order to be saved?"* Almost without exception they will reply, "Yes." If language has any meaning at all, then the answer is *"Yes – one must be a member of the body of Christ in order to be saved because Christ is the Savior of those who are in His body."* Sinners who are outside of the body of Christ are excluded from salvation

because they are not in that which Jesus will save.

The second text is **Ephesians 4:4**, wherein we learn that *"there is one body."* We have already learned that one must be in the body in order to be saved, for Jesus is the Savior of the body (Eph. 5:23). However, there are hundreds of religious bodies in the world today. Yet, according to Ephesians 4:4 *"there is one body."* Hence, I must be a member of the one body spoken of in Ephesians 4:4 in order to be saved.

The third passage is **Ephesians 1:22-23** from which we learn that Jesus has been made head over all things to the church, *"which is his body."* Thus, according to inspired Scripture, the body of Christ is the same thing as the church of Christ. We have already established that one must be a member of the one body of Christ in order to be saved (Eph. 4:4; 5:23). But the body of Christ is the same thing as the church of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). Therefore, one must be a member of the church of Christ in order to be saved.

If one can be saved outside of the church of Christ, then the blood of Christ was unnecessary, for it cost Christ His blood to purchase the church (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25). If one can be saved outside of the church of Christ, then one can be saved outside of Christ, for He is the head of the body, the church, and you cannot separate the head from the body (Col. 1:18; Eph. 5:23; 1:22-23). The church is the bride of Christ (Rom. 7:4; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-27) and just as one bride was not as good as another to

Jacob (Gen. 29), one bride is not as good as another to Jesus, the Bridegroom.

How Can I Determine Which Church Is The Lord's Church?

With so many churches in the world today, some may have difficulty in determining which church in their community is the one true church. The following questions will be of some assistance in this regard. As you study your Bible, ask the following:

1. What church in this community has no creed but Christ?

2. What church in this community has no manual, catechism, or book of discipline but the New Testament?

3. What church in this community requires the same terms of admission as did the New Testament churches?

4. What people in this community wear the same religious designations as those worn in New Testament times, preferring to be called Christians only?

5. What church in this community follows the Biblical pattern of church organization in having elders lead the flock, while the preachers, deacons and members serve under the elders, who serve under the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ?

6. What church in this community insists that the commandments of God be obeyed as they were in New Testament times?

7. What church in this community meets upon

the first day of the week to study the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship by praying, singing, giving, breaking bread and drinking the fruit of the vine?

8. What church in this community possesses all the earmarks of a New Testament church?

If we answer these questions prayerfully, carefully, and scripturally, then we will have no difficulty identifying the one true church of Jesus Christ!

HOW MANY CHURCHES ARE THERE?

Chapter 17

What Obligation Does The Church Have To Truth

John W. Moore



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In John 8:32, Jesus said “*ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*” In this monumental passage, Jesus emphatically reveals that truth exists, and that truth can be obtained. Unlike some in the world today who claim that truth is whatever one believes it to be, truth is objective. It is not subjective. It is not dependent upon the whims of society or the norms of the culture. According to John 17:17, truth is the Word of God, and God’s Word is the standard for determining what is right and what is wrong (2 Tim. 3:16-17). On the Day of Judgment, Christ will judge men by the standard of God’s Word. This being

true, it behooves the Christian – and thus the church – to uphold the truth of the Gospel and to defend its claims. Since truth is what sets the sinner free, we dare not compromise when it comes to truth. Truth, above all else, should be prized and valued. It must also be defended. Indeed, the church is obligated to preach and preserve the truth.

When the apostle Paul wrote to the young evangelist Timothy, he reminded him that a well balanced life entails not only taking heed unto oneself, but it also involves taking heed unto the doctrine of Christ (1 Tim. 4:16). Living the Christian life is paramount, but living the Christian life also demands and necessitates our defending and preaching the truth and nothing but the truth. Some in the religious world are dedicated to prayer, giving, benevolence, purity of thought, and a life of holiness, but when it comes to doctrine, they are severely deficient. An emphasis upon preserving the truth and preaching the truth is extenuated in scripture.

The Truth

The truth must be kept pure (Titus 2:7-8). Both in the first century and in the religious world today, there are some who would pervert the Gospel of Christ. Whether it was in the form of Gnosticism, false teaching about the deity of Christ, erroneous views about His second coming, or fallacious teachings regarding His resurrection, etc., truth was constantly assaulted and therefore needed defending. Some in the first century were teaching a different Gospel, and

yet Paul said there was not another Gospel, and any who would teach otherwise should be accursed (Gal. 1:6-9). Today, some would contaminate the truth with the doctrines of men and the traditions of religious formalism and sectarian creeds. Yet, we must do all within our power to contend earnestly for the faith (Jude 3). Likewise, there are some who would pervert the Gospel through contaminated translations and perversions of the scriptures. According to 2 Peter 3:16, some twist the Scriptures under their own destruction. A child of God must therefore be set for the defense of the Gospel, lest we be led away with the error of the wicked, and thereby fall from our own steadfastness (2 Peter 3:16-17).

In the books of 2 Peter and Jude, there is a clear reminder that false teachers would arise and lead people into destruction. Their damnable heresies would be brought in secretly and thereby undermine the foundation of the church. Many of these false teachers had ulterior motives, seeking self-aggrandizement, and so the child of God must therefore not be ignorant of Satan's devices. False teachers often creep in secretly, appearing as though they are sheep but in reality are nothing more than ravening wolves who end up decimating the flock. In response to these attacks the church must "*contend earnestly for the faith*" (Jude 3) and remember that throughout history there has been a continual struggle between truth and error, right and wrong. The church must remember that it is involved in a spiritual battle:

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints (Eph. 6:10-18).

The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:4-5).

In these monumental passages, the apostle Paul reminds us that the battles we are to fight are to be of a spiritual nature. They involve warring against that which opposes God and that which "*exalts itself against the knowledge of God.*" Any doctrine which – if taught and embraced – would involve a man losing his soul is an affront and an attack on the system of truth. As revealed earlier, truth is what makes us free and so error must be opposed lest it hide the light of the saving power of the gospel of Christ.

Futher observations in regard to the church's obligation to truth must be considered in light of the relationship between Jesus and truth. The Lord Himself revealed that He was the living embodiment of truth (John 14:6), and that He spoke the truth (John 8:14). Since this is true, the church, in seeking to follow Jesus, must love the word of truth in the same manner with which it loves the Lord. Loving the truth therefore necessitates our obeying the commandments of God for Jesus said, "*If you love me, keep my commandments*" (John 14:15). If the church indeed loves the Lord, then it will also love the truth for they are one and the same. Throughout John's gospel account, the word "*truth*" and "*true*" are used a total of 43 times. In a world filled with confusion and error, Jesus brought forth words of truth whereby souls could be purified and ultimately saved from the torments of hell. He had an obvious concern for truth and if the church wants to be pleasing to Christ then it must likewise, in seeking to be like

Christ, be concerned about it as well. We must *“buy the truth and sell it not”* (Prov. 23:23).

Consider also these passages in regard to the church and its obligation to truth:

1. The church must worship according to truth: *“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth”* (John 4:24).

2. The church must not allow the truth to be changed:

Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen (Rom. 1:24-25).

3. The church must obey the truth:

But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath (Rom. 2:5-8; cf. 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Gal. 3:1; 5:7).

4. The church must speak the truth in love:

But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ (Eph. 4:15).

5. The church must share the truth with its neighbors:

Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another (Eph. 4:25; cf. 1 Tim. 2:4).

6. So as not to perish, the church must love the truth:

And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved (2 Thess. 2:10).

7. The church must be the pillar and ground of the truth:

These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:14-15).

8. The church must rightly divide the truth:

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15).

9. The church must not resist the truth or turn from it:

Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith (2 Tim. 3:8; cf. 2 Tim. 4:4; Titus 1:4).

10. The church must keep the commandments of truth:

He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him (1 John 2:4).

11. The church must love in truth:

He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:18).

12. The church must walk in truth:

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth (3 John 1:4; cf. 2 John 1:3-4).

Today, with so many false and erroneous ideas prevalent throughout the religious world, it is incumbent upon the church to be keenly aware of its sacred obligation toward truth. On the day the Lord returns we will be judged according to the standard of truth (Rom. 2:6-16; John 12:48). Each of us will give account of ourselves before God (Rom.

14:12). How will we measure up? Will we be found as those who love truth and lived it in our lives? The truth is a precious commodity and we must therefore treasure it with all of our being and never be guilty of compromising its worth.

Chapter 18

Do All Members Have A Role Of Involvement?

Robert Hatfield



Robert is a member of the East Hill congregation (Pulaski, TN). From a child has been taught the Scriptures and trained in leading and serving others. Has preached at numerous congregations and spoken at youth gatherings. A regular speaker on Gospel Broadcasting Network (**Truth For Youth**). Presently a freshman at Freed-Hardeman University. Robert has a younger brother, Bill, who is a special young man.

The blessing of membership in the church is impossible to adequately describe. With Almighty God as its Author (Eph. 3:9-11) and Jesus Christ as its Head (Eph. 1:22-23), the church is the greatest institution on earth of which man can be a part. *Do all members have a role of involvement in the church?* This study will answer that question by noting the *attitude* toward involvement, that *all* must be involved, the *actions* and *ages* of involvement, and the *advantages* of involvement in the work of the church.

The ATTITUDE Toward Involvement

People often involve themselves in social or

business activities with coworkers, neighbors, and friends, but many are indifferent to involvement in the work of the church with brothers and sisters in Christ. The church has the greatest work on earth, the responsibility of seeking and saving the lost (which is accomplished by means of evangelism, benevolence, and edification). Jesus charged His followers to go forth and preach the gospel to all nations (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). Unfortunately, there are Christians who fail to get involved as they should; some because of ignorance of the truth (they have not studied and are not aware of that which Christ commands), others possibly because of laziness, selfishness, a lack of concern, or even because of fear. Christians must not allow *anything* to stand in the way of faithful obedience to God. Excuses are sinful, and provide no valid reason for one to fail in his service to the Father. Jesus said, "*The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few*" (Matt. 9:37). Realizing the importance of church involvement, Christians must manifest an attitude of work, *diligent work*, in order to faithfully accomplish the task at hand.

The apostle Paul provides a great example of a righteous attitude toward involvement. In the first letter to the Corinthians Paul wrote, "*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye **stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord**, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord*" (emp. mine, RH). Timothy was exhorted to "*Preach the word; **be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine***" (2 Tim. 4:2).

Paul's fervor is manifested in Romans, "*Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved*" (Rom. 10:1). The church was Paul's passion. This faithful apostle fully realized the importance of the work with which he was charged and the urgency with which he had to work. It was because of his faithful attitude that Paul was able to write at the end of his life,

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

Will Christians today be able to repeat Paul's words when their lives come to an end? They may be as confident as Paul if they manifest the same attitude as he did, and actively involve themselves in obedience to the Lord's will.

ALL Must Be Involved

Each Christian has the responsibility of involvement in church work. Notice those to whom Paul addressed: "*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord*" (emp. mine, RH). The brethren are responsible for the work. This charge undoubtedly

includes elders, deacons, and preachers, but is also *equally addressed to the members*. It was the *members* of the first century church who spread the gospel message (Acts 8:1, 4), not only the apostles and elders of the congregations. Members' involvement can be based upon the following points.

Involvement should be based upon the great commission. The words of Jesus' great commission are familiar:

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matt. 28:18-20).

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned (Mark 16:15-16).

Jesus said, "*All power is given unto me.*" As the Son of God, Creator of the universe, Jesus has power over all things (John 1:3; Col. 1:16-17). Additionally, as the Mediator (go-between, reconciler) between God and man, the universe is placed under Him (Eph. 1:20-23; Phil. 2:6-11). Therefore, Jesus Christ has "*power or authority committed to him over all things, that he might redeem, defend, and save the church purchased with his*

own blood" (Barnes, 323). It is because of His power that Jesus is able to command, "*Go ye therefore.*" They were (and Christians today are) to teach. Jesus commanded a three-step process involving teaching the lost, baptizing them, and then continuing to teach those who had been baptized. Any excuse of fear or uncertainty is quickly disposed because those who place themselves under Christ's command need not worry; He can defend and care for His followers, even unto death (cf. Rom. 8:35-39; 2 Cor. 2:14). This assurance is based upon Jesus' statement, "*I am with you alway.*" The great commission commands and motivates members of the church toward work and involvement.

Involvement should be based upon one's talents. God does not expect above that which one can do. While not every member will be able to fulfill the same particular job in the church's work, there is a job for everyone to do. Obviously, different people are talented in different ways and those talents should be used to their full potential in the kingdom of God. In Matthew 25:14-30 Jesus described three servants who were given different amounts of money. The Bible says each man was given according to that which he was able to do (Matt. 25:15). Two of the three servants used their money to its full potential and were able to double the amount for their master. The other servant, doing nothing with what he had, was described as wicked and lazy (Matt. 25:26) for failing to use his talents. "*And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*"

(Matt. 25:30). Accordingly, Christians are to use their God-given talents to their fullest abilities in order to obey God.

Involvement should be based upon one's unconditional love for the lost world. As God has shown His love for man, man is to show love toward his fellow man with special regard toward the lost. This even includes enemies. Jesus said, *"love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you"* (Matt. 5:44). Each soul is valuable (Matt. 16:26) and worth more than the entire world. Several passages of Scripture confirm the lost state of the souls of the world. The Galatian brethren were told that Christ could *"deliver us from this present evil world"* (Gal. 1:4, emp.) mine, RH). That which is of the world is not of the Father (1 John 2:16), for *"the whole world lieth in wickedness"* (1 John 5:19). Jesus' words ring true, *"The harvest is plenteous"* (Matt. 9:37). There is much work to be done. The lost world is in a dangerous condition, therefore, *ALL* have an important role.

ACTIONS And AGES Of Involvement

Many ways exist for members of all ages to be involved in working for the church. The proper time to begin working for the church is NOW and, as long as one is able, there is never the proper time to quit. *There is work for every member to do.* Some work is unique to one's age and spiritual maturity, while other areas of responsibility are bound upon all Christians.

For example, Christians of every age must study and grow in knowledge (1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 2:15; 2 Peter 3:18). With so much to learn from the Scriptures, there is never a time in which one should cease to study. Additionally, Christians must regularly pray to God (Luke 18:1; 1 Thess. 5:17; Phil. 4:6-7; 1 Tim. 2:8) and worship God on the first day of the week (John 4:24; Acts 20:7). Another contributing factor to church involvement is keeping priorities in order (Matt. 6:33; Col. 3:1-2). Christians certainly must be mindful to put "*first things first.*" Regular study, prayer and worship, and keeping proper priorities are four areas on which all Christians must focus, regardless of age.

Having noticed that which all Christians must do, questions may arise concerning the responsibilities of different age groups. How can young people be involved? How can adults, those that are "*middle aged*" be involved? How can "*senior saints*" be involved? The Bible provides the answers.

The Responsibility Of Young People. Upon becoming a Christian, the Lord adds the obedient follower to the church (cf. the people on the day of Pentecost believed, obeyed, and the Lord added them to the church, according to Acts 2:37-38, 41, 47). As already noted, each member must be actively involved in working. Therefore, young Christians are required to work for the church. Young people can be involved in many ways.

- *Young people must be involved in "church activities."* In other words, young people should become involved with their fellow members with

special regard toward their fellow youth members. Young people with the common goal of heaven can help one another. Fellowshiping with young Christians can influence for the good. Young people should surround themselves with a wholesome, Christian environment, where they may rejoice and weep together (Rom. 12:15), worship together (Acts 2:42), and work together (1 Cor. 3:9). Helping one another reach heaven is the ultimate goal.

- *Young people must be a godly influence upon their peers.* Jesus asked, "What good is salt if it does not serve it's purpose? And what good is the light if it is hidden under a bushel?" (Matt. 5:13ff. paraphrased, RH). If the salt does not enhance the flavor of the food, it serves no purpose, and if the light does not aid in seeing in the dark, it serves no purpose. Therefore, Jesus paralleled His illustrations by noting that Christians who fail to let their lights shine before men (and to glorify the Father in heaven) are failing to serve their proper purpose (Matt. 5:13-16). Young Christians should influence their peers in a godly manner, letting their lights shine both in word and deed (Col. 3:17), that others may know they are Christians. Paul told Timothy to be "*an example of the believers*" in every aspect of his life; in word, in how he lived (conversation), in love, in spirit, in faith, and in purity (1 Tim. 4:12). A young person's life that is dedicated to serving God will do nothing but good in the lives of friends and neighbors.

- *Young people must evangelize their peers.* One of the greatest things about young people is the fact

that most are teachable; they are willing to listen and seriously consider what they hear. Many young people reach a point in their lives when they question what they believe. This is an open door for a Christian to study the Bible with such people and teach them the truth! Young Timothy was the one to whom this charge was given: "*Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine*" (2 Tim. 4:2). Young Christians should not let such valuable opportunities pass them by, for in so doing they risk causing a friend to be eternally lost. The young can, *and must*, work for the Lord through evangelism.

Timothy is a great character to which young people may look because he was young. Yet, Paul said "*he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do*" (1 Cor. 16:10). It is often and truly stated that young people are the church of the future. With such a challenge, the young ought to prepare *right now* that they may be ready to fill the roles of elders, deacons, preachers, teachers, etc. But young people must not forget that they are also very much a part of the church *today*. They have a vital role that they must fulfill. As a chain can only be as strong as the weakest link, so can the church, collectively, only be as strong as its weakest member. Thus, young people should grow and mature in God's word, realizing their important role of involvement in the church.

The Responsibility Of Middle-Aged Adults. While this writer is unable at this point to speak from personal experience concerning being "*middle-aged*,"

DO ALL MEMBERS HAVE A ROLE OF INVOLVEMENT?

the Bible is concise in teaching that which adults should do. One who has fulfilled the responsibilities of the young will simply continue, on a different level, that which they have already begun.

- *Adults are responsible for being involved, and making themselves available for involvement.* One mistake that must not be made is thinking, "Someone else will do it." Each individual member is responsible for involvement. Just as it would be easy to fail to study and grow, failing to make oneself available for involvement would also be easy to do. Involvement in the church is not an option, it is a command. Therefore, for one to fulfill this command obediently, he must make himself available to work.

"Who will follow Jesus?
Who will make reply,
'I am on the Lord's side;
Master, here am I?'"

Isaiah wrote, "Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me" (Isa. 6:8). Whether it is a Bible study with friends and family or work with one's congregation, time is an obvious necessity for which one will have to plan. Church work involves planning, time, and even sacrifice (Rom. 12:1-2). Making oneself available will ensure time to do the work of the church, which effects eternity.

- *Adults are responsible for building a good home.* The home is a vital part of an adult's work, especially

in today's world. Using evil things such as divorce, evolution, violence, and all sorts of immorality, Satan forcefully attacks the home. This present age is a *crucial* time for parents to build a godly home. The husband has responsibilities in the home (see Eph. 5:23, 25-29; 1 Peter 3:7). He must love his wife, giving her honor, and he must provide for his family. As the husband, he must spiritually lead the home. The wife, too, has work she must do in the home (see Eph. 5:22, 24, 33; Titus 2:4-5; 1 Peter 3:1-6). She must love, submit to, and reverence her husband. As the two work together, being as one, they are a team; they will help one another in every way possible. They are *both* responsible for raising their children (See Deut. 11:19; Prov. 22:6; Eph. 6:1-4). Every opportunity parents have to teach their children should be taken (cf. Deut. 11:19). Parents must be willing to teach their children that which is right, to provide for their children the proper foundation upon God's word. Parents must teach their children by example (Matt. 5:16), by studying together (2 Tim. 2:15), and by faithfully prioritizing (Matt. 6:33; Col. 3:1-2). *Nothing is more important than husbands and wives helping one another reach heaven, and teaching their children how to get there.* Parents *must* remember the importance of spiritual matters in relation to ball games, school activities, and anything else. For the work of the church to be a success, Christian parents must build godly homes and raise godly children. This is their responsibility!

The Responsibility Of "Senior Saints." Since this writer is unable to pen from experience concerning

those that are "*middle aged*," he is certainly not able to write concerning older people. But the writer has been blessed with *many* righteous examples who are uplifting, determined, and some of the best on earth. It is from the example of the "*senior saints*" at East Hill (this writer's "*home congregation*") that the writer has developed the following points.

- *Older people must "keep on keeping on."* The church needs older people! As previously noted in this study, there is never a time to cease involvement. Paul said, "*always abounding in the work of the Lord*" (1 Cor. 15:58). To be a part of the church is to be a part of the greatest work on earth. So, while roles may slightly shift, and while it may be that some older Christians cannot do those things which they once could, there is still much work older people can do. Robert Browning wrote, "*Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be.*" The words of Mr. Browning could easily be applied to older Christians and the work of the church. Sometimes the greatest work that people may do is in their old age. Moses was eighty years old when he began to lead the children of Israel (Exod. 7:7). Genesis 21:5 notes that Abraham was 100 years old when his son Isaac was born (the child through whom Abraham's seed would be blessed). Noah was 600 years old upon the completion of the ark, and, while men lived longer then than they do now, he certainly was not young at such an age. The point is that much work can be accomplished through the everyday life of an older Christian. Paul admonished the Ephesians to "*redeem the time*" (Eph. 5:16). Truly

Paul redeemed his time, remaining faithful until the very end of his life (2 Tim. 4:6-8). Therefore, following Paul's example, *"keep on keeping on!"*

- *Older people can encourage others of all ages.* One of many ways this writer is effected by older people is by their encouraging words and uplifting spirits. Older Christians provide encouragement to younger Christians through their righteous influence, godly deeds, wonderful words, and nice notes. Again, the writer has been blessed to receive and be greatly uplifted by many nice notes from several older members at East Hill. Sometimes older people may feel discouraged because of their age, but the Bible says that those who are older have a blessing. The wise man wrote, *"The hoary head [silver-haired head, NKJV] is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness"* (Prov. 16:31). Truly old age is a blessing from Almighty God:

The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. **They shall still bring forth fruit in old age;** they shall be fat and flourishing; (Psm. 92:12-14, emp. mine, RH).

Old age is a blessing to older people, and older people are truly a blessing to the church.

- *Older people can be great teachers and examples.* Great amounts of experiences and Bible study make a great teacher. Such is that which is found within many older members of the church. Members of all ages

benefit from the wisdom and growth of “*senior Saints,*” and such is God’s will. Paul wrote that the older men and women are to provide faithful examples in order to teach the younger men and women (Titus 2:1-8). Paul noted Timothy’s righteous raising:

And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:15).

Timothy had been taught the truth from his mother, Eunice, who had been taught by her mother (Timothy’s grandmother), Lois (2 Tim. 1:5). A goal of older members should be to pass on that which they have learned from God’s word (2 Tim. 2:2). In a world that needs faithful examples, this is truly an important responsibility.

- *Older people must continue to worship and serve God.* While one may be prevented due to illness, or many other situations, God wants older Christians to continue to worship and serve Him to the best of their ability. “*Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer... be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life*” (Rev. 2:10). Jesus said, “*he that endureth to the end shall be saved*” (Matt. 10:22). Paul never stopped serving God, and at the end of his life he was confident of his future.

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which

the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

Older Christians, "*senior saints*," are a vital part of the work of the church. The church needs older people to "*keep on keeping on!*" The church needs their encouragement and righteous examples. Members that follow these faithful men and women are able "*to stand on their shoulders*." Finally, God wants older people to continue serving Him, to the very best of their ability, so that heaven can await them in eternity.

The ADVANTAGES Of Involvement

Having covered the *attitude* toward involvement, the fact that *all* must be involved, and the *actions* and *ages* of involvement, it is important now to focus upon the *advantages* of being involved. God rewards His obedient children. The most obvious and long-awaited reward that God offers is eternity in heaven (Matt. 7:21). Notice, also, some advantages that will benefit Christians while they are still upon the earth.

- *Involvement draws Christians closer to God.* James wrote, "*Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded*" (James 4:8). It must be clearly noted that the responsibility to draw closer to God lies on the shoulders of each individual person. James told the people that they had to "*cleanse their hands*." Isaiah makes the responsibility clear:

Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But **your iniquities** have separated between you and your God, and **your sins** have hid his face from you, that he will not hear (Isa. 59:1-2, emp. mine, RH).

So one can clearly see that God has not separated Himself from man, but man has *separated himself* from God (Isa. 59:1-2). Contrastingly, when one obeys the will of God, that person will eventually become closer to God. Paul described church workers as "*labourers together with God*" (1 Cor. 3:9). Prior to that statement, Paul explained how this joint participation works, "*I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase*" (1 Cor. 3:6). The Creator allows for His children, the "*royal priests*" (1 Peter 2:5), to approach His throne and address Him as Father (cf. Matt. 6:9). As they draw nigh to God, He (in drawing near to them) is "*faithful and just to forgive*" the sins they have committed (as they continue to walk in the light, 1 John 1:6-9). The old song says, "*There is a place of quiet rest, near to the heart of God.*"

• *Involvement draws Christians closer to each other.* As Christians work together for the Lord's church, they will inevitably build closer relationships with one another. Christians share a common Father (Gen. 1:1), a common family (1 Tim. 3:15), a common reward (2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 2:10), and, of course, a common work in spreading the gospel (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Phil. 1:5). Lanny Wolfe's *God's Family* contains words that are near and dear to Christians' hearts:

And sometimes we laugh together,
sometimes we cry;
sometimes we share together,
heartaches and sighs;
sometimes we dream together
of how it will be –
When we all get to Heaven,
God's family.

Having the privilege of worshipping, working, and spending time in general fellowship with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ is valuable and needed. The times of encouragement, wisdom, and strength are treasured. *"Blessed be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love."* Being involved in the works of church can bring about such valuable relationships that will truly last an eternity!

- *Involvement causes individuals to grow spiritually.* Drawing nearer to God and to each other will cause one to build stronger faith. Paul noted to Titus that maintaining good works is *"good and profitable unto all men,"* (Titus 3:8) and that doing good works will produce fruit (Titus 3:14). Christians must strive to exercise unto godliness, for it is *"great gain"* (1 Tim. 4:7-8). One who is actively and passionately involved in doing that which is right will *not* fail to grow. Only good can come from doing the Lord's work.

- *Involvement reaches the lost.* The main goal of the work of the church is reaching the lost. That was Jesus' purpose while He was on earth (Luke 19:10), and it is that same purpose that He has committed to Christians (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). The work

that is done for the church is priceless. Each individual soul is worth more than the entire world and all the riches herein (Matt. 16:26). Therefore, any effort the church can put forth to effectively spread the truth of the gospel should be done without hesitation! This is God's plan for His people!

Conclusion

All members have a role of involvement in the church, and it is a *crucial* role! Souls are at stake – lost souls and possibly *your own soul*! There is no excuse for refusing the greatest, most important work ever to be done. Will **YOU** obey God's command and be involved in the church?

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Chapter 19

Who Can The Glorious Church Fellowship Or Not Fellowship?

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What Is Fellowship?

The Greek "*koinoneo*" means "A. To come into communion of fellowship, to become a sharer, be made a partner. B. To enter into fellowship, joins one's self as an associate, make one's self a sharer, or partner" (Thayer, 351-352). Of the Greek "*koinonia*," Thayer says,

Fellowship, association...communion, joint participation...in the New Testament the share which one has in anything, participation...in the benefits of Christ's death, I Cor.10:16...in the (mystical) body of Christ or the church...the intimate bond of fellowship which unites Christians, etc.

Now, what is the right attitude toward all this in the church? The word *"attitude"* means *"a position assumed or studied to serve a purpose; as a threatening attitude. 2. Position or bearing, as indicates action, feeling, or mood itself; as a kindly attitude."*

In the very beginning of our study of church fellowship, we should have a right attitude toward each truth and fact involved in our consideration of the subject at hand.

Fellowship With The Godhead

First of all, we should cultivate a right attitude toward God, Christ and the Holy Spirit.

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3).

If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others (Phil. 2:1-4).

If there is no proper attitude toward real and genuine fellowship with Deity, there can be no right attitude toward the church and brethren.

Fellowship Upon The Basis Of God's Word

If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin (1 John 1:6-7).

This "*light*" in which we must walk in order to have fellowship with God in His word.

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path (Psm. 119:105).

The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple (Psm. 119:130).

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them (2 Cor. 4:3-4).

Hence we must follow the truth, as it is in the Bible, regardless of the consequences. Those who oppose this will be the cause of all the confusion, disunity and lack of fellowship in the church.

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned;

and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple (Rom. 16:17-18).

The Church Can Have No Fellowship With Infidels

A right attitude toward church fellowship does not embrace everybody, and everything. Christians cannot scripturally fellowship infidels and unbelievers. Paul says,

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? (2 Cor. 6:14-15).

Therefore, a right attitude toward church fellowship will refuse to compromise the truth to be in fellowship with one who does not believe in God, nor believe His word. *"The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God"* (Psm. 14:1; 53:1). The believer can have no part, or fellowship with an infidel. *"And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?"* (2 Cor. 6:15). Any member of the church who loses faith in God would have to be excluded from church fellowship, as is true of any other sin committed not repented of (2 Thess. 3:6-15; 1 Cor. 5:1-13).

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican (Matt. 18:15-17).

The Church Can Have No Fellowship With Idolatry

There can also be no fellowship in the church with those who worship idols, or false gods. Paul says,

And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty (2 Cor. 6:16-18).

The Church Cannot Fellowship With Satan

Paul also says, *“What concord hath Christ with*

Belial?" (2 Cor. 6:15.). Since there is no unity, or harmony possible between Christ and Belial (or Satan), then there can be no Christian fellowship between Christians and those who are of Satan, whether they be alien sinners or apostates in the church. Those who follow Christ and those who follow Satan are going in opposite directions, and can have no fellowship with each other.

The Church Can Have No Fellowship With Judaism

There can be no scriptural fellowship between Christians and Judaism, or those holding on to the old covenant and rejecting Christ and Christianity. Christ desired and prayed for unity among those who believe in Him, and who accept the apostles' doctrine—believe on Him through "*their word.*"

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me (John 17:20-23).

The Church Can Have No Fellowship With The World

The church is called by the gospel out of the world, and is to stay out of it, and exist apart from the world. *“And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful”* (Col. 3:15). *“And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness”* (1 John 5:19). *“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them”* (Eph. 5:11).

The Church Can Have No Fellowship With Faith Only

The church cannot scripturally fellowship those having dead faith—faith only. There are many who believe the gospel, believe in Christ, but for sinful reasons they refuse to obey Him—or to obey his gospel so as to be saved. We read of many who believed on Him, but were not saved or free from sin; for they refused to obey His truth so as to be free, and were still the children of the *“devil”* (John 8:30-32, 44).

Paul says,

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?
(2 Cor. 6:14).

All of God’s commandments are righteousness, and must be obeyed to make one righteous.

My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteousness (Psm. 119:172).

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless (Luke 1:5-6); Acts 10:24-35).

He that doeth righteousness is righteous (1 John 3:7).

Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God) (1 John 3:10).

Beginning on Pentecost (Acts 2) only those believers who repent and are baptized for the forgiveness of sins are in fellowship with the apostles and the church, (Acts 2:36-42)

The Church Cannot Fellowship False Teachers

Jesus warned us to beware of false prophets, and said they would be in sheep's clothing, but inwardly, are ravening wolves.

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a

corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them (Matt. 7:15-20).

John also warned us not to believe them.

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error (1 John 4:1-6).

Paul warned the elders to watch and be on guard against them for they would divide the church and lead away disciples after them. *“And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church”* (Acts 20:17)

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified (Acts 20:28-32).

Such heretics are to be rejected and disfellowshipped after a first and second admonition, even if members of the church.

A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself (Titus 3:10-11).

An *"Heretic"* is *"a factious man."* If such in the church must not be fellowshiped, it follows that such false teachers and factious leaders out of the church and in denominations must not be fellowshiped. *"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them"* (Eph. 5:11).

The Church Must Not Fellowship Denominations

Jesus was born under the old law,

But when the fulness of the time was come,
God sent forth his Son, made of a woman,
made under the law, To redeem them that
were under the law, that we might receive
the adoption of sons (Gal. 4:4-5).

He was revered and obeyed the law then in
force—the law of Moses.

Let your light so shine before men, that
they may see your good works, and glorify
your Father which is in heaven. Think not
that I am come to destroy the law, or the
prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to
fulfil (Matt. 5:16-17).

But He belonged to no sect, or religious party, such
as the Pharisees, Sadducees, etc. He stood aloof
from all such parties and religious "*denominations*"
as were among the Jews at that time. They held no
truth which He could not hold and teach just as an
Israelite, or as a servant of God.

Not one of the more than 350 sects and
denominations today can be found in the New
Testament, which gives us a record of the New
Testament church for over a half century after
Pentecost. The apostle Paul warned against sects
and parties and divisions as works of the flesh and
said they "*shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*"

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21).

Every human denomination on earth today is actually in competition with the church of the New Testament which was build by Christ two thousand years ago. (Matt. 16:18). He prayed against all divisions and sects among believers (John 17:20-23).

The Church Cannot Fellowship False Doctrine

We have already seen that the church is to beware of false prophets and false teachers (Acts 20:17, 28-32; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 4:1-3).

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if

it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer (1 Tim. 4:1-5).

Instead of saying we cannot identify true doctrine until after the judgment, Paul said,

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple (Rom. 16:17-18).

Here the church is forbidden to fellowship those who teach false doctrine, and cause division and offences contrary to the true doctrine.

John says,

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 9-11).

Paul says *"What communion hath light with darkness?"* (2 Cor. 6:14). The *"light"* is God's Word, and *"darkness"* is ignorance, false teaching, and the like. We cannot have scriptural fellowship on the

basis of a mixture of light and darkness, or truth and error. Jesus says, *"And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil"* (John 3:19).

The Church Must Fellowship In The Truth

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin (1 John 1:7).

Let us remember that the *"light"* is God's word. *"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path"* (Psm. 119:105). *"The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple"* (Psm. 119:130).

The light shows us the strait and narrow way which leads to heaven, and which cannot be found in the darkness of ignorance of God's Word.

The Church Must Have The Right Attitude

So, the right attitude toward fellowship in the church is to purpose and determine in our hearts that we are going to learn, believe, love, and obey the exact truth of the gospel under which we live. We must determine to be Christians only, and members of the church of the New Testament, which Jesus built, and of which He is Head and Savior.

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matt. 16:18).

For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing (Eph. 5:23-24).

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:25-27).

With the right attitude toward church fellowship we will all abide in the doctrine of Christ.

WHO CAN THE GLORIOUS CHURCH FELLOWSHIP / NOT FELLOWSHIP?

Chapter 20

Should The Glorious Church Be Militant / Aggressive?

Billy Bland



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Introduction

Jesus Christ is the “*Prince of peace*” (Isa. 9:6). It is through Him that we have peace with God (Eph. 2:13-16). Both Jew and Gentile are one (at peace) in Christ. We are reconciled (made friendly again) to God in the one body (or church) of Christ (Eph. 2:16). Yet, the Word of God plainly reveals there is a standard for peace. The same Word of God that presents Christ as the Prince of Peace also teaches us that Christ came not to bring peace but a sword. Jesus taught;

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but

a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes [shall be] they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me (Matt. 10:34-40).

The peace of Christ does not come without conflict. Jesus knew that by the very nature of truth, conflict is inevitable. He knew that His teaching would cause separation, even among the closest of family ties. The wisdom that is from above is "*first pure then peaceable*" (James 3:17).

The Church As God's Army

Every Christian is one who has been enrolled in God's army. Paul told Timothy,

This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare (1 Tim. 1:18).

He later stated to the same evangelist;

Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses (1 Tim. 6:12).

In his second epistle to Timothy, Paul admonished;

Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier (2 Tim. 2:3-4).

God has issued the equipment and commanded the Christian to put on the whole armor of God.

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Eph. 6:10-17).

We Are In A Battle!

The Scriptures listed above, plus many others, inform us that we are in a battle. This battle that we are fighting as Christians is not a physical battle, fought with material weapons of war. Paul said;

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare [are] not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

Although the weapons of our warfare are not carnal and we do not war after the flesh, nonetheless, we are in a real battle! This battle is for the souls of men and women, boys and girls. Mankind has an enemy. His name is Satan. Peter warned;

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8).

The devil is our adversary. He would rob us of our soul and would love to accuse us before God! However, we are to resist the devil. Peter continued; *"Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same*

afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world" (1 Peter 5:9). Likewise, James exhorts us; *"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you"* (James 4:7).

Our soul's destiny is at stake. Every person will exist eternally either in heaven or in hell (Matt. 25:46). Jesus tells us the value of our souls when He states;

For what is a man profited, if he shall gain
the whole world, and lose his own soul?
or what shall a man give in exchange for
his soul (Matt. 16:26)?

One's soul is worth more than the whole world! Think of the over six billion souls that are on the earth today. Consider also all the souls that have been here previously, plus all those that shall exist, if the Lord permits. This illustrates just how important this battle for souls really is.

Should The Church Be Aggressive?

Let there be a resounding "YES" throughout this great brotherhood! Friends, souls are at stake! How can we sit idly by and let multitudes perish? In the great words of the weeping prophet Jeremiah, *"Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by"* (Lam. 1:12)? Unfortunately, some would rather hide the truth than speak the truth and risk offending someone. After preaching on the topic, *"Why One Should Be A Member Of The Church Of Christ,"* one lady came to me and stated; *"I am so glad that my daughter wasn't here today because she would have been offended."* Even

though her daughter had been raised in the Lord's church, she had married outside the church and had gone into a human denomination. She had even asked her mother for advice prior to "joining" that denomination. Sadly her mother's advice was "You will have to do what you think is right." Rather than encouraging her daughter to be loyal to the Lord in His church, she encouraged her to just make up her own mind. Not only that, she was happy that her daughter wasn't present in the assembly to hear the Bible topic on the church of Christ! She was so afraid of offending her daughter, she didn't want her daughter to hear the truth. Paul wrote; *"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them"* (Eph. 5:11).

One should never desire conflict, just for the sake of conflict. We should all try to live peaceably with all men. Paul said; *"If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men"* (Rom. 12:18).

Regarding the matter of "aggression," James Boyd noted;

We speak of manner just here rather than message. The message that we proclaim is the gospel. How do we go about doing that? Christians are not people who go around just looking for a fight for the sake of being in a fight, even though fighting is inevitable. We do not simply seek to make arguments in the sense of being quarrelsome. We must make arguments in the sense of making points and establishing them with evidence. We must not confuse being aggressive with being obnoxious, contentious, rude, loud,

spewing fiery and provocative rhetoric. Some might be like the preacher who had written in his notes beside one point to yell loudly there because he was not quite sure of that point.

While none desires conflict, there is an inevitable conflict between right and wrong. As long as light is light and dark is dark, there will never be communion between the two (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14).

Jesus, our Commander, has issued an aggressive decree. The Bible says;

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Mat. 28:18-20).

The word "go" is an aggressive command. We cannot be passive to this directive and be pleasing unto the Lord. The army of God is to take an aggressive approach in evangelism. We are not to sit idly and "hope" someone comes to our buildings and obeys the Gospel upon the invitation extended by the preacher. While a conversion to Christ may occur every great once in awhile by such a method, it will never result in taking the Gospel into all the world and preaching the Gospel unto every creature

(Mark 16:15). The solemn charge given to Timothy is applicable to us. Paul wrote;

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine (2 Tim. 4:1-2).

Paul knew that conflict would arise over the preaching of the Word, but Timothy was to continue in his mission. Paul continued;

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry (2 Tim. 4:3-5).

Examples Of Aggression

Jesus Christ was aggressive in His mission. He came to seek and save that which was lost (Luke 19:10). Attention is given to the fact that He came to seek the lost and to save the lost. He was "*proactive*" or aggressive in His work. Even at a young age He was "*in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing and asking them questions*" (Luke 2:46). He stated that He must be about His Father's business

(Luke 2:49). The principles that He taught and the error that He exposed and opposed brought much conflict. He spoke out against the religious leaders of His day, such as the Sadducees and Pharisees. Ultimately, He was crucified because of the truth He proclaimed.

Other than Jesus Christ, perhaps the most well known aggressive preacher of the first century was the apostle Paul. He made three great missionary journeys aggressively teaching and preaching the Word of God. He was often opposed in the places where he went and suffered much persecution as a result of his steadfast proclamation of the Word of God. Someone has stated that wherever Paul went he either had a revival or a riot. All one has to do is read such passages as Second Corinthians eleven to see the tremendous persecution he endured as a result of his preaching. He aggressively sought to convert the world to Christ.

Soon after the establishment of the church, faithful men such as Stephen and James were put to death for their preaching of the Word of God (Acts 7, 12). Early Christians knew that following Christ was a life or death proposition in many cases. Yet they zealously taught the truth in spite of the dangers. The disciples and apostles of Christ were so aggressive that it was said of them, *"these that have turned the world upside down have come hither also"* (Acts 17:6).

The church today is under the same commission as were the early disciples. They were so zealous or aggressive in carrying out the great commission

that it was stated that the Gospel "*was preached to every creature that was under heaven*" (Col. 1:23). They did not accomplish this by building a building and hoping people would drop in and be baptized. They went into all the world preaching the Gospel. Today, we must be aggressive in getting God's message to every creature under heaven. We can do it, because God has commanded it and Christ has promised to be with us (Matt. 28:18-20).

Defending The Gospel

While some consider "*defending the faith*" as unloving, we must realize it is commanded by Christ and in reality it is the loving thing to do. Jude wrote;

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints (Jude 3).

He then tells them why;

For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not. And the

angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire (Jude 4-7).

The Christians in the first century were to *"earnestly contend for the faith,"* rather than allowing false teachers to lead precious souls away from the truth.

Jesus defended the truth and often found Himself in conflict with the religious leaders of the day. Alexander Campbell noted that Jesus as "the prince of peace never sheathed the sword of the Spirit while He lived. He drew it at the banks of Jordan and threw the scabbard away."

Paul not only aggressively carried the Gospel, but he was also *"set for the defense of the gospel"* (Phil. 1:17). He defended the gospel against all those who would turn people away from the truth. He likewise warned others of the apostasy that they would be facing (cf. Acts 20:28-35, I Tim. 4:1-5).

Conclusion

It is wise for us to note several important matters in closing. First, God says that we are soldiers. Second, He states that we are to be *"good"* soldiers (2 Tim. 2:3). Third, as a *"good soldier"* we are to be strong and that we must endure hardship. Fourth,

we are to *"war a good warfare"* and *"fight the good fight of faith"* (1 Tim. 1:18, 6:12). God did not say we are to fight every fight that comes along, but we are to *"fight the good fight of faith."* There are some fights or arguing we are to avoid. James Boyd wisely observed;

While there are those matters over which we must fight in order for truth to prevail, there are also some matters that do not deserve our energies of combat.

He then quoted Titus 3:9 and I Timothy 1:4, which respectively states: *"But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain."* And, *"Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do."* A *"good soldier"* knows when to fight and when not to fight.

The church of Christ must be aggressive. Let us never be ashamed of the Christ or His message. Jesus said;

Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven (Matt. 10:32-33).

There is a place in God's church for every soldier. Each of us must be at his post. Let each soldier (Christian), put on the Christian armor and march into war (Eph. 6:10-18).

Chapter 21

Must The Church Change Or Stay Constant?

Dave Miller



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We live in a country and culture that is characterized by change. The Sixties novel, **Future Shock**, highlighted the rapidity with which the future intrudes upon us. Americans have become accustomed to continual change and even seem now to expect it. The over-stimulation that we have experienced for the last four or five decades has conditioned us to require change. We become listless and bored with the status quo. We opt for new cars, new homes, new toys, new tools, new clothes, and new mates. With the future caving in on us so swiftly, we have not only become disenchanting with

our religion, demanding fresh and innovative ways to worship (Acts 17:21), we are also softening in our unchanging commitment to the Christian moral framework.

From any perspective, this preoccupation and obsession with change is bad. It signals our culture's loss of commitment to the unchanging values and beliefs that are indispensable to the survival and stability of a nation. The rampant change that has gripped our civilization by the throat has contributed to our spiritual and moral decline. It has triggered the erosion of traditional values that has led sociologists to describe America as a "*post-Christian nation*."

God's people – Christians – must not be deceived or duped by the restless spirit of our times. We must continually look to God and His Word in order to make sense of what is happening around us and in order to keep our own bearings. The Bible is clear about whether the church must accept change – or stay constant. The Bible makes clear what may be changed, what must be changed, and what cannot and must not be changed.

What May Change?

God has always built into His will a realm of considerable flexibility in which we humans are permitted to exercise our will with regard to optional matters. For example, when God conveyed His will to Adam and Eve regarding the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, He allowed great latitude regarding all the other trees of the garden. Notice God's use

of the term “*freely*” (Gen. 2:16). They were permitted to arrange their food menu with an infinite number of possibilities. They could eat the fruit of one tree for breakfast on Mondays, eat from another tree for lunch and yet another for dinner. On Tuesdays they could switch to three completely different trees. So God’s will allowed for great variety and the exercise of human preference.

The same may be said of Noah. When God gave him the task of constructing a boat, great leeway was permissible in several areas. Noah was permitted to use a variety of tools—hammers, saws, nails, ropes, ladders, etc. He could have solicited assistance from surrounding unbelievers. He was given great latitude in the matter of the capture and handling of the animals to be placed in the ark. In reality, God gave far fewer restrictions than He gave options. He specified (1) the type of vessel—a boat; (2) the kind of material—gopher wood and waterproofing; (3) the dimensions—300 x 50 x 30; (4) four features of the ark—one door, one window, three decks, inner compartments; (5) the animal population; and (6) a food supply. Otherwise, Noah was given the opportunity to exercise his own discretion in the optional areas.

Examples could be multiplied from Bible history. The same may be said of New Testament teaching. For example, in the matter of worship, the following items are matters of option: (1) where to assemble (rent a building, build our own, meet outdoors); (2) how to furnish the building (type, number, and arrangement

of lights, type and arrangement of seating, shape and size of auditorium, etc.); (3) order of worship (communion before or after the sermon, length of the sermon, number of songs and prayers, order of songs and prayers, whether to use songbooks, sheet music or overhead projectors, etc.).

When we stop and realize how much God has allowed human beings throughout history to exercise their own preferences, it is amazing that we humans have been so rebellious and reluctant to conform ourselves to the few requirements that God has given! We need to get a hold of ourselves and realize that God has never been an arbitrary, vindictive Being who just sits around and thinks up restrictions and burdens to strap on people. He has always been a benevolent God who only places upon people what is good for them (Deut. 6:24; 10:13; Matt. 11:30). Human parents make mistakes and sometimes over restrict or under restrict their children. But God never does such a thing! His laws and requirements are perfect—in quantity and quality (Psm. 19:7-11; 119; Rom. 7:12).

What Must Change?

Change can be very wholesome. Life itself is characterized by change. From birth to death, a human being undergoes tremendous change. That process is normal and natural. God set it up that way. Plant life, animal life, and human life all progress through a cycle of change (Gen. 1:14; 8:22). Likewise, in the spiritual realm, God expects and demands that

we change. He calls this necessary change “*growth*” and “*repentance*.” The very word “*repent*” means to change the mind. Repentance is necessary to become a Christian and to remain a Christian (Luke 13:3,5; Acts 2:38; 8:22; 17:30; 2 Cor. 7:9-10).

God wants us to change on a daily basis. He wants us to grow and develop in our spirituality. He wants us to be “*spiritual*” and to become “*mature*” (Gal. 6:1; Heb. 5:12-14). He wants us to “*grow up*”!

Paul exhorted the Ephesians to become a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love (Eph. 4:13-16).

To the Colossians, Paul gave similar admonitions:

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may have a walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light (Col. 1:9-12).

The required change is described by Peter as a progression that involves “*adding*” to our faith:

add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:5-10).

We are given tremendous motivation to change and to grow in anticipation of Heaven! Peter closes his second epistle with the admonition: “*but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Peter 3:18).

Paul describes this change process as “*casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ*” (2 Cor. 10:5).

Indeed, even though the New Testament epistles generally detail the abstract ideals and theoretical principles that form the foundation of God's scheme of redemption, they typically contain lengthy hortatorical sections that enjoin practical application (e.g., Rom. 12:1-15:13; Gal. 5:1-6:10; Eph. 4:1-6:9; Col. 3:5-4:6; 1 Thess. 4:1-5:22; Heb. 12:1-13:19; Jude 17-23). They show the inevitable and obvious application of what God has done for us in terms of the necessity of growth and alteration. God's acceptance of us through Christ and the Gospel naturally means we must devote ourselves to change!

As a Christian, are you changing? Are you progressing in your elimination of sinful habits—like the use of tobacco and alcohol (1 Cor. 6:19-20)? Are you growing in your control of your tongue (James 3:1-12)? Do you use language that is unbecoming a child of God (Eph. 4:29; 5:4; Col. 3:8)? Do you use your tongue to talk about and criticize other people and to say discouraging, hurtful things (Eph. 4:31)? Do you lie on occasion (Eph. 4:25)? Are you slow to speak and slow to wrath, controlling your temper or do you become inappropriately angry with people (Eph. 4:26; James 1:19-20)? Do you have control of your appetite for money and things or are you covetous and greedy (Col. 3:5; James 4:2-3)? These behaviors and many more are where the "*rubber meets the road*" in our cultivation of Christian living. God wants us to change!

What Must Not Change?

Perhaps the biggest threat to the safety and security of the kingdom of Christ in this country in our day is the prevalent restless propensity for change among Christians. Of course, this inclination is simply a reflection of the change-intoxicated culture around us. The goal of change is the same now as it has been throughout human history: to please self. The ultimate outcome of the change will be to obliterate the true church in those locations where the change is accepted.

Permit me to suggest that the foundational change that underlies all of the illicit change that is occurring in the church of our day is in how people conceptualize God. The Bible teaches that God is **immutable**, i.e., unchanging (James 1:17; Num. 23:19). He is **infinite** in all of His attributes. He is **perfect** and **complete** in the attributes of love, compassion, grace, and mercy. He is also infinite in His wrath, justice, and hatred of sin. However, current culture has recreated God in its own image. People today have essentially jettisoned God's wrath and justice and then have redefined His love and grace. Love and grace have become "*unlimited toleration*" and "*unconditional acceptance.*"

Out of this defective, Calvinistic view of deity, the agents of change have proceeded to orchestrate illicit, unscriptural changes in doctrine, belief and practice. They have changed in their view of the church, the plan of salvation, and worship:

1. **They have changed the Biblical view of the**

church. The Bible presents the church as singular and exclusive. Only one church exists with God's approval—the church of Christ (Isa. 2:1-5; Dan. 2:44; Matt. 16:18; Eph. 3:10; 4:4). Denominations are manmade counterfeits. All who enter into a denomination will be lost. True Christians cannot have fellowship with the denominations. Jesus is not a bachelor (i.e., He has a bride—the church) and one cannot be saved without being part of His bride (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:23). Likewise, Jesus is not a polygamist (i.e., He has only one bride—one church) and He will not accept other churches (Matt. 15:13; 16:18).

2. They have changed the Biblical plan of salvation. The New Testament clearly teaches that to be saved (this side of the Cross), a person must (1) hear the gospel message, (2) believe the Gospel (the truths contained in the Gospel—especially the role that Jesus played as our atonement for sin), (3) repent of sin, (4) confess the fact that Jesus is deity, and then (5) be immersed in water in order to have all past sin forgiven. The agents of change have tampered with this divine plan of salvation by adopting the denominational view that all one must do to be saved is to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. Hence, the God-ordained essentiality of water immersion as a prerequisite to salvation has been relegated to a nonessential status. Nevertheless, Jesus still says, *“Except a man be born of water...”* (John 3:5).

3. They have changed the Bible view of worship. Jesus insisted that those who wish to

worship God must worship Him “*in spirit and in truth*” (John 4:24). In other words, our worship must be conducted correctly on the inside and on the outside. Throughout human history, God has always specified the correct way to worship Him. Humans have never been free to create their own worship actions. Rather, they must conform themselves to the worship actions stipulated by God (e.g., Gen. 4:4,7; 1 John 3:12; Lev. 10:1-3; 1 Sam. 13:9-13; 2 Chron. 26:16-18). In New Testament worship, God has limited our worship activity to five specific acts: prayer, singing, giving, engaging in Bible study/preaching, and observance of the Lord’s Supper. Each of these actions is regulated by Scripture—to be conducted according to precise specifications (e.g., Matt. 6:5ff.; Eph. 5:19; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; 1 Tim. 4:13; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:17-34).

In contrast, the agents of change are forging numerous changes in the worship of God, tailoring worship assemblies to please the worshipper. In the realm of church music, they have enacted the use of instrumental music, praise teams, solos and/or choirs, and rhythmical handclapping. They have expanded their observance of the Lord’s Supper to include days in addition to Sunday. They have added to the simple Bible study, Scripture reading, and listening to preaching taught in Scripture by incorporating drama, dramatic readings, testimonials, and witnessing. They have turned the worship of our God into an entertainment-oriented, Pentecostal-like environment, complete with applause, shouts,

and meaningless body movements like swaying and holding up ones arms. The preaching event no longer teaches, reproves, rebukes, admonishes, and convicts (2 Tim. 4:1-4). Now, slick speakers employ comedic humor, entertaining theatrics, and special effects that emotionally stimulate the audience to feel good. Like cotton candy and carbonated drinks, such presentations momentarily taste good but will result in spiritual starvation.

In a society that has virtually given itself over to self-stimulation, amusement, and pleasure, many congregations have transformed themselves into high tech, preprogrammed performances that deceive the masses into thinking that symbolism, hype, circus theatrics, and smoke and mirrors take precedence over substance and obedience to God. Rather than being a time to focus completely upon God in order to express praise, respect, and adoration toward Him, the worship assembly has become a place where over-stressed members can disengage their minds, forget their worries, and release their pent-up frustrations. They can—in the words of a Sixties cliché—*“let it all hang out.”* In fact, the changes introduced into the liberal churches of our day are spiritual parallels to the marijuana and LSD of the Babyboomer generation. They accomplish the same purpose that is achieved when people go to bars and restaurants after work and drink margaritas. It’s a way to numb one’s nearness to one’s problems and temporarily distance oneself from the stresses of reality. One can stop thinking for a little while and just relax and feel good!

Obviously, many churches have turned inward and are feeding their own lusts rather than seeking to please God by disciplining self and seeking the lost souls of society. Like spoiled children, they are clamoring for changes that stroke them emotionally and make them feel better about their undone condition. They cannot achieve fulfillment, satisfaction, and happiness in this way anymore than a spoiled child attains contentment by jumping from one toy to another and demanding more. They have been caught in a vortex of change, assuming that perpetual newness can eventually accomplish meaning and well being.

We are living at a time in which change, discontent, and restlessness are rampant. People tire very easily of the same old thing and quickly look for a replacement. This phenomenon is true of the cars we drive, the mates we marry, and the houses we live in. But Christians ought not to be so susceptible to cultural currents and human inclinations. We need to *"keep our wits about us."* People who divorce their mates when things become a little difficult, people who jump from one house to another or one car to another or one job to another, have an attitude problem. They have an internal problem that does not go away after they make a change in their external surroundings.

So it is in the church. If worship has become boring and less meaningful to a member, so much so that he feels the need to change churches or liven up the worship assembly with theatrics, he has a

spiritual, internal problem—a heart problem. His restless discontent is more of a reflection of his own spiritual condition than the status of the worship assembly. Blue Bell ice cream, Coca-Cola, and Big Macs all share in common the fact that you want them to stay the same. You expect them to taste the same—every single time you take a bite!

Repetitiveness and sameness are, therefore, not inherently bad. Change is not inherently necessary, preferable, or even good. The Bible teaches that some things must not change. God has enjoined repetition and lack of change in many areas—and expects us to keep it that way. Your mate expects the same! Shame on the man who puts away the wife of his youth because she is getting old and she's the same woman he married twenty or thirty years ago. Likewise, shame on the Christian who puts away the simple worship of the New Testament church because it's the same old thing. Just because an action is the same and predictable, that action need not necessarily be boring. That depends upon the attitude of the individual.

When we came up out of the waters of baptism and sang *"O Happy Day"* or *"Tis' so sweet to trust in Jesus, just in simple faith to plunge me 'neath the healing, cleansing flood"*—were we thrilled and excited? Certainly. Who has changed? Manipulating external gadgets and gimmicry will not revive a genuine, heartfelt attitude of worship. We must change our own heart—melt it, soften it, prick it. We have a heart problem and it's up to us to change that heart. The

Biblical word for that is—repent. Our worship toward God ought to be like His mercies and compassions toward us—*“they are new every morning”* (Lam. 3:23). If we want our needs met, if we really want to achieve personal contentment and satisfaction, the only bonifide, surefire way to do so is to conform to God’s will.

Conclusion

God does not change! Jesus does not change! They are *“the same yesterday, today, and forever”* (Heb. 13:8). We fickle human beings think that just because we change, God must do so as well. But He does not change (Mal. 3:6)!

God’s Word does not change! Truth is truth. God has communicated His will to all human beings this side of the Cross. The doctrine of God is set in concrete and does not change (1 Peter 1:24-25)! Whoever does not embrace and abide in God’s doctrine will not be acceptable to Him in eternity (John 12:48; Heb. 5:9; 2 John 9).

God’s plan of salvation does not change! God’s church does not change! God’s worship does not change! All who wish to be acceptable to Jesus Christ must obey His gospel plan of salvation, be added to His church, worship Him in His way, and live life according to His specifications

Such a view of reality may well be deemed narrow, restrictive, and rigid by today’s culture. It was so described by Jesus Himself (Matt. 7:14). Nevertheless, we would do well to adopt the

attitude of Moses just prior to his departure from this world:

For this commandment which I command you today, it is not too hard for you, nor is it far off. ...See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil... therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life... Set your hearts on all the words which I testify among you today, which you shall command your children to be careful to observe—all the words of this law. For it is not a futile thing for you, because it is your life (Deut. 30:11,15,19,20; 32:46-47).

Chapter 22

What Is The Role Of Preachers In The Glorious Church?

Curtis A. Cates



Brother Cates has been faithfully preaching the gospel for almost fifty years. Holds various degrees from respected universities. Since 1982 he has served as Director of the Memphis School of Preaching. Author of various superb volumes. Mission work in Singapore, Malaysia, and Russia. Annette and Curtis have two sons (both are faithful gospel preachers) and four grandchildren.

Introduction

Brother N. B. Hardeman in his tabernacle sermons pointed out that he had heard a number of judges in our courts give impressive charges to the juries. However, he stated,

The most solemn charge ever delivered to mortal man or clothed in human words was announced by Paul to Timothy when he said, "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and kingdom; preach the word." ... When I think of this one, delivered by the peerless apostle, in which he called to witness both God, the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ,

the judge of the living and the dead, I can but be impressed with its weight and importance. "I bid you preach the word." (Hardeman's Tabernacle Sermons, I, p. 65).

It is the preaching of the Sacred Message that will save lost humanity (1 Cor. 1:21; Rom. 10:13-17) and enables those who are obedient through faith to be born into the family of God, "*the glorious church*" (Eph. 5:27). It is thus vital and appropriate that we study the relationship between preaching and the precious bride of Christ.

The Glorious Church And The Relevance And Need Of Preaching

In the first place, the Scriptures point out the relevancy and need of preaching. In fact, Paul stated very succinctly that the Divine message saves. Without it, the kingdom would not exist on this earth.

For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching (Gr. *thing preached*, ASV margin) to save them that believe (1 Cor. 1:21).

To sectarians who require a direct operation of the Holy Spirit, brother J. Roy Vaughan stated, "*The gospel is also foolishness to some people,*" as it was to the Gentiles.¹

Brother H. A. Dixon wrote:

It is God's plan to save the world through preaching, though the plan and content of that preaching may sometimes appear as foolishness to men. Through the preaching of Noah God

offered to save man from the flood; through that of Jonah he sought to save the Ninevites; through the “**voice** of one crying in the wilderness” he gave the Jews opportunity to correct their lives and believe on the Messiah; through Spirit filled men God delivered a remedy for the murderers of Christ and to a Roman Centurian, the good news that God shows no respect toward persons.²

The appropriateness of preaching is clearly seen in the great commission to preach the pure gospel to the whole world (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-47). Never has man been commissioned by Christ to preach anything else (Gal. 1:6-9). Paul made very clear the necessity of preaching.

Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard? And how shall they heard without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? even as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that bring glad tidings of good things! (Rom. 10:13-15).

The gospel message is man’s source of hope.

If so be that ye continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel which ye heard, which was preached in all creation under heaven; whereof I Paul was made a minister (Col. 1:23).

Paul continued, “*Whom we proclaim, admonishing every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ*” (v. 28). No

wonder Paul charged Timothy, *“Preach the word”* (2 Tim. 4:2)! Only the gospel can call mankind out of the emptiness of atheism, the guilt of sin, the darkness of despair, the futility of materialism, the destruction of immorality, and the hopelessness of ignorance. The gospel is God’s power to save (Rom. 1:16). Woe be to that person who accuses one who preaches the potent Word of being a *“babbling”* as did the intelligentsia of Athens term the apostle Paul (Acts 17:18). The Word is *“the power of God, and the wisdom of God”* (1 Cor. 1:24). *“The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God”* (1 Cor. 3:19).

Someone might say, *“The preaching in churches of Christ is answering questions people are not asking.”* Well, does that mean that preaching the old Jerusalem gospel is irrelevant? It is true that most Biblical preaching does not answer questions people are asking. They generally do not want to hear the truth, and thus the truth does not appeal to them. The Jews sought a sign, and the Greeks sought heathen philosophy (1 Cor. 1:18-24); Paul catered to neither group’s wish. Rather, Paul preached what the Greeks considered foolishness—Jesus Christ and him crucified. The Jews stumbled at his preaching.

Why did Paul preach the gospel of Christ? It was because that is the only message that would save the Jews and Greeks. It is true; the Word is not popular with most people. Giving the Jews and the Greeks what they wanted would not save them! The same is true today, except for the few who are seeking answers to their questions regarding the remedy of sin

and the hope for their immortal souls, most people are asking the wrong questions. Anyone who seeks to appeal to and answer with human philosophy and vain traditions of men and offer a type of sign of the Holy Spirit, his preaching is vain. And, those who refuse to hear Moses and the prophets will not hear and obey the gospel no matter how well their questions are answered (Luke 16:29-31). W. L. Totty wrote:

The gospel of Christ is the only panacea for the world. If nations would believe the gospel and obey it, wars would cease and all nations of people would dwell together in peace. But when we think of the population of the world today and realize how many nations do not even believe in the existence of God, we see that there is still a tremendous work before the church.³

What more than the Word is required to urge potential preachers to see the relevancy and need.

The Glorious Church And The “Old Paths” Preaching

In the second place, the Scriptures point out the necessity of “old paths” preaching. Jeremiah’s preaching was, “*Whatsoever I (God) command thee thou shalt speak*” (Jer. 1:7). With God’s powerful Word, Jeremiah was commanded “*to pluck up and to break down and to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant*” (v. 10). His message to Judah was:

Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way; and walk

therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls: but they said, We will not walk therein. And I set watchmen over you, saying, Hearken to the sound of the trumpet; but they said, We will not hearken (Jer. 6:16-17).

Here at the turn of the century, many have been clamoring for change, for *"a new gospel for the twenty-first century"* (cf. Gal. 1:6-9). NEW is better, superior, more exciting, more captivating, they say.

Is *"new"* superior to the *"old"*? In some things, the answer is likely *"yes."* Would we wish to return to the *"good ole days"* of scrub boards and wash pots, horse and buggy, et al? Some things wear out, are imperfect, can be improved. Many things are soon obsolete, such as cameras, automobiles, computers, In the last thirty years, the large and bulky Univac that virtually filled an entire large room has been replaced by the modern computer which is vastly superior and can be held in your hand. The Mercury the author drives today is vastly superior in comfort, road worthiness, and dependability to the first automobile he owned, a 1930 Model "A" Ford coupe, with a rumble seat.

But, is new always superior? The answer is *"no"* when it comes to God's Word. Why not *"update"* it? Some aver, *"The old paths cannot meet present day problems confronting the Lord's church – there must be changes to meet a changing society and a changing world."* But, a number of principles are involved which some often do not consider. Truth does not change, for man's spiritual nature and man's spiritual need have not changed. Sin was sin in Jesus' day, and He rebuked it. Sin was sin in Paul's day, and he rebuked

it. It was sin in past generations, and they rebuked it. Sin is still sin in our day, and we must rebuke it. The old paths are **not outdated**.

Those things mentioned above which have changed, and thankfully so, were not perfect; there was (and is) much room for improvement. These things will continue to be updated and improved. Think of the new advancements medical scientists for example, are constantly making – great advancements! What are they doing? Are they not SEEKING PERFECTION?

It is different in religion. God's revelation is the "*perfect law, the law of liberty*" (James 1:25), and we must give heed to following it, "*as men that are to be judged by a ('the,' KJV) law of liberty*" (James 2:12). The word perfection is demonstrated clearly by God's restrictions regarding it, relative to adding to or taking from the Word (Deut. 4:2; Prov. 30:5-6; Rev. 22:18-19; Gal. 1:6-9; Jude 3). Man is commanded to preach the Word, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else (Phil. 1:17; 2 John 9-11; 1 Peter 4:11; 2 Tim. 4:2-3). Why? It is because holy writ is complete, perfectly fitted to man's needs for all time and is able to make him perfect and completely furnished for every good work (1 Peter 1:21; 2 Peter 1:3; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). There is NO ROOM for improvement. When the "*perfect*" is "*doctored on,*" it becomes imperfect! Thus, one clearly sees the need to call people back to the perfect "*old paths,*" the old Jerusalem gospel (2 Tim. 4:2ff).

What are the "*old paths?*" Paul said they are "*The traditions which ye were taught, whether by word, or by epistle of ours*" (2 Thess. 2:15). He further defines them

as the inspired revelation, the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16ff), the powerful word (Heb. 4:12). John described them as *"the truth,"* which the elect lady and her children knew (2 John 1) and in which they walked, as commanded by God (v. 4). *"And this is love, that we walk after his commandments"* (v. 6). Compare the same failure of the Jews in Jeremiah's day to keep the command of God to *"ask for the old paths, where is the good way; and walk therein";* their reply was, *"We will not walk therein."* In spite of the pleadings of the inspired watchman, they said, *"We will not hearken."* They clamored for change, they sought a new message for a new age—and, it brought their destruction. ***What more than the Word*** is necessary in training preachers to *"speak as the oracles of God,"* the *"old paths?"*

The Glorious Church And One's Personal Life And Preaching

In the third place, the Scriptures train the preacher to be exemplary in personal conduct. To be effective, the preacher must be a person of sterling character and of impeccable ethics. Brother Gus Nichols, in preaching on *"The Conduct of the Preacher,"* stated that gospel preachers *"should aim at sinless perfection...to live as Jesus lived. He was successful."* He proceeded to say that we preachers would *"cry forever if the Bible said, 'Live sinlessly perfect until death.' We are thankful the Bible said, 'Be thou faithful unto death' (Rev. 2:10)."* *"Look at your own lives (Acts 6:1-6),"* he urged. Brother Nichols continued by pointing out that

the person who contemplates preaching *"should be qualified. Commit it to those already faithful,"* speaking of the Word. Preachers are to be *"good examples – the most powerful preaching one can often do."* In illustrating this critical principle, brother Gus stated, *"Mistakes will kill him and the church in the community."* His sage advice for preachers was, *"Make your word good; pay your debts."* Additional great pitfalls of preachers mentioned by this outstanding preacher and elder included when the preacher *"becomes interested in flirting with women, becoming sexually interested in women"* and when the preacher *"does not treat his family right"* and does not practice the golden rule toward them.⁴

God had one Son, and He was a preacher. Furthermore, He is the preacher's perfect example (1 Peter 2:21). About Him, Luke wrote that Christ *"began both to do and to teach"* (Acts 1:1). Paul's inspired command to Timothy was, *"Take heed to thyself, and to thy teaching. Continue in these things; for in doing this thou shalt save both thyself and them that hear thee"* (1 Tim. 4:16). They were effective because of not only what they taught but also what they were. God's faithful preachers in the apostolic age gave up the domination of materialism, worldliness, vain glory, worldly philosophy, and the commandments of men, sacrificing it all for Christ (cf. the apostle Paul-Acts 22:3; 21:37-40; 1 Tim. 1:12-15; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 3:4-8; Col. 1:13-14). Very critical to a person's training how to **preach** is training how to **live**. That is more important than ability.

When God's man allows himself to be overcome

by lust, greed, pride, et al., he, like David “*has given great occasion to the enemies of Jehovah to blaspheme*” (2 Sam. 12:14). Though David repented, David’s sins brought serious consequences in his life and to his family (vs. 10-12). Dishonesty, selfish ambition, sexual sin, and other misconduct in the life of a gospel preacher bring devastating consequences. He must meticulously be vigilant and guard his mind and heart and his associations, because

the things which proceed out of the mouth come forth out of the heart, and they defile the man. For out of the heart come forth evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witnesses, railings: these are the things which defile the man (Matt. 15:18-20).

Very appropriate are the admonitions of Malachi:

Therefore take heed to your spirit, and none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. For I hate putting away, saith Jehovah, the God of Israel, and him that covereth his garment with violence, saith Jehovah of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously (Mal. 2:15-16).

Indeed, *what more than the Word* is needed in bringing about a humble life of purity, godliness, and uprightness befitting the sound doctrine?

The Glorious Church And One’s Personal Conviction And Courage In Preaching

In the fourth place, the Scriptures provoke the preacher to have the courage and earnestness of conviction.

All who knew brother Gus Nichols instantly knew his conviction, courage and earnestness. Hear it expressed in his following statement:

Preaching the gospel is the greatest work in the world. The joy of preaching the sweetest story ever told, and the thousands who have turned to God under my feeble efforts, would be reward enough for me. If I were qualified to fill his office, and had the opportunity to exchange jobs with the President of the United States, I would instantly spurn the invitation. I am doing what God wants me to do and what I want to do. If I had a thousand lives to live I would want to be a gospel preacher every time, and at last would want to pray for a little more time in which to preach the gospel and reach a few more of those hungering for the truth. I have been preaching forth years now, and if I had life to live over I would do it again. May God give us more preachers of the word!

One's personal conviction and earnestness was eloquently expressed by brother Franklin Camp:

"No man that warreth entangleth himself in the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier" (2 Tim. 2:4). The soldier not only suffers, he must concentrate on his job. When a soldier enlists in the army, he realizes that he leaves behind his former work. A preacher cannot have divided loyalties. His whole heart and soul must be in his work. It is right for him to be supported, but his mission is not making money. He does not look for the most lucrative place to preach. His concern is where can he do the most good; where is he needed. Where he is needed may not be the

largest congregation. It may be in the mission field. His concern is not prestige but pleasing the one that hath chosen him. He must keep in mind that he success will be measured by God and not the brethren. It may be done in a difficult field and brethren may know little or nothing about it but, "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered unto the saints, and do minister" (Heb. 6:10).⁵

Brother Camp continued:

Paul is an excellent example for preachers to follow. Study carefully 1 Corinthians 9:16-27. Paul preached because he could not help it. It was not a past time with him. He did it willingly. He concentrated on his work. He was willing to become all things to all men in order to save all he could. He lived for the gospel. He lived the gospel and finally he died for it. Paul was a real soldier of the cross. Think of the impact he had on the world. Ponder the enemies he faced. Look at his suffering and hardship. Neither false brethren nor prison caused him to lose his concentration. Our world is falling to pieces, and if there is any hope it will come through preachers like Paul who will not compromise nor quit.⁶

In thinking of courage and earnestness brought about by conviction, contrast the reticence of many preachers to reprove and rebuke anyone or any false doctrine with the courage of such outstanding preachers such a Elijah, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, Peter, Paul, and John—and our Master Himself! Clearly evident is the fact that men of the world

preach to please the people of the world—and the world listens to them. *“They are of the world: therefore speak they as of the world, and the world heareth them”* (1 John 4:5). In this category would be those who castigate book, chapter and verse preaching, who are careful not even to hint that someone might be living in adultery or otherwise violating the truth, and who mimic the *“church growth”* strategies of the sectarians. Naturally, those who insist in persisting in their sin and rebellion will flock to this type *“preaching,”* as John stated. Satan is working overtime to silence the mouth of the Lord today (even in the church), and sadly he is widely succeeding. Incidentally, does John’s indictment of preachers *“of the world”* have anything to say about the often heard defense, *“Well, they must be doing something right”*?

On the other hand, though, John stated, *“We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he who is not of God heareth us not. By this we know the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error”* (v. 6). We ask, John, who are those who hear us? He replies, *“And hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoso keepeth his word, in him verily hath the love of God been perfected”* (1 John 2:3-5). What would be/was Paul’s reaction to the fact that those of the world and worldly children of God *“bow up their backs”* at the truth preached in love?

We waxed bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God in much conflict. For our exhortation is not of error, nor of uncleanness,

nor in guile: but even as we have been approved of God to be intrusted with the gospel, so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God who proveth our hearts (1 Thess. 2:2-4).

The Word is sufficient to challenge and to enable preachers to imbibe the spirit of courage and earnestness characterized by God's faithful men in the Old and New Testaments. They were loving, compassionate, and gentle souls, and yet they hesitated not to sacrifice all (including their own lives, if necessary) to convey God's sacred, soul-saving message to the lost. *What more than the Word* is required in training preachers of conviction, courage, and earnestness.

The Glorious Church And Love And Compassion In Preaching

In the fifth place, the Scriptures produce in the preacher the heart-felt attitude of love and compassion. John wrote, *"We know that we have passed out of death into life, if we love the brethren"* (1 John 3:14). Paul penned, *"But speaking the truth in love"* (Eph. 4:15). Timothy was told:

Hold the pattern of sound words, which thou hast heard from me, in faith and love which is in Jesus Christ. That good thing (that "pattern of sound words") which was committed unto thee guard through the Holy Spirit which dwelleth in us (2 Tim. 1:13-14).

One cannot be mean, bitter, ugly, and vindictive and at the same time be a preacher of *"sound* (healthy)

words." Paul warns against anything "*contrary to the sound doctrine*" (1 Tim. 1:10); however, never is a harsh and caustic attitude sanctioned in the Word. How can such be defended in light of the golden rule (Matt. 7:12), or the command to be full of pity and courteous, or the fact that to rail on one another is sin (1 Peter 3:8)? Read Peter's words:

Finally, be ye all likeminded, compassionate, loving as brethren, tenderhearted, humbleminded: not rendering evil for evil, or reviling for reviling; but contrariwise blessing; for hereunto were ye called, that ye should inherit a blessing (3:8-9).

The faithful and successful preacher of the Word is compassionate. We need to imitate the Master, who was "*touched with the feelings of our infirmities*" (Heb. 4:15) and whose love is seen in his compassion toward the Jews (Matt. 23:37). Ezekiel "*sat where they sat*" (Ezek. 3:15); Paul was as gentle as a nursing mother and as a loving father (1 Thess. 2:7), and he served "*the Lord with all lowliness of mind, and with tears*" (Acts 20:19) and "*ceased not to admonish every one night and day with tears*" while in Ephesus (20:31). How tragic that some fail to see that sowing and weeping are companions! "*They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, beareth seed for sowing, Shall doubtless come again with joy, bringing his sheaves with him*" (Psa. 126:5-6). Christ was as gentle as a lamb (John 1:29; Acts 8:32-33; 1 Peter 2:22-23) when personal attacks were barraged upon Him.

Dear reader, this spirit of love and tenderness is the very epitome of God. Why was it that God sent the prophets?

And Jehovah, the God of their fathers, sent to them by his messengers, rising up early and sending, because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: but they mocked the messengers of God and despised his words, and scoffed at his prophets, until the wrath of Jehovah arose against the people, till there was no remedy (2 Chron. 36:15-16).

In Jeremiah, *"the weeping prophet"* one sees the tears of Jehovah. Jeremiah is the *"Paul"* of the Old Testament. Condemned sin Jeremiah did, but he did so with compassion (Jer. 4:19-21). *"Oh that my head weep waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people"* (9:1). Yet, note his condemnation of their transgressions in the rest of chapter nine and throughout the book, as he fulfilled God's command *"to pluck up and to break down to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant"* (1:10). See the tears of God as He warns through Jeremiah, *"But if ye will not hear these words, I swear by myself, saith Jehovah, that this house shall become a desolation"* (22:10; compare Christ's similar tears of deep regret and compassion over Jerusalem [Matt. 23:37]). Please notice closely that neither Jehovah through Jeremiah nor our Lord Jesus Christ compromised toward sin, failed to warn about impending judgment, or refused to expose popular sins, false doctrines, and false teachers, evil while characterized by deep love and compassion. ***What more than the Word*** is required to produce preachers of conviction and compassion?

The Glorious Church And Biblical Balance In Preaching

In the sixth place, the Scriptures produce in the preacher the biblical balance of scriptural compassion for the souls of men and love for the truth. As many are choosing to abandon the truth and apostatize into denominationalism, ecumenicalism, and modernism, the hue and cry often heard is "*Be balanced!*" However, the reader is likely aware that what is popularly meant by such a plea is to overlook any and all wrong teaching and sinful practice(s) engaged in by the brethren. Do not draw any lines of fellowship (actually, God has already drawn them in His Word), and especially do not mark any false teachers/congregations, they demand. These loving, irenic spirits seem to rebuke and mark only their brethren who are "*set for the defense of the gospel*" (Phil. 1:17). This attitude is not new, for brother W. L. Totty wrote thirty years ago as the present apostasy was beginning,

In the 30's and 40's when the blight of pre-millennialism was hindering the progress of the church, the sympathizers with premillennialism began to chant the old song of love. If a preacher condemned the speculations of the premillennialists, he was branded as being void of love, self-centered, and sometimes even jealous. Nevertheless, the church had many preachers who were not frightened by those sympathizers with false doctrine. The same thing is heard today in many places. False teachers are singing the same song.

We must love the brethren but not in the sense

that we overlook and condone false teaching. Parents should love their children but not in the sense that they neglect to correct them... "Speaking the truth in love" must not be interpreted to mean in love of false teaching, as some are prone to interpret it. "Speaking the truth in love" means in love of God and his truth and the salvation of people.⁷

Brother Totty pointed out that *"God is love"* (1 John 4:8), but *"that does not mean that God cannot hate."* David hated every false way (Psm. 119:104). God hates, among other things, *"an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren"* (Prov. 6:16-19). *"When we speak the truth in love, we must not have the love of false teaching in mind: we must hate false teaching,"* brother Totty warned.

Very often, a *"preach the man and not the plan"* or similar compromiser will shout, *"We need to imitate the Lord!"* Question: Are we to follow Christ? Indeed! Are we to imitate the loving Master in His refutation of false teachers by name and in public? It seems many try to *"out-nice"* the Master; they might even proport to be *"more loving than he,"* if not in word, at least in impressions they try to leave. They are greatly repulsed at such expressions *"scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites," "full of iniquity," "son of hell," "blind guides," "fools," "whited sepulchers," "offspring of vipers,"* etc. (Matt. 23), all terms used by our Lord. What about Paul's preaching? *"O full of all guile and all villainy, thou son of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness,"* he said to

Elymas (not in a corner) (Acts 13:10). Who will deny the huge, loving heart of the apostle Paul, who had a constant, deeply painful ache because souls were not saved (Rom. 9:1-3; 1:13-15; 10:1)?

The preaching of Christ, of the apostles, and of other gospel preachers of the first century was loving and tender, but it also addressed the need. The grease was put **inside** the hub, the salve onto the sore, the message needed into the ear. The Lord might have avoided identifying and exposing the Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, Nicolaitans, Jezebels, et al., when appropriate, **but He did not**. Peter and the other apostles (and Stephen) might have avoided identifying and exposing those who murdered the Messiah, **but they did not**. Paul might have avoided exposing Hymenaeus, Alexander, Demas, Philetus, et al., **but he did not**. The Holy Spirit might have refused to give us the commandment to *“mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which ye learned: and turn away from them”* (Rom. 16:17); to *“have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather even reprove them”* (Eph. 5:11); and (to the elders of the church to *“be able both to exhort in the sound doctrine, and to convict the gainsayers... whose mouths must be stopped”* (Titus 1:9-11), **but He did not**. Dear reader, will God excuse us from obeying these commands because we are so loving and have such irenic spirits that we just cannot be that *“mean, judgmental, offensive, and pointed”*? Friend, even the loving Lord did not/could not

escape hatred, envy, abuse, and opposition when He denounced the *"tradition of the elders"* (Matt. 15:2, 12). Did He err? Would some of today's loving brethren have *"marked"* **Him** because of being so *"unloving," "rigid," "radical,"* and *"right-wing"*?

Our Lord while on earth was determined not to confirm the sinner in sin, ease his conscience when in rebellion to God, and sent him on his way rejoicing, feeling good in his lost condition! He warned man to repent or perish (Luke 13:3, 5), and he realized that preaching without compromise and with conviction brings a person to *"godly sorrow"* which produces repentance unto salvation (2 Cor. 7:10). That power is in the Word, not in the preacher (Rom. 1:16; James 1:21; 2 Tim. 3:15). The loving preacher is careful not to leave out anything taught in Holy Writ (Acts 20:26-27; Matt. 4:4; 28:20; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Acts 10:33), both milk and meat (Heb. 5:12-14). The gentle *"Lamb of God"* went on the attack as the *"Lion of the tribe of Judah"* when His Father and truth were blasphemed and the word was abused. The preacher who is neutral in the battle for truth and right is on the side of error, whether he is aware of it or not (Matt. 12:30).

Soft-soaping, spinelessness, and compromise does not help the cause of truth against error anymore than does meanness, radicalism, and vindictiveness. Neither is biblical! **What more than the Word** is required to produced in preachers the attitude to **preach the truth** with courage and to preach it with **gentleness and love**?

The Glorious Church And Christ Not Ourselves The Emphasis In Preaching

In the seventh place, the Scriptures motivate the preacher humbly to preach Christ, not himself. Paul said, *"For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain"* (Phil. 1:21). Paul had crucified the old man of self (Rom. 6:1-4), and he kept the old man of sin buried (1 Cor. 9:27). He wrote,

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me (Gal. 2:20).

Now, whom did Paul preach in view of the fact that he himself was now dead in Christ, himself or Christ?

Paul told the Corinthians, *"For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified"* (1 Cor. 2:2). Whom do you think God commanded Paul to preach? Paul?

But even as we have been approved of God to be intrusted with the gospel, so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God who proveth our hearts (1 Thess. 2:4).

We preach Christ crucified (1 Cor. 1:23).

The forerunner of Christ, John, also preached the Messiah (Matt. 3:3) and told his own disciples to follow Him. *"And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus"* (John 1:37); John preached the Messiah, as did Paul. They reasoned, What is His mission (Luke 19:10); how can I help Him achieve His purpose? Jeremiah's *"burning fire shut up in (his) bones"* was to

“speak in his (God’s) name” and *“make mention of him”* (Jer. 20:9), to preach God by His authority. Far be it from Jeremiah, or John the Immerser, or Paul to build some personal following or to crown himself as some magnificent one! They served in great humility; *“Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ,”* he wrote (Rom. 1:1).

When Paul preached, he did not preach what the Greeks considered *“excellency of speech,”* the worldly philosophies of the Greeks (1 Cor. 2:1), but rather *“the testimony of God.”* His preaching was *“book, chapter, and verse,”* a *“What saith the Scriptures”*? In fact, he warned against exalting men and following their damnable doctrines. Note the following Scriptures (1 Cor. 4:6; Col. 2:8; Rom. 16:17-18).

Those who serve themselves find out what the people want to hear, their *“felt needs,”* and that comprises their *“messages.”* Paul described these politicians who put their wet fingers into the air to test the wind thus:

For the time will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine; but, having itching ears will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and turn aside unto fables (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

Professional preachers and professional politicians cannot be counted upon to rise up when the wolf approaches (John 10:12-13). What a powerful statement Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 4:5!

For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.

What more than the Word is necessary to produce servants' hearts, humble preachers of Jesus Christ, who saved us from eternal disaster?

The Glorious Church And One's Endurance In Preaching

In the eighth place, the scriptures produce within the heart of the preacher the ability to overcome discouragements and to endure sufferings and persecutions. Paul told Timothy, *"For God gave us not a spirit of fearfulness"* (2 Tim. 1:7); *"suffer hardship with the gospel according to the power of God"* (1:8). *"Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus"* (2:3). Paul was a prisoner for preaching the gospel (1:8); he was suffering in that Roman prison (1:12); he was lonely, for all Asia had abandoned him (1:15). How could he endure? It was because of his inward strength, the source of which was Christ and His word: *"Thou therefore, my child, be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus"* (2:1). The preacher who relies upon his own strength when troubles come is doomed to failure! Christ is *"full of grace and truth"* (John 1:14). They are *"exceeding riches"* (Eph. 2:7). God's grace was fully capable of enabling Paul to deal with his thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

One of the most discouraging experiences of preachers of the Word is for the sacred message to be rejected. But, most will reject the truth, regretfully. For the most part, the multitudes who heard the Messiah rejected Him and His will. What was the attitude of the Galatians to Paul's inspired message? *"So then*

am I become your enemy, by telling you the truth" (Gal. 4:16). Most will not love the truth (2 Thess. 2:10-12). However, there are still many who will hear it gladly (Mark 12:37). They are those who hunger for it (Matt. 5:6), those who thirst and pant after God and the divine message (Psm. 42:1-2). The Lord understands thus His urging us not to "*cast your pearls before swine*" (Matt. 7:6). Remember, the world hated and rejected Christ before it hates and rejects us (John 15:18-25).

Conclusion

The Bible enables the Lord's glorious church to produce preachers. The need for stalwart, capable gospel preachers is critical today, as never before in present times. Never have the fields been more white; and, truly the laborers are few. Think about the hundreds of thousands of precious souls being born every day, most of whom will never get to hear a true gospel sermon! The place to begin with preacher training is in the home, exalting the Lord and the verbally inspired, inerrant, plenary Word of God – the sole power of God to save mankind. Parents produce preachers; they instill the need within the hearts of our young men. They are very supportive of their children in being actively involved in the work of the Lord. We need more mothers like Hannah and Lois and Eunice. We need more "*fathers in the gospel*" like Paul.

The imperative is, "*and the things which thou has heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also*"

(2 Tim. 2:2). Many fine and gifted men are timidly awaiting the encouragement to preach. Often, they have been reared in very devoted Christian homes, who have sowed the seed and pressed the need for capable preachers. What are we in the congregations of which they are a part doing to encourage them? Do we give them opportunities to serve at the Lord's table, teach classes, do personal work, visit the delinquent, lead singing, etc.? Do we take them "*under our wings*" and guide them into greater service? May we never disparage the work of preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ. The faithful, loving preacher is worthy of honor and respect. Elders can be tremendous encouragement. If elders will give young men opportunities (perhaps on fifth Sunday nights, or at other times), the older ladies, especially, will give them great encouragement.

The writer is thankful for my parents for instilling within me the love of preachers and preaching. Dad being himself a preacher. They saw to it that we were around faithful preachers of the Word and that we had preachers for meals in our home etc. We were exposed to good preaching. They did not tell me I had to preach; they just never told me there was anything else that I could do. I cannot remember when I did not want to preach. Many thanks to all who have encouraged me all through the years to be a gospel preacher! May we all preach the pure gospel, in love, humbly, looking for that crown which awaits on the other side at that great day (2 Tim. 4:6-8)! "*Preach the word!*" Inasmuch as the Scriptures equip us for "*every*

good work," inasmuch as the training of preachers is a good work, the Scriptures are completely sufficient for the training of preachers—a vital necessity in "*the glorious church.*"

Endnotes

1 J. Roy Vaughn, "Is Preaching from the Pulpit Out of Date?" **Gospel Advocate** (January 30, 1969), p. 78.

2 H. A. Dixon, "The Preaching We Need Today," **Bible Light** (July-August, 1997), p. 1.

3 W. L. Totty, "Sowing the Seed," **The Informer** (April 16, 1972), p. 3.

4 From notes taken by the author of Gus Nichols' sermon on "Conduct of the Preacher."

5 Franklin Camp, "Paul's Pen Picture of a Preacher (no. 3)," **The Knight Arnold News** (July 19, 1988), p. 1.

6 Franklin Camp, "Things That Differ," **The Knight Arnold News** (April 26, 1988), pp. 1-2.

7 W. L. Totty, "Speaking the Truth in Love," **The Informer** (May 30, 1971), pp. 1-2.

Chapter 23

What Is The Role Of Deacons In The Glorious Church?

Perry Cotham



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The word **deacon** means "*a servant.*" It carries the idea of active service. Several people in the New Testament were referred to as "*servants,*" using this sense of the word: Christ, the apostles, all faithful Christians, and to a special group of officers in the church (cf. Rom. 15:8; 1 Cor. 3:5; John 12:26). In the last, more limited usage, it denotes a certain class of Christian officers, men meeting very specific qualifications and serving the congregation under the authority of the elders.

In the opening statement of Paul's letter to Philippi the deacons are distinguished from the saints in general, and are ranked with the bishops (elders)

as an order of ministers (servants):

Paul and Timotheous, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons (Phil. 1:1, KJV).

Also, in Paul's first letter to Timothy, they are again mentioned with their qualifications:

Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy to filthy lucre; holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these first also be prove; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 3:8-13).

These verses prove that the deacons in the church were a distinct order of Christian servants. Like the elders, they must first be proved; and those who perform the work of a deacon well procure for themselves a good standing in the church.

But what were their duties they were required to discharge?

Duties Of Deacons

It is usually thought by most students of the Bible that the account of servants in the church is given in Acts 6:1-7, for the seven men who were selected to wait on tables for the widows.

The apostles said to the members:

Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business (Acts 6:3).

From this narrative it seems it was the duty of these men simply to attend to the secular wants of those in the congregation. So deacons may help feed the poor and needy, clothe those in need of clothing, and help wait on the sick. The principle involved is very broad and comprehensive.

Of course, to a certain extent, the duty and privilege of every Christian is to teach the Word of God and help the needy at every opportunity, and a good time to do it is while helping the physical body. Paul wrote:

As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:10).

Qualifications Of Deacons

From the statements noted in Acts 6:3-15 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13, we learn that a deacon (servant) must:

- Have a good reputation, both in the church and out of it.
- Be full of the Holy Spirit, in other words his life he should bear the fruit of the Spirit: *“love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance”* (Gal. 5:22-23), produced by the message of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God.
- Full of wisdom, or as we often say *“good common sense;”* for if a man cannot manage his own temporal affairs well, how can he take care of the Lord’s work in this respect?
- Deacons serve under the elders.

Some Words Of Advice

The number of deacons should vary according to the various wants and needs of each congregation and those available thus to serve. The elders of the church should supply the deacons with many jobs, and have them report back concerning what has been done and what is being done. In helping the needy, Paul gave some good advice that needs to be respected:

And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; that ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing (1 Thess. 4:11-12).

For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; neither did we eat

any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us. For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing. And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed (2 Thess. 3:7-14).

To Timothy Paul wrote:

But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel... If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed (1 Tim. 5:8, 16).

Christians need to be taught to work, to manage, to save, and to have provisions for their own use, and even some to help others less fortunate (cf. Eph. 4:28). This the deacons of the church can do in their work.

Learn From The Ant

The wise Solomon said,

Go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways and be wise; which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? (Prov. 6:6-9).

"The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meats in the summer" (Prov. 30:25). The ant is busy in the summer, preparing for the chilly days of the winter.

What Of Phebe?

Paul spoke of sister Phoebe, *"a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea,"* a sea-port city near Corinth, who probably took his letter to the church at Rome (Rom. 16:1). He asked that the brethren,

...receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succorer of many, and of myself also (v. 2).

Based on this some think that Phebe was a special deaconess of the church, but being a woman she could not have met the qualifications mentioned by inspiration for being one. The ASV (1901) puts the word *"servant"* in the text, but adds in the footnote the word *"deaconess."* So does the NKJV (Rom. 1:1).

However, some of the newer modern translations insert the word "*deaconess*" (see the RSV, Moffat, and the Amplified New Testament). The New Living Bible says that Phebe was a deacon.

So, some of the "*liberal*" churches are now having women "*deaconesses*," women in the pulpit, and in other parts of the public worship services. This is a violation of the Scriptures. Paul wrote:

I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting.... But I suffer not a woman to teach or usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression (1 Tim. 2:8-14).

Let your woman keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law (1 Cor. 14:35).

David Lipscomb, in his commentary on Romans, says of Phebe:

Some think she was a publicly recognized deaconess, but we find no recognition in the Scriptures of any such class. Many women did, however, devote themselves in a womanly way to teaching and helping those who preached, waiting on the sick and doing whatever were presented itself for them to do. Phebe was one of this

class. Paul commended her as a Christian to the brethren at Rome (**Commentary On Romans**, p. 264).

Matthew Henry says of Phebe as a servant to the church but that she was "*not to preach the word (that was forbidden to women), but in acts of charity and hospitality*" (**Commentary On The Bible, Acts-Revelation**, Vol. VI, p. 497).

So women were servants of the church in one sense of the word, but were never regarded in the order of deacons as in 1 Timothy 3, nor were they allowed to preach in the congregations. Philip, the evangelist, who baptized the eunuch (Acts 8:26-39), had four virgin daughters "*which did prophecy*" (Acts 21:9), but this does not say they did public preaching.

Older women were told by Paul to "*teach the young women*" (Titus 2:3-5), but he did not say for them to preach publicly. Christian women have been and still are special servants to the church in many various ways, but there are no deaconesses in the church, not in the first century and it is not authorized for today.

Today in many foreign countries the congregations try to help take care of widows and orphans and homeless children and aged saints in the best way they can. They do not have government support as we do in our American nation. This is truly a part of Christianity: "*To visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction*" (James 1:27).

How Selected

Deacons are selected to serve the church by the congregation, as the members of the church in Jerusalem were told to do to select those to wait on tables (Acts 6:1-7). This example of selection should serve as a pattern for the selection of both elders and deacons.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF DEACONS IN THE GLORIOUS CHURCH?

Chapter 24

Is The Glorious Church Obligated To The Wayward

B. J. Clarke



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Introduction

There is only one way to know the answer to the above question, and that is to discover what, if anything, the God of heaven has revealed about the subject. Although God has given ample revelation of His existence in nature, natural revelation does not even tell us that there is such a thing as being wayward, much less whether the church has any obligation toward the wayward. Fortunately, God has provided specific information in the 66 books of the Bible to enable us to know His will for mankind. In particular, our task is to discern what

God's will is regarding the church's responsibility to the wayward.

Who Are The Wayward?

It does no good to discuss the church's obligation to the wayward if we do not even know who fits the description of being wayward. Webster defines the word "*wayward*" as follows:

1: following one's own capricious, wanton, or depraved inclinations : UNGOVERNABLE; 2: following no clear principle or law.

While these definitions are helpful to a point, we are most interested in the Biblical identification of the wayward.

According to Scripture, those who are wayward are those who (1) have turned from righteousness to wickedness (Ezek. 18:24-26); (2) in time of temptation fall away (Luke 8:13); (3) "*go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection*" (Luke 8:14); (4) are overtaken in a fault (Gal. 6:1); (5) love this present world (2 Tim. 4:10); (6) have fallen from grace (Gal. 5:4); (7) have become entangled again in the pollutions of the world (2 Peter 2:20); (8) have turned from the holy commandment delivered unto them (2 Peter 2:21); (9) have erred from the truth (James 5:20). This is but a sampling of the descriptive terms that could be used to describe the wayward.

Is The Church Obligated To The Wayward?

Three New Testament texts answer this question decisively:

What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance (Luke 15:4-7).

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ (Gal. 6:1-2).

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins (James 5:19-20).

The sum of these passages is as follows: (1) One wayward sheep is of such importance that we should

leave the ninety and nine safe sheep in order to seek it; (2) We must go after the wayward sheep rather than waiting for its return; (3) It is our responsibility to seek to restore one who has been overtaken in a fault; (4) It is our responsibility to seek to convert the sinner from the error of his way.

Why Must The Church Seek The Wayward?

Obviously, the church ought to seek the wayward because it is commanded by God. Beyond this, comprehending the first three words of James 5:20, *“let him know,”* is critical to understanding why it is so urgent to seek the wayward. What should we know? We should know that if we convert a sinner from the error of his way we are saving a soul from death! Thus, seeking the wayward is a matter of life and death, spiritual life and death! Heaven and hell are real! If our wayward brothers and sisters are not restored, they are going to suffer the pain of everlasting punishment in the lake of fire! Furthermore, if we do not honor God’s command to seek the wayward, then we are going to suffer eternal torment as well! When we fully appreciate these facts, then we will be sufficiently motivated to seek and save the lost.

Which Members Of The Church Are Obligated To Seek The Wayward?

Some would point to Luke 15, because of its reference to a shepherd seeking the lost sheep, and

this imagery may bring to mind the work of elders, who are referred to as shepherds of the flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2-4). Certainly, it is the work of elders to seek to restore the wayward. However, both Galatians 6:1 and James 5:19 begin with the word "*brethren*," thus evidencing the fact that all who share the privilege of brotherhood in Christ must also share the responsibility of seeking wayward brothers and sisters in Christ.

In reality, anyone who is "*spiritual*" has the responsibility to endeavor to restore the wayward (Gal. 6:1). To be sure, elders must lead the way, by their examples as well as their words, but it is equally important for every member to follow their lead. The passage in James 5 does not specify which one of the members of the church should be involved in converting the sinner from the error of his/her way.

Hence, we cannot afford to sit on the sidelines while the elders and preachers go and look for the wayward sheep. Moses rebuked the tribes of Reuben and Gad for their suggestion that they not cross the Jordan and fight the battle with their fellow Israelites. In Numbers 32:6, he asked, "*Shall your brethren go to war, and shall ye sit here?*" Like those in Nehemiah's day, we are to work shoulder to shoulder to get the job done (Neh. 3).

We are "*laborers together with God*" (1 Cor. 3:9). When every member of the body of Christ does his/her part of the work, it causes the growth of the body (Eph. 4:16). Thus, if each and every member

of the church will assist the elders in seeking the wayward, then that many more souls will be saved from death!

What Should The Church Tell The Wayward?

God not only revealed that the church is obligated to seek to restore the wayward—He also revealed the message we ought to take to them. On the positive side, we must tell the wayward that God still loves them, and is willing to forgive their sins. This fact is certainly evident in the parable of the prodigal son, where the father longs for the return of his wayward son. Moreover, the father is willing to forgive his son for his riotous behavior, and to reinstate him to a place of blessing (Luke 15:11-24). Our Heavenly Father is equally gracious and merciful to forgive, as the following passages demonstrate:

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon (Isa. 55:7).

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life (Rom. 5:8-10).

The message of these passages gives us a thrilling message to take to the wayward. Sometimes those who have become Christians, and then have gone astray, erroneously conclude that God is so disappointed in them that He cannot possibly love them anymore. However, if God loved us enough to save us when we were enemies, that *“much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life”* (Rom. 5:10). What an encouraging thought!

We need to tell the wayward of the love of God, but we must also tell them of their need to repent. God insists that all men come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). When Simon the sorcerer sinned, after his baptism, the apostle Peter told him, *“Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee”* (Acts 8:22). In order to *“recover themselves out of the snare of the devil,”* wayward children of God must repent in acknowledgment of the truth (2 Tim. 2:25-26). Furthermore, the wayward need to be reminded that if they refuse to repent they *“shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death”* (Rev. 21:8). In short, the message for those who have strayed away is quite simple: God still loves you and wants you to come home; however, if you do not come home, then you will forfeit an eternal home with God, and suffer eternal punishment instead.

What Attitudes Should The Church Exhibit In Seeking The Wayward?

In attempting to restore the wayward, we must exhibit

the quality of “*meekness*” in our efforts. Concerning the wayward brother, Paul told the faithful to “*restore such an one in the spirit of meekness*” (Gal. 6:2). He told Timothy:

And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

We must be careful not to equate meekness with timidity. Sometimes we fail to endeavor to restore the wayward because we are too timid to approach them. We are so afraid of being labeled as intrusive that we just sit back and leave them alone. How can we do this when they are headed for a devil’s hell?

This is not to say that the wayward will always be thrilled to receive our visit. Certainly, some wayward brethren would rather be left alone than to be lovingly confronted about their sins. Many years ago this author preached at a congregation where a man cheated on his wife, and started forsaking the assembly of the saints. When I suggested to one of the elders that we go and visit this wayward brother, he replied, “*Well, he said he just wants to be left alone.*” My answer was, “*I am sure he would rather be left alone than to be confronted with his sins, but don’t we*

still have an obligation to try and reach him?" In spite of my question, this particular elder was content to just *"leave him alone."* I do not relish confrontation anymore than the next man, but *"God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love and of a sound mind"* (2 Tim. 1:7). We must not allow the fear of *"ruffling the feathers"* of the wayward to cause us to just sit back and leave them alone.

On the other hand, some will condemn us for actually confronting the wayward with their condition. They might object to our confrontation of the wayward by quoting Matthew 7:1, *"Judge not that ye be not judged."* A close look at the context of this statement makes it clear that Jesus was not forbidding all forms of judgment. He was simply saying that before we can help pull the mote out of our brother's eye, we must make sure that there is no beam protruding from our own eye (Matt. 7:1-4). Matthew 7:5 makes it clear that, once the beam has been cast out of our own eye, we have the responsibility to try and cast the mote out of our brother's eye (Matt. 7:5). Let the detractors say what they will. It is not a violation of the Lord's teaching on judging to meekly approach the wayward, confront them with their sins, and encourage them to come home!

How Far Must The Church Be Willing To Go To Restore The Wayward?

It would be wonderful if every wayward member would cease being wayward after receiving

a single visit from a concerned brother/sister in Christ. However, this is not at all realistic. While some will occasionally return after only one visit, this is definitely not the norm. In discussing a procedure for resolving personal differences between brethren, Jesus set forth a pattern that works well in general when it comes to dealing with the wayward. Consider the plan given by our Lord:

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican (Matt. 18:15-17).

In cases involving a personal offense between brethren, the first step is for the offended brother to approach the brother who committed the trespass in an effort to secure his repentance. If this fails, then he is to take two or three others to try and effect a reconciliation. If there is still no repentance forthcoming, then the aid of the entire church is to be enlisted. If even this measure does not lead to the wayward brother's repentance, then the church is to refuse to fellowship him.

The principles involved in settling personal

matters between brethren can also be used in reaching out to all wayward brethren. For instance, the first step is to approach the wayward brother and lovingly attempt to secure his repentance. If the initial effort fails, then other attempts should be made. If the wayward brother/sister still refuses to repent, then a final all-out effort should be made to persuade them to repent. If they still refuse to repent, then fellowship must be withdrawn.

In this permissive age, the very mention of withdrawing fellowship evokes a negative reaction. This is really not surprising, considering the fact that society is bombarded on a daily basis with the messages: "*Have it your way,*" "*Do your own thing,*" and "*I did it my way.*" Hence, the basic attitude of society toward the subject of discipline is vastly different today than just a few decades ago. Teachers in the public schools are intimidated to initiate discipline with unruly students for fear that they will incur the wrath of permissive parents. This attitude has even infiltrated the Lord's church; a large percentage of congregations of God's people have abandoned the practice of discipline altogether, apparently believing that such will not be tolerated by the broadminded members occupying the pews.

The Bible contains all that one needs to know pertaining to the practice of discipline. From the New Testament we learn that there is no greater joy than to be in fellowship with God and with the people of God. Conversely, it can be said that there is no greater sadness than the sadness of being out of fellowship

with God and his children. It would be marvelous indeed if the blessed ties of fellowship never had to be severed. However, the same inspired book which reveals unto us the means by which fellowship can be enjoyed, also records for us the means by which fellowship is to be severed and withdrawn.

Paul wrote the Thessalonians:

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us ... And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed (2 Thess. 3:6,14).

In dealing with the problem of the man at Corinth committing fornication with his father's wife, Paul commanded the brethren to "*deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh*" and not to company with fornicators (1 Cor. 5:5,9). On yet another occasion, the apostle instructed Timothy to withdraw himself from false teachers (1 Tim. 6:3-5). To the Romans, he wrote, "*Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them*" (Rom. 16:17; Comp. 2 John 9-11).

No one who respects the authority of God's Word can ignore the mandate given in Scripture to withdraw from disorderly brethren. If we really care about the wayward, then we will do what God says

to do in trying to restore them, even if it means withdrawing fellowship from them. Whether or not we think that the action of withdrawal is proper is not the issue. There is a way that seems right unto man, but the end thereof is death (Prov. 14:12).

Our desire to restore the practice of New Testament Christianity must include a commitment to restore the New Testament practice of withdrawing fellowship from those who walk disorderly. We must not preach the importance of keeping the commandments of God and then proceed to ignore the plain command to withdraw fellowship.

It is inconsistent for us to chide the denominational world about the commandments that they ignore while we ignore the commandment to practice withdrawal of fellowship. The command of 2 Thessalonians 3:6 is no less sacred or significant than the command of Acts 2:38. God's mandate must be honored.

It is extremely important that we have the proper motivation in withdrawing fellowship from a brother or sister in Christ. The motivation for withdrawing from the transgressor in Corinth was so that his "*spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*" (1 Cor. 5:5). Contrary to the view of some, the action of withdrawal is an act of love! Biblical withdrawal of fellowship is never done out of spite or hatred. It is done out of love for souls!

Love and discipline are not mutually exclusive (Rev. 3:19). Rather, they are twin companions that complement each other beautifully. This harmonious

connection is affirmed in both the Old and New Testament. *"He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes"* (Prov. 13:24). The writer of Hebrews makes this same inspired observation in Hebrews 12:5-11. The passage declares that the Lord chastens or disciplines those whom He loves. Neither the giver nor receiver of discipline enjoys it when it is administered. Yet, the results of this infliction of pain are worth it after all. Likewise, when the action of withdrawal of fellowship is carried out, it is not a joyous time for either the church or the member being disciplined. Yet, if the action taken leads to the reclamation of a lost soul, the infliction of pain will certainly have been worth it all. It is better to go through the emotional pain of being withdrawn from and then restored than it is to wander away from the church, die lost and suffer the everlasting pain of a devil's hell.

How Will The Church Be Blessed In Fulfilling Her Obligation To Seek To Restore The Wayward?

When we are successful in restoring the wayward, we are blessed with the knowledge that we have saved a soul from death and covered a multitude of sins (James 5:20). When a lost sheep comes back to the fold, it is an occasion for rejoicing (Luke 15:5-7). When a lost and valuable coin is found, it is a time for celebration and rejoicing (Luke 15:8-10). How much more should we rejoice when a lost

soul comes home?! When the prodigal son returned home,

...the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry (Luke 15:22-24).

Even in cases where the church has to withdraw fellowship from the wayward, there can still be a joyful ending. In fact, one of the first manifestations of the action of withdrawal just might be the restoration of the withdrawn from child of God. Withdrawal works! It worked in the case of the man in 1 Corinthians 5. Referring to the punishment inflicted upon this man, Paul said,

Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him (2 Cor. 2:6-8).

The withdrawal of fellowship had been sufficient to jolt the offending brother into repenting of his sins so that his fellowship with God and his brethren might be restored. Now that the brother has returned,

Paul admonished the Corinthians to forgive him and accept him back with open arms.

Countless other instances of the effectiveness of withdrawal are known of by this author. Withdrawal works because it is God's way and God's way is the best way. This is not to suggest that every individual who is withdrawn from will definitely come back to the sheepfold. Nevertheless, the action is proper and will strengthen the body of Christ.

A second manifestation of the action of withdrawal is that the other members of the church will be more reverent and aware of what their lot shall be should they decide to walk disorderly. When the rest of the brethren saw the punishment inflicted upon Ananias and Sapphira, they were moved with great fear (Acts 5:11). There was no doubt in their minds that God meant business and that he expected them to learn a lesson from what happened to Ananias and Sapphira. Paul wrote Timothy, "*Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear*" (1 Tim. 5:20).

Thirdly, the action of withdrawal by the church will cause many in the world to respect the church for its strong stand. This is precisely what occurred after Ananias and Sapphira were punished for their transgression. Fear came not only upon the church but upon as many as heard these things (Acts 5:11). The prevailing view today seems to be that withdrawal of fellowship makes us look unloving to the world about us and that to practice it is detrimental to our cause. We ought to be more concerned about what the world will think of us if we put up with

sin than we should about how they will view our loving, yet firm, attempts to deal with sin.

The church in Jerusalem experienced multitudes of additions of both men and women to the body immediately following the punishment of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:14). Likewise, when the Lord's church faithfully, consistently and lovingly practices discipline today, the result will be greater respect and greater numbers of believers added to the body of Christ. Besides, even if the latest Gallup poll showed that 99.9% of all Americans were opposed to a church having the right to withdraw fellowship from its disorderly members, we must ignore the masses (Exod. 23:2) and obey God rather than men (Acts. 5:29). God's way works!

Conclusion

If all of the wayward members of the church within our communities were to suddenly be restored, our church buildings could scarcely contain them. Truly, all we need to do is lift up our eyes to see that the field of wayward brethren is white unto harvest. Let us remember that we have a mandate from God to seek to restore the wayward. Let us all contemplate the lost and tragic condition of the wayward so that we will possess the proper motivation for restoring them. Furthermore, let us remember that our own salvation will be dependent upon our willingness to seek the wayward. May all of the members of the church take their responsibility personally, and seriously. After all, we have a message of hope to

bring to the wayward. Therefore, we need to get busy engaging in whatever Scriptural method possible to try and restore the wayward so that we may see the marvelous results of their return!

Chapter 25

The Eternal Destiny Of The Glorious Church

Jimmy Clark



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The eternal purpose of God is centered in the church. The inspired apostle Paul wrote,

To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: (Eph. 3:10-11).

Again, Paul stressed God's plan for the church in the words,

But, God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even

when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: (Eph. 2:4-6).

Therefore, the eternal destiny of the church is in heaven. How could there be real ultimate glory for the church without heaven being the eternal destiny?

Evidence For Heaven

While much is said in the Bible about heaven and the connection that God's people have with it, it would be foolish to address it as the eternal destiny of the church if it did not really exist. Modernism and humanism have had an impact on the thinking of people producing skepticism and materialism. Therefore, it is important to look into the pages of the Bible to look for the evidences of heaven's existence.

First, there is an eyewitness of heaven in Jesus Christ. Jesus said to the disciples,

In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also (John 14:2-3).

Jesus often addressed the fact that He came from the Father (cf. John 8:21-27; 17:3). He specifically stated, *"For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me"* (John 6:38). John

wrote of Jesus after His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension,

And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood (Rev. 1:5).

Jesus would not be a faithful witness if his words about the place of heaven were not true. Eyewitness testimony is always a solid piece of evidence for drawing the proper conclusion.

Second, there is an empty tomb to verify His deity and give credence to His words. Paul wrote of Jesus, "And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:" (Rom. 1:4). Paul stated to those in Athens,

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead (Acts 17:30-31).

The empty tomb is God's way of saying that Jesus is My Son and that His words are true. Therefore, the day of judgment will see certain ones receive their eternal reward of heaven in that His resurrection to

glory assures the redeemed to be raised “unto the resurrection of life” (John 5:29).

Third, there is the eternal word of God. Jesus Himself said, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Matt. 24:35). Peter wrote,

Being born again, not of corruptible seed,
but of incorruptible, by the word of God,
which liveth and abideth for ever (1 Peter
1:23).

The verbal, plenary, inspired record of the New Testament is solid testimony of the fact of heaven. Every generation has it as the stabilizing standard for faith.

Exhortations To Motivate To Want To Dwell There

Now that the evidence for the existence of heaven has been given, there is the need to motivate men to desire to live there more than to live here on earth. It is stated of those who died in faith,

But now they desire a better country, that is,
a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed
to be called their God: for he hath prepared
for them a city (Heb. 11:16).

There are several passages in the New Testament that give motivating messages for a desire to live in heaven.

First, heaven is a rewarding place. Jesus stated,

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you (Matt. 5:11-12).

Jesus further stated in this same sermon,

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal (Matt. 6:19-20).

Man shall receive his inheritance in view of his faithful service to God (cf. Matt. 25:21, 23).

Second, heaven is a resting place. John wrote,

And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them (Rev. 14:13).

Job himself said of a peaceful death, "There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest" (Job 3:17). The suffering of life is not to be found in heaven (cf. Rev. 21:4).

Third, heaven is a reserved place. Peter wrote,

“To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:4). This denotes the prepared place that Jesus addressed to the apostles (cf. John 14:3).

Fourth, heaven is a renewing place. It is written in the Hebrew letter,

But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect (Heb. 12:22-23).

It is wonderful to think about the renewing of strength and memory and all that time takes from the just to be restored in full vigor in heaven. It is equally comforting to know that those who never had full health (i.e., the mentally retarded, physically impaired at birth, etc.) will know the fullness of completeness in heaven.

Fifth, heaven is a reuniting place. Paul wrote,

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

There will be a great reunion with the redeemed of all the ages in heaven.

Sixth, heaven is a rejoicing place. Jesus said,

I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance (Luke 15:7).

Man's imagination is unable to fathom the greatness of the joy that will be experienced in heaven.

Seventh, heaven is a righteous place. Peter wrote, *"Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness"* (2 Peter 3:13). John wrote of heaven,

And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life (Rev. 21:27).

The ideal moral setting is found in heaven, not on this earth.

Essentials Toward Gaining Entrance

Entering the everlasting kingdom should be the top priority of all. Searching diligently in the pages of the Bible to find that way is an absolute necessity. Doing whatever is required no matter what the cost is the attitude that must prevail. There will be plenty of discouraging days along life's pathway, but the goal must be kept before the eyes.

There are several passages that reveal the reward of heaven is not based on merit.

For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him. That meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember thee in thy ways: behold, thou art wroth; for we have sinned: in those is continuance, and we shall be saved. But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away (Isa. 64:4-6).

Being right with God will not be based upon man's righteousness, but upon a different kind of righteousness. Paul wrote,

Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; Who hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was give us in Christ Jesus before the world began; But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Tim. 1:8-10).

Jesus Himself said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me"* (John 14:6).

Coming through Jesus requires certain responses on man's part. Jesus Himself said to certain unbelievers, *"I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come"* (John 8:21). He further explains this statement with the words,

Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world. I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins (John 8:23-24).

Faith in Jesus Christ is absolutely essential to entrance into heaven. *"For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end"* (Heb. 3:14).

Tied to that faith in Christ is the requirement to turn from sin in repentance.

For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death (2 Cor. 7:10).

Jesus Himself said of repentance,

Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish (Luke 13:2-3).

Even God's longsuffering is linked to the desire for all to repent (cf. 2 Peter 3:9).

Coupled to that same faith is the confession of Jesus to be the Son of God. Paul wrote to the Roman brethren,

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (Rom. 10:9-10).

Paul wrote to Timothy of his confession,

Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hath professed a good profession before many witnesses (1 Tim. 6:12).

Jesus Himself said,

Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven (Matt. 10:32).

The completing of faith that places one into Christ is in the act of being baptized. Paul wrote to the Galatian brethren,

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Gal. 3:26-27).

Baptism is the condition that places faith in the blood of Christ to take away sin. Paul wrote to the Roman brethren,

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4).

This is in full agreement with the words of Peter on the day of Pentecost to those who asked what to do (cf. Acts 2:37-38).

The obedience of faith will continue on to develop unto spiritual maturity. Peter wrote further,

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; And to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; And to godliness, brotherly kindness; And to brotherly kindness, charity...Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:5-7, 10-11).

That everlasting kingdom in heaven itself: the eternal destiny of the glorious church. Therefore,

the exhortation of the book of Hebrews is highly important to remember and apply on a daily basis.

Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul (Heb. 10:38-39).

Heaven is a real place with great blessings. All the spiritual blessings to be received are in Christ (cf. Eph. 1:3). One day the glorious Lord will take His glorious bride, the church, to its glorious home: heaven (cf. Eph. 5:23, 25-27).