

The Church Triumphant

Bobby Liddell, Editor

1991 Bellview Lectures

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Sixteenth Annual
Bellview Lectures

Pensacola, Florida

May 12-15, 1991

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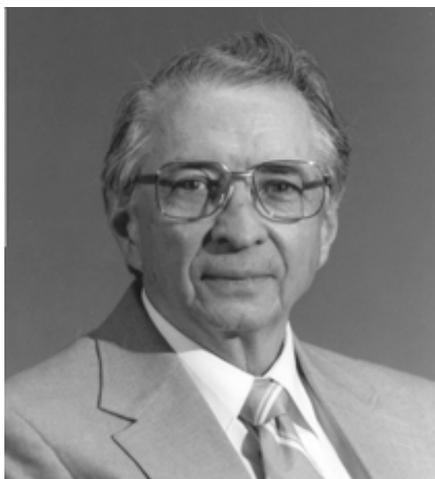
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DEDICATION



Roy Deaver

Because of a deep respect and appreciation for his value to the cause of Christ, this book, containing the lectures delivered in the Sixteenth Annual Bellview Lectures, May 12-15, 1991, Pensacola, Florida, is gratefully dedicated to Roy Deaver.

He has been a gospel preacher since 1940. It is indeed a privilege to sit at his feet while he, as a preacher, teacher or lecturer, proclaims the Word of God with skill and clarity.

Brother Roy Deaver is a native of Texas. He graduated from Freed-Hardeman College, Abilene Christian College and National Christian University. He is the founder and former Director of Brown Trail Preacher Training School; founding President of Fort Worth Christian College and Academy; a former Vice-President and Professor in Tennessee Bible College, a former instructor in Bellview Preacher Training School; and a former instructor in Southwest School of Biblical Studies. At present, he is being supported by many individual Christians and several congregations of the Lord's church to concentrate his enormous abilities on writing about God's Word. He edits and publishes *Biblical Notes*. As an author, debater, teacher and preacher, his stance is exemplified by the words that are printed with the title on each issue of *Biblical Notes*: "A personal medium: to uphold the right, to oppose the wrong, to edify the saints, to teach the Word of God, to

reach the lost.” He and his wife, the former Wilma Ruth Gibson, have three sons.

We at Bellview are especially grateful to brother Deaver for his willingness to serve as a consultant to William S. Cline when preparing to open the former Bellview Preacher Training School. He also helped greatly in setting up the curriculum. For a period of time (during the years 1985-1986) he was a member here at Bellview. He has been a speaker at the majority of these lectureship programs since they began while the Bellview Preacher Training School was still operating.

It is our wish and prayer that Roy and Wilma Ruth may have many additional years in the Lord’s service.

Hairston Brantley

Bill Gallaher

Fred Stancliff

Elders, Bellview Church of Christ

PREFACE

The Church Triumphant! What a blessed privilege to be a part of the divine institution eternally purposed in the omniscient mind of a loving God, purchased with the redeeming blood of a precious Savior and revealed through the inspired words given by power of the Holy Spirit. Triumph it shall, for Christ in its head and King and eternal glory its promised reward. Under the banner of Christ, wielding “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17), His church goes forth to battle every foe of truth and righteousness. None shall be able to stand against it! Truly, “it shall stand for ever” (Dan. 2:44).

The Church Triumphant! The only church which Jesus built. The only church over which Christ is head and in whom His Spirit dwells. The only church in which salvation and spiritual blessings are. The only church revealed, proclaimed and uplifted in the New Testament. The only church in which one should work and worship. The only church of which redeemed saints in the first century were members. The only church of which one should be a member today. The only church of which one shall be a member when he hears, believes and obeys the saving gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16), for it is the only church to which Christ adds the saved (Acts 2:47). Indeed, only His church shall triumph!

We gladly express our deep appreciation to the fine men of faith who have labored many hours in preparing the excellent manuscripts for this book and the speeches for the lectureship. We selected each one because of their love for the Lord, for the truth of His Word and for the triumphant church which He built. Thanks also to the bishops of the Bellview church, Hairston Brantley, Bill Gallaher and Fred Stancliff, who oversee the work of the Bellview church, a part of which is the annual lectureship. We extend our gratitude to the members of the Lord’s church at Bellview. Through the years, they have sacrificed willingly and joyfully to present the lectures with hope for the good that might come from them and for the souls that might be reached through them. By these and other efforts, “from you sounded out the word of the Lord...also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad, so that we need not to speak any thing” (1 The. 1:8).

May this volume, *The Church Triumphant*, bring good to the lives of all who read it. Through it, may many be lead to heed the gospel call

and be added to that triumphant body. Through Christ, the head of the body (Col. 1:18), may God receive all the glory.

*Bobby Liddell, Director
February 15, 1991*

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THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT— ACCORDING TO GOD’S ETERNAL PURPOSE

Joe Gilmore



Joe Gilmore, Jr. has been preaching the gospel for over fifty years and is now working with the church in San Lorenzo, California. He attended Abilene Christian University, East Central State University and San Jose University. A Creek Indian, he lectures for the Federal Government on Indian Culture and has recently been selected by five of the Indian nations as spokesman and representative to Washington for over four hundred Indian nations. This is an even greater honor than that bestowed on his grandfather who was “Chief of Chiefs” of the Creek Nation. Brother Gilmore is a debater, lecturer, preacher, rancher and oil producer. He and his wife, Joy, have one daughter and one granddaughter.

God is a God of purpose. Job said, “I know that Thou canst do every thing, and that no thought [purpose] can be withholden from Thee” (Job 42:2). God has the necessary power to carry out His plans. “For the Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it?” (Isa. 14:27). Nothing can keep God from accomplishing His eternal purpose!

God planned the church from the beginning. The birth of the church was not something which just happened. It was something which had been planned by God from eternity. God made vast preparations by a great master plan. He used prophets, priests, kings, generals, armies, empires, builders, masses of people for the time of the birth of the church. Paul said.

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).

Jesus spoke with authority about the church and said, “I will build my church” (Mat. 16:18). He defiantly added, “and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Mat. 16:18). The birth of the church took place on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. On this day some three thousand heard the gospel preached by the apostles. These Jews obeyed the gospel and were added to the church that day.

WHAT IS THE CHURCH OF THE NEW TESTAMENT?

The church is the body of people who have been called out of the world by the gospel of Christ and over which Christ rules as king (John 16:19; 17:15-16; 2 The. 2:13-14). The church is the greatest institution in all the world. It is the only divine institution.

The church is often called “kingdom” which refers to its government (Col. 1:13; Rev. 1:9; Mat. 28:18). The church is also called the house, household, family of God (1 Tim. 3:14-16). Inspired writers never referred to the church as a denomination. Modern denominations came fifteen hundred years too late to be the New Testament church.

The day of Pentecost of Acts 2 (A.D. 33) is the birthday of the church. Jesus said, “I will build my church” (Mat. 16:18). The church had not been built when Jesus made this statement. If the church had been set up before the first Pentecost after the Lord’s resurrection the apostles did not know it for they said, “Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). Isaiah said, “The mountain of the Lord’s house” would be established in the “last days” (Isa. 2:2-3). Daniel said, “In the days of these kings [the Roman Empire] shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom” (Dan. 2:44). John and Jesus preached “The kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mat. 3:2; 4:17). After

John the Baptist had been beheaded, Jesus taught His disciples to pray “Thy kingdom come” (Luke 11:2). The first reference to the church existing is in Acts 2:47. After Acts 2 the church is always spoken of as a matter of history. “And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church” (Acts 15:4). “Paul and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians” (2 The. 1:1). Any church established before Acts 2 (A.D. 33) is too old to be the New Testament church. Any church established later than the Acts 2 (A.D. 33) date would be too young!

Jesus Christ is the *foundation* of the church. “Upon this rock” (Mat. 16:18). God revealed this truth to Peter (Mat. 3:17; 17:5; Rom. 1:4). Isaiah describes the foundation (Isa. 28:16). Paul refers to Christ as the chief cornerstone and the only foundation (Eph. 2:19-20, 1 Cor. 3:11). The religious denominations of today center around some man, woman, doctrine or dogma. They are not built upon The Rock, Christ.

Jesus is the *builder* and *owner* of the church. “I will build my church” (Mat. 16:18). Moses, Abraham, David nor John the Baptist built the church. Calvin, Luther and Wesley did not build the Lord’s church. The Lord built His own church. He is the owner of it because He built it. Jesus purchased the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28). Jesus loved the church enough to die for it (Eph. 5:25-27). Jesus did not build, buy, love and give Himself for a worthless institution. We must have a high estimate of the church. It is important!

What name should the church wear? Jesus answered this question when He said, “My church” (Mat. 16:18). A scriptural name honors the Lord. A man-given name dishonors the Lord. Christ is the bridegroom and the church is the bride (John 3:28-29). We honor the bridegroom when we wear His name.

Jesus revealed the indestructible nature of the church when He said, “The gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Mat. 16:18). Daniel said it would never be destroyed” (Dan. 2:44). Paul said, “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved” (Heb. 12:28).

The church originated in the *eternal purpose* of God (Eph. 3:10-11). The church being divine cannot be destroyed by Satan or man.

Denominations can be destroyed and will be destroyed. “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). Jesus said, “Every plant, which My heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up” (Mat. 15:13).

THE ETERNAL PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

By inspiration Paul makes mention of a mystery that was hid in other ages (Eph. 3:3-11). It is no mystery to us because it is now revealed. Here is the mystery, “That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ by the gospel” (Eph. 3:6). Thus in the church both Jew and Gentile would become one. This was in the mind of God from the beginning. The church or kingdom is the direct fulfillment of the “eternal purpose of God.” Salvation is in the church. Both Jew and Gentile are reconciled unto God in one body and that one body is the church (Eph. 2:16; 1:22-23).

There are five stages of the church. (1) Purpose, (Eph. 3:10-11); (2) Promise, (Gen. 12:1-4); (3) Prophecy, (Isa. 2:1-4); (4) Preparation, (Mat. 3:10-17); (5) In fact, or in perfection, (Acts 2:47; 15:4).

The church goes as far back as the beginning and the birth of Paul. It certainly did not come into the world accidentally. Paul said, “it was the good pleasure of God, who separated me, *even* from my mother's womb, and called me through his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles” (Gal. 1:15-16). When Paul preached to the Gentiles the gospel of Christ he made known to them the mystery, how that they were fellow-members of the body, the church. When God separated Paul at his birth to preach to the Gentiles, he separated him to declare to the Gentiles how they might be fellow-members of the church. When people say that Jesus came to set up a kingdom and the Jews were not ready for it and He set up the church instead they misrepresent Paul.

Man is to be saved in and through the church. To be in the church is to be in Christ. No man can become like Christ out of the church. The church was planned that all might be reconciled unto God (Eph. 2:16). This is the eternal purpose of God.

THE CHURCH IS NOT A SUBSTITUTE OR CONTINGENT

Some say that Jesus came to establish a kingdom but the Jews as a nation refused to accept Him. Thus, as an afterthought Jesus decided to build the church as a temporary substitute. They further tell us that Jesus will establish His kingdom when He comes again. The theory contradicts Paul's statement, "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated *us* into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Col. 1:13). Saints were in the kingdom in the first century. Jesus said, "Verily I say unto you, that there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God come with power" (Mark 9:1). If the kingdom has not come then some of those people are still alive. Does anyone know their names and addresses? When Jesus gave the limited commission to His disciples He said, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mat. 10:5-6). Next we read, "But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come" (Mat. 10:23). Jesus declared that His disciples would not reach all the cities of Israel before the Lord would come. All the disciples that Jesus addressed in these passages are dead. Jesus made it plain that they would not reach all the cities of Israel before He would come. Many of these cities of Israel do not now exist. It is impossible to reach them today. His disciples were to preach, "the kingdom of God is at hand." How did Jesus come before they reached all the cities of Israel? Jesus came on the day of Pentecost.

A contingent means: liable, possible, afterthought, makeshift. If the church is a makeshift it is inferior to the kingdom. The church is not an accident in any sense. It is the masterwork of God's wisdom and power. It was God's eternal purpose to build the church. Paul in addressing the elders at Ephesus said, "feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28—ASV). The Lord did not die for an accident or contingent. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself up for it" (Eph. 5:25). Christ died for the church, not an accident This

theory, the church is an accident, belittles Christ. Jesus is the *head* of the church (Eph. 5:23).

It was God's eternal purpose to build the church. It is through the church that the blessings of the gospel are to be made known.

THE CHURCH PURPOSED BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD

God formed and fashioned the scheme of human redemption before He began the execution of it. Paul said, "Although the works were finished from the foundation of the world" (Heb. 4:3). Again Paul says, "According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). Jesus speaks of the kingdom thus: "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Mat. 25:34).

That the church had a place in the purpose of God before the foundation of the world is clearly seen, "Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before Him in love" (Eph. 1:4). Whom did God choose? God chose, "the saints that are at Ephesus and the faithful in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 1:11—ASV). This passage refers to the church. We are chosen for a purpose. "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. 5:27). Paul refers to the church when he said, "in whom also we were made a **heritage**, having been foreordained according to the **purpose** of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:1—ASV). "Heritage" means "to make a private possession." This is language that refers to the church. Peter said,

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light. Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God (1 Pet 2:9-10).

Yes the church was purposed before the foundation of the world!

MOSES AND THE PROPHETS SPOKE OF THE CHURCH AND SALVATION

Paul quotes a statement from Moses,

I stand unto this day testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses did say should come; how that the

Christ must **suffer**, and how that He first by the resurrection of the dead should proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles (Acts 26:22-23—ASV).

Paul makes mention that Christ must *suffer*. We ask, for what was Christ to suffer? Paul says, “Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it” (Eph. 5:25). Jesus died, suffered, that He might purchase the church with His blood (Acts 20:28). There was a definite purpose in the suffering of Christ. Thus, an far back as in the days of Moses, God purposed that the church should be brought into existence by the suffering of Jesus. Paul also said, “that He...should proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:23). How did Jesus proclaim light to the Gentiles? Paul quotes, “I have set thee for a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Isa. 49:6; Acts 13:47—ASV). When Paul proclaimed Jesus to them he proclaimed light to the Gentiles. In preaching Jesus to the Gentiles Paul declared *how* they may be “fellow members of the body.” The body is the church (Col. 1:18). The *how* is included in God’s plan. The mystery briefly explained is that the Gentiles may be fellow members of the body, the church, which was hid in God in the time of Moses. Paul plainly says he preached nothing but what Moses and the prophets did say would come. Thus, Moses and the prophets spoke concerning the church and salvation. Even at this time when Moses and the prophets spoke the church was in the eternal purpose of God. Like a golden thread of purpose, the thought of the kingdom of God runs throughout the Bible. Yet, the Bible is not planned like other books or written like an encyclopedia, with all of a subject treated in one connection. It is here a little and there a little, as Isaiah said (Isa. 28:13).

Before Jacob died, he spoke in prophecy of the destiny of his sons and the tribes to which they should give birth. Of Judah he said. “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him [the Shiloh or the glory of God, the Christ] *shall* the gathering of the people *be*” (Gen. 49:10). Christ did spring of the tribe of Judah, of which Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood (Heb. 7:14). This was the tribe of kingly power among the Israelites. It produced the kingdom and lineage of David, from which Christ came. The channel of this prophecy of the

Messianic Kingdom widens and deepens with the passing of the centuries of the Old Testament. Moses spoke of a great prophet, who should be like unto himself (Deu. 18:15). This prophet was the Christ. God said to David by the prophet Nathan:

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 forever...And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established forever before Thee; Thy throne shall be established for ever (2 Sam. 7:12-13, 16).

This prophecy concerned Christ and did not refer to Solomon, “I will raise up Thy seed after Thee, which shall be of thy sons; and I will establish His kingdom” (1 Chr. 17:11). On Pentecost, when the church was established, David was in the grave sleeping with his fathers.

THE CHURCH AND THE KINGDOM ARE THE SAME INSTITUTION

Both the church and the kingdom were in the preaching of the early messengers of the New Testament. John the Immerser, the harbinger of the Messiah, came into the wilderness of Judea, saying, “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mat. 3:2). When Jesus began His public ministry, He preached that the kingdom of heaven was at hand (Mat. 4:17). The seventy proclaimed the same message (Luke 10:9). After the twelve apostles were selected, they preached that the kingdom was at hand (Mat. 10:7). And in Caesarea Philippi, Jesus said, “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” (Mat. 16:18-19).

The church and the kingdom are the same institution. Those who deny that they are the same institution reject large portions of the Holy Scriptures. Jesus uses the two words, church and kingdom, interchangeably. Jesus promises to build His church and give Peter (and all the apostles) the keys, or terms of admission into the kingdom (Mat. 16:18). If the church and the kingdom were not the same, Peter and the other apostles would have no right to use the keys of the kingdom on the church. If the kingdom has not yet been established,

as some falsely teach, Peter and the other apostles never had the privilege of using the keys. Why should the keys be given to them? The church, or kingdom was established on the first Pentecost following the resurrection, ascension, and glorification of the Messiah. On that day the keys were used and about three thousand people were added to the *church* (Acts 2:41,47). Other considerations show that the kingdom and the church are the same.

The church and kingdom are entered on the same conditions. Jesus said, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom" (John 3:5). What is it to be born again? What is included? The new birth includes, as does the natural birth, a begetting. Men are begotten when they believe. "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God" (1 John 5:1—ASV). Faith comes by hearing (Rom. 10:17). Peter says Christians are begotten by the Word of God (1 Pet. 1:23). But a begetting alone is not the new birth anymore than a begetting alone is the natural birth. The begetting is only part of the new birth. The new birth includes the entire process of becoming a Christian such as faith, repentance and baptism. Paul declares that we are saved through "the washing of regeneration [baptism]" (Tit. 3:5). But baptism is not the now birth, yet it is included in the new birth. In baptism one completes the process of becoming a Christian, or the now birth. Men are born into the kingdom. Those on Pentecost believed, repented and were baptized for the remission of sins. They were added to the *church* (Acts 2:38, 41, 47). The same process by which one enters the kingdom adds him to the church because they are the same institution.

The church and the kingdom have the same *head*. Christ is the head of the church (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22). And Jesus in the *king* of the kingdom (Acts 17:7; Rev. 1:5; 17:14).

The church and the kingdom have the same laws. "According an His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (2 Pet. 1:3). If either the kingdom or the church had one thing that pertained to life or godliness which the other did not have, then the one lacking it would be imperfect, and Peter's statement would not be true of both. Hence, they must have the same laws.

The church and the kingdom have the same *subjects*. Paul said that the Colossian saints had been translated into the kingdom (Col. 1:13). All who have been born again are Christians, members of the church, and also are subjects of the kingdom (John 3:5).

The church and the kingdom have the same *seed*. In the parable of the sower, Jesus spoke of the Word of God as the “word of the kingdom” (Mat. 13:19), and “the seed” (Luke 8:11). When the Word, or seed, of the kingdom is received into honest and good hearts it produces subjects of the kingdom. When the Word of God was preached in Corinth (1 Cor. 15:1-3) many of the Corinthians heard it, believed and were baptized (Acts 18:8). Paul addressed these people as the “church of God.” The seed of the kingdom produced members of the church as well as subjects of the kingdom. If the church and the kingdom are not the same institution, then we have the seed producing two different kinds of plants. This is contrary to both nature and revelation (Gen. 1:11; Gal. 6:7-8). This consideration alone should be enough to convince one that the kingdom of heaven and the church are “one and the same.”

The Lord's supper was to be in Christ's kingdom (Luke 22:29-30). The Corinthians observed the Lord's supper (1 Cor. 11:17-30). Therefore, they were in the kingdom.

Christians are citizens of the commonwealth and members of the household of God. Before the Gentiles obeyed Christ they were “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel” (Eph. 2:12). When they were made nigh by the blood of Jesus they were “no more strangers and foreigners, but **fellow citizens** with the saints, and of the **household** of God” (Eph. 2:19). The house, or household of God is the church (1 Tim. 3:15). The expression “commonwealth” indicates a political body. Yet it is a spiritual body. The expression “citizen” also shows that these people were part of a kingdom when they became members of the household (church) of God. Again we see that the church and kingdom are the same.

Paul's use of the word “way” suggests that the church and the kingdom are the same.

And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that **way** before the multitude, he departed from

them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus (Acts 19:8-9).

These Scriptures inform us that Paul preached in Ephesus about the kingdom of God. Paul must have preached some *commandments* for the people became “hardened and disobedient.” One cannot obey or disobey facts or promises. Nothing but *commandments* can be disobeyed. Those who disobeyed what Paul preached were not of his group of belief. Paul departed from them. The disobedient were in another group. Jesus said, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven” (Mat. 7:21). The obedient were in the kingdom and the disobedient were not in it. Thus, Paul must have preached what one must do to become a citizen of the kingdom of God. Paul departed and began preaching in the school of Tyrannus. The disobedient began speaking evil of the *way* before the multitude. We conclude that the kingdom of God is called the *way*. The disobedient spoke evil of the kingdom that Paul preached. The *way* is the kingdom of God which Paul preached. But the *way* is also the church of God. While Saul of Tarsus was busy trying to exterminate Christians, he asked letters of authority to go to Damascus unto the synagogues, that if he found any that were of the *way*, whether men or women “he might bring them bound to Jerusalem” (Acts (9:1-2). Saul was persecuting the *way*. We read from the pen of Paul, “For ye have heard of my manner of life in time past in the Jews’ religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God” (Gal. 1:13—ASV). When Paul persecuted the *way* he persecuted the church. We have found that the kingdom of God is the way, and now we learn that the way is the church. Things equal to the same thing are equal to each other. This we learn in math. Hence the church and the kingdom are synonymous terms.

The theory of an offered, rejected, and delayed kingdom has done harm, has led to millennial speculation, and holds it out to the Jews a hope where there is none. God’s people today are Christians, whether Jew or Gentile (Gal. 3:28-29). There is only one way of salvation. All without Christ are lost. Christ’s coming marks the end of time and the beginning of eternity (2 Pet. 3:8-11).

PICTURES OF THE PURPOSED CHURCH

The Bible vividly portrays the nature of the church and the various descriptive ways which are applied to it.

As a *pearl*, the church is costly. It is to be purchased even at the expense of “selling all one has” (Mat. 13:45-46). Nothing compares in value with the church purchased with His blood.

As a *kingdom*, it is obedient. Divine law only comes from king Jesus (Col. 1:13). Efforts of others to bind where the king has loosed or to loose where the king has bound are not permitted in the kingdom.

As a *house*, it is orderly. Every stone is fitly framed together for a suitable habitation of the Spirit (1 Pet. 2:5; Eph. 2:20).

As a *flock*, it is dependent. The flock is to be fed upon the pure milk of the word and to look to the great Shepherd of the sheep for spiritual strength (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:20).

As a *family*, it bears His image. The whole family in heaven and earth is named for Him, and is composed of children of God, joint-heirs with Christ of the heavenly fortune (Eph. 3:15; Rom. 8).

As a *bride*, it is vitally joined to Him. The church subjects itself to Him who gave Himself for it, sanctifies and cleanses it, who one day will present it to Himself for eternity (Eph. 5:13-33).

As a *body*, it is united. No member is unnecessary, each cares for the other, and is joined to Christ the head. It is to have no schism (1 Cor. 12:12-27).

As a *candlestick*, it is exalted. It serves as a light to the world, reflecting the light of Him who is the true light (John 1:9, Rev. 1:12).

No one should speak lightly of the church. Membership in the church is important and valuable. David the sweet singer of Israel said,

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem [church], let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem [church] above my chief joy (Psa. 137:5-6).

THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT— AS SEEN BY THE PROPHETS

Flavil H. Nichols



Flavil Nichols has been preaching almost 58 years, having preached his first sermon when he was 15 years old. Since May 1, 1989, he has been retired from local responsibilities, but preaches in revivals, speaks on lectureships, and fills other special engagements. Prior to that for 5 ½ years he was minister of the Sixth Avenue church in Jasper, Alabama, where he yet resides. The oldest son of Matilda Nichols and the late Gus Nichols, Flavil was born near Jasper, Alabama. A graduate of Freed-Hardeman College, he later attended what is now the University of North Alabama, in Florence. His wife, the former Mary Elizabeth Hardin, and he have two children and three grandchildren. He has preached in 21 states and three foreign countries, and has done local work with churches in Alabama, Arkansas, Tennessee, and Kentucky. His articles have been published in several gospel papers. He served two different terms as Editor of *Words Of Truth*, a weekly journal begun by his father in 1962.

Grace was given unto the apostle Paul to

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. 3:8-11).

Inspiration here reveals that the church was no accident, nor afterthought, with God! It was in his “eternal purpose!” Furthermore, we learn that salvation—which, under the New Testament, involves Christ and his church (Acts 2:47)—was in God’s purpose and plan “before the world began” (2 Tim. 1:8-9).

Almost 2,000 years ago, both Paul (Col. 1:13) and John (Rev. 1:9)—two apostles—affirmed they were “in” the “kingdom”! It is not a restoration of the national kingdom of the Jews. Nor is it any sort of material or earthly “kingdom” which some imagine will be established at Christ’s second coming! It is the “church” of which

Christ is head (Eph. 1:22-23), to which all the saved are added by the Lord (Acts 2:47), and in which the Holy Spirit dwells (1 Cor. 3:16-18).

It was established “with power” (Mark 9:1) when the Holy Spirit came (Acts 1:8) upon the apostles on Pentecost Day (Acts 2:14). This indeed was in the lifetime of some of those who heard Jesus preach. The apostle Paul declared this “kingdom”—which is the church of Christ (Mat. 16:18), the only “church” in the New Testament—was in God’s eternal plan and purpose (Eph. 3:9-11).

Only Deity could possibly have foreknown the various details of the church. And likewise Deity alone could have so clearly prefigured so many details of the triumphant New Testament church as are delineated in the types and shadows (Heb. 10:1-3) of the Old Testament. *Prophecies* of the triumphant church must include these types and shadows of it couched in the sacred Scriptures.

For example: there are many comparisons between Adam and Christ, so that inspiration called Christ “the figure of him that was to come” (Rom. 5:14), and the “last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45). Adam was miraculously created (Gen. 2:7); the virgin birth of Christ was a biological miracle (Mat. 1:18-25). Adam had no wife at first (Gen. 2:20); Christ had no church at first (Mat. 16:18). Adam was put to sleep (Gen. 2:21); Christ was put to death (1 Cor. 15:1-3). While Adam slept his side was opened (Gen. 2:21); while Christ was dead His side was pierced (John 19:31-34). Adam gave up a rib that he might have a wife (Gen. 2:21-22); Christ gave up His blood that He might purchase the church (John 19:31-34; Acts 20:28). Adam awoke, revived (Gen. 2:23); Christ arose from the dead (Mat. 28:6; Mark 16:6; Luke 24:6; 1 Cor. 15:1-4). Adam had only one wife (Gen. 2:22); Christ has only one church (Eph. 4:4; 1:22-23). Adam was head of his wife (Gen. 3:16); Christ is head of His church (Eph. 5:23). Adam loved his wife (Gen. 2:23-25); Christ loves His church (Eph. 5:25-27). Adam’s wife wore his name (Gen. 5:2); Christ’s church wears His name (Rom. 16:16; 1 Pet. 4:14). Adam’s sin brought physical death upon all mankind (1 Cor. 15:22); Christ’s righteousness brings a bodily resurrection to all mankind (John 5:28-29; 1 Cor. 15:22).

Many lessons can be learned from the story of Noah: Noah built the Ark; Christ built the Church. Noah built only one Ark, Christ built only one Church. The Ark was built of only one material—"gopher wood"; the Church is comprised of only one material—"living stones." All in the Ark were one family; all in the Church are one family. All those in the Ark had one common name. "Noah." (In modern parlance, there was the elder Mr. & Mrs. Noah, plus Mr. & Mrs. Shem Noah, Mr. & Mrs. Ham Noah, and Mr. & Mrs. Japheth Noah). Similarly, all who are in the Church should wear the same name—the name of Christ (Acts 4:11-12; 11:26). The world was in despair of a flood; the world is in "danger of hell fire" (Mat. 5:22). There was one door into the Ark; and there is one door into the Church (John 10:7, 9). All who were saved from the flood were in the Ark which Noah built; and all who are saved from sin are in the Church which Christ built (Acts 2:47).

Numerous other events back then prefigured the Lord's church. Israel was in bondage in Egypt; the world is in bondage to sin (1 John 5:19). Moses was a type of Christ (Acts 3:22-23). Slaughter of innocents at his birth typified killing of babies at Jesus' birth (Mat. 2:16-17). Moses gave up the palace to lead them out of bondage; Christ gave up heaven to bring us out of sin (Phi. 2:5-11). The miracles of Moses prefigured the miracles of Christ. Moses' miracles made them believe God sent Moses (Exo. 4:30-31); we believe in Christ because of His miracles which are recorded (John 20:30-31). They believed God sent Moses; we must believe God sent Christ (John 3:16; Heb. 11:6). They had to turn from Egypt, and follow Moses; we must repent, and follow Christ (Luke 13:3; Mat. 16:24). Underneath the cloud Moses led them through the Red Sea, where Paul says they "were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the Sea" (1 Cor. 10:2); Christ leads us to be baptized (Mat. 28:18-20). All who were in Egypt had to cross the Red Sea to be saved from Egypt; all who are in sin must be baptized to be saved from sin (1 Pet. 3:21). (Remember Babies are not sinners; Eze. 28:15). God saved them after they crossed the Red Sea (Exo. 14:29-30), not before, salvation is promised today after baptism (Mark 16:16), not before. Israel did not have to "join" the wilderness (the same process

that transferred them out of Egypt placed them in the wilderness); we do not “join” the Lord’s church (Acts. 2:47) (the same process that delivers us from sin translates us into the kingdom or church; Eph. 1:13-14). Many Israelites displeased God (1 Cor. 10:5-13); it is possible for us to do likewise (Heb. 4:11). God gave them physical food and water, He provides our spiritual food (Mat. 4:4; 1 Pet. 2:2). Many were overthrown in the wilderness; we can “fall from grace” (Gal. 5:4; 1 Cor. 10:1-14; 2 The. 2:1-3). God opened up Jordan for the faithful to enter Canaan; He will open graves, raise the dead, and take the righteous to heaven (John 5:28-29; Mat. 25:31-46; 1 The. 4:13-18).

The Tabernacle (Heb. 8:5) also was a type or shadow of the church, demonstrating that the church was in God’s mind and purpose back then (Heb. 10:1-3). Moses built the Tabernacle; Christ built the Church. Moses built only one Tabernacle; Christ built only one Church. God gave the pattern for the Tabernacle, Christ (Mat. 28:20) gave the pattern for the Church. The Tabernacle was situated in the Outer Court; the Church is located in the world (John 3:16). In the consecration of one becoming a priest, a sacrifice was offered for him at the brazen altar in the outer court; one who becomes a Christian (all Christians are Now Testament “priests”; 1 Pet. 2:5) must accept the sacrifice of Christ’s blood which was offered on the cross for our sins. One consecrated to be a priest was required to give up every unholy thing (Lev. 10:3; 22); one who becomes a priest (or Christian) must repent of all past sins (Acts 3:19). One becoming a priest then was washed in the laver; one becoming a “priest” now must be baptized “for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38; 22:16). The priest had to wear holy garments (Exo. 28:4); the Christian must live a holy or “set apart” life (Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 7:1). The Candlestick was the source of light in the tabernacle; the gospel is our only light (2 Cor. 4:4). The golden altar of incense typified our prayers (Psa. 141:2). The table of showbread was set every sabbath day (Lev. 24:8); we eat the Lord’s supper every week (Acts 20:7). The only way into the Most Holy Place was through the Holy Place; the only way for a sinner to go to heaven is through the Church (Acts 2:47).

Many lemons could be cited from the Old Testament happenings, such as Jacob's Ladder, Naaman's Leprosy and Sin; but space forbids. So many points of comparison exist!

Surely this is no "accident," but was the foreknowledge of God at work "for our learning" (Rom. 15:4).

The apostle Peter tells us that even the inspired Old Testament prophets "enquired and searched diligently" (1 Pet. 1:9-11) to understand prophecies uttered through them by the Holy Spirit, which eventually were fulfilled in the establishment of the church and the unfolding of the gospel of Christ.

The New Testament church is an exhibition of God's wisdom. Hear brother Robert R. Taylor, Jr.:

Heavenly angels and inspired seers had but a faint picture of the great wisdom God intended one day to unfold as the chief exhibit of his great wisdom. When the Lord's church became an established reality on that memorable Pentecost, God's creatures in heaven and men upon earth observed the greatest exhibition of divine wisdom the world has ever witnessed. The Lord made the earth by wisdom (Prov. 3:19), but the building of the church displays a wisdom that greatly transcends creative wisdom at the beginning. Great wisdom was displayed in the giving of the Decalogue on shaking Sinai, but Pentecost is of much higher eminence than Mt. Horeb. Are you searching for the display of God's wisdom? Look no further than the church, for here is the very pinnacle of heavenly wisdom manifested upon earth. The church exhibits not just a single facet of God's wisdom, but the many-sided aspects of this wisdom. Just as a beautiful building eloquently exhibits the talents of its architect, and the building skill of those who erected it, so the church marvelously manifests the wisdom of its Divine Architect and the skill of the Messianic Builder (*The Church of Christ—Essential, All-Sufficient, Indestructible, Perpetually Relevant*, Freed-Hardeman Lectureship, Gospel Advocate, 1971, pp. 20-21.)

The apostle Paul preached and wrote much about the church (Rom. 16:16; Eph. 1:22-23; 3:14-15). He mentioned the church in almost every epistle he wrote. This inspired apostle identified the "gospel" which he preached—which includes the *church*—as exactly the same "gospel" which God "promised afore by his prophets in the holy Scriptures" (Rom. 1:1-2). The church existed in "the eternal purpose" of Almighty God (Eph. 3:9-11). This refutes Premillennialism, which teaches that no Old Testament prophet foresaw the *church*; rather Premillennialism holds that, upon being

rejected by the Jews, Jesus—changed His purpose, and established the church as a substitute for the “kingdom” of prophecy! By the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul negates this doctrine.

When Adam sinned, God “struck out for,” or headed toward, the establishment of the church on Pentecost Day of Acts 2. Jehovah planned for His church to occupy the times “until,” (not the *beginning*, but the *completion*) of the “restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21)—from A.D. 30 until the end of the world. Herein is another prophecy that the church will triumph! This “restoration” is now being accomplished by gospel preaching (Rom. 1:16), which results in the salvation of souls who are added by our Lord to the church (Acts 2:47).

Premillennialism to the contrary notwithstanding, the church established by Christ was no “accident,” nor “afterthought!” The church of Christ (Mat. 16:18) is not an “emergency measure” established as a substitute for something else God (allegedly!) had previously envisioned. This church was in “the eternal purpose” (Eph. 3:9-11) of our allwise God “before the world began” (2 Tim. 1:8-9).

Our Savior Himself foretold the *spiritual nature* of His kingdom, declaring: “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). Its triumph was never intended to be in military or material conquests, but as the spiritual “kingdom of peace” (Rom. 14:17). God is the “God of peace” (Rom. 15:33). Christ is the “Prince of peace” (Isa. 9:6). His church is the kingdom of peace (Rom. 14:17). The gospel of Christ is the “gospel of peace” (Rom. 10:15; Eph. 6:15).

The peaceable nature of the triumphant church is depicted in a highly figurative prophecy:

The wolf also shall 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' [ASV: “adder's”] 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 cover the sea (Isa. 11:6-9).

This is fulfilled in the New Testament church, for Jesus said, “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Mat. 7:12). Hear him again: “But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Mat. 5:39).

Isaiah said those who adhere to the “word of the Lord” which would emanate from Jerusalem “shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks,” adding: “nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Isa. 2:24). The Messianic prophet did not mean that entire “nations” (as such) will thus act; but rather that those in all nations who subscribe to “the law” which goes forth from Zion will thus do. They, like their “Prince of Peace,” Will become “Peacemakers” (Mat. 5:9).

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder. and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this (Isa. 9:6-7).

This prediction is being fulfilled in the church of Christ today.

Look again at Isaiah—for therein lies another prophecy of the church triumphant “The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11:9). The pillar and ground of the truth is our Lord’s church (1 Tim. 3:15); and that it was successful in evangelizing the world was affirmed by the apostle Paul, who testified that in his lifetime the gospel had been “preached to every creature which is under heaven” (Col. 1:23).

The Old Testament prophets foretold the universal nature of the church of Christ. The same inspiration which could foretell that Christ would be the “seed of woman” (Gen. 3:15), and the seed of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3), and that “the sceptre shall not depart from Judah” (when as yet there never had been a king of Israel!), “nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him

shall the gathering of the people be” (Gen. 49:10)—could also predict (Gal. 3:8) that in him all the “families” (Gen. 12:3), “nations” (Gen. 18:18), and “kindreds” (Acts 3:26) of the earth shall be blessed. If there is any person on earth who is not eligible to be blessed through Christ, he is no “kin” to any of the rest of us!

Inspiration foretold that Christ would come to bless the Gentiles as well as the Jews; and this is fulfilled in the church. Jews and proselytes were converted on Pentecost (Acts 2), and Gentiles were brought into the church in Acts 10—which fact the Jews acknowledged to be of God (Acts 11:18). The apostle Peter (himself a Jew), declared. “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34). Another Jew, the apostle Paul, wrote. “There is neither Jew nor Greek...for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

This universal nature of the church triumphant was predicted by several prophets. Bear in mind that the New Testament asserts that the “house of God...is the church of the living God” (1 Tim. 3:15). Also be aware that in prophecy the word “mountain” is often used of a “kingdom” or government. Isaiah wrote,

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. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more (Isa. 2:2-4).

That this kingdom is universal is evident, for Jesus said, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).

Even the time for the establishment of the church of Christ was anticipated. The prophet Daniel foresaw four world empires, and identified Babylon as the East one in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. History reveals that Rome was the fourth, of which it was foretold. “In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed” (Dan. 2:44). The Roman Caesars ruled the world when Jesus was born; therefore He Himself

declared. “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mark 1:15). The apostle Paul wrote that “when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son” (Gal. 4:4). God did not send Him too soon, nor did He let the predicted time pass by; but He sent Him at exactly the right time to fulfill Daniel’s inspired prophetic utterance.

John the Immerser (Mat. 3:2), Jesus Christ (Mat. 4:17), the twelve apostles (Mat. 10:5-7); and the other seventy disciples (Luke 10:1-11) declared that “the kingdom of heaven is at hand” or “is come nigh unto you.” (Premillennialism makes false prophets of these seventy inspired men!) Jesus affirmed that some living at the time He preached would not taste death “till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power” (Mark 9:1). That it did come in their lifetime is evident from Paul’s affirmation that he and other saints had been “translated...into the kingdom” (Col. 1:13-14). John’s declaration that he was “in the kingdom” (Rev. 1:9) also proves Jesus was not a false prophet!

The eternal nature of this kingdom is also a subject of prophecy:

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 forever (Dan. 2:44).

Micah, who foretold the birthplace of the Savior (Mic. 5:2), and predicted that miracles would be performed for about forty years (Mic. 7:15), also prophesied concerning this church:

But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more (Mic. 4:1-3).

“And thou, O tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem” (Mic. 4:8). “First

dominion” implies that there will be a *second* dominion of the kingdom. It was this “first dominion” which John, Jesus, the twelve, and the seventy heralded as being “at hand,” and “nigh unto you” in the first century. Into it all Christians have been translated (Col. 1:13-14) when we are born of water and of the Spirit (John 3:3-5).

The church comprises this “first dominion.” However, those in the church (kingdom) “must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22)—the *second* dominion of it. However, those who are unrighteous in the church—the “first dominion”—“shall not inherit the kingdom of God”—the second dominion of it (1 Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 5:21). Paul was confident that “the Lord...will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom” (2 Tim. 4:18). The apostle Peter by inspiration assured the faithful that “an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:11).

Zechariah foresaw that Jesus would be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver, and that those coins would be cast to the potter in the house of the Lord (Zec. 11:10-14). Hear him regarding the establishment of the church:

Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord: Even he shall build the temple of the Lord, and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both (Zec. 6:12-13).

From 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, we learn that the “temple of the Lord” is the New Testament church—the church of Christ. In exact harmony with this prophecy, Jesus asserted, “Upon this rock I will build my church” (Mat. 16:18). So, the church of Christ—and no other!—was built by Jesus Christ in fulfillment of one prophecy after another.

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.

But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall

be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever (2 Sam. 7:12-13, 15-16).

Neither Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Daniel—nor any other Old Testament character was a member of the church of Christ—and this includes John the Baptist! Why? Simply because they lived before it was established! They lived under the first testament, we are under the second (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 10:9-10).

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THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT— PREPARATION PRIOR TO PENTECOST

Ray Peters



Ray Peters was born in Pensacola, Florida in 1943. He graduated from Escambia High School in 1961 and attended Pensacola Junior College and in 1966 graduated from Valdosta State College in Valdosta, Georgia with a B.S. degree in History Education. He is a 1969 graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching and has a Masters in Bible from Alabama Christian School of Religion in Montgomery, Alabama. Ray began preaching in 1965, and has preached full-time for congregations in Georgia, Louisiana, Tennessee, Florida, Arkansas and Alabama. He has done mission work in Canada, Virgin Islands, and is presently engaged in full-time mission work in Southeast Asia.

Brother Peters is married to the former Judy Baker and they have one son, Michael, who is a junior in high school.

The church of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was set forth in stages. The church/kingdom was first in the “planning” stage, “in the mind of God” (Eph. 1:4-5). Then it was in “promise,” as the Lord made the pledge to Abram (Gen. 12:1-3). Next, there was the “prophetic stage,” as revealed in the prophets; i.e., Joel, Daniel, and Isaiah, chapter 2. Before the “perfection” stage, there was the stage of “preparation”—of which our attention is given in this lesson. The other stages or phases of the church are the “perfection” (Acts 2), and its “perpetuity” or growth (Luke 8:11; Acts 2:47).

It has been stated that when man sinned in the Garden of Eden, “the Lord set out for Pentecost.” The question sometime arises, “Why didn’t God set up the church/kingdom right after the Fall in the Garden,” instead of waiting until the day of Pentecost, A.D. 33? The obvious answer is, “While our Heavenly Father could have done no, mankind was not ready, and it took time and events to prepare mankind for such a monumental moment.” But, bringing it closer to the time frame of our discussion, there was a need to pre-

pare the Jews for the coming of Jesus and the establishment of the church.

It is well understood that the “ploughman must precede the sower,” preparing the ground to receive the seed. Such was the case with “John the Preparer” and “Jesus the Sower” (Mat. 13; Luke 8). Yet, in regard to the “coming of the kingdom” both John the Immerser and Jesus the Christ had preliminary tasks. Any great event or the establishment of an institution must be preceded by proper preparation, and there has never been nor ever will be any greater institution than the church of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:21; 1:22-23). The preparation for the coming of the Lord and the church cannot be separated, no more than the “church” and “kingdom” can be separated (Mat. 16:18-19).

In this lesson, attention will be given not only to the preparatory work of John the Immerser and Jesus the Christ, but also the work of the Seventy and the Apostles.

JOHN'S PRIOR PREPARATION

The term “prior” in the adjective form means “earlier, previous.” John the Immerser’s work was “previous” to the Lord’s and was to “prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight” (Mat. 3:3) as prophesied by Isaiah (Isa. 40:3).

A Powerful Preparer Malachi prophesied,

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse (Mal. 4:5-6).

Luke informs us that John was to: “go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17). John was a rugged, outdoorsman dressed in “camel’s hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey” (Mat. 3:4). John was very powerful and strong in his message. “The furnace that melts out the ore is harsh and fierce, yet it is making the metal ready for the goldsmith to work up his beautiful design.” He was to lead the people to feel a deep sense of their sin.

Preparation By A Powerful Proclaimer This profound recognition of their sin was produced by powerful preaching. His message is described as “crying in the wilderness” (Isa. 40:3; Mark 1:3). The Greek word for “crying” is “bowntos” and its root is “boe” and means, “to exclaim, proclaim, invoke.” In readying the Jews for the establishment of the church/kingdom he exclaimed that they had to reform their lives, and be faithful to the teaching of the law of Moses. John administered the “baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” and thus they were “prepared stones” for the kingdom. The kingdom was not in existence, as some avow, during the ministry of John the Immerser. He preached “baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Mark 1:4), and the Jews came “confessing their sins” and were baptized. There are those that will use this as the “pattern” today, but fail to realize that this was to the Jews, who were already children of God, and they needed to reform their ways. The kingdom was not in existence because the “power” had not come (cf., Mark 9:1; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; Acts 2:1-4, 38-47).

JESUS’ PRIOR PREPARATION

The term “prior” in the noun form possesses the meaning of “superior.” John exclaimed that there was one who was “mightier” than he was (Mat. 3:11; Mark 1:7; Luke 3:16), that is, one who possessed greater power and might; hence, “superior.” This by no means diminishes the importance of John’s work in the preparation of the church. Jesus ferried it to another level and completed the work.

The Prophet Preached. The “Word” Incarnate (John 1:1, 14) was an “apostle, and a prophet,” and is a “priest and a king” (Heb. 3:1; Luke 24:19; 1 Tim. 6:15). Moses said there would be a “prophet” or “preacher” like unto him (Deu. 18:15; Acts 3:22). In the beginning stages, Jesus’ “work” was that of a “proclaimer.” In the creation of the physical world, it was His Word that brought things into existence, “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made” (Psa. 33:6).

The Prophet Powerfully Prophesied. Like John, Jesus preached “Repent,” and the Lord stated, “for the kingdom is *at hand*” (Mat. 4:17b). Something which is “at hand” is “close by,” “nigh,” but not in existence. John had preached the same message (Mat. 3:2). Our Lord went all over Galilee teaching and preaching “the gospel of the

kingdom.” Jesus was very busy in His preparation, and a very big part of that was in “Preaching” (cf., 1 Cor. 1:18, 21). The people were astonished at his teaching” (Mark 1:22).

Powerful Phenomenon Performed. It is stated that “John did no miracle: but all things that John spake of this man were true” (John 10:41). A “miracle” is a “supernatural” event, hence it truly is a “phenomenon.” The work of Jesus was not only in “proclaiming” but also in “performing.” He plainly proclaimed that He “was the Christ” (John 10:24-25), but they did not believe Him. Therefore, He “performed works” and did things which were an “extraordinary manifestation of Divine power that were independent or contrary to the laws of nature”—that is, “miracles.” These proved that He was Jesus the Christ. Jesus said, “the works...bear witness of me” and “though ye believe not me, *believe the works*” (John 10:25, 38). John summed it up in John 20:30-31 when he stated that he wrote in his book and recorded the “signs” or “miracles” that Jesus did that people “might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name.” Hence, all of the works such as: raising the dead (e.g., Lazarus, John 11:43); feeding the hungry (Mark 8:1-9, the four thousand; John 6:5-15); turning water to wine (John 2), were to prepare the people to accept Him as the “Rock of the church.” Nicodemus bolted, “no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him” (John 3:2).

The Passion Of The Prophet (Acts 1:3). The term “passion” has many meanings, but when used in connection with Jesus it has reference to the “suffering, the misery, and death on the cruel cross of Calvary.” The miracles of Jesus, while He lived, were enough to demonstrate that He was the “Messiah” that was prophesied in the Old Testament. But, the death on the cross, the burial, and resurrection “declared (Jesus) to be the Son of God with power” (Rom. 1:4). In this monumental task and happening our Lord demonstrated that he was the “tried” stone (Isa. 28:16), also the “foundation” and “precious comer stone.” If the church/kingdom was in existence when John and Jesus were living, it had “no foundation,” and that is an impossibility. Jesus did not “build” His church upon Peter as some

misuse Matthew 16:13-18. Our Lord stated to Peter, after he said, “Thou art the Christ,” that upon “the foundation of the fact that Jesus was the Christ, He would build His church” (cf., 1 Cor. 3:11). The Saviour said that Peter (*petros*) was a “tiny pebble stone,” but upon the “rock” (*petra*), a “large foundation stone,” He would build (future tense) His church.

Presentation After The Passion. If there had been no resurrection there would have been no Pentecost, or establishment of the church. It was no hoax, as some would suggest. All of the precautions were made to prevent His disciples from stealing Him away (Mat. 27:64) and Pilate said, “make it sure as ye can” (v. 65). Luke in his treatise in Acts stated, “To whom also he showed himself alive after his Passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days” (Acts 1:3). Jesus was also “seen of five hundred brethren at once” (1 Cor. 15:6), and of Mary Magdalene and Mary mother of James and Salome (Mark 16:9). His “presence” and “presentation” among them was in itself “miraculous”: cf., Luke 24:36-40; as he “appeared in another form” (Mark 16:12).

THE SERVICE OF THE SEVENTY

In Luke 10:1, there is mention of the fact: “The Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come.” Notice this comment found in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Volume 4, page 2744:

Commentators have sought parallels in the seventy elders chosen to assist Moses (Num. 11) and suppose that Jesus was incidentally indicating Himself as the “prophet like unto Moses” whom God would raise up. Again, the Jews’ popularly reckoned the “number of the nations of the earth” at seventy (cf., Gen. 10), and some have supposed Jesus to be thus indicating that His gospel is universal. Attention is called to the fact that the Seventy are not forbidden to go to the Gentiles and that their commission probably included Peraea, where many Gentiles were to be found. Some, again, have supposed that Jesus had in mind the Jewish Sanhedrin, composed of seventy (seventy-two), and that that the appointment of a like number to extend the work of His kingdom was a parabolic recognition that as the Jews were officially rejecting Him, so He was rejecting them as agents for the work of the kingdom. It is impossible to speak with any certainty as to any of these suggestions. It is to be noted that there is the same

confusion between the numbers seventy and seventy-two in all four instances, as also in the tradition as to the number of the translators of the Septuagint.

In the *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, McClintock & Strong; Vol. 9, page 600, there is a list of the names that were supposedly the seventy. But, here again, this is according to tradition. Whatever the reason for the number, whether seventy or seventy-two, that is not the real significant thing. What is important is the fact that there was a “crop” to be “harvested,” and he sent them out in thirty-five pairs. After having done foreign mission work for four years now, this writer can truly appreciate the Lord’s directive to send them out in two’s. That is the most prudent manner in doing mission work, because there will be companionship and each can help the other to “bear the burden” (Gal. 6:2). Our Lord sent these men out as “preparatory harbingers” ahead of Him into a territory He would be traveling. This may seem like a “small” number but these are not only to work but to “enroll” other workers. Jesus wanted these to understand, as we should, that God the Father is the “Lord of the harvest”—He is the owner and manager, and has put the “ingathering” into Jesus’ hands.

Today, we have the “seed,” the Word of God (Luke 8:11), and we are to be “seed-scatterers.” Those that were “scattered” abroad (Acts 8:4), are referred to by Peter as the “dispersion” in the margin of 1 Peter 1:1. The term “dispersion” is from the Greek, “Diasporia” and is translated, “seedscatterers.” The apostle Paul stated, “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase” (1 Cor. 3:6), and that is the way each Christian is to view his task, and to realize the “power is in the gospel” (Rom. 1:16).

Another lesson that can be learned from the “Seventy” is the fact that the spread of the Gospel is not for a “clergy.” As was pointed out earlier in Acts 8:4, there was the “dispersion” that “went everywhere preaching the word.” To prepare for the spread of the gospel, the idea that salvation was for the Jews only was a problem that had to be overcome.

THE TRAINING OF THE TWELVE

The church of our Lord was not just a whimsical “afterthought” that did not have any planning or preparation. It was God’s “eternal purpose” (Eph. 3:11). The “determinate counsel and foreknowledge” of God “predestined” that salvation would be in Christ, the church (Eph. 1:5; Acts 2:23, 47). It would then follow that the perpetuation and growth would not be left to chance, but by preparation of those that would carry it through after Jesus left the earth. A. B. Bruce stated it this way:

The twelve were to be Christ’s witnesses in the world after He Himself had left it; it was to be their peculiar duty to give the world a faithful account of their Master’s words and deeds, a just image of His character, a true reflection of His Spirit.

The Twelve Spent Time With The Saviour. Our Lord, while walking by the sea of Galilee saw Peter and Andrew fishing. Jesus said unto them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Mat. 4:19), and then He said to James and John, the sons of Zebedee, the same thing. They put down their nets and “followed.” These and the other apostles would spend time in observing Jesus “teaching in their synagogue, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people” (Mat. 4:23). If one is to be a “servant” in the kingdom of our Lord, one must “spend time with the Saviour”: reading and noticing His example and emulating Him. Jesus was not asking them to do something He was not willing to do. Paul declared, “Be ye followers of me as I am also of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). In essence, the apostles were getting, “on the job training.” It is good to have classroom training, but it cannot replace “seeing it being done” and “doing it.”

Training The Twelve. In our Lord’s prayer (John 17:6), He said, “I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world. thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word.” Therefore, the training of these men was planned and was a principal part of the work of Jesus while on the earth. It is likewise the principal work of the church in training men to preach the gospel to the whole world and should not be treated as an

indifferent thing. If Deity saw the benefit and need to instruct men to carry on the most important business there is, surely we ought to perceive the demand.

The Twelve And Their Turn. The word “turn” in the noun form has the idea of “capableness, bent.” These men were from different backgrounds, different abilities, but most of them were poor men. There would have to be a lot of “unteaching” of former beliefs, prejudices (e.g., Peter, Gal. 2:11-14), and traditions. Except for the apostle Paul, most of them had little if any formal education (Acts 4:13). Even after their selection they would make mistakes, proving they were still human. Impetuous Peter, who even denied the Lord (Mat. 26:69-75), was to be a great servant in the Lord’s kingdom. Each of us may have a different “turn or bent,” but the Lord can use us to His glory, if we will but “follow” Him. Also, when we make mistakes, do not quit trying, but learn from them and be strengthened to greater service (1 Cor. 15:58).

THE PART OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN PREPARATION

Our Heavenly Father, in preparation of the coming of the kingdom/church, did not leave His servants, even as in the Old Testament, without direction and guidance. The part of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament was significant. In building the tabernacle, Bezaleel was “filled with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship” (Exo. 31:3). The Holy Spirit is referred to as the “glory of the Lord” and filled the tabernacle (Exo. 40:34-38). Therefore, the Holy Spirit played a significant part in the preparation and the building of the tabernacle of the Lord and was a “type” or “shadow” of the preparation and building of the church in the New Testament.

There is no direct passage that states that John the Immerser was “filled with the Holy Spirit.” It is stated that the “babe leaped” in Elisabeth’s, his mother’s womb and that she was “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Luke 1:41). The margin reading of Luke 1:37 is, “no word from God shall be without power.” Even Zacharias, John’s father, “was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied” (Luke 1:67). If the statement, “the Spirit without measure” (John 3:34), could be understood to have reference to John, then the passage could be

saying “That God commissioned John to testify of Jesus and had not given insufficient measure for him to perform this task.” Either way, it is safe to conclude that John was enabled by the Holy Spirit to carry out his “preparing the Way for the Lord.”

After John the baptizer had baptized Jesus, “the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him” (Mat. 3:16). It may be a thing of wonderment as to why would He who was God in the flesh have need of the Holy Spirit? The answer could exist in the fact that the Holy Spirit was a “seal,” because the voice from Heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mat. 3:17).

The seventy were told to “heal the sick” and say, “The kingdom of God in come nigh unto you” (Luke 10:9). They even said, “the devils are subject unto us through thy name” (10:17), and Jesus said, “Behold, I give unto you power” (10:19). Therefore, they were “empowered” to do their “preparatory work.”

It is very clear from passages such as: John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-15; Acts 1:8; and Acts 2:1-4, that the twelve, the apostles, were equipped by the Holy Spirit in preparing, building, and perpetuating the church. They would be “guided into all truth” and enabled to “confirm” the truth they spoke (Mark 16:17-20).

CONCLUSION

Any great worthwhile effort, in order to be successful, takes “preparation.” This was true in the establishment of the greatest institution known to mankind. The Lord also made preparation for the perpetuity of His kingdom. That responsibility falls upon the shoulders of each Christian today. Let each of us properly prepare ourselves and properly plan to carry out the “commission” to preach the gospel to every creature (Mat. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16).

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THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT— BEGINNING IN JERUSALEM

David P. Brown



David P. Brown was born on December 29, 1946, in Camden, Arkansas. He married Joann Anglin, and they have four children: Timothy, Carrie, Rebekah and Joanna. David currently serves as Director of the Southwest School of Bible Studies, Austin, Texas. He received B.A. and M.Ed. degrees from North Eastern Oklahoma State University. He is at dissertation status for his doctorate. He has had 26 years preaching experience and has been active in gospel meetings, lectureships, and in religious journalism. He is the associate editor of the *Christian Worker*, and was Assistant Director of Turley Children's Home prior to assuming directorship of S.W.S.B.S.

INTRODUCTION

The church of Christ has many marks of identity that, when compiled, reveal it to be the church that Jesus built and shed his blood to purchase (Mat. 16:18; Acts 20:28). Without these singular marks of identity no one would be able to recognize God's institution of the saved and, without being able to recognize it, no one could get into it. Hence, all of the rest of the truths of the Bible would be to no avail (Acts 2:47; Eph. 1:3, 22-23; 2:16; 4:4; 5:23).

There is a correct way to study the Bible "(Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)" (Eph. 3:4; 2 Tim. 2:15). One of the chief points necessary to the correct study of the Bible is to realize that the New Testament is an inspired infallible blueprint or pattern for the identification and establishing of the Lord's church in any age or country. "Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount" (Heb. 8:5). These words were said to Jewish brethren to remind them that as Moses was admonished of God under the Old Law to not deviate from that divine pattern, they, in like manner, must not leave the New Testament pattern. In the

words of the inspired writer. “But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises” (Heb. 8:6). There is no point at all to Hebrews 8:5-6 if it is not that, since Moses was expected under the law given at Sinai (an inferior system) to follow it as a pattern, then it is also important that we follow the “perfect law of liberty” (a superior system) as a pattern (Jam. 1:25). Hence, one of the important marks in the New Testament pattern for the identification of the church of Christ, apostates and denominationalists notwithstanding, is *the place* that Christ established his church.

PROPHECIES, FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

During the days of the kingdom of Israel, the Babylonian Captivity, and the restoration of the Jews, God was speaking through many prophets. Some of the greatest prophecies of this time related to the coming of Christ and the establishment of God’s kingdom upon the earth. Isaiah spoke of the building of God’s house in the “last days” in Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3). In 1 Tim. 3:15, Paul identifies “the house of God” as “the church of the living God.” With Isaiah, the prophet Joel also declared that God’s house, the church, would be established not only in the “last days,” but in the city of Jerusalem (Joel 2:28-32). In Jerusalem, Peter, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, declared Joel’s prophecy was being fulfilled on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:14-17).

Jesus taught *where* the kingdom would become a reality. He said that it would “come with power” in the lifetime of some who were alive then (Mark 9:1). Just before Jesus left the earth to return to heaven he commanded the apostles to “tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). This is called by Jesus “the promise of my Father,” and along with the coming of the “power” the apostles were to be his witnesses (John 15:26-27; Acts 1:8). The commission under which they would labor would begin at Jerusalem and extend to “all nations” (Luke 24:46-49). The “power” was to come when the Holy Spirit came on the apostles, and they were then to begin their witnessing for Christ in Jerusalem (Mark 9:1; Acts 1:1-5). Isaiah had prophesied: “for out of

Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem” (Isa. 2:3). Where did the Holy Spirit come on the apostles in His baptismal measure of power? The apostles received said baptism in the city of Jerusalem on the first Pentecost following the resurrection and ascension of Christ (Acts 2:14).

IN SUMMATION

The kingdom was to come during the lifetime of some who were alive when Jesus uttered the words of Mark 9:1. Many of these were alive in Jerusalem when the events of Acts 2 occurred.

The kingdom was to come with power; the church and the kingdom are one and the same institution (Mat. 16:18-19); the power was to come with the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit came on the apostles of Christ in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ. It was at that time that the Lord added the saved to the church (Acts 2:47). Hence, the church of Christ began in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ.

Any church; therefore, that claims its origin in any other place than the city of Jerusalem on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ is not the Lord’s one institution of the saved!

PENTECOST

Pentecost comes from the Greek word meaning fiftieth. Hence, Pentecost was the feast of the fiftieth day. It was known also as the *Feast of Weeks* because it was on the day following the cycle of seven full weeks (Lev. 23:15-17); as the *Feast of the Harvest* because it was observed at the end of the complete harvest—the weeks between it and the passover forming the season of harvest (Exo. 23:16); and, as the *Feast of the First Fruits* because it was the time on which the Jews were to present to God the first-fruits of their harvest (Exo. 23:16; 34:22; Num. 28:26).

The law of Moses authorized men to attend (Deu. 16:16-17); a free will offering was made (Deu. 16:10,16-17; Pro. 3:9); and, a day of convocation was observed (Num. 28:26). Other offerings included, a burnt offering, cereal offering, drink offering and sin offering (Num. 28:26-31). Also, there was the offering that was peculiar to, this day—the wave offering (Lev. 23:17-20). Note also Leviticus

7:30-34; 8:27; 9:21; 10:4; Numbers 6:19. In general it was a time of thanksgiving and rejoicing (Exo. 23:16; 34:22; Num. 28:26; Deu. 16:11-12).

Pentecost was fifty days after the Sabbath of the passover week, hence, always on the first day of the week (Lev. 23:11,15-16). The wave-offering was on the morrow after the weekly sabbath (Lev. 23:11). “Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days” (23:16). This ends the count on the day following the seventh sabbath. “Seven sabbaths shall be complete” (23:15). A fitting day, indeed, for the bountiful harvest of Christ’s work for mankind to be fully revealed.

Singular indeed are the events that transpired in Jerusalem on that first Pentecost following the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. On that morning, being obedient to their Lord’s command, the apostles waited for the baptism of the Holy Spirit which had been promised them (Acts 1:4-5). Without warning, the event which the Savior had promised to His apostles transpired. A great sound (echos) came down from heaven; it was the sound “as of a rushing mighty wind.” Luke had earlier employed “echos” to refer to the roar of the sea (Luke 21:25). A. T. Robertson says that the sound was “an echoing sound as of a mighty wind borne vibrantly.”¹

Accompanying this great sound was something that could be seen. Its appearance was like as of fire and it divided itself to sit as tongues upon each of the apostles.

These events were the outward appearances of Christ, directly from heaven, administering Holy Spirit baptism to the apostles. No human administrator was involved. With these marvelous audible and visible signs the Holy Spirit so filled the apostles with His power that He took control of them so that the words which they spake were the words of the Holy Spirit in the different languages of the devout Jews gathered in Jerusalem from throughout the world in obedience to the law of Moses. These Jews had come together because of the “sound...as of a rushing mighty wind.” The great gathering was confounded because each person heard the apostles (“Galilaeans”) speaking in his own language; thus, a miracle of

speaking and not of hearing. There was a purpose and a meaning to all that was transpiring before them, and they wondered what it was.

The mockers, and there are some, it seems, in every assembly, charged the apostles with being drunken. Peter, standing with the other apostles, refuted the charge with the facts that

1. It is only nine o'clock in the morning and men are not usually intoxicated at this time of day;
2. It is the fulfillment of prophecy, and,
3. The rational sermons that all of the apostles presented.

Having refuted the mockers without giving them undue attention, Peter moves into his sermon, the design of which is to explain the true meaning of what was taking place (Acts 2:12). His explanation does not consist of mere assertions. The apostles were in the "proving business" (Acts 4:33). Thus, Peter's sermon is one of offering proof that Jesus Christ of Nazareth is the only begotten Son of God.

The sermon is comprised of four types of evidence:

1. The miraculous demonstrations which took place on that day;
2. The fulfillment of prophecy (Acts 2:16-21, 25-28, 30, 34-35);
3. Miracles which Christ had wrought in his personal ministry (Acts 2:22); and,
4. Christ's resurrection of which the apostles were witnesses (Acts 2:32).

In the light of this irrefutable proof Peter states the obvious conclusion: "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).

At this point it is important to note that while Peter and the other apostles proved conclusively that Jesus was the Messiah, such does not necessarily mean that everyone who heard the preaching was convinced. Something or someone can be proven to be this or that, but due to the bad attitude of one's auditors not be acceptable to them. There were those on that Pentecost who knew credible evidence when they heard and saw it. These were fully persuaded due

to their “honest and good heart” (Luke 8:15; Acts 4:15-18). Hence, as believers in the Christ they desired to know what they must do (Rom. 10:17; Acts 2:37).

ACTS 2:38

To these believers in the Christ Peter declares: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). From the auditors’ question by which they sought a certain end, and by Peter’s reply to it, we see the full question: “Men and brethren what shall we do?...for the remission of sins.” It does not make any difference whether Peter’s answer is construed to be a duty incumbent upon the questioners or the purpose (end) they desired (remission of sins); they definitely understood that two things were essential to either one: repentance and baptism.

Now notice the phrase, “for the remission of sins.” This phrase clearly sets forth the object or end to be obtained. To see this more clearly let us look at a parallel expression that appears in Matthew 26:28. In this passage, our Lord said. “For this is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many, for the remission of sins.” Hence, we learn that Christ shed his blood *for the remission of sins*. Both in Greek and English the phrase is identical with that of Acts 2:38. For what purpose or to what end was the shedding of Christ’s blood? *For the remission of sins*. For what did Peter command those on the day of Pentecost to be baptized? *For the remission of sins*! If “for” in Acts 2:38 means “because of” remission, then Christ shed his blood *because* our sins were already remitted. To say the least, such a view is absurd and preposterous!

ACTS 2:41-42

The words “gladly received” refer directly to the attitude of the questioners to the instructions of Acts 2:38. With promptness they obeyed the divine prescription and by the Lord Himself, they were “added” to the church (Acts 2:41, 47). The same act of obedience that remitted their sins was also the means whereby the Lord “added” them to the church (Gal. 3:27). There was no great urging by the apostles for the multitude to “make a decision for Christ” and then “join the church of your choice.” Such terminology is foreign to the

Bible and belongs to the false denominational sectarian concept of the church that arose some 1500 years after the establishment of the church. Imagine Peter, a Roman Catholic; Paul, a Baptist; James, a Presbyterian; Andrew, a Methodist, etc., ad infinitum, ad absurdum and ad nauseum! In the light of Acts 2, can you imagine all of the apostles preaching different ways of being saved and telling every one to join whatever church pleased them? Only one church existed at that time and every faithful member of it “continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (v. 42). They were expected to remain one or unified on all those matters wherein men are obligated to be faithful to Christ; and when they began to be divided on these matters they were severely rebuked and warned to return to the unity of the church revealed in this verse (1 Cor. 1:10).

In fact, in the four items listed in verse 42 is found the model for all subsequent generations to follow if they would be acceptable to God. The four items are:

1. “Continuing stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine;
2. Fellowship;
3. The breaking of bread,
4. And prayers.”

Please note that fellowship followed and did not precede the Jerusalem church’s “continuing stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine.” The highest goal for any church is to continue stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine. There is no way for Christians to advance in the knowledge of those things which pertain to life and godliness and exclude the apostles’ doctrine from their lives.

Fellowship with God is dependent upon persons conducting their lives in harmony with said teaching. Those who comply with the apostles’ doctrine are then in a position to be in fellowship with one another. Those who do not continue in said doctrine cease to be in fellowship with God and, therefore, they cease being in fellowship with those who abide in the apostles’ doctrine. Thus, John, one of the apostles, wrote:

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).

Hence, all faithful children of God will always be found “Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3), that the fellowship of God with man and of man with man may prevail.

The “breaking of bread” is a synecdoche for not only the observance of the Lord’s supper, but for the worship of the church. A “synecdoche” is where a part stands for the whole or a whole for the part. It is obvious that literally there is more to the Lord’s Supper than the actual breaking of bread (Mat. 26:26-29). Also, there is more to the worship of the church on the first day of the week than the observance of the Lord’s Supper. Hence, the inspired Luke lets “breaking of bread” stand for the worship of the church routinely observed according to the apostles’ doctrine.

An indispensable part of the Christian life is prayer (1 The. 5:17; Phi. 4:6). To continue in the apostles’ doctrine is to be directed by God as He speaks to us. To pray is to speak to God. Such a one who is thus characterized by a disposition of heart that is regularly engaged in the previously noted points of verse 42 is certainly one who spends much time in prayer. Hence, one of the marks of a faithful church is a praying membership.

It is the apostles’ doctrine that teaches how to become a Christian and just what the church is in its organization, work, worship and destiny. J. W. McGarvey observed that:

The man then, who is doing the most to-day for the final union of all God’s people, is not the man who is making the most noise about it, and getting up the biggest conventions to consider the subject, but the man who is doing the most to establish the unity of the Spirit in the midst of some single congregation, and thus reproducing the model church of old. Why can not the church which I am now addressing be the one to first set an example in this direction? Here is your model. See that you work according to it.²

It is obvious that the beginning of the Lord’s church was in the city of Jerusalem. Obvious also is the fact that said church is the model church, revealing to all how God wants the church to conduct itself.

Clear, indeed, is the fact that denominationalism has no part nor lot with the church founded on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The denominations were founded hundreds of years too late to be the Lord's church. They developed out of a desire to reform Roman Catholicism and not with the motive to return to the Jerusalem gospel and, therefore, the church started therein. The phrase, "You go to your church and I will go to mine; and we will all get to heaven together," mocks the prayer of Christ for the unity of all believers on the basis of his authoritative will (John 17:20-21; Col. 3:17). Denominations differ on God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, redemption, justification, sanctification, repentance, confession, baptism, name of the church, its identity, origin, importance, polity, terms of membership, etc.; and, yet, they try to say that they are united on all the "essential" matters!

CONCLUSION

Jesus prayed for the unity that is exemplified in Acts 2:42. We have no right to seek a "unity" which is foreign to the model found in said passage. Anyone, at any time who repudiates the New Testament as a divine pattern is, in effect, repudiating the preaching done in Acts 2, as well as the church mentioned therein and derived therefrom. It is imperative that we return to Jerusalem to find the church that our Lord built (Mat. 16:18). In order for any church to be the Lord's church, said church must continue "stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." This is the way that is right and cannot be wrong!

ENDNOTES

¹A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6 Vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1930), 3:20.

²J. W. McGarvey, *Sermons* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co., 1958), p. 251.

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THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT— VICTORIOUS IN THE FIRST CENTURY

Alton Hayes



Alton Hayes was born in Birmingham, Alabama. He is a graduate of Memphis School of Preaching and has the B.A. and M.A. degrees in Bible from Alabama Christian School of Religion and the A.S. degree in Nursing Northwest Alabama State Junior College. His fifteen years of preaching include local radio and television work and meetings in several states and Trinidad. Alton contributes articles for several publications and is Co-editor of *What Does The Bible Teach?* He now works with the church in Munford, Alabama. He and his wife, Linda, have three children.

The book of Acts unfolds the history of the church throughout its inspired pages. As one examines Acts 2 (the beginning of the church), he sees what a marvelous beginning the Lord's church had. Luke records in Acts 2:41-47,

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly 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, and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

The divinely inspired historian writes of a time when the church had "favour with all the people," but, alas, this was to change! The favor of the people would give way to the fervor of persecution. Problems and persecutions would quickly come to the Lord's bride.

Much of the New Testament deals with problems faced by the body of Christ. By showing us the victory the church had over its problems in the first century we learn the victory that must be gained by the church today.

In our discussion of “The Church Triumphant—Victorious In The First Century” we want to examine the church from its origin in Jerusalem to the seven churches of Asia. The problems faced by the church will surely be a part of our discussion, but the emphasis will be on the victories of God’s people. Many of these victories were hard-fought thus making them even more sweet. When we see “The Church Triumphant—Victorious In The First Century,” strength will be gained by Christians to cause us to become victorious in the Twentieth Century.

Let us now observe carefully these problems and the tremendous nature of “The Church Triumphant—Victorious In The First Century.”

VICTORIOUS IN THE FIRST CENTURY OVER PERSECUTION

The Sovereign Son of God had warned the Twelve,

And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all man for my name’s sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved (Mat. 10:21-22).

Therefore, it does not surprise the Bible student that shortly following the beginning of the church in Acts 2 and the favor we noted the church had “with all the people” (v. 47), persecutions arose against the people of God. This first persecution came about because of a good deed done by the apostles Peter and John in the healing of a lame man (see Acts 3). Who could say or do anything against these men of God? Who indeed? After all they had healed a man who had been crippled all his life through the power of God and His Son, Jesus Christ. Yet, Luke records,

And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from

the dead. And they laid hands on them and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide (Acts 4:1-3).

This persecution came about because the religious beliefs of some people had been shown to be contrary to truth. The Sadducees did not accept biblical teaching concerning the spiritual world and resurrection. *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* states,

The most prominent doctrine of the Sadducees was the denial of the immortality of the soul and of the resurrection of the body. The Pharisees believed that Moses had delivered these doctrines to the elders, and that they had in turn handed them on to their successors. From Acts (23:8) we learn that they believed in neither “angel or spirit.” As appearances of angels are mentioned in the Law, it is difficult to harmonize their reverence for the Law with this denial. They may have regarded these angelophanies as theophanies. Joe distinctly asserts (*Ant*, XVIII, i,4) that the Sadducees believe the soul dies with the body. They deny, he says, Divine providence (*BJ, H. viii, 14*). Their theology might be called “religion within the limits of mere sensation.”¹

To preach the resurrection of Jesus from the dead caused these so-called religious leaders’ blood to boil. Many today reject simple biblical teaching and become angry when their man-made doctrines are challenged. Jesus realized this problem during His day and said,

Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men (Mat. 15:7-9).

This attitude of heart caused persecution to come against the church in the first century and it still does today. The Sadducees, along with other people, the priests, and the captain of the temple ordered the preaching of Christ to cease (Acts 4:13-17).

Now we must ask, “What solution (if any), does the Bible give to this problem?” In other words, “How would the church win a victory over the problem of persecution?” Peter and John’s answer to this problem shown the only way to gain victory over persecution—trust in God and His verbally inspired Word. Luke recorded,

And they called them; and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more

than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard (Acts 4:18-20).

The only way any Christian can expect to overcome persecution is by complete trust in God and submission to His will.

When persecution comes, the child of God will be sustained only by God. David realized this and wrote,

LORD, how are they increased that trouble me! many *are* they that rise up against me. Many *there be* which say of my soul, *There is* no help for him in God. Selah. But thou, O LORD, *art* a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head. I cried unto the LORD with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. Selah. I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the LORD sustained me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set *themselves* against me round about. Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God: for thou hast smitten all mine enemies *upon* the cheek bone; thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly. Salvation *belongeth* unto the LORD: thy blessing *is* upon thy people. Selah (Psa 3:1-8).

Did Peter and John receive courage? Yes, indeed! Verse 31 states, “And when they had prayed the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and **they spake the word of God with boldness**” (emphasis mine, AH). When we trust God today, no matter the persecution which come our way, we will gain the victory.

Persecution lead to martyrdom in Acts 7 where Luke records the death of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. All this righteous preacher was guilty of was preaching God’s inspired Word as he delivered his beautiful synopsis of Israelite history, yet he was persecuted and finally died for his belief. Would this persecution destroy the body of Christ? God forbid! Acts 8:14 says,

And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.

Although Stephen was murdered for his faith and Saul continued in his persecution of the church these faithful Christians were not deterred in their service.

Concerning their persecution John wrote to the congregation at Smyrna, “I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich)” (Rev. 2:9). Then he commanded,

Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer. behold the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life (Rev. 2:10).

The command of God is plain regarding the persecution Smyrna would undergo and that we may suffer. Remain faithful “unto death.”

The church in the first century was indeed victorious over the problem of persecution.

VICTORIOUS IN THE FIRST CENTURY OVER COVETOUSNESS

No one is foolish enough to believe improper attitudes toward material things are unique with our generation. Nor do we believe the world only is affected by a spirit of covetousness. The house of God was troubled in the first century by this problem.

Acts 5 tells us of Ananias and Sapphira and their inordinate desire for the material. Ananias “sold a possession, and kept back a part of the price his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles’ feet” (Acts 5:1-2). It seems this couple wanted the acclaim of Barnabas without his sacrifice (see Acts 4:32-37). Their problem was much deeper than their covetous spirit. Paul said to them, “thou hast not lied unto me, but unto God...ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord” (Acts 5:4, 9). What a sad sight—covetousness by those who wear the name of Christ!

Biblical admonitions to avoid a covetous spirit are numerous. Paul reminded the bishops from Ephesus, “I have coveted no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel” (Acts 20:33). Timothy was warned by Paul, “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Tim. 6:10). Luke called the Pharisees “covetous” in Luke 16:14. This Greek term literally denotes “a lover of silver.”² It should not be surprising the Christian

is commanded, “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5). Lest one become an idolater he must avoid covetousness because covetousness “is idolatry” (Col. 3:5).

The church would not be defeated because of covetousness. Although this man and his wife disregarded God’s promise, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” the church would remain victorious over covetousness. God’s answer to this problem was simple—discipline! Through his servant Peter he announced the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira within a three-hour period. Holy Writ informs us of the result, “And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things” (Acts 5:11). Jehovah has always intended discipline be practiced upon those who disregard His simple commands. To the church of the Thessalonians Paul wrote, “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” (2 The. 3:6). Robertson tells us the term translated “walketh disorderly” is a military term and denotes “out of ranks.”³ Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, were out of step spiritually because they were covetous. God took care of their discipline. He expects His servants today to practice divinely appointed discipline when covetousness and other sins which cause the Christian soldier to get out of ranks are leading the Christian astray.

A part of discipline that is often overlooked is the training or teaching part. The Laodiceans had an improper attitude toward the material. Therefore, God in His instructive discipline, told them,

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear, and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love. I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent (Rev. 3:17-19).

The church in the first century gained certain victory over covetousness.

VICTORIOUS IN THE FIRST CENTURY OVER CHURCH GOSSIP

The Savior's brother, James, wrote about man's tongue,

For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the air is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind. but the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith blow we even the Father, and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be (Jam. 3:7-10).

Even though we have many such admonitions in the Scriptures, Christians in the first century (and today), have multitudes of difficulties with their tongue. Acts 6:1 speaks of one of the earliest recorded cases of misuse of Christians' tongues,

And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a **murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews**, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration (emphasis mine, AH).

Obviously the church gossip was by the Grecian Christians against the Hebrew Christians. This is simply a case of church gossip and a church squabble. Church gossip has destroyed congregations and it could have destroyed this congregation.

We must recognize abusive use of the tongue is condemned throughout divine revelation. Using Israel as an illustration, Paul warned the church at Corinth, "Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer" (1 Cor. 10:10). Following this warning the apostle wrote,

Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall (1 Cor. 10:11-12).

To the brethren at Philippi Paul recorded,

Do all things without murmurings and disputings: 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 (Phi. 2:14-15).

The younger widows of 1 Timothy 5 were condemned when Paul stated, "And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from

house to house and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things they ought not” (v. 13). God is never pleased by a tongue which is abusive and destructive, especially one used in such a manner as church gossip.

The victory to be gained over the problem of church gossip in Acts 6 was quite simple. These folks would act as Christians should! The apostles would not personally aid these widows by waiting on tables, for they said, “It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables” (Acts 6:2). They then looked out “seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business” (Acts 6:3). They found good, Christian men to solve this problem. The result of this was no more backbiting and gossip. In fact, “the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7). Paul warned the brethren of Galatia, “But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another” (Gal. 5:15). Idle church gossip will cause the church to be destroyed today through spiritual cannibalism.

Victory came to the church of the first century over church gossip.

VICTORY IN THE FIRST CENTURY OVER PREJUDICE

Prejudice and national pride has gotten in the way of man’s spirituality throughout the history of mankind, but perhaps this prejudicial pride was greatest seen in many of the Jews’ lives in the first century who became Christians. One such example was Peter. Acts 10-11 tell of his problem with prejudice and how he gained the victory over the same.

Perhaps seven to eight years following the establishment of the church, Peter, as a converted Jew, was happy to serve Christ and tell other Jews about Him, yet he was not going to the Gentile. At Joppa, Peter had a vision which would rid his mind of prejudicial thinking forever. Three times he saw as it had been a great sheet let down from heaven with different animals contained therein. Three times he was told to eat. Three times he answered, “Not so, Lord: for

nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth” (Acts 11:5-10). Three men came from Caesarea beseeching him to come to Cornelius’ house. When Peter arrived at this house and began to preach according to the leading of the Lord victory was certain over the matter of prejudice. Listen carefully to the opening words of this sermon by Peter, “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness is accepted with him” (Acts 10:34-35). If Christ died for all nations, which He surely did, those who are obedient to the gospel of Christ can have salvation (John 3:16; Rom. 1:16; 5:8-10). Since God does not respect men and nations what right does anyone have to place themselves over God by a spirit of prejudice?

This example concurs completely with many other simple New Testament teachings. It seems some of these during Peter’s time had a real problem with a Jew eating with a Gentile for they said unto Peter, “Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them” (Acts 11:3). However, didn’t God show through Peter, “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common” (Acts 11:9)? God showed plainly He made both Jew and Gentile. He, not respecting persons, did not make one clean and one unclean. Isn’t this the point made by Paul in Colossians 2:16 where he tells us, “Let no man therefore judge you in meat”? Under the Christian system all have access to the gospel. Prejudice has no place in the Christian’s life.

Also notice an Paul wrote to the brethren of Galatia he stated,

For ye are all 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).

The Christian realizes nationality has no real significance. Real importance lies in the fact of whether or not one is a citizen in the kingdom of God. Those who are Christians are spiritual Israel and blessed because of the promise to Abraham, “in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:3).

Victory was won by the church in the first century over prejudice.

VICTORY IN THE FIRST CENTURY OVER MANY OTHER PROBLEMS

Because of limited space in this section of the book we shall list briefly other problems and the victories gained by the church in the first century.

One problem was possible dissension over doctrinal issues. In Acts 15 there was a discussion of circumcision and the Gentile Christian. Their solution was to see what was God's attitude toward the matter of the Gentile Christian and circumcision (see Acts 15:5-21). Oh, the need today for us to allow God to speak in the matter of doctrinal issues!

Another problem the brethren in the first century faced yet gained a victory over was the matter of ignorance in religion. In Acts 17 Paul approached the "scholars" of his day by telling they were religiously ignorant (Acts 17:23). He knew how he had overcome his ignorance of Jesus Christ and how they must. He taught the truth of God's Word. Only this truth would give freedom from religious ignorance (John 8:32).

Overall problem after problem would face the church in the first century, yet it would stand victorious in the end. These Christians faced problems of division (1 Cor. 1-3), immorality and worldliness (1 Cor. 5; 1 John 2:15-17); marriage questions (1 Cor. 7), worship and work in the church (1 Cor. 11; 15:58; 1 Tim. 3:16), and faithfulness (Remember: five of the seven churches of Asia had gone astray and were commanded to repent, see Revelation 2-3).

The victory over every problem would be gained by faithful trust and obedience to God's guidance. Victory was gained over these and many other problems in the first century.

CONCLUSION

A problem was not faced in the first century which could not be overcome and a victory gained by "The Triumphant Church." No problems facing us today are so insurmountable the church cannot be victorious. What we must say is, **"But thanks be to God which**

giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:57).

ENDNOTES

¹James Orr, M.A., D.D., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1939), 4:2660.

²Robert Young, LL.D., *Analytical Concordance To The Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 210.

³Archibald Thomas Robertson, A.M., D.D., LL.D., Litt.D., *Word Pictures In The New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1931), 4:58.

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THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT— HER MANY FACETS

W. R. Craig



William R. Craig, son of R. W. and Julie Gallaher Craig was born March 21, 1919 in North Alabama. He studied under such men as H. Leo Boles, N. B. Hardeman and J. N. Armstrong in three Christian Colleges. He was baptized by Cled Wallace and began preaching while still in David Lipscomb College at Meades Chapel in Antioch, Tennessee, in 1936. He has done local work in eight states and has preached in meetings in nineteen states. He was Director of Elk City School of Preaching in Elk City, Oklahoma for eleven years and President of Oklahoma College of the Bible for twelve years. More than one hundred preachers trained under his direction are now in the field. He is married to the former Sarah Kelly of Scottsboro, Alabama, and they have

one son, Patrick, a teacher and preacher in Norman, Oklahoma. He now preaches for the church in Lucedale, Mississippi.

The theme of this lectureship is most timely. All around us the self-appointed experts on “church growth” are crying that the church is doomed to oblivion if we do not adopt their growth gimmicks, most of which have been borrowed from the denominations. I say in the words of the great Foy E. Wallace, Jr., “That which is borrowed ought to be returned.” But, as will be confirmed in this lectureship, the church will always triumph.

In preparing this lesson I was reminded of a statement by the lamented H. Leo Boles. When asked the reason for the greater results of his preaching in his latter years as compared to the years of his prime, he said, “I have returned to the simple sermons of my youth.” That is exactly what I propose to do in this lecture. I shall not try to be scholarly, but simply approach the subject as I have in my sermons for the past fifty or more years.

I have been assigned the task of presenting the church in her many facets as illustrated in the Bible, especially the New Testament, by many types and figures of speech. Most of these facets were presented by Jesus in the form of parables.

I would suggest first, that the church is presented to us in the great sermon on the mount as a light-giving city (Mat. 5:14). There are so many features characteristic of one or more of the ancient cities of the Bible that are comparable to the church. So much so that the Old Testament prophets, Christ and the apostles frequently alluded to them. The most frequent reference, of course, was to Jerusalem.

David declares, “Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God” (Psa. 87:3). He continues, “There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High” (Psa. 46:4). The prophet Isaiah proclaims, “We have a strong city, salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks” (Isa. 26:1). He goes on to say, “Thou shalt be called, Sought out, a city not forsaken” (Isa. 62:12). These and other passages with regard to the city of God have reference to the church and matters pertaining to it.

A city implies citizenship. All who desire her rights and privileges, must, upon entering comply with the requirements of naturalization. No foreigner coming to this country refusing to pledge allegiance to our constitution and government could expect to share in rights and benefits of a citizen.

So it is with the church. No one can expect to enjoy all spiritual blessings promised to a citizen of the kingdom of Christ, the church, until he has complied with the law of entry. “Ye are all 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 the second place, the church has been called the household or family of God, Paul declares, “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners but fellow citizens with the saints and the household of God” (Eph. 2:19). Someone has well said that thoughts of home and family are perhaps the most cherished sentiments on this earth. How much more precious the thought when designating the relationship our Heavenly Father sustains to His children. When we have been born by water and the Spirit into the sacred family, we have God as our Father and Christ as our elder brother who ever lives and intercedes in our behalf. In addition, we have all the child-

ren of God, members of the church, as our brothers and sisters sharing with us our joys and sorrows, comforting us in trial and tribulation and encouraging us in our endeavors in His name.

Moreover, the church is depicted as the “Mother of us all.” We do not as a usual thing refer to the church as our mother, but the apostle Paul did so when he wrote, “Jerusalem which is above in free, which is the mother of us all” (Gal. 4:26). Perhaps we have shied away from this facet of the church because the Catholics have used the expression to refer to the Roman church, but we should not ignore a teaching because errorists misuse and abuse it. The traits of motherhood are those that aptly convey the tenderness and concern, the nourishment and protection provided by the church to the children of the Father. A mother’s love is that which, on this earth, allows us an imperfect glimpse of God’s great love for us. A child may disappoint and grieve the mother but her love for him never dims. The church is the body of Christ and His love for us is ever constant.

The apostle John in God’s last revelation to man depicted the church as a mother about to be delivered of a child in Revelation 12. Truly, Christ’s church is the mother of us all.

Again, the church is presented to us as a temple in the which God dwells. The book of Ephesians has been called the “church epistle” because more has been written about the church in this short book than in any other section of the Bible. It presents the church as the body of Christ (1:19-23) and as the body of the reconciled to God by the cross (2:14-16).

In Ephesians 2:20-22, the church is presented as the Lord’s habitation. God’s church constitutes “a holy temple in the Lord,” and the folk who are in it are said to be “fitly framed together for a habitation of God through the Spirit.” They are built upon the foundation laid by the apostles. That, of course, is Christ (1 Cor. 3:11). The apostle Paul said, “I have laid a foundation,” but he added, “I am determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified.”

Christ is the chief cornerstone in this spiritual temple. This keystone is more functional than ornamental. A cornerstone binds two walls of a building together and makes them stand as a unit. Christ

became “our peace” by “breaking down the middle wall of partition” and thereby creating of the two one new man. Christ came to bring men together and He does this by drawing man to Himself. He declared, “If I be lifted up from the earth I will draw all men unto myself.” It is a great truth that the nearer two men, no matter their station in life, come to the Lord, the closer they will come to one another.

The church is God’s dwelling place, His temple, in the which He is to be adored and glorified. Since it is His domicile and He will dwell only where purity and righteousness prevail, we must therefore, “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph. 5:11). We must ever be careful in our walk of faith. “Not as unwise but as wise, redeeming the time because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:15-16).

I would also point out that the church is presented to us as an army, the Lord’s army (Eph. 6:10-18). The church as the fullness of Christ is engaged in an ongoing battle with principalities, powers, world rulers of darkness in heavenly places. Those who press the battle against the enemies are soldiers, standing together under the captain of their salvation, Jesus Christ. They are strong not in their own resources, but are strong in the Lord. Those who have enlisted in this divine army will refrain from donning the modern Philistine armor of chain mail, but will array themselves in the whole armor of God. They will gird their loins with truth, buckling on the breastplate of righteousness, having their feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, protected by the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation while wielding the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God and ever vigilant watching with all prayers and supplications (Eph. 6:14-18).

All of the weapons and equipment provided for the Lord’s army are aggressive in nature. The captain of our salvation has made no provisions for defensive action, to say nothing of retreat. The Lord expects His church to be an aggressive force against sin and error. No provision should be made for a “holding action” or as some put it “keeping house for the Lord.” We must earnestly contend and

fight for the faith of the gospel in order to free those held hostage in sin by the enemy of righteousness.

The kingdom, which is, of course, the church, is compared to a great fish net. Jesus said,

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every End, which when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth (Mat. 13:47-50).

The lesson of this parable of our Lord is so clear that it hardly seems possible that any could misunderstand it; yet its meaning has been missed by a great many folk. Here Jesus says, the kingdom is like a net. Now, wherein is the comparison?

Now note, when the net was drawn upon the beach they sat down and divided the catch into good and bad. The bad were cast away. Now, hear him: "So shall it be in the end of the world." So shall it be how? The angels shall come and sever the wicked from among the righteous. The wicked shall be cast into the fire. Be it understood, then, the comparison is in the "separation" of the wicked from the righteous. It is not in the "catching" of every kind, as we are so often told, but in the separation of the good from the bad who are "already in the kingdom" at the end of the world. All who enter the kingdom do so by becoming children of God. In emphatic terms Jesus declared, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). There is no possible way to get into the kingdom without being born anew, but all who are born anew are children of God. Now, when the net, which Jesus says is like unto the kingdom, that is, the church, is drawn to shore and all who are in it are gathered together, the angel of God will separate the good from the bad and the bad will be cast into the fire.

It is a pity that many have missed our Lord's lesson entirely. The only point they see is that all kinds of folk, both good and bad, enter the kingdom, just as they enter various human institutions. Yes, it is true that all sorts of people join clubs, sects, and denominations organized by men, but "only" the good get into the kingdom of God.

They may have been bad before they entered the kingdom or they may have become bad after they entered, but if they actually enter the kingdom, they must have had good purposes and intentions at the time they did so.

It is imperative that they be born anew. However, a child may become so incorrigible as to be disinherited in the father's will. So also the child of God may so act as to be disinherited, to be cast out of the net. The lesson emphasized in this parable is the careful separation of the good from the bad among members of the church in the day of judgment.

Moreover, the church is presented to us as a great flock with a great shepherd and many undershepherds. In 1 Peter 5, we have mentioned the flock and the Great Shepherd. The elders of the various local congregations of the church are the undershepherds. Shepherds have many fundamental tasks to perform. They are to "feed the flock of God which is among you" (1 Pet. 5:2). One of the qualifications for a scriptural undershepherd is that he be "apt to teach" (1 Tim. 3:2). The apostle Paul in his instructions to the Ephesian elders said, "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" (Acts 20:28).

Another obligation of a shepherd is to shelter and protect the flock. He will always do this even at great inconvenience to himself. So it is with every faithful shepherd over God's flock. He will at all costs protect the sheep. Paul instructed the Ephesian elders further:

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 (Acts 20:29-30).

Wolves care nothing for the sheep. A good shepherd is always on the lookout for these enemies of the flock.

In this connection, the church is also presented as a sheepfold. The sheep are safe and protected inside the fold. When one strays, the good shepherd must seek him and bring him to safety.

Again, the church is presented to us as a "bride." Christ is the Bridegroom. To the Ephesians 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).

Now, that is a most beautiful picture of the church, the bride of Christ.

A faithful bride wears the name of her husband and honors his name. So also with a faithful Christian, he wears no other name. He honors the name of Christ. Moreover, a faithful wife bears her husband's children and helps to bring them up in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord." A faithful church has members born into God's family at regular intervals and trains these babes in Christ in the way they should go. It has also been observed that a faithful wife develops the characteristics of her husband. I know this is true of a faithful Christian. "For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones" (Eph. 5:30).

We note, but briefly, the church is pictured for us as a "body." The members of the body must harmonize. There should be no friction in the body. "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular" (1 Cor. 12:27). The members of the body should have the same care one for another. Moreover, the members of the body must obey the head of the body.

In a parable recorded in Matthew 20:1-16, Jesus compares the church to a "vineyard." Christians are compared to laborers in that vineyard. The householder of the parable was owner of the vineyard and needed laborers to work in the cultivation and harvest. He went out into the marketplace to hire men to go into his vineyard and perform the prescribed work. He promised to pay them a shilling which was the usual wage for a day's work.

The householder in the parable represents Christ. The marketplace represents the world. The laborers represent the lost. The vineyard represents the church. The wage or reward represents eternal salvation. The Lord invites men to labor in His vineyard and those who respond to His invitation are adequately paid. Note that the Lord wants laborers, not idlers. Neither does He hire bosses. The

Lord hires folk to labor as He directs and not as they may happen to choose.

Be it remembered also that the householder hired men to work in a specific vineyard, his. The Lord does not invite people, nor reward them, to labor outside of the church. As the householder would have been under no obligation to pay those laborers had they worked in another man's vineyard, so the Lord has not promised to reward anyone for work He does outside the church. "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end" (Eph. 3:21). Read Matthew 7:21-23 in this connection. The hiring of laborers at different hours indicates that they accepted employment at the first opportunity afforded them.

In the parable, the first laborers were hired at a stipulated price, while those hired at the third, sixth and eleventh hours had no agreement as to the amount they would receive. The hiring of laborers at different times of the day is analogous to the different ages in the lives of folk when they obey the gospel. The laborers were all hired the same day indicating that there will be no opportunity to obey the gospel and enter the Lord's vineyard after this life is over, as per Hebrews 9:27. In this settlement with his laborers at the end of the day all received the same wage. However, the parable does not teach that all will be rewarded the same regardless of length of service. The reward will be the same for all who enter the vineyard at the first opportunity and work faithfully according to the Lord's direction to the end of life's day. All will be rewarded according to their work (Mat. 16:27; Rev. 20:11-15; Luke 19:13-27).

"But many that are first shall be last and the last shall be first" (Mat. 19:30). The first in opportunity are not always first in reward. The reward depends on the spirit of service rather than the length of service. The love and mercy of our Lord is shown in the householder of the parable hiring laborers at the close of the day.

And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that ye shall receive (Mat. 20:6-7).

Our God in a God of infinite mercy as evidenced by His repeated invitations to enter His vineyard where we work out our salvation in reverence and few.

Finally, Isaiah, in his prophesy, portrays the church as a “way” or a “highway.” He says,

And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found them but the redeemed shall walk there: And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away (Isa. 35:8-10).

Our Lord used this same figure in the sermon on the mount when he 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 (Mat. 7:13-14).

Truly the church, the body of Christ, is the way of life (John 14:6). The church of our Lord is the only institution that fulfills the requirements of Isaiah’s prophetic declaration and Jesus’ description in these two passages. The church is the way of holiness, the way of spiritual and moral cleanliness. It is indeed the highway on which the redeemed walk from, earth to glory. The requirements for walking in that way are strict and narrow. They are as strict as the teaching of Christ in the New Testament and as narrow as the commands of the gospel.

Every type, every figure of speech, and every metaphor in the Bible with regard to the church points to her ultimate victory over sin, error and the world power of darkness in high places. She is indeed, “The Church Triumphant.”

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THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT— EFFECTS OF APOSTASY THEN AND NOW

Ira Y. Rice, Jr.



Born August 3, 1917, at Franklin, Texas, Ira Y. Rice, Jr., is the son of Ira Y. Rice, Sr., and the former Eula Edna Davis. Baptized at the age of 12 by A. R. Holton, at Norman, Oklahoma, Rice began preaching while yet a boy, in 1932. He went, in 1955, to plant the churches of Christ in Singapore, Malaysia, and Southeast Asia.

Having now been preaching for some 59 years, Rice is the editor of two monthly periodicals—*Contending for the Faith* and the *Far East/World Evangelism Newsletter*—and also the author of several books, including *God's Truth on Elders*, *We CAN Evangelize the World*, and *Axe on the Root—Volumes I, II and III*. Co-founder and second President of Four Seas College of Bible and Missions, in Singapore, he has served as Chairman of its Board of Directors since 1968, and as missionary to the Far East under oversight of the Elders of the Bellview church of Christ, of Pensacola, Florida.

By definition, apostasy is the desertion of one's faith, religion, party, or principles—a standing off or a standing away. Down through the ages from the beginning of time a tendency toward apostasy appears to have characterized the human condition. In the book of Job 14:1, generally thought to be the oldest book in the Bible, Job wrote that “man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble.” In Genesis 6:5-7, we read,

And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.

Even though Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord, and God spared him, his wife, their three sons and their wives to people the world after the flood, yet, through them, this tendency to get way

from God is seen all through the Old Testament. No more poignant demonstration of this exists than that found in the book of Judges. All through this book, no matter how kindly the God of heaven treated His people, when left to their own devices, again and again and again they could hardly wait for an opportunity to disobey His will. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jer. 17:9).

Quite apart from biblical revelation, it was observed by the Taoists, among the ancient Chinese, that for every action there appeared to be an equal and opposite reaction, which they called the “ying” and the “yang.” Life to them was not all positive; for every “ying” there was always a “yang.”

In that memorable passage from Romans 7:7-23, the apostle Paul described it this way:

What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once- but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slow me. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.

Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good.

Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not, but the evil which I would not that I do.

Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my

members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

WARNINGS AGAINST APOSTASY IN THE EARLY CHURCH

All of us are familiar with Paul sending to Ephesus and calling for the elders to come to him in Miletus. Beginning from Acts 20:17, he reminded them of many things, such as “how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you,” and “I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God” (verses 20 and 27). Nevertheless, fully aware of man’s propensity toward evil, he warned them against the apostasy that was sure to come, saying, in verses 28 through 31,

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 departure 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 teen.

By as early as his second letter to the Thessalonians, apostasy already was setting into the early church. In 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul already was warning against those who would deceive, saying,

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means. for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?

And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: even him, whose coming in after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the

truth. that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a He that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness (2 The. 2:1-12).

EFFECTS OF APOSTASY IN THE EARLY CHURCH

The first effects of apostasy in the early church evidently resulted from Judaizing teachers seeking to rebind at least part of the Mosaic law upon First Century Christians. Acts 15:1ff records that “certain men which come down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.”

Paul and Barnabas, of course, knew better. Their “no small dissension and disputation” with these apostatizing teachers resulted in the first general counsel of the apostles, elders and church at Jerusalem about this question (verses 2 through 4).

When the matter was presented to the Jerusalem church, and certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed said “that it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses,” it was then that the apostles and elders came together to consider. Even so there was much disputing until the apostle Peter (evidently referring to the events at the household of Cornelius, in Acts 10) rose up and said unto them,

Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and put no difference between us and than, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved. even as they (verses 7 through 11).

Be it said to the credit even of the erstwhile Judaizers at Jerusalem, who had caused this furor in the first place, that after Peter had spoken them words “all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them (verse 12).

Seeing this reaction to what Peter had just said, James showed that even the Old Testament prophets agreed with him, concluding,

Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them. which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: but that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood (verses 19 and 20).

Resulting from what both Peter and James thus had spoken, it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to write out a statement to the church at Antioch, which they sent by the hands of Paul and Barnabas and two other chief men among the brethren (Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas), after this manner:

The apostles and olden and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment: it seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have ent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than those necessary things; that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well (verses 23 through 29).

Once these brethren reached Antioch, they called the multitude of the disciples together and delivered the foregoing epistle unto them. Instead of the Antioch brethren being left to take Paul's and Barnabas' word for what had taken place at Jerusalem, Judas and Silas, being prophets themselves, "exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them" (verses 30 through 32). It was in this way that what had threatened to become the first general apostasy in the early church was laid to rest.

Not that this doctrine of Judaism and other such false doctrines did not have to be dealt with again and again in the early church. They did. The book of Galatians, for instance, had to be written to persuade those Gentile Christians not to mix the Mosaic law with Christianity. Paul called such a mixture "another gospel," saying,

I marvel that ye are so own removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another, but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angle 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. 1:6-9).

In view of what Peter had said at the first general counsel in Jerusalem, one should have thought that he was absolutely clear, regarding the law. However, from Galatians 2:11ff, we see him—and even Barnabas—compromising with Judaizers on that point. Paul writes:

But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which was of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him, insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.

But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be Justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain (Gal. 2:11-21).

Having thus refreshed their thinking relative to grace and the Mosaic law, Paul went on to ask those Gentile Christians a number of penetrating questions, two in particular, saying, in Galatians 3:2, “This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” And again, in verse 5, “He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?”

Farther down, he declares that “no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith And the law is not of faith” (vv. 11-12). Then, after several cogent arguments, he announces, in 5:4, that “Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.”

With such a concerted effort on the part of Paul (and no doubt others) to stem the tide of apostasy, brotherhood-wide, over the doctrine of Judaism, it is little wonder that general apostasy was thwarted—then. Other false doctrines arose which *could* have led to apostasy; however, they fared no better—doctrines as those of the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:6, 15), of Balsam (2:14), and such like. No sooner did they rear their repulsive heads than defenders of the faith arose to meet them head on with a “thus saith the Lord.” As Luke described it, in Acts 19:20, “So mightily grow the word of God and prevailed.”

APOSTASY THROUGH THE CENTURIES TO THE RESTORATION

Even though stalwarts for the gospel in the early church such as the apostle Paul and others truly arose in its defense, with the passing of years and decades, this militance for the truth slowly ebbed. As early as the second century A.D., some began affecting a difference in the *kinds* of elders (or bishops) theretofore non-existent. Thus, instead of viewing all elders as equals, some came to be looked upon as “ruling” elders whereas others were “teaching” elders. This set the stage for a profound change from equality among elders and churches to the hierarchical form of government and organization leading to Catholicism;

By A.D. 325, this apostate condition had grown to the extent that the Council of Nicea was called, which produced what is known in church history as the Nicene Creed—the first time in the Christian era that men abrogated to themselves the right to legislate for God.

Three of the biggest churches in this apostate brotherhood got into a squabble as to which should have the rule over the whole body. From the second century onward, the Greek term “katolikos” had been widely used to distinguish the so-called “universal” church

from the multiplicity of sectarian bodies that had arisen. When the church at Rome, by political means, was successful in gaining ascendancy over the churches at Constantinople and Alexandria, it began referring to itself as the Roman Katolikos Church from which was derived the Roman, Catholic Church with which we all are familiar.

With all these changes in organization, it became easier and easier also to introduce changes in doctrine as well as in practice. The use of mechanical instruments of music in worship (unknown in the early church) was first introduced by Pope Vitalian I. It caused such a furor—even among the Catholics, then—that he took it back out. Within a century, however, it was back in again—to stay.

Across the centuries, of course, this apostate church kept adding departure after departure from original doctrine and practice—from immaculate conception, to transubstantiation, to papal infallibility, to Maryolotry, bodily assumption and all the rest. Once apostasy sets in there appears to be no change or innovation that those determined to depart cannot condone.

As the centuries wore on, truly, occasional efforts to reform the overall apostasy appeared. For instance, in the 11th century, the Orthodoxy movement arose, resulting only in creating three more apostate bodies—the Greek, Russian and Armenian Orthodox Churches. From the late 14th and 15th centuries, starting with Zwingli, in Switzerland, such men as Calvin, Knox, Huse, Tyndale, Luther, Henry VIII, and others arose to protest Catholic departures, succeeding only in the rise of still more apostate bodies—the denominational churches of Protestantism.

APOSTASY THROUGH THE RESTORATION TO THE PRESENT

It was not until 1793, with James O'Kelly, a Methodist preacher, that anything like a genuine return to the name, organization, doctrine and practice of the early church began to be observed. Followed by the efforts of such men as Barton W. Stone, in 1801, the Campbells (both Thomas and his son Alexander) in 1809—all three Presbyterians, Walter W. Scott, "Raccoon" John Smith, Tolbert

Fanning, and many others, this great return back to the Bible became known in history as the Restoration Movement. Instead of creating new churches, as was done repeatedly by the Orthodox and Reformation movements of the 11th and later centuries, the Restoration Movement sought to go back behind Protestantism, Orthodoxy and Catholicism all the way back to the First Century and restore Christianity to its original state, just as it was in the beginning. “Back to the Bible” became the rallying cry of the Restoration Movement. Slogans such as “calling Bible things by Bible names,” “doing Bible things in Bible ways,” and “if any man speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God,” caught on.

Within the first fifty years of this movement to restore Christianity to its pristine state or condition, more than half a million adherents flocked to its banner. Starting from just a handful of deeply disillusioned denominationalists surrendering their denominationalism for unity based strictly on “thus saith the Lord,” truly it looked for a time that this movement, as a mighty juggernaut for truth, literally would sweep the earth.

However, anything that man has touched from the Garden of Eden onward he has succeeded in corrupting. Lamentably, the great Restoration Movement, so full of promise, was not to escape man’s corrupting influence. By approximately 1830, one of our so-called “pioneer preachers” Sidney Rigdon already was deserting the faith to join Joseph Smith in founding the Mormon Church. By 1849, Alexander Campbell and others were instrumental in organizing the American Christian Missionary Society, which eventually would lead to establishing the Disciples of Christ or Christian Church as an apostate body separate and apart from the true churches of Christ. Within another decade, mechanical instrumental music was reintroduced into church worship, causing those who could not in good conscience accept it to divide from congregations thus determined to apostatize.

It was not until the religious census of 1906 that the Disciples of Christ (Christian Church) was listed separately from the churches of Christ; however, at least from the 1880s onward, the corporate divis-

ion of these two bodies one apostate—the other basically true—had been taking place.

Other apostasies continued to plague the churches from 1906 onward—particularly those of the “anti” variety. Divisions away from the main body of believers were occasioned by movements such as Anti Bible Classes, Anti Women Teachers, Anti Multiple Containers (in serving the Lord’s Supper), Anti Inter-Congregational Cooperation and such like.

By the late 1920s and early ’30s, Charles T. Russell’s Thousand-Year-Reign ideas had so infiltrated the churches of Christ that, polemically speaking, pitched battles had to be fought to prevent apostasy into Premillennialism. (After his death, Russell’s chief disciple, “Judge” J. F. Rutherford, changed the name of Russell’s movement from The Bible Students Association to what today is known as “Jehovah’s Witnesses.”)

The Anti-Cooperation Movement, which began August 9, 1946, at the East Oakland church of Christ, in Oakland, California, finally caused approximately 10 percent of the churches to accept this apostasy, binding where the Lord had not bound. On the other hand, the apostasy known loosely as Liberalism has caused enormously more devastation to the churches. (Estimates of our losses to Liberalism vary from 50% to possibly as much as 90%—and the end is not yet).

The doctrinal basis of Liberalism, primarily, is a tendency to “loose” what the New Testament “binds.” In its early stages, mostly those who went for their doctorate degrees to secular and sectarian divinity schools such as the University of Chicago, Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and the University of Southern California brought their heresies into many (most) of our so-called Christian colleges and universities, while the Presidents and Boards of such turned a blind eye to what actually was happening, refusing to be warned. By the time some of those doctrinal Rip Van’ Winkles began waking up, Liberalism had become so entrenched in their institutions that it already was too late for apostasy to be prevented. Most astonishing, of leading brethren who were carried away with Liberalism were such known men as Reuel Lemmons, Lynn Anderson, Marvin

Phillips and (more recently) Rubel Shelly, Randy Mayeux and others.

For a time, back in the '60s, it appeared that such apostates as Pat Boone might succeed in leading many of our brethren and churches into Pentecostalism. However, such a hue and cry was raised that nothing much came of it. Don Finto, with his mixed bag of weirdo ideas, for a time appeared to be a threat—but after appointing himself to be an “apostle,” this so discredited him that few indeed pay him any attention any more.

One of Finto's chief disciples, Jim Bevis (also now a self-styled “apostle”) cut quite a swatch across the brotherhood in the late '60s and early '70s with his so-called “Campus Evangelism” until influential brethren awoke to the fact that this movement was designed to undermine if not destroy the true churches of Christ. The financial base of his movement was withdrawn and “Campus Evangelism” collapsed—but not before it had corrupted practically a whole generation of college-age Christians, which largely accounts for how few now-middle-aged brethren and churches still are faithful among us.

Chuck Lucas and the Crossroads Church of Christ, of Gainesville, Florida, took over where “Campus Evangelism” left off, calling their movement “Campus Advance.” Having first formed “Campus Advance” in 1967, it was no problem at all for them to take over practically the full apparatus of “Campus Evangelism” at its demise and go from there. This largely accounts for the seemingly invincible inroads they made among the churches for a time. For whatever reason (“recurring sin” in his life in all that was ever given), Lucas was forced to resign at Crossroads in the mid-'80s—and leadership of that apostate movement gravitated to Kip McKean and the so-called Boston Church of Christ, of Boston, Massachusetts.

By now (1991), Crossroadism, per se, appears to have run its course, and even Bostonism is on the wane. Alan Cloyd, Marvin Phillips, and their discredited, so-called “Unity” Movement with the Christian Church are losing steam. And Rubel Shelly's drive to inter-denominationalize the churches of Christ has about finished its course.

What further apostasies may arise to undermine the true churches of Christ during the rest of the '90s is anybody's guess. For the moment, at least, brotherhood conditions seem to be improving. Most of our older brethren who fought the battle for truth in the '60s, '70s and '80s continue to stand—and that increasing numbers of younger men now are taking their stand by our side likewise is apparent.

The effects of apostasy upon the churches of Christ—both then as well as now—admittedly has been disastrous. However, as we view “the church triumphant” as described in the New Testament—particularly in the Book of Revelation—we look forward to better things.

THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT— HAS IT BEEN RESTORED?

Eddie Whitten



Gospel preacher, has served congregations in Seabrook and San Antonio, Texas. Worked in industry for thirty years before going into full-time preaching. Graduated from the Brown Trail School of Preaching in 1969. Returned to the school as the Administrator in 1971. Served as the Director of the school from 1982 until December 1987. Served as one of the elders of the Brown Trail church from 1975-1989. He is the author of a book on the *Minor Prophets*. He has preached in India, Jamaica, Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia and Alaska in special efforts. Has conducted gospel meetings and various special Bible study series in many states. He directed the Fort Worth Lectures from 1983-1990. He is now working with the Bedford church of Christ in Bedford, Texas. He is a staff writer for the *Firm Foundation* and now serves as Secretary-Treasurer and Business Manager for that paper. He writes articles for several of our brotherhood periodicals. He is married and is the father of three daughters. He and his late wife have nine grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

INTRODUCTION

When Moses was upon Mt. Sinai, God was concerned about the order of things pertaining to man's worship of Him. He commanded Moses to require of the people offerings of gold, silver, brass, blue, purple and scarlet. He asked for fine linen and goat's hair, rams' skins dyed red, badger skins and shittim wood, oil for the light, spices for anointing oil and sweet incense. Onyx stones and other stones for adorning the breast plate and ephod were named. The purpose of the items required was also stated: To "make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them" (Exo. 25:3-8). God did not leave Moses to guess how to build the tabernacle in which He would dwell with them, nor did He leave it to Moses' own pleasure as to how it would be built. God said, "According to all that I show thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it" (Exo. 25-9).

We have in this one incident the precedent of God's determining the pattern for acceptable worship, and man's obligation to faithfully observe that pattern. After giving the instructions of how and with what the tabernacle should be furnished, God said,

And there will I meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel (Exo. 25:22).

God continued to instruct Moses in the construction of the tabernacle and of the instruments and articles it would contain. In the giving of the instructions to Moses, God interjects in Exodus 25:40, "And look that thou make them after their pattern, which was shewed thee in the mount." It was of major concern to God that the tabernacle be made out of certain materials, that it be of certain proportions, that the articles contained within it were made a certain way. It was also of great importance in the eyes of God that the whole project was to be according to the pattern which God had shown Moses while he was in the mount. The matter of pattern is not a new thing when it comes to the relationship of man with God.

Another example of God's instructions being observed is in regard to the building of the ark. God gave Noah instructions as to how the ark was to be built, of what it was to be built, what to put into the ark, why the ark was to be built and the consequences of not qualifying to be in it when the time came. The culmination of these instructions came in Genesis 6:22, "Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he." Noah did as God instructed him and received the blessing of God's promise. The ark is a type of the church, therefore if we, in the 20th century, observe and imitate that which was done in the days of Noah, we can also expect to receive the blessings that come from obedience to God's instructions.

Many other examples could be given showing the necessity to heed the pattern God sets forth. Korah, Dathan and Abiram learned the hard way the consequences of not respecting the authority of God as they perished in the earth. The two hundred and fifty followers of these three rebels (Korah was of the priestly tribe of Levi) also perished by fire for following their lead (Num. 16).

Biblical history flourishes with rebellion and restoration of God's people. The book of Judges is a three hundred year history of God's people drifting away from God, getting into trouble with other nations and God's sending a judge to deliver the people and bring them back to Him. The New Testament is comprised largely of warnings to the churches brought about by the disobedient spirit of various congregations. The church apostatized shortly after the first century and we remained in an apostate condition until the late 18th century. Pockets of restoration began before the 19th century, but the most effective effort toward restoring the Lord's church to the pattern set forth in the Word of God began in the late 18th century. James O'Kelly, Elias Smith and Abner Jones began almost simultaneous efforts in different parts of the country to separate the church from the denominational dogmas of the day. Then in the early years of the 19th century, Thomas Campbell and his son, Alexander, Barton W. Stone, Walter Scott, Jacob Creath, John Mulkey and a host of others throughout the frontier regions of an expanding America set the church on the course of restoration that has taken it back beyond the apostate groups from which denominationalism has risen.

It has been a long, arduous road back to the principles of first century Christianity. Many pitfalls have endangered the march toward the church for which Jesus died. Many souls have been lost to deviation and departure. Men have arisen "speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:30). Many have been successful. For a hundred years (1860-1960) the doctrine of Christ was preached from our pulpits with little departure from truth. True, a great schism developed over the proper approach to Bible authority resulting in the departure of the Christian Church, but the Bible was still respected as the Word of God. Splinter groups representing several hobbies of men broke away from the true church over the passing years, but the restoration of the church that Jesus built remained undaunted.

During the past twenty or thirty years, questions have arisen challenging the validity of the church. Has it really been restored? Is it the same church Jesus built on Pentecost in A.D. 33? The first ripple of doubt centered, not on the requirements for being added to

the church or on what is done in worship, but on whether the church today has restored the same *spirit* that existed in the first century. This became such a major consideration that the ripple of doubt became a great swell of emotionalism. To restore the *spirit* of worship the church had to become all things to all people in order to generate that certain *feeling* which some equated with *spirit*.

SToday, the pentecostal influence necessitated by emotional extremes has led the leaders of many congregations into questioning the need to adhere to biblical authority at all. Consequently, much of the conduct of the church regarding how to become a Christian and how to worship God in spirit and in truth is under suspicion. One of the bases of such questioning reverts back to the source which once only questioned the restoration of the *spirit* reflected by the church. Only now, the swell of emotionalism has created in the roaring wave of rejection of biblical authority. To justify the rejection of biblical authority for what we do in principle and practice the cry is made that the church has not yet been restored; that we cannot understand the love and the grace of God if we hold to any set pattern of conduct called “law.”

In this study, it is our purpose to aver that the church of our Lord as it was established on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Jesus *has* been restored to the purity of the first century. We fully realize that men often pervert truth. We fully realize that departures can and do occur when the opinions of men differ on points doctrinal or otherwise. We fully realize that apostasy can and does rise up and decimate segments of the church. We also fully realize we are not attempting to emulate the individual churches of the first century such as the church in Corinth, or Ephesus, or Antioch, or even Jerusalem. What we do claim and attempt to show is that the principle of true Christianity as presented in God’s Word has been (past tense) restored in our time. What we do with this principle in the days and years ahead may be a different story if we lose sight of the authority by which we make the claim of restoration.

The church of Christ has been restored to its first century principle by virtue of:

ITS NAME

Name alone does not exclusively identify a person, or thing. The name “Smith” does not identify one certain individual named “Smith.” There must be something else to narrow the identification to one person. The name “Main Street” does not exclusively identify one certain street called “Main Street.” There must be additional information for proper identification. The same is true in regard to the church Jesus built. In the Bible there are several names attached to the church. Inspiration addresses the church by the terms, “church of God” (1 Cor. 1:2), “the house of God” (1 Tim. 3:15), “the church” (Acts 2:47), “the body” (Col. 1:18), “the church of the firstborn [ones]” (Heb. 12:23), “the churches of Christ” (Rom. 16:16), besides the multitude of references to the church in various geographical areas. The use of these terms would be scripturally acceptable if all the other aspects of the reference were also scriptural. To use one of these scriptural terms does not make the “church” scriptural in itself. The denominational organization commonly known as “The Church of God” is not a scriptural organization because of other unscriptural tenets associated with it. The name alone does not make it scriptural. Neither does the name “the church of Christ” make the organization wearing that name scriptural if the practices engaged therein are unscriptural.

To use names that are not mentioned in the Bible automatically identifies a false organization. The mere fact that Jesus stated, “upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,” eliminates the right of the use of any other name. Man does not have the prerogative to name a religious institution after himself, or a man-made movement then claim to be following Jesus. Therefore, to use non-biblical names such as are prevalent in the denominational world is a clear departure from true Christianity.

In the quest to return to the Bible for acceptance in the sight of God, the leaders of the great effort of restoration rejected all denominational names and chose to select the name mentioned in the Bible for identification. The name “the church of Christ” signifying ownership of the church by Jesus, was restored.

ITS ORIGIN

Since the name of the church, as important as it is, is not conclusive evidence of its identity, other evidence must be presented. There are many exotic religions throughout the world. It is an overwhelming conclusion that man is inherently religious; he will worship some kind of god whether it be in the form of personality or imagery. The many idols and philosophies to which men submit in abject obedience and superstition is proof positive of the compulsion to worship a supreme force. To submit oneself in such worship is not an indication of God's approval or acceptance. The apostle Paul stated this basic principle in Romans 10:1-3:

Brethren, my hearts desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

It is not difficult to recognize the focus of the Eastern religions as being completely foreign to anything akin to Christianity. Anything from graven images to historical personages are exalted as gods and so worshipped without ever having heard the name of Jesus. These are religions that are tragic in consequence to the souls of men, but there is no confusion as to their relationship with Christian practice. It is evident that adherents to these religions need to be taught concerning the Christ.

There is a great body of religious belief that does constitute confusion in the name of Christianity. That great body is called "denominationalism." The word itself means "to name" or "to designate," or "to give a name to." In the sense of religion it means "a religious organization uniting in a single legal and administrative body a number of local congregations" (*Websters Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*, p. 221). Therefore, the name itself denotes division. Our monetary system is made up of several "denominations" of currency constituting the whole. The same definition is true regarding denominational groups. Their claim is denomination "A" is divided religiously from denomination "B" and "C" etc., all of them comprising the church as a whole. However, the very nature of denominationalism is that each of them has a different origin in time, place

and founder. These factors identify them as something different from the church which was established by the Lord Jesus Christ, in Jerusalem of Judea, on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ in the first century.

The “restoration fathers,” those men who are credited with initiating the effort or movement to return to the Bible for our faith and practice, did not wish to reform an existing organization as did Martin Luther in the early 16th century. They set forth the premise of going back to the Bible, to the origin of the church, to restore the church founded by the Christ. In order to do so, they espoused the logic that the pattern of the New Testament church must be duplicated. In reality, they activated the long-dormant body through which the blood of Jesus had been coursing through all the years since its beginning. By being faithful to this premise, the New Testament church has been restored.

ITS ORGANIZATION

The church we read about in the Bible had a very definite organization through which it operated. Biblical hermeneutics must be employed when we speak of church government then and now. Then, apostles of Jesus spoke through inspiration. They had the keys of the kingdom that must be taught to the world. They spoke with unerring accuracy. They could perform miraculous deeds even to the raising of the dead (Acts 9:40-41). There were signs that were used for the purpose of confirming the Word (Mark 16:20). They used these signs only for the purpose of promoting and spreading the gospel of salvation. They did not employ miracles to foster their own well-being (Acts 16:22-24), or comfort (2 Cor. 11:24ff).

Prophets fell into the same category regarding the miraculous. They prophesied things that had not yet been revealed to man from God. The prophecy mentioned in these circumstances was supernatural. They were “speakers of, or for God,” the definition of the word “prophet.” Once the written Word was complete, the need for special prophets was taken away (1 Cor. 13:8-10). The application of apostles and prophets (Eph. 4:11) as part of the organization of the church today does not, cannot exist. The qualifications of such offices makes it impossible for men to serve as apostles or prophets in the church

today. The qualifications of apostles required personal contact with the Christ. The qualifications of prophets (used in the sense under discussion) required special revelation from God. Neither of these possibilities exists today. Therefore, the special “offices” of either apostle or prophet cannot exist in the church and be in accordance with the Word of God.

We do read that the church had elders as the leaders, rulers, overseers and bishops over the church (Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28; Tit. 1:5; Heb. 13:17). These are offices for which specific qualifications must be met by men before they can serve. The men who serve in this high office must be men of unquestioned character. They must be students of the Bible and consecrated to the responsibilities associated with the eldership. The church of the first century was instructed to “esteem them (elders) very highly in love for their work’s sake,” (1 The. 5:12).

Deacons were to be selected to assist the work of the church (1 Tim. 3:8-13). The “office” of deacon is implied in the giving of special qualifications which must be met before one can serve in this capacity. Among those qualifications is the necessity of “having one wife.” Nothing is mentioned within the pages of God’s holy Word which would suggest that the deacons are to assume authority in the church. The example of the “seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom” who were selected in Act 6:3 for the purpose of tending to the “daily ministrations” of the Grecian widows, is sometime used to define the duties of deacons. Whether it is appropriate to do so is not the issue here. The point to be made is that the “office” of deacon was a part of the organization of the church in the first century which has been restored in the church of the twentieth century.

Preachers were a part of the organization of the first century as well. Jesus preached to the multitudes (Mat. 5-7), Paul preached (Acts 20:7), Peter, James, John, Timothy, Titus, Apollos, and on and on, all preached the Word of God to the church and to the lost. Preaching is the method by which the plan of salvation is to be spread throughout the world. The word “Pastor,” is never associated with the “preacher” in the Bible. The term “pastor” always refers to

the eldership. It is never used in the singular such as is used in denominationalism to denote the preacher.

Why is it necessary to address the organization of the first century church? It is tragic that such is needful, but apostasy came because of the failure to heed the warning Paul gave the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28-30. He warned them of the danger of one or more taking upon themselves authority they did not have. Such happened and organizations developed that were not scriptural. Today, the structure of church organization has been restored as it was during the time of Paul, but there are those who challenge that structure. The authority of the eldership is questioned, ignored and usurped. Those who do so are usurping the authority delegated by God and face the consequences attendant thereto. A study of the Bible will reveal that to challenge or ignore the authority of God reaps dire consequences.

Others are exalting themselves above the authority of the elders. Today, there is a great movement among younger preachers to exalt the authority of the evangelist above the authority of the elders. They are taking upon themselves a “pastoral” authority that is foreign to the Bible and *elders are letting them get by with it!* Deacons are assuming the role of authority in “matters that are not spiritual.” The authority of the elders is being limited only to the “spiritual” aspects of the church. That understanding is a *misunderstanding*. The elders have the oversight of the church and could not exercise that function with dual authority with the deacons. Preachers are to “Preach the word” (2 Tim. 4:2), and are never given responsibility of authority over the eldership. Those who hold true to the God-given organization of the church have restored the first-century church in modern times.

ITS TERMS OF ENTRANCE

It is tragically strange that the method by which one becomes a New Testament Christian must be defended. In the first century, according to the Bible, people heard the gospel of Christ preached, believed it and obeyed it. The apostle Paul graphically described the prescription for salvation in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4:

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 sines according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.

The apostle Peter preached on the day of Pentecost at the establishment of the church that one must repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins in order to be saved (Acts 2:38, 41, 47). Paul described what happens when one is baptized in Romans 6:3-4. There is a burial (immersion) into the death of Christ and, as Christ was raised from the dead, so is the new Christian to walk in a new life. Peter plainly states that baptism saves us (1 Pet. 3:21), and Ananias told Paul what would take place in baptism: his sins would be washed away. This was the practice that was observed by the church in the beginning.

Since the time of the first-century church, many deviations and departures with regard to entrance into the church have occurred. Most of the denominational world negates the Bible teaching concerning baptism from the mode of baptism all the way to the necessity for baptism at all. Many churches of Christ have joined the practice of denominationalism in not requiring baptism for the remission of sins as a requisite for fellowship in Christ. Some are saying there are Christians in all denominations and some are accepting all denominations in full fellowship with the church. It is a growing practice to accept individuals into fellowship upon the basis of their denominational baptism.

The true church of our Lord has been restored in the terms of entrance into it because it still requires that one be baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27), by immersion (Col. 2:12), for remission of sins (Acts 2:38), to have our sines washed away (Acts 22:16) and to be saved (1 Pet. 3:21). Those who practice otherwise have not restored the New Testament church in principle or practice.

ITS WORSHIP

Many things are a matter of expediency in our worship to God. Such matters as the time of worship on the Lord's day, where we worship, the order of our worship, whether we have a paid preacher on a full-time basis, how we get to the worship, etc., are all matters

that can vary with individual congregations. What does matter and is not an expedient is what we do in worship. As we read and study the activities that were approved in the early church, we understand that Christians assembled for worship, exhortation and edification. It is a matter of fact that in every type of secular endeavor in which a goal is set, members of that endeavor meet for the benefit of instruction, encouragement, training, involvement and a sense of common interest. The importance of worship should compel every member to present himself before God at every opportunity for assembly. But what is done in worship? How is our worship of God expressed? Again, the religious world is widely diversified in this regard. The denominational world exercises all manner of entertainment as a form of worship. In the pursuit of such triviality, the emphasis has centered upon tickling the pleasure of the people. In much of this type of activity, God is completely shunted aside and is not even mentioned during the so-called worship. Church growth emphasis demands something to attract the masses and church leaders appeal to the physical and social mores to achieve the desired growth.

The church to be restored, the first-century church, engaged in certain acts in which God was glorified and revered.

(1) *They prayed*, giving praise and adoration to an awesome God. They asked for God's blessings and guidance. They prayed for strength to persist in the face of peril. They prayed as they faced death for the cause of the Master. Prayer was an integral part of the life and worship of the early church.

(2) *They sang* praises unto God. They "made melody in their hearts unto the Lord." They spoke one to another "in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." They expressed their happiness by singing. They taught through the avenue of singing. Christians sang!

(3) *They gave* of their means whatever it happened to be. God does not need money, but the cause of Christ needed funds to carry out the works of God. They sacrificed in many ways. They considered the cause for which Jesus died of such value that they gave out of their "deep poverty."

(4) *They preached* the Word of God. Not just for an hour, but joyfully for the hearing of the word. Paul preached till midnight (Acts 20:7). The preaching of the gospel is the means by which man can hear what he must do to be saved (Rom. 10:14). They preached when it meant danger and possible death, but the early church preached.

(5) *They communed* around the Lord's table. Jesus gave the charge to observe the supper in remembrance of him. The early church observed the Lord's supper on the first day of every week. It is a reminder to the Christian of the supreme sacrifice Jesus offered for the atonement of men's sins in the sight of God. His death on the cross is the focal point of history and the church remembered this eventful day in honor to Him and in thanksgiving for His sacrifice. "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb. 9:22), and the blood of Christ was the only sacrifice that could atone for the sins of man.

To pervert the worship of God through incorporating activities other than those approved and practiced in the New Testament church is adding to God's pattern for acceptable worship. The church of Christ, the New Testament church, has restored the pattern of New Testament worship.

CONCLUSION

The question is asked, "Has the church of the New Testament been restored?" We have considered several characteristics of the New Testament church to see if they are present in the world today. As we noticed, one characteristic alone does not always correctly, or sufficiently, identify. However, when one considers all of the aspects of the New Testament church and compares it with contemporary practice, it depends upon whether the church of today is following the pattern of the New Testament church. We have noticed that God has always *demand*ed His people follow the pattern He set for them. His pattern for the New Testament church is unmistakable. The Bible sets forth the pattern and man can readily understand with sensible, honest study and humility what he must do to restore that pattern.

We have briefly noticed that the church of the New Testament has been restored with regard to: (1) its name, (2) its origin, (3) its organization, (4) its terms of entrance, and (5) its worship. When all of these elements have been returned to their proper places of honor, restoration is the result.

In spite of what men might do to compromise the pattern of God's church whether through denominationalism or unfaithful practice within the church itself, the church of the New Testament will continue as long as faithful followers of God remain diligent in their quest for restoration. The church of the New Testament has *been restored* and will continue to function as the body of Christ as long as the truth is preached and defended.

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THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT— IS IT THE KINGDOM?

Noah A. Hackworth



Noah A. Hackworth was born in Oklahoma but grew up in California. Educated in California Colleges with work toward degree In Speech. In March of this year he completed his twenty-five year of work with the church of Christ in San Mateo, California. Served as editor of the *Bay Area Christian*, a monthly periodical, for seven years. Present co-director of West Coast Lectures and Director of the Firm Foundation Northwest Lectures in Washington. Has preached and/or held meetings in several states. Serves as a staff writer for *Firm Foundation*. Noah and Glenda Hackworth have three children and one grandchild.

THE CHURCH WILL TRIUMPH

Triumphant is indeed a beautiful and proper word when used to describe the ultimate state and destiny of the church of the Lord. To triumph means “to achieve success; to exult as a result of victory.” No New Testament book more beautifully sets forth triumph for the church of God than the book of Revelation. A crown of life awaits those who suffer martyrdom (Rev. 2:10). The souls under the altar point to temporary defeat, but their elevation to thrones point to their triumphant victory (Rev. 6:9; 20:4). No words more beautifully describe the triumphant church than those of Dr. Philip Schaff.

Christianity has thus passed through many stages of its earthly life, and yet hate hardly reached the period of full manhood in Christ Jesus. During this long succession of centuries it has outlived the destruction of Jerusalem, the dissolution of the Roman empire, fierce persecutions from without, and heretical corruptions from within, the barbarian invasion, the confusion of the dark ages, the papal tyranny, the shock of infidelity, the ravages of revolution, the attack of enemies and the errors of friends, the rise and fall of proud kingdoms, empires, and republics, philosophical systems and social organizations without number. And, behold, it still lives, and lives in greater strength and wider extent than ever; controlling the progress of civilization, and the destinies of the world, marching over the rains of human wisdom and

folly, ever forward and onward, spreading silently its heavenly blessings from generation to generation, and from country to country, to the ends of the earth. It can never die; it will never see the decrepitude of old age; but, like its divine founder, it will live in the unfading freshness of self-renewing youth and the unbroken vigor of manhood to the end of time and will outlive time itself. Single denominations and sects, human forms of doctrine, governments and worship after having served their purpose, may disappear and go the way of all flesh; but the Church Universal of Christ in her divine life and substance, is too strong for the gates of hell. She will only exchange her earthly garments for the festal dress of the Lamb's Bride, and rise from the state of humiliation to the state of exaltation and glory. Then at the coming of Christ she will reap the final harvest of history, and as the church triumphant in heaven celebrate and enjoy the sternal sabbath of holiness and peace.¹

THE CHURCH IS THE KINGDOM

Confusion about the existence and nature of the kingdom of Christ is not a recent thing. One of the leading false teachers concerning the kingdom was R. H. Boll. Most of the false notions we hear today about the kingdom are but echoes of the doctrine he taught more than fifty years ago. One of the great truths of the Bible is that the church existed, or was conceived in the mind of God before the world began. Plans for its establishment were developed down through the ages. It was purposed, promised, prophesied, prepared and finally realized (cf., Gen. 3:15; Mat. 3:1-3; 16:18; Rom. 16:25-26; Eph. 1:9-11; 3:3-21). There is much more to this church-kingdom issue than is often realized, the veracity of God is at stake. It is admitted by premillennialists that Christ came to establish His kingdom, but postponed it because He was rejected by the Jewish nation, so He built the church instead. Hence, the "church age." The colossal error here is in thinking that the establishment of the kingdom of Christ was contingent upon Jewish acquiescence. Christ was rejected by His own, but the kingdom was not postponed because of it (John 1:11-12). For the eternal kingdom, conceived by God before the world began, to be postponed is not only an unthinkable reflection upon Deity, but an absolute rejection of the prophetic Word as well (cf., Dan. 2:44; Isa. 2:1-2; Luke 1:32-33). In the parable in Luke 19, it is stated that "a certain nobleman went into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return" (v. 12). The fact that

the nobleman received the kingdom shows that Jewish rejection made no difference.

Observe the following passages. Matthew 16:18-19:

And I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it. I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

If the church is not the kingdom, neither Peter nor Christ knew it; because Peter was given the keys to the kingdom and the authority to use them. Keys indicate authority, and Peter used those keys on the day of Pentecost when he “opened the door” into the church by setting forth the terms of admission (Acts 2:38). But the keys Peter used were the keys to the kingdom (Mat. 16:19); therefore the door into the church was also the entrance into the kingdom of Christ. If this is not the case, Peter was guilty of “breaking and entering.” What he did was unlawful, and worse yet is the fact that Christ told him to do it. There is absolutely no reason to differentiate between kingdom and church. Peter knew that the kingdom and the church were the same thing. “The statement that ‘the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it’ says, in other words, it ‘shall never be destroyed,’ ‘it shall stand forever.’”² Luke 1:33 says, “And he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end.” If, as Jesus said, the church cannot be destroyed, and if, as the angel Gabriel said, there shall be no end to the kingdom, we have positive proof that the kingdom and the church are the same. The kingdom encompasses the church and it is the kingdom that shall be delivered up to God (1 Cor. 15:24).

Luke 22:29-30: Jesus said, “And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me, that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom; and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” This passage places the Lord’s table in the Lord’s kingdom. Those who partake of the Lord’s Supper must be citizens of the kingdom, and yet Paul directed the church at Corinth to eat the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 1:2; 11:20-26). So, the Lord’s Supper is in two different institutions at the same time, which cannot be, or the kingdom and the church are the same.

The Lord's Supper is the only table at which His people eat. This table, as all agree, is in the church. If the church has been established, then the kingdom has, for the same table cannot be in two different institutions at the same time. As the apostles received the promise, the kingdom must have been in existence in their day or they could not have eaten at the Lord's table. If the kingdom does not exist, no one has the right to partake of the Lord's Supper. Every time the supper is observed, the participants proclaim the existence of the kingdom.³

Colossians 1:13: "Who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love." The Colossian epistle was written (ca. A.D. 62) to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ at Colosse (1:2). This refers to the church, but Paul said "translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of his love." So, the church and the kingdom are the same. To "translate" (*methistemi*) means to "remove from one place to another." Josephus uses it of the deportation of the Israelites by the Assyrian king.⁴ The Colossian Christians could not have been translated into something that did not exist. The kingdom of the Son of His love means the kingdom of Christ, the church here and now.⁵

1 Thessalonians 2:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:14: "To the end that ye should walk worthily of God, who calleth you into his own kingdom and glory" (1 The. 2:12). "Whereunto he called you through our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 The. 2:14). The Thessalonian epistles were written (ca. A.D. 50-51) to the church of the Thessalonians (1 The. 1:1; 2 The. 1:1), who had been "called out" of the world by the gospel (2 The. 2:14). The word church translates the word *ekklesia* and means "the called out." Yet Paul says they had been called into "his own kingdom and glory" (1 The. 2:12). So the church and the kingdom are the same.

John 3:3-5: "Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God... Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Without being "born anew" one cannot "see" the kingdom of God. "See" obviously means "to enter." Unless, therefore, one is born of the water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. The new birth puts one into the kingdom; and baptism, which is the new birth, puts one into the church (1 Cor. 12:13); therefore the kingdom and the church are one and the same.

CHRIST IS NOW KING AND REIGNING

The contention of some that Jesus is king “de jure et potentia,” by right only; but not a king “de facto et actu,” not in actual fact and act is palpably false.⁶ That Christ is now king and reigning is proved by the following passages.

Acts 2:25-36:

For David saith concerning him, I beheld the Lord always before my face; For he in on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; Moreover my flesh also shall dwell in hope: Because thou wilt not leave my soul unto Hades, Neither wilt thou give thy Holy One to an corruption. Thou madest known unto me the ways of life; Thou shalt make me full of gladness with thy countenance...Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he hath poured forth this, which ye now see and hear...God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified.

Peter the apostle affirmed that Christ was at that very moment exalted, by the right hand of God, and both Lord and Christ. All these expressions are indicative of the kingship and Lordship of Jesus. Such language would not be appropriate if Jesus was not king right then. Peter says Christ is reigning (Acts 2:32-35). Over what is He reigning? His kingdom (cf., Luke 1:32-33; 1 Pet. 3:22). The very title “Christ” is extremely significant, because Christ means “anointed.” The functions of kingship cannot be administered until the king takes his throne. Hence, when Jesus administered the functions of kingship, as He was doing on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), He was king both in “act” and “fact.” Jesus Christ is even now “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1 Tim. 6:15). See also Isaiah 9:6-7. Either Jesus Christ is king or He is not (the law of excluded middle). If He is not king He is nothing more than a “crown prince.”

1 Corinthians 15:24-26:

Then *cometh* the end, when he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be abolished is death.

This passage affirms several significant facts. (1) The kingdom now exists. (2) Christ is now reigning. (3) Death is the enemy of mankind.

(4) Death is the enemy of mankind at the same time Christ is reigning. (6) Christ will cease to reign when death ceases to be man's enemy. (6) Death will cease when Christ destroys it. (7) At the end, when all rule, power and authority have been abolished, the kingdom will be surrendered to God.

Ephesians 1:19-21: "In this text Paul affirms that God raised Christ from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named." All such language is ridiculous if Christ is not now king. God subsequently "put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body and the fullness of him that filleth all in all." The words "rule," "authority," "power" and "subjection" are all indicative of the kingship and headship of Jesus. An king Jesus exercises rule, power and authority, and because He is its head, the church is in subjection to Him.

THE TRIBULATION, RAPTURE, AND THOUSAND YEAR REIGN

The so-called doctrine of the great tribulation, the rapture and the thousand year reign of Christ constitute one of the most "cunningly devised fables" the world has ever known (cf., 2 Pet. 1:16). How this tremendous fabrication could be successfully "pawned" off on the religious world is almost beyond our ability to imagine, but thanks to the likes of William Miller, Ellen G. White, Joseph Smith, Charles T. Russell and Mary Baker Eddy we have some of Satan's most popular doctrines. While some have an adequate grasp of what these things mean, the average religious person does not fully understand the legion of things connected with these issues. Like some other false beliefs (e.g., hereditary depravity, direct operation of the Holy Spirit and the impossibility of apostasy) they stand or fall together. Our first obligation will be to understand these doctrines.

The Great Tribulation

"For then shall be great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be" (Mat. 24:21). To apply this statement to premillennial doctrine is to completely destroy the context in which it is found, but this is exactly

what has been done. The tribulation, according to the premillennialists, relates to the end of the world and the period just previous to the second coming of Christ,⁷ which they say is the affirmation of this text. The context surrounding this passage is the destruction of Jerusalem, and a careful analysis of Matthew twenty-four reveals some irreconcilable difficulties. Verse 16 says the disciples were to flee to the mountains, but since the tribulation theory has the disciples caught up in the air with Jesus, there will be no disciples on earth to flee to the mountains. Hence the Word of the Lord could not be obeyed. Their flight could not be in the winter because the weather would be so severe that it would hamper their flight. Their departure from Jerusalem could not be on the Sabbath day, because the gates to the city would be closed. The tribulation in this chapter had not been preceded by anything greater, nor would anything subsequent be comparable to its intensity. These facts nullify any attempt to make the happenings of Matthew twenty-four refer to the doctrine of the premillennialists. Concerning the tribulation Kik says:

The nature of it would be “such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.” However, if it denoted a future event ushering in the end of the world, it would hardly be necessary for Christ to add, “nor ever shall be.” That tribulation would automatically end all tribulations...Considering the physical, moral, and religious aspects of this horrible happening in history, one may safely say that the Jews have never experienced such a tribulation even up to this day. We must remember that Jesus is speaking about a tribulation to be experienced only by the Jewish nation.⁸

The Rapture

The word “rapture” is conspicuously absent not only from our English Bibles, but from many of the standard works to which we appeal for information. Haun’s account affirms:

The premillennial idea of “the rapture” doesn’t mean just the lifting up of the saints to meet Christ in the air at the end of the world. It means the secret catching away of the church, the resurrected and living saints, who will rise from the earth to meet the Lord who has secretly appeared in the air just before the beginning of a great tribulation period on earth. This tribulation period is to last seven years, at the beginning of which the literal Jews shall have returned to their land in unbelief, and at which time they have either rebuilt their temple or are in the process of rebuilding it. In unbelief of Christ, they will enter into a seven year agreement with the Antichrist. After three and one-half years the true

nature of the Antichrist will be revealed. He will stop the daily sacrifice which has been resumed, and have his own image set up in the holy place. The Devil and his angels are then cast into the earth, having great wrath, because their time is short. During the final three and one-half years Jerusalem is to be trodden under foot. A third of the Jews are to assemble in Jerusalem. The nations are to unite against the city and overcome it. Great suffering is to be inflicted on the inhabitants and half of them are to be carried into captivity. Those remaining are to turn to Christ.⁹

The rapture theory, in order to be believable, requires the coming of Christ to occur in “two stages.” The Lord first comes “for” His saints, then He comes “with” His saints. First Thessalonians 4:14-17 is said to be the Lord’s “first” coming, and Jude 14-15 supposedly refers to the “second” coming. At His first coming, the saints will ascend to meet Christ and remain with Him for seven years, while at the same time a period of great tribulation will be in progress on the earth. But there is no evidence that the Thessalonian passage refers to a “first coming” of the Lord. Paul simply says that the dead in Christ will be raised before the living ascend. This is obviously what is meant by the expression, “even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.” The theory further affirms that Jude refers to a “second coming” of the Lord, after the tribulation, at which time the millenium begins. However, the ungodly, of which Jude speaks, will be judged when the “coming” to which he alludes occurs. But the theory affirms that judgment of the ungodly will not take place until after the millenium, so the ungodly are judged a thousand years too soon. Therefore, the so-called “rapture” becomes a gigantic “rapture” right in the heart of the millenial man. Pre-millennialists try to sustain their theory of “two comings” by making a play on two Greek words. They say the “first coming” will be the *parousia* or “presence,” and the alleged “second coming” will be the “epiphaneia” or “manifestation;” and there is to be a seven year period between the two. When the Lord comes “for” his saints, it will be the “parousia,” and this coming will not be manifest. But after the tribulation when he comes “with” his saints, it will be the *epiphaneia* or “manifestation.” And His manifestation signals the beginning of the millennium. A careful study of *parousia* and *epiphaneia* will

prove that they do not refer to “two comings” (cf., 2 The. 2:8; 1 The. 3:13; 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:8; Acts 23:6; 24:15).

PAUL’S CASE AGAINST THE THOUSAND YEAR REIGN

1 Corinthians 15:23-26: There are a number of things in the above text that make a millennial reign impossible. First, the resurrection of all the dead will be accomplished at the time of the *parousia* (v. 23), at the time of Christ’s “first coming” (cf., John 5:28-29; Acts 23:6; 24:15). There is provision for only one resurrection, and it includes “all the dead.” Second, connected with the *parousia* (coming) of verse 23, and happening in the same process is “the end.” Then cometh the end (v. 24). “Cometh” is not in the Greek text. “Then the end” is the reading as well as the meaning. There is no room in this verse for a thousand year reign. The word “then,” an adverb of time, translates the word *eita* which means “then; next; after that.”¹⁰ (cf., John 13:5; 19:26-27; Jam. 1:14-15; 1 Cor. 15:5). The word “then” does not allow for a long lapse of time which the millennial theory requires. Third, at the coming (*parousia*) of Christ the already-existent-kingdom will be delivered to God. Fourth, “for he must reign till” means He is reigning “now.” Fifth, “till” (*achris*) refers to a point of time.¹¹ The point of time when the reign of Christ shall and in when death, the last enemy, is destroyed. First Corinthians 15:23-26 sounds the “death knell” to the so-called thousand year reign.

CONCLUSION

The kingdom is the church and is now in existence. Christ has been crowned king and is now reigning on his throne. The rapture, the tribulation, the dual coming, and the thousand year reign are obviously false doctrines which can only be rejected after careful examination (cf., Mat. 16:19; Col. 1:13; Acts 2:30-33; 1 Pet. 3:22; 1 Tim. 6:15).

ENDNOTES

¹Philip Schaff, *History Of The Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, n.d.), 1:19-20.

²H. Leo Boles, *A Commentary On The Gospel According To Matthew* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1952), p. 348.

³John T. Hinds, *Christ On David’s Throne Is Now Reigning* (Tract), p. 5.

⁴H. D. M. Spence, *The Pulpit Commentary, Galatians-Colossians*(Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdman's, 1950), p. 6.

⁵F. C. Cook, *The Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981), 9:655.

⁶Foy E. Wallace, Jr., *God's Prophetic Word* (Oklahoma City, OK: Foy E. Wallace Publishing Co., 1948), p. 174.

⁷J. Marcellus Kik, *Matthew Twenty Four*(Philadelphia, PA: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1948), p. 56.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁹Dolton Haun, *Is There Going To Be A Rapture?* Tract (Pasadena, TX: Haun Tract Co, n.d.), pp. 2-3.

¹⁰Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon Of The New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan,n.d.), p. 188.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 91.

THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT— IS IT ESSENTIAL TO SALVATION?

Jerry L. Martin



Jerry Martin was reared in Crossett, Arkansas. For a number of years, he was employed by the U.S. Post Office. A graduate of Memphis School of Preaching, he has preached for congregations in Georgia. He currently is the local evangelist for the Blackwater Macedonia church in Nauvoo, Alabama. Jerry has spoken on several lectureships, is a staff writer for Firm Foundation, and serves on the Board of Directors of Indian Crook Youth Camp. He is married to the former Denise Hardin and they have three sons and one daughter.

When the angel instructed Joseph to take Mary for his wife he said “for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost” (Mat. 1:20). He continued to inform Joseph saying, “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Mat. 1:21). Jesus would be triumphant and save “his people.” Who are His people? They are those who *hear* His voice (John 10:4; Acts 3:20-23). His people are those who do what He says (Luke 6:46; Mat. 7:21-29). His people are those that *heed* the gospel and will be assured of salvation (2 The. 2:13-14; 1:7-12).

Now the question is asked, but where and how will He save His people? It is a common idea, and a false one I might add, that all good people will be saved. The majority are at ease with the opinion that people who are morally upright, who are good citizens and are interested in all churches are “good enough to be saved.” The conclusion that is reached is that it therefore does not matter which church you are a member of or whether you are a member of any church at all. This attitude puts the church on the level of a social club or lodge.

People of this mentality make a play on our emotions by saying such things as, “The church doesn’t save, God and Christ save.” They will also confidently profess, “The church is not our Saviour.” We agree with both statements but hasten to ask, “Where does God and Christ save, in the church or out of the church?” Acts 2:47 says, “and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” The one who is the Saviour will save those in the church. My friends, we ought to be fair enough to furnish scripture in support of our view (1 Pet. 3:15). We ought to know whom God has promised to save and where.

The church my Lord promised to build is not nonessential. It is essential to my salvation or my Lord would not have built it (Mat. 16:18). He expressed too great a love for it in giving Himself for it for it not to be essential (Eph. 5:25). He paid too great a price for it to be nonessential or optional (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 1:18-19). There are only two possible reasons one would ever say salvation does not reside in the church. The first is that he does not know what Christ has said concerning His church. The only other possibility in that one knows what the Lord has said but he has no intention of accepting such teachings.

If the church is not essential then the Bible becomes a confusing, invalid, unimportant collection of uninspired writings. The church is essential for the following reasons:

TO BE CALLED FROM THE WORLD IS ESSENTIAL

The Bible teaches that the Lord calls His people out of the world. In fact the word “church,” already defined in other lessons in this book, literally means “called out.” If we can be saved out of the church we can be saved without being called from the world. Such thinking reduces passages like 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 to total emptiness. As Paul writes to the church of the Thessalonians (1:1) he encourages them by saying,

But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 The. 2:13-14).

Meaningless is John's contrast, "And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness" (1 John 5:19), and powerless is the gospel Paul preached to the Romans if it does not call us out and separate us from the world (Rom. 1:1) and if it does not save us from the world (Rom. 1:16).

What a mockery his word to the *church* at Corinth (1:1) when he reminds them of their relations with God and the world.

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. 6:17-18).

Surely all honest hearted people will declare it necessary to be "called out" from the world and therefore necessary to be in the church, the "called out."

TO BE IN HIS BODY IS ESSENTIAL

In Colossians 3:15, Paul penned these inspiring words, "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful." That one body Paul speaks of is the church which belongs to Christ, over which he is the head (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22). Christ in the Savior of that one body (Eph. 5:25). As Christians we are members of His body and are therefore subject unto Him (1 Cor. 12:12; Eph. 5:24). It is in this spiritual body that we are reconciled unto God (Eph. 2:16).

If the church is not essential to salvation there in nothing for us to be called into. There would be nothing for Christ to be head over, no body for him to save. There would be no spiritual body function for us to perform. If the church is not essential there in no place for us to be reconciled to God.

TO BE IN THE FAMILY IS ESSENTIAL

The reference to the church as the house of God emphasizes its necessity. Peter reminds us of our close relationship to God, "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" (1 Pet. 4:17). *House* has reference to *family* as used in Joshua 24:15, "an for me and my house we will serve the Lord." Noah "prepared an ark to the saving of his house" (Heb. 11:7). The

house of God is a “spiritual house” made up of “lively stones” (1 Pet. 2:5). We become children of God’s spiritual family by being “born again” (John 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:23). This spiritual birth is called baptism (Gal. 3:26-27). The house of God is the church and as God’s family it behaves itself as he directs. “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). If the church is not essential to salvation then we have no need to be in God’s household because no one is a stranger or foreigner to God (Eph. 2:19). If the church is not essential to salvation then there is no citizenship in the family of God and we therefore cannot be heirs as His children (Rom. 8:17).

IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT WE BE MARRIED TO CHRIST

The church as the spiritual body is married to Christ and bound by the spiritual laws of matrimony.

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 (Rom. 7:4).

As members of the church of Christ we enjoy the beautiful benefits of the closest relationship possible to Christ.

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 an the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it (Eph. 5:23-25).

How invalid the comparison if the church is not essential. We could be saved without being married to Christ. We would be saved without being subject to Him. Our salvation would not be dependent on His love for us. The groom is coming after his bride and none other. The church is that bride He has sanctified and cleansed, “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. 5:27). Thus, the church will be prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev. 21:2). How could anyone say the church is nonessential?

LABOR IN HIS VINEYARD IS ESSENTIAL

The kingdom or church of our Lord is described as a vineyard in Matthew 20:1. It is necessary to have laborers in that vineyard (vv. 1-16). It is from that background that the apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth and said, "For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry" (1 Cor. 3:9). If one can be saved without being in the church he can be saved without working in the vineyard. How meaningless the Lord's parable becomes with such thinking.

THE PURCHASE PRICE IS ESSENTIAL

If the church is not essential to salvation then one can be saved without the blood of Christ. He purchased the church with His blood (Acts 20:28). Tell the Lord the church He promised to build (Mat. 16:18) is not really important. While you are informing Him that His church is nonessential, go ahead and tell Him you still expect remission of sins. My friends, "without shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb. 9:22). Tell the Lord you will gladly accept His love, forgiveness, justification and salvation from wrath but not His church. How much more inconsistent, irreverent and ungrateful could a person be?

THE CHURCH IS ESSENTIAL

The church cannot be triumphant if salvation does not reside therein. This truth is nowhere illustrated better than in Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus. Before the Ephesians were added to the church they were "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1, 5). They were living in the world and ruled by Satan and according to the flesh (Eph. 2:2-3). They were children of wrath (Eph. 2:3). They were aliens separated from Christ (Eph. 2:12). They had no hope and were without God in the world (Eph. 2:12). Paul draws a sharp contrast in what the Ephesians *were* and what they *are* now in Christ. They are made alive in Christ (Eph. 2:5). They are saved by His grace (Eph. 2:8). They are now reconciled unto God in one body by the cross (Eph. 2:16). I wonder how nonessential the Ephesians thought the church was? They are now fellow citizens with the saints (Eph. 2:19). They are now built on the sure foundation of

Christ (Eph. 2:20). They were important stones that helped put together an holy temple for an habitation of God (Eph. 2:20-22). They were truly part of a spiritually triumphant institution. You would never convince those who had experienced such a change that the blood of Christ was not really necessary to bring about such a change. You would never convince them the gospel they had *heard* and *believed* was not necessary to their salvation (Eph. 1:3). You would have never convinced these folks that their *repentance* was not really essential to their salvation (Acts 20:21; 19:18-19). You would not have convinced these brethren they could have been saved without being *baptized* into Christ (Acts 19:1-5; Eph. 5:26). Nor would you ever have convinced these saints at Ephesus that they could be saved outside the church that their Lord had added the saved to (Acts 2:47). It would have been totally futile to try and convince them they could be saved in any other church than the *one* Christ promised to build (Mat. 16:18); which He died for (Acts 20:28); over which He is the head (Eph. 1:22-23). They knew there was but one (Eph. 4:4). On that all were so convinced on such matters. The church of Christ is just as triumphant today and still is essential to the salvation of the souls of mankind. Let us enter it, love it, support it, proclaim it, never harm it and be determined to die in it!

THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT— WHAT IS ITS RELATIONSHIP TO CHURCHES OF MEN?

Roy Deaver



Graduate of Freed-Hardeman College, Abilene Christian University, National Christian University. Founding President of Forth Worth Christian College and Academy. Has preached the gospel for 50 years (1990), with 35 of those years having been spent in the classroom, training men to preach the gospel.

Debater and Author. Founder, Editor, and Publisher of *Biblical Notes* and related publications. Former Vice-President and professor in Tennessee Bible College, Cookeville, Tennessee.

Assistant Editor of *Firm Foundation*. Devotes much of his time to writing and publishing in connection with the gospel.

SOME CRUCIAL QUESTIONS

As we study together “The Church Triumphant—What Is Its Relationship To The Churches Of Men?” I will be keeping in mind some very important questions.

1. Is the Lord’s church a denomination?
2. Should the Lord’s church have fellowship with the denominations of men?
3. Does God approve of denominations?
4. Should the church be not only non-denominational but also anti-denominational?
5. What about the Disciples of Christ? What about the Christian Church?
6. Are Christians narrow-minded and unkind in their view of denominations?
7. How may Christians reach their religious neighbors with the saving gospel?

8. Is compromise the answer? Should we just “go along in order to get along”? Should we just adopt an attitude of “grace only”? Should we just adopt pure existential philosophy?

Should we just act and teach as if “it really doesn’t make any difference anyhow?”

IS THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH A “DENOMINATION”?

Before we can give correct and satisfactory answer, hereas is so often the case—we must be careful to define. Voltaire said. “Before I will discuss anything with you, you must define your terms.” This is a very important lesson.

The basic concept in the word “denominate” is that of naming. To “denominate” is “to name.” That which has been named thus becomes “denominated.” So, the dictionary says: “To call by name... having a specific name...a class, or society of individuals called by the same name....” This is what the dictionary says; but—remember—that the dictionary is an “historian,” not a “legislature.” It simply records how people at certain times use certain words.

If “designation” or “naming” is the sense in which we are using the word “denominate” or “denomination,” then we simply point out that the Bible itself has already taken care of this matter. The New Testament has “denominated” members of the Lord’s church. They are Christians. They are brothers and sisters in Christ. They are members of the Lord’s body. They are fellow-citizens with the saints. They are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.

Further, the church itself is referred to by various descriptives. It is called “the church.” It is “the church of the Lord.” It is “the church of God.” It is the “church of the firstborn ones who are enrolled in heaven.” It is the body of Christ. It is the bride of Christ. It is the temple of God. It is the family of God. It is the kingdom of the Christ. Several or many congregations were “churches of Christ” (Rom. 16:16). So, each one was a “church of Christ.” Each of these names and each of these descriptives contains a tremendously important lesson stressing something very special with regard to the nature of the Lord’s church.

But, from another viewpoint, a “denomination” is a *part* of something—not even claiming to be or intending to be the *whole* thing. But, the New Testament church was not (and it is not) a *part* of anything. Rather, it *was*, and consequently it *is*, *the whole thing!* The dictionary also defines “denomination” as being “a religious organization uniting in a single legal and administrative body a number of local congregations” (*Webster’s Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*, p. 221). So far as concerns organizational structure as a functioning entity there is nothing larger in the New Testament than the local church (the local congregation). Brother N. B. Hardeman often stressed that a “denomination” is a religious organization (1) containing more than one local congregation, but (2) not even claiming to be the universal church, and to which situation the word “church” as used in the New Testament is not properly applicable. Here, I am not quoting brother Hardeman, but simply summarizing some points he often made. Too, in this connection, I would point out that in Acts 9:31 the American Standard Version uses the word “church” in reference to all the congregations in Judaea and Galilee and Samaria. The King James reading is “churches.” The Textus Receptus has “hai ekklasiai” (the churches).

SOME NOTES ON THE VICTORIOUS CHURCH

As is recorded in Matthew 16:18 the Lord promised, “Upon this rock”—that is, upon Himself, the tested, tried, proved solid stone, the sure foundation, of *Isaiah 28:16*—“I will build my church.” The Lord added. “and the gates of hell [hades]”—all the hateful and opposing powers of the unseen world—“shall not prevail against her”—shall not be strong to overcome her! All the powers of Rome, of death, of the hadean realm, of the devil himself could not and would not keep Him from establishing His church, His kingdom, and not one of these powers nor all of them combined could ever be victorious over this divine institution which He here promised to build.

“Prevail” here is the future active indicative, third person plural of the Greek *katischhuo* (which *is kata*), the basic notion of which is “down,” plus *ischuo*, which means to have strength to overcome. It is interesting to observe that when the angry mob with loud voices

demanded that the Lord be crucified, Luke records that “their voices prevailed” (Luke 23:23). “Prevailed” here is the same Greek word that we have in Matthew 16:18. Their voices “prevailed.” They did succeed in getting the Lord to be crucified. But *they did not succeed in keeping Him from establishing His Church/His Kingdom!*

The writer of Hebrews (rather, the Holy Spirit) stresses that those in the Christ have not come to Mount Sinai; but rather

ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn [ones] who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men **standing right now in the position of having been made perfect** [perfect passive participle], and to **Jesus** the mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than the blood of Abel (12:22-24).

Then, with this same divine institution in mind, in verse 28, the writer calls it “a kingdom that cannot be shaken.”

Daniel 7:13-14. Daniel saw prophetically the Son of man ascending upon the wings of the clouds, to the very presence of God. Daniel says: “And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him.” Daniel continued. “his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.”

Let it be pointed out here that this does not mean that the Lord’s church/kingdom could not be troubled or even temporarily defeated. In this same chapter of Daniel’s prophecy, in the discussion about the “fourth beast” and “the ten horns that were in his head” Daniel said: “I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them.” “Prevailed” here, in the Septuagint, is a form of the same Greek word we have in Matthew 16:18. The saints could be, and would be, perhaps often, temporarily defeated, but the church/kingdom could not be destroyed.

And, in fact, this takes us to the Revelation. In chapter 6, verse 9, in connection with the opening of the fifth seal, John “saw underneath the altar the souls of them that had been slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held.” This is a scene of *defeat*. As we continue to study through the book we watch the

great battle between the church and the world, between the Christ and Satan. In chapter 20, after the defeat of the beast and the false prophet and the dragon (Satan), we are given a picture of these same souls *on thrones*: “**and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.**” This is a scene of victory. Taking these souls out from under the altar and placing them upon the thrones, reigning with the Christ, is “the first resurrection” victory of the Christ and His saints.

A key word in the Revelation is the Greek *vikao*, which means: I overcome, I conquer. Great and wonderful promises are made “to the overcoming one.” As we study through chapters 5 through 11 we are studying about the constant, ongoing battle between the world and the church (especially during the time of the persecution of the church by the Roman Empire). As we study chapters 12 through 20 we are studying this same conflict but from the viewpoint of concentration upon the leaders in this ongoing conflict—that is, the Christ and Satan and those through whom Satan does his work. What a beautiful picture is given us in 19:11-16.

And I saw the heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and he that sat thereon called Faithful and True; and in righteous he doth judge and make war. And his eyes *are* a flame of fire, and upon his head *are* many diadems; and he hath a name written which no one knoweth but he himself. And he *is* arrayed in a garment sprinkled with blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white *and* pure. And out of his mouth proceedeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of God, the Almighty. And he hath on his garment and on his thigh a name written, **KINGS OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS**

Clearly the rider of the white horse is the Christ Himself And the “white horse” is the symbol of victory. The beast and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat upon the white horse, and against his army. “And the **beast** was taken, and with him the **false prophet**...they two were cast alive into the lake of fire that burneth with brimstone.” Only the *dragon* (the devil, Satan) was left, and he was taken. Finally, he “was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where are also the beast and the false prophet; and they shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Rev. 20: 10). Then, in verses 11-15 (chap-

ter 20) we are given the “great white throne” scene, clearly a judgment scene. Next, John saw “a new heaven and a new earth. for the first heaven and the first earth are passed away. Then, John saw “the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.” John

heard a great voice out of the throne saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his peoples, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God: and he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more: the first things are passed away. And he that sitteth on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he saith: Write: for these words are faithful and true...I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit these things: and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

Whatever else may be included in the beautiful symbolism thus set forth, the message given had to have some significant meaning to those to whom the book was first addressed—those saints of God undergoing the horrible persecution by the Roman Empire. The symbolism may reach out to include points and thoughts even of the final judgment and of heaven for the faithful and hell for the wicked, but the basic message intended was: *There is Marvelous Victory in Jesus!* The closing chapters of the Revelation emphasize *the triumphant church of our Lord*.

So, we say with Paul:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Even as it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; We were accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are **more than conquerors through him that loved us** (Rom. 8:35-37).

THE UNDENOMINATIONAL NATURE OF THE LORD’S CHURCH

God’s “Eternal Purpose” included the church of our Lord (Eph. 3:10-11). It was in the mind of God before He created the heavens and the earth and man. In the Old Testament records, in type and shadow and copy and figure, we are given glimpses of the New Testament church. Through the Old Testament prophets God often

talked about the New Testament church. We stand amazed and fascinated as we study “The Church the Prophets Saw.”

In Matthew 16:18 it is recorded that the Lord said. “Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” What a tremendous promise! At other times and places the Lord specified the time, the place, and the circumstances relating to the establishment of His church on the earth.

It is generally agreed among men that the Lord promised to build, to establish, His church. It is generally agreed (among those who respect the Bible) that the Lord did, in fact, establish His church upon this earth. It is generally agreed that it is in Acts, chapter 2, that we have the Bible record of the establishment of the Lord’s church, and that *Acts of Apostles* records the, beginning and early growth of the New Testament church.

Likewise, it is generally agreed that the Lord’s church *does now exist* upon this earth, among men. However, most people do not know enough about the Bible to be able to recognize it, if and when they should come in contact with it. Most people, including many of its members, would not know how to proceed to establish a congregation of God’s people in a new place. Millions of people—honest, sincere—hold that the numerous, varied, contradictory religious bodies of the world—somehow—in some indefinite, vague, inexplicable way, make up the Lord’s church. There is in our world an appalling, inexcusable ignorance of the nature and mission and identity of the Lord’s church.

But, the plain truth of the matter is that the church which our Lord established was not and it is not a denominational body. In fact, the New Testament, in an approving sense, knows nothing about denominationalism. It forthrightly condemns every false way, every departure from the truth. Yet, generally, religious matters are thought of in terms of denominationalism. This fact clearly and powerfully illustrates how far men have departed from the divine plan.

There are various preachers who speak of themselves as being “non-denominational.” What they mean is that they are “all-denominational”—they want to work with everybody, regardless! This is

not what we have in mind. By “undenominational Christianity” we simply mean that the New Testament church was not and it is not a denomination. It is this particular point to which I want to give special emphasis at this time.

THE PRESENT GENERAL VIEW

As previously indicated, we live in a time and situation in which religious matters are generally thought of in terms of denominationalism. The Lord’s church was established in Jerusalem. *Acts of Apostles* sets out its marvelous growth: numerical, geographical, spiritual, ethnological. The pure gospel was preached and practiced, and thousands became simple New Testament Christians. But, even in its early days there were evidences that men would turn away from the faith. Powerful warnings were issued. The sad story is that apostasy did come. Men departed from the divine plan, God’s plan.

Roman Catholicism is a religious system which developed out of this state of apostasy from the original gospel, the original church. This is the kind of apostasy Paul talked about in Acts 20-30-31. Many years later came the “Protestant Reformation.” The present protestant denominational bodies grew out of the labors of the Reformers. Now, there are more than three hundred denominational bodies in America, all claiming to be ways of salvation, and generally claiming to be a part of the invisible, universal church. Men, somehow, have drawn the conclusion that the one, true, invisible, universal church is made up of all these various denominational bodies.

Many years ago I received a letter signed by several preachers for different religious bodies, inviting me to attend a planned “unity” meeting. In their letter these men spoke of “Christians of every obedience,” and they referred to “prayer to God that He may restore the visible unity of His church.” They talked about “the separated brethren in Christ.” To these men the various religious bodies are “Christians of varied obedience,” “separated brethren,” parts of the Lord’s church.

The present generally accepted view could be represented by a circle, consisting of varied component parts or conical segments. The circle would represent the invisible, the universal church, each

segment would represent a complete, fully developed and organized denominational body.

What I want us to see in the present lesson is *the fact that there is nothing like this in the Bible!*

THE BIBLE VIEW

So far as concerns the present study, the word “church” is used in the New Testament in two senses. Sometimes reference is made to the universal church, as in Matthew 16:18; Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 5:25. In fact, it is used in this sense eighteen times. Sometimes reference is made to a local congregation, as in Acts 8:1; Acts 11:22; Acts 13:1; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:2; Revelation 1:11. In this (local congregation sense) the word “church” is used ninety-four times.

A denominational body is larger than a local congregation, since that denomination consists of many local congregations. Yet, a denomination is smaller than the universal church, not even claiming to be the universal church, but only to be a *part* of it. Hence, a denomination is something to which the New Testament word “church” (in connection with God’s people) does not properly apply.

Each New Testament church (congregation)—(1) was *organized* the same way; (2) wore the same *name*; (3) *worshipped* in the same manner; (4) was *governed* by the same book, (5) taught the same *doctrine*; (6) *practiced* the same thing; (7) preached the same *conditions* of salvation. New Testament churches were not a part of some denominational body.

So, with reference to our circle, let’s look at the situation again. We would take out the names of various denominational groups and replace these with local congregations: as, the church in Jerusalem, or the church in Antioch, or the church in Ephesus, or the church in Corinth. This is God’s plan, God’s will—each local congregation independent of each and every other local congregation, each organized as God has instructed, each wearing the same name, worshipping in the same way, following the same divine pattern, teaching the same thing, believing the same thing, practicing the same thing, being the same thing.

THE BIBLE VIEW ILLUSTRATED

1. In Acts 2 we have the Bible record of the conversion of many present on Pentecost. Peter preached a wonderful sermon (vv. 14-36). People were brought to believe (v. 37). The people, knowing they were not saved by “faith only,” asked what they should do (v. 37). Peter told them: “Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (v. 38). They that “gladly received his word were baptized” (v. 41). “And there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls” (v. 41).

When these people learned what they learned, and did what they did, what were they? What did they become? Were they saved? Were they children of God? Were they members of the Lord’s church? Were they members of some denomination? If so, which one?

2. In Acts 8:26-39 we have the record of the conversion of the nobleman of Ethiopia. This man was honest, religious, sincere, studious. He was a member of the cabinet of Queen Candace, the man who had charge of all her treasure. While he was returning to his home in Ethiopia he was studying the Bible. He was reading from Isaiah 53. Philip, in God’s power and providence, preached the pure gospel to this man. The man was brought to believe in the Christ. He requested that he might be baptized. He confessed his faith in the Christ. He was baptized. He went on his way rejoicing—rejoicing because of (1) what he learned, (2) what he did, (3) what he was, and (4) the blessings which were now his.

When this man learned what he learned, and did what he did, what was he? What did he thus become? Was he a child of God? Was he a member of the Lord’s church? Was he a member of some denomination? If so, which one? Is it possible for one to be saved, to become a child of God, to become and be a member of the Lord’s church, to live a faithful Christian life and go to heaven when this life is over, and never be a member of a denomination? If I learn what this man learned, believe what he believed, do what he did—what will I be? Will I be the same thing he was? Will I be a member of the same church of which he became a member?

3. In Acts 9, Acts 22, and Acts 26 we have the record of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. This man, too, was religious, zealous, honest, sincere, conscientious. But wrong! This man learned about the Christ, came to believe upon him, genuinely repented of his sins, and was baptized to wash away his sins (Acts 22:16).

When this man learned what he learned and did what he did, what was he? What did he thus become? Was he saved? Did he thus become a child of God? Was he a member of some denominational body? Is it possible that I can learn what he learned and do what he did and become a member of the same church of which he became a member? Was he a member of the same church of which those on Pentecost became members?

4. Many, many years ago, during the distressing days of the un-Civil war, in northern Kentucky, two preachers of different denominations (Methodist and Baptist) decided to hold a meeting together. In view of their denominational differences they agreed that they would not preach their peculiar denominational doctrines, but that they would preach the Bible and the Bible only. For purposes of illustration, let's suppose that they kept their word, and that they did all things according to the New Testament. It is recorded that in that meeting there were thirty "converts." If and when these had heard the pure gospel, and had responded according to its teachings, what were they? What did they thus become? Were they saved?

After the meeting was over each of the thirty converts was allowed (and urged) to join the denomination which he preferred. Ten persons (converts) joined the Methodist denomination, and ten others (converts) joined the Baptist denomination. That left *ten*. Ten *what*? These refused to join either the Methodists or the Baptists or any other denomination. They determined to remain simple New Testament Christian, members of the Lord's church, and to continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine. What were these?

We have sought to emphasize that the New Testament church was not and that it is not a denomination; that New Testament Christianity was not and that it is not denominational in nature. In this connection we have considered. (1) the general view, (2) the Bible view, and (3) some illustrations of the Bible view.

The absolute absurdity of denominationalism is illustrated in the following. It is claimed that Christ *is in* and *is the author of* the various denominations of the world, and the numerous doctrines which they teach. Several years ago, in Vernon, Texas, I was studying with a young man who was doing his best to defend denominationalism. In his thinking, each denomination just had to be right(!) and all right in the sight of God. In a Sunday morning Bible class, and after he had had his say in this regard, I stepped to the chalk board, and placed upon it the following material.

Religious Body	/	Baptism	/	Lord's Supper	/	Apostasy
Baptists:		immersion only		close communion		can't fall
Methodist:		sprinkling acceptable		open communion		can fall

When reference to this diagram I asked the young man: “Suppose I told you that I believe both views on these subjects indicated. Suppose I told you that I believe that baptism is by immersion only, but that I also believe that sprinkling is all right. Suppose I told you that I believe in ‘close’ (closed) communion, but that I also believe in ‘open’ communion. Suppose I told you that I believe that a child of God cannot so sin as to fall from God’s favor, but that I also believe that a child of God *can* so sin as to fall from God’s favor. What would you say?” He did not hesitate for one second. He said. “You would be a hypocrite!” I said to him: “And yet you want me to accept the view that God is the author of both views on these subjects!” Shortly thereafter this man was baptized into Christ.

It is generally understood that Peter and Paul were Christians—members of the Lord’s church—and were not members of any denomination. Why can’t people be content to be members of the Lord’s church *now*?

We must believe and obey the same gospel as was believed and obeyed 2000 years ago.

THE SYMBOL AT MIDWAY

As we proceed in this series of studies I am keeping in mind the questions which brother Liddell sent to me. We are now in better position to answer his questions with regard to denominationalism. But, some of his questions related specifically to “Christian Churches,” “Disciples of Christ,” and “Independent Christian Churches.” Much of what has been said about denominationalism applies with equal force to these. Some of these seem themselves as being another denomination among the many denominations. And in all these three different groups there are numerous errors—many doctrines and practices out of harmony with the New Testament Teaching. But, especially because these have a background in Restoration History, I want to record here two articles which I wrote and published in *Biblical Notes* of May 1976. The first in, “The Symbol At Midway,” and the second is: “If You Have the Rogers Diary.” Here is the first article.

Congregations involved in the great Restoration plea had recognized and had respected the fact that the music of the early church (as set out in the New Testament) was singing, and that the singing was without mechanical accompaniment.

As early as 1851 there was a brief flare-up of the matter in Kentucky. Aylette Raines was preaching at Millersburg, Kentucky, and was in the habit of keeping a dairy. On April 27, 1851, Raines wrote: “Bro. S(aunders) wishes to introduce the melodeon into the church.” The first issue of the *American Christian Review* was sent out in January of 1856. It was edited by Benjamin Franklin, and was “destined to play an important role in the future struggle over instrumental music.” (See Earl West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, Vol. I, pp. 306-317).

The subject of instrumental music did not come up again before the brotherhood until 1860. In response to an article written by Benjamin Franklin, L. L. Pinkerton of Midway, Kentucky wrote Franklin as follows: “So far as known to me, or I presume, to you, I am the only preacher in Kentucky of our brotherhood who has publicly advocated the propriety of employing instrumental music

in *some* churches, and that the church in Midway is the only church that has yet made a decided effort to introduce it.”

Thus, the use of instrumental music and the church at Midway, Kentucky have been connected in the thinking of persons acquainted with restoration history from that day to the present. The suggestion to use the instrument did not come from Pinkerton himself, although the persons responsible undoubtedly knew his opinion and that he would not oppose its introduction.

The introduction of the instrument owed its inception—at least in part—to the deplorable singing the congregation did. Song-practice meetings were held on Saturday nights. A melodeon was brought in to get the right pitch. Later, one of the sisters was accompanying the singing with the melodeon. It was then decided to use the instrument in the Lord’s Day worship.

One of the elders, Adam Hibler, strongly opposed the instrument. He took one of his colored slaves, named Reuben, one night, and helped him through the window of the meeting house. Reuben passed the melodeon through the window, and Hibler took it to his home. Another instrument was later brought in, and was allowed to stay. Hence, the church in Midway, Kentucky is the first congregation on record to use the instrument—the first to adopt its use.

May we emphasize in this connection that when mechanical instruments of music were introduced to the destruction of peace among brethren that the real issue *was not instrumental music at all!* Rather, as someone has well expressed the matter: “This was just the horse upon which the real issue rode out.” The real issue is involved in the questions: (1) What is the correct (scriptural) attitude toward the Bible and its authority? (2) How does God authorize? (3) How do men ascertain Biblical authority? (4) Recognizing the Bible as being the inspired, the infallible, the inerrant, the allsufficient Word of the Living God, is it the case that we can do anything and everything *not specifically and directly condemned in the Word of God?* (5) Or, is it the case that—to be pleasing to God—we must do *only that for which there is Bible authority?* (6) What are the limitations inherent in walking by faith?

This is the starting point in the study of mechanical instrumental music in Christian worship. This is the starting point in our discussions with others. The answer to this question involves the basic difference between Churches of Christ and the Christian Churches (including Disciples of Christ and Independent Christian Churches). And, in fact, the answer to this question sets out the difference between the Churches of Christ and the rest of the religious world.

This melodeon which was introduced into the worship at Midway, Kentucky, under the influence of L. L. Pinkerton, is now housed in the library of Midway College. It is kept in a glass case, and is treated by its keepers as if it deserved special respect. A hand-out piece of literature says the old melodeon "...occupies a position of honor...."

On Wednesday morning, April 7, 1976, I stood in the library at Midway and saw his old melodeon. The glass case was removed that it might be viewed even better. As we stood there upon that occasion I thought long and hard about the attitude toward Biblical authority which this melodeon represents. How different things could have been and would have been if brethren *had not changed their attitude toward* (1) the necessity of our having Bible authority, and (2) how Biblical authority is established.

From the library we went to the Pinkerton home, and to the church building where the instrument was introduced. Pinkerton's picture fills one of the stained-glass windows. As we left the old church building that day—where services are still being conducted by the Christian Church—I picked up a copy of their most recent bulletin. It makes reference to the "morning chimes," the "processional Hymn," the "Choral Amen and Chimes." The bulletin says: "We bid you welcome to this sanctuary today: it in our Father's house. We erect no bars whatsoever, and any and all phases of the church's life and service are open to all." Note carefully: "...no bars whatsoever!"

The instrument in 1860, and *now*, "no bars whatsoever."

Would to God that—somehow—our own brethren could come to appreciate fully the significance of the *symbol of apostasy at Midway*.

This additional note. In his *Handbook of Denominations*, Frank S. Mead (on page 77) says about “the Christian Church”—“Their interpretation of Bible teaching might be called evangelical, but no sincere follower of Christ is barred from their membership because of difference in theological belief Open Communion is practiced, baptism is considered a duty, but it is not required; immersion is used generally, but any mode may be employed.”

Now, let’s proceed to the second article—

IF YOU HAVE THE ROGERS’ DIARY...

From April 5-8 (1976) it was my privilege to accompany our students of the Brown Trail Preacher Training School on our annual Restoration History Tour. This trip each year is a very important part of our Restoration History course. We intend for our men to know and to appreciate the lives and the works of the great gospel preachers who have gone before. We travelled by chartered Silver Eagle bus, and it was a delightful experience.

On Thursday morning, April 8, we were at Cane Ridge, Kentucky. We engaged in wonderful worship to God—in the beautiful old historic Cane Ridge meeting house. It was my privilege to preach a short sermon from the pulpit occupied so long by the great Barton W. Stone.

Before our period of worship, Dr. Hoke Dickinson, Curator of Cane Ridge, spoke about the history of the old building, the grounds, the cemetery, and the museum. He explained that through the years various changes had been made in the old building, but that in 1932 it was determined to put the building back to its original condition. This was done without difficulty since the timbers (which had been removed) had been well-preserved.

One problem arose: what did the pulpit area look like? How was it constructed? What were its dimensions? It was remembered by those working on the building that they possessed the diary of William Rogers. A beautiful old tombstone in the Cane Ridge Cemetery says that William Rogers united with the church of Christ at Cane Ridge in 1807. William Rogers had meticulously kept a diary of the events and services at Cane Ridge. (I saw this old diary, and the details are amazing.) This old diary contains minute details as to

how the pulpit was constructed, its dimensions, the steps, the entrances, and what it looked like. By following the details of this diary the workers were able to restore completely the old Cane Ridge pulpit.

At this point I stood up in the assembly made up of our group, and asked Dr. Dickinson to repeat—word for word—what he had said about restoring the pulpit area. He willingly did so. Then I sought to emphasize to our students: ‘This is the perfect illustration of the principle we are concerned about—the principle of *restoring the New Testament Church*. If you have the Rogers’ Diary you can reproduce the pulpit! And, in this book—the New Testament—we have the Rogers’ Diary.

BACK TO OUR QUESTIONS

Now, let’s go back and quickly deal with the questions brother Bobby asked me to deal with.

1. Is the Lord’s church a denomination? Answer. No.
2. Should the Lord’s church have fellowship with the denominations of men? Answer Absolutely not! We are specifically instructed. “and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather even reprove them” (Eph. 5:11). The Greek word here translated “reprove” literally means to “convict.” Elders are to “exhort in the sound doctrine” and “to convict” the gainsayers (Tit. 1:9). Same word. We are likewise specifically instructed:

mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which ye learned. and turn away from them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Christ, but their own belly; and by their smooth and fair speech they beguile the hearts of the innocent (Rom. 16:17-18).
3. Does God approve of denominations? Absolutely not, These are false religions—founded in error, and maintained in error. These are steadfastly opposed to God’s will, God’s plan, God’s church. These are agents of Satan.
4. Should the church be not only non-denominational but also anti-denominational? Yes, the Lord’s church must be un-denominational, non-denominational, and anti-denominational. Why is it that we steadfastly refuse to do the job

which the Lord requires of us? to steadfastly oppose, fight, any and every false religion? We need to consider carefully 2 Timothy 3:12. If we did our job, *there would be constant persecution.*

5. What about the Disciples of Christ? What about the Christian Church? We have considered these. They, too, are steeped in false doctrines. They refuse to “walk in the old paths,” and to call men back to the ancient gospel. There can be no fellowship as long as they refuse to repent of their sins and to return to the pure gospel.
6. Are Christians narrow-minded and unkind in their view of denominations? We are often accused of being “narrow-minded” and “unkind.”

Was the Lord “narrow-minded” when he stressed: “Enter ye in by the narrow gate. for wide is the gate and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many are they that enter in thereby. For narrow is the gate, and straitened the way, that leadeth unto life, and few are they that find it” (Mat. 7:13-14)? Was He narrowminded when he said. “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. no one cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6)? When He said: “Every plant which my heavenly Father planted not, shall be rooted up” (Mat. 15:13)? Was Peter narrow-minded when he said. “And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved” (Acts 4:12)? Was Paul narrow-minded when he said: “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all” (Eph. 4:4-6)?

If the Lord and Peter and Paul were narrow-minded, then I want to be just as narrow-minded as they were. If they were very exclusive in their teaching, then I must be very exclusive. And, yet, I want to keep in mind that this “narrow way” is broad enough and big enough to include very person who wants to be right in the sight of God. Too, we want to be

mighty careful to be honest, sincere, straight-forward, true to the Book—without being obnoxious, hateful, unkind.

7. How may Christians reach their religious neighbors with the saving gospel? Answer: Always be loving and concerned. Always live according to the gospel. This is a powerful evangelistic force (cf., Mat. 5:14-16). Always be willing and anxious to uphold the right and to oppose the wrong. Often it is possible and very helpful to show special concern for the children. Be careful to make effective use of written material. Be anxious to make effective use of every teaching opportunity.
8. Is compromise the answer? Should we just “go along in order to get along?” Should we just adopt an attitude of “grace only”? Should we just adopt plain old existential philosophy? Should we just act and teach as if “it really doesn’t make any difference anyhow?”

The answers to these questions are obvious. Many brethren have, in fact, adopted some of all of the attitudes indicated in the questions. There can be no justifiable compromise with sin. The Bible does not teach the doctrine of “grace only.” Existential philosophy is contrary to Bible teaching. The Bible does not teach that “Right is whatever pleases you.” Truth—the truth, the whole truth—does make a difference. It makes all the difference in the world—not only in relationship to time, but also in relationship to eternity.

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THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT— MUST IT WEAR A SCRIPTURAL NAME?

Stephen Law



He and his wife, the former Jane Marie Mackey, have two children: Joshua Seldon and Ginger Marie. Stephen has served churches in Tennessee, Alabama and Georgia and currently preaches for the church at Rockmart, Georgia. He is a 1985 graduate of Memphis School of Preaching and has also studied at Freed-Hardeman University, Technical School in Crossville, Tennessee and the University of Tennessee. His work as a preacher has included radio and television experience.

The subject for this study is “The Church Triumphant—Must It Wear a Scriptural Name?” The church and the name which it must wear has been a topic of much discussion for many years among our brethren. It will be the purpose of this study to examine what God has said in the Bible about names to be used for His Son’s church. Also a section will be given to reveal quotations from past preachers on this matter. The study will follow the points given here.

INTRODUCTION: We must speak as the oracles of God.

- I. NAMES ARE IMPORTANT TO GOD.
 1. Old Testament names that show this.
 2. New Testament names that show this.
 3. A new name to be given by God.
- II. A WORD STUDY OF *EKKLESIA* GIVEN.
 1. *Ekklesia*, what does it mean?
 2. Church, what does it mean?
 3. Are there other words for *ekklesia*?
- III. MAN-MADE NAMES ARE NOT SCRIPTURAL
 1. Man-made names are not scriptural.

2. Names must give honor to Christ.
3. Man-made names do not honor Christ.

IV. DESIGNATIONS GIVEN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT FOR THE CHURCH.

1. Various New Testament names which are given.
2. Quotations from past preachers on the use of New Testament names for the church.

CONCLUSION: The church must wear a scriptural name if it is to honor Christ and be pleasing to God.

INTRODUCTION

As one examines both Testaments of the Bible, he learns that man must follow the Word of God or the pattern given by Deity. Moses instructed Israel to follow the Word of God in Deuteronomy 5:1-3. Later he wrote by divine inspiration. "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it" (Deu. 12:32). The same warning is given by Solomon in Proverbs 30:6. In the New Testament it is given by John in Revelation 22:18-19.

For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

Paul and Peter wrote similar warnings in Galatians 1:7-9 and 1 Peter 4:11. Therefore we must always study sacred things with the honor and respect due God and His inspired Word.

NAMES ARE IMPORTANT TO GOD

Often is heard the saying, "There is nothing in a name." Many seek to justify any name used by their religion by using this phrase. But the Scriptures tell a different story. They show that names are important.

In the Old Testament, Deity demonstrates divine interests in names. The Lord changed Abram's name to Abraham (Gen. 17:5). Sarai's name was changed to Sarah (Gen. 17:15-16). Jacob's name was changed to Israel after he fought with an angel (Gen. 32:28).

The angel named him Israel which gives glory to God, since it ends with “el,” the Old Testament name for God. Thus it can be seen that in the Old Testament names were important to Deity.

Even in the New Testament God has shown that names are important to Him. When Zacharias and Elizabeth were about to be parents the people wanted the child to be named Zacharias after his father (Luke 1:57-59). God was interested in this child’s name. He sent an angel to Zacharias while he was in the temple and the angel said that the child would be named John (Luke 1:13, 60-64). When the time came for the child to be named, rather than being called Zacharias, both Elizabeth and Zacharias called him John. God was also interested in the name for the Savior of the world. “And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS” (Luke 1:31). Peter tells us that in that name alone is salvation (Acts 4:10-12).

Thus names are important to God. He has changed some and selected others. The following helps us to see that names are important to men as well.

A preacher one time, in a revival, clapped his hands and shouted, “Thank God, there is nothing in a name! nothing in a name!” When an old woman in that audience, who had been Scripturally taught, jumped to her feet, clapped her hands and shouted, “Glory to Beelzebub, the prince of devils,” the preacher and the congregation were shocked, and he immediately rebuked her for giving glory to Beelzebub. But she said, “You say there is nothing in a name. Glory to Beelzebub, the prince of devils.” The preacher’s mouth was closed.¹

In Isaiah 65:15, the prophet foretells of a new name to be given to God’s people. “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.” Add to this Isaiah 56:5 and we learn that to eunuchs the new name will be “a name better than of sons and of daughters” and the same will also be an everlasting name. The messianic prophet again wrote, “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. 62:2). Several items can be gathered from these Scriptures: (1) The Lord would give a new name to His people, (2) The new name would be given by the mouth

of the Lord or by inspiration, (3) The new name would be for all saints, ie., Jew and Gentile, and (4) It would be an everlasting name.

This name prophecy was fulfilled in Acts 11.

Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: 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 (11:25-26).

The new name prophesied is “Christian.” There are some who say this name was given in derision by the enemies of the church. Nothing could be further from the truth. Notice how the Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled by this name given in Antioch. The new name that was to be given by the mouth of the Lord was given when the apostle Paul was in the city. The words “were called” in Acts 11:26 show that God was speaking here. They are translated from *chrematizo* which means “to declare by an oracle.”² It is used also in Luke 2:26, Hebrews 12:25, and Hebrews 8:5 to demonstrate that something was spoken or revealed by God. The disciples were called Christians by the mouth of God through the inspired men, Paul and Barnabas. And the name is still used today by the faithful which shows that the “everlasting” prophecy is still being fulfilled. The Gentiles were in the church according to Acts 10-11 and this fulfills “the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness.” Even the eunuch was rejoicing in Acts 8 after he was baptized and the name is thus “a name better than of sons and of daughters.” Therefore the new name prophecies were accomplished by the giving of the name Christian.

In addition to the previous points, Peter tells a child of God to not be ashamed of suffering as a Christian, “but let him glorify God on this behalf” (1 Pet. 4:16). Would the Holy Spirit inspire Peter to write such if the Word were only spoken in derision by the enemies of Christ? Of course not! Christian is a divine name and proves that God is eternally interested in names. They are not “nothing” to the heavenly Father.

A WORD STUDY OF *EKKLESIA*

Since God is interested in names and names are important to Deity, we should want to know and understand the words used by

Him in the Scriptures for His people today. The meaning of the original words should be examined. This is the object for the study of the Greek word *ekklesia* which is translated “church” in the Bible.

Ekklesia is a compound word. *Ek* means “out of” and *kelsia* is from “kelsis, a calling (kaleo, to Call).”³ Thayer explains the common meaning is:

a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place; an assembly; so used 1. among the Greeks...an assembly of the people convened at the public place of council for the purpose of deliberating Acts xix.39.⁴

In Acts 19:32, 39, and 41 *ekklesia* is used and means “an assembly,” as given above. Thayer continues to point out that *ekklesia* is used in the Septuagint to show when Israel gathered for sacred purposes especially (See Jud. 21:8; 1 Chr. 29:1; etc.). In the New Testament, Stephen used it thus in Acts 7:38 to mean the assembly of Israel in the wilderness who were called out of Egypt. The KJV translators translated it “church” which has caused problems due to some erroneously saying the Lord’s church existed on earth during the Old Testament times. Thayer further states “in the Christian sense, a. an assembly of Christians gathered for worship.”⁵ In other words an assembly or body called out by God’s Word to worship and serve Him.

Does church translate *ekklesia* or should another word be used? Is church unscriptural? No. The etymology of church shows that it is from the Greek word *kyriakon* which means the Lord’s house.⁶ Peter tells Christians that they make up the spiritual house of God. “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:5). Also one of the meanings given for church is “any group of worshippers.” Thus church as used in the New Testament carries the meaning of a group called out by the Word of God. A group which makes up the house of God (1 Cor. 3:9-17; Eph. 2:21-22; Heb. 3:6).

But are there other words which can also translate *ekklesia*? Yes. As seen above, “assembly” is used in Acts 19. Assembly means “a company or collection of individuals in the same place, usually for

the same purpose: an assemblage.”⁷ Another word that can be used is congregation which is “a collection or assemblage of people or things.”⁸ All three words, “church,” “assembly,” and “congregation” are usable for *ekklesia*. Assembly is also translated from *sunagogue* in Acts 13:43. Here it refers to the gathering of the Jews and Gentiles in the city of Antioch of Pisidia. One might conclude that “congregation” should not be used since it does not refer to the church in the Now Testament. But further study of the Old Testament, where it is often used, reveals that congregation is a proper word for *ekklesia*. Congregation in translated from the Hebrew word *qahal* in the Old Testament.

It is translated “assembly” 17 times, “company” 17 times, “congregation” 96 times, and “multitude” 3 times.⁹ When the Septuagint translators were looking for a Greek word for this Hebrew word they selected *ekklesia*. Thus they saw the need for *ekklesia* to be used in place of *qahal*. The KJV translators used “congregation” and “assembly” for *qahal*. Therefore “congregation” and “assembly” are proper translations of *ekklesia*.

MAN-MADE NAMES ARE NOT SCRIPTURAL

Man has always wanted to classify things into variou’s groups. While this in fine in areas of opinion and to some degree in non-religious areas, it is not right in areas where God has selected Bible names and classifications.

The Jews were guilty of using names to divide brethren of their day. Familiar names such an Pharisee, Sadducee, Herodians, and Essen were used. Each group wore its manmade badge with pride. Each held to their teachings as accepted by God (Acts 23). Thus they were divided and God was displeased (Prov. 6:14,19).

The Christians at Corinth were following this practice also. Paul wrote to correct the matter.

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. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I am of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. In

Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Cor. 1:10-13).

Such thinking and usage of names was and is carnal (3:2, 5). Many presently living are carnal in their use of names. They say, “I am Baptist,” “I am Methodist,” “I am Catholic,” etc. Artificial names are wrong because they divide those who proclaim to follow the Bible.

Such designations are wrong too, because they do not show honor to God and Christ. Christians are to honor the Lord’s name (Phi. 2:9-10; Col. 3:17). Denominational designations dishonor Christ and honor man and his methods. Lutherans and Baptiste seek to honor some man by wearing such labels. Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Methodist, and similar terms show honor to a method of religious government or other things. All such names are without authority and should be cast off. Christians should go by Bible based names only. Names authorized by the sacred Scriptures. Even some leaders of various denominations have expressed dissatisfaction with man-made names.

I pray you to leave my name alone, and call not yourselves Lutherans, but Christians. Who is Luther? My doctrine is not mine. I have not been crucified for anyone. St. Paul (1 Cor. 1:13) would not that any should call themselves of Paul nor of Peter, but of Christ. How, then, does it befit me, a miserable bag of dust and ashes, to give my name to the child of God? Cease, my dear friends, to cling to these party names and distinctions; away with them all; and let us call ourselves only Christians after Him from whom our doctrine comes.¹⁰

John Wesley, founder of the Methodist faith said:

Would to God that all party names and unscriptural phrases and forms which have divided the Christian world were forgot, that we might all agree to sit down together an humble, loving disciples at the feet of the common Master, to hear His word, to imbibe His spirit, and to transcribe His life into our own.¹¹

Spurgeon, a Baptist said:

I look forward with pleasure to the day when there will not be a Baptist living. I hope they will soon be gone. I hope the Baptist name will soon perish; but let Christ’s name last forever.¹²

The Bible and these leaders all tell us to put aside manmade names which cause division and wear only scriptural names. Let God and Christ be glorified but not man.

NEW TESTAMENT DESIGNATIONS

In the New Testament is found several scriptural designations to be used by Christians when speaking of the Lord's church. Why cannot everyone just use these and stop seeking to come up with names which are not Bible based? Why not follow the lot century Christians by following "the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42), by "searching the scriptures" (Acts 17:11) and by speaking only "as the oracles of God" (1 Pet. 4:11)? If all would do this, then all would be in one body and would be one with the Lord (John 17).

The New Testament instructs us to be known as the "churches of Christ" (Rom. 16:16); "the church of God" (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 1:2; 11:16, 22; 15:9; 2 Cor. 1:1); "church of the Lord" (Acts 20:28—ASV); "church of the first born" (Heb. 12:23) and even "the church" (Acts 2:47). Other words used for the church are "the body" (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22-23), "kingdom" (Heb. 12:28; Mat. 16:19), God's building" (1 Cor. 3:9) and "the flock" (1 Pet. 5:3). Each of these latter usages describe some characteristic about the Lord's church.

Should one name be used to the exclusion of the others? Should we only go by one name? These questions have been discussed and many voices can be heard about the pros and cons but there is no scriptural authority for using only one Bible name for the body of Christ. "Church of Christ," "church of God...church of the Lord" and other Bible names are all scriptural. Each can be used. The equal use of all scriptural designations needs to be emphasized. We, as a brotherhood, may not have dealt with this enough and thus a generation is growing up or has grown up with misconceptions about Bible names for the church. Some think that only the words "church of Christ" can be scripturally used on signs and stationary. This beautiful designation to some has become equal with saying "Baptist Church," "Methodist Church," and so on. Many see us, that is see the Lord's people, as just a group among other groups and we are all a part of the "Big Invisible Universal Church." This is wrong and a proper Scripture based foundation on the use of sacred names for the church would help to remedy the situation. Christ built only one church (Mat. 16:18). He is the saviour of one church or body (Eph. 5:23; 4:4; 1:22-23). He is the head of only one body (Eph.

1:22-23; Col. 1:18). This one church is given different names in the Bible and it is scriptural to use any one of them when referring to the church.

In the early years of this century, various brethren have sounded a warning to us about names and how we should carefully use them so as not to mislead people. Below are some quotations from these faithful men. These are given to help us again realize the need to get back to the Bible on this subject.

God's people are sometimes described as *the church of God*. A number of congregations are called "churches of Christ" (Rom. 16:16). They are *the church of the first born*, or *the church of the Lord*. Not one of these terms, however, is given as a proper name to be used exclusively. The fact is, we may describe God's family in any way that is in harmony with divine revelation. We may speak of the blood-bought church, the holy church, the universal church, the local church, the church of the saints, or in many other ways.... Trouble ensues and error begins when men take one or more of these terms as *the proper name* of the called out.—H. A. Dixon¹³

While we may use any or all these scriptural designations of the church according to our purpose demands or as our taste dictates, yet if we should exalt and set apart any one of them as *the name of the church*, we would be guilty of a serious error. We would be presumptuously supplementing the word of inspiration, for no inspired man ever gave any name to the church.—G. C. Brewer¹⁴

To use the phrase "church of Christ" as *the name of the Lord's body* is not only to make it a sectarian designation; it is also to exclude the expression church of God and all other scriptural terms that are applied to the people of the Lord.—G. C. Brewer¹⁵

There is no Scriptural name in the New Testament for a denomination, as there is no denomination in the New Testament; and if a denomination were to select a Scriptural name for itself, it would still be an unscriptural institution. I am more concerned about what is in the New Testament than I am for a name for a thing that is not there. Let us be careful not to make the mistake that the church at Corinth made, when to describe them Paul said, "Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas; and I of Christ." (1 Cor. 1:12) Sectarianism, partyism, and all divisions are condemned in the New Testament. "Let no therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things where with one may edify another." (Rom. 14:19)—F. D. Srygley¹⁶

Brother Srygley wrote the above in an editorial after several months of articles on the subject of "church names" were published

both in the *Gospel Advocate* and the *Firm Foundation*. He wanted all to be called by Bible names and to work together for the Lord. It would do no good to reread some of the writings by brethren like F. D. Srygley, David Lipscomb, M. C. Kurfrees and others who battled this years ago.

SUMMARY

God is interested in how we use the Bible which He has given us. He teaches us that names are important to Him. The same tells us to use designations divinely given for the church and not to use artificial ones. Must the church triumphant wear a scriptural name? Yes! May the Father in Heaven help us all to follow the only divinely inspired Word and to live faithfully so that we can have a home in the heavenly city forever is my prayer.

ENDNOTES

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³W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1966), pp. 83-84.

⁴Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1972). pp. 195-196.

⁵Thayer.

⁶*Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (1988), s.v. "Church."

⁷*Ibid.*, s.v. "Assembly."

⁸*Ibid.*, s.v. "Congregation."

⁹Young, *Index-Lexicon to the Old Testament*, p. 36.

¹⁰Crawford, p. 102.

¹¹*Ibid.*

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¹³H. A. Dixon, "The New Testament Church—A Definition," in *Harding College Bible Lectures 1958—The Mission of the Church*, ed. W. B. Went Jr. (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation Pub. House, 1959), p. 5.

¹⁴G. C. Brewer, "The Church," *Gospel Advocate*, March 27, 194 1, p. 290.

¹⁵G. C. Brewer, "Is Not the Church of Christ a Church Among Other Churches?," *Gospel Advocate*, Nov. 20, 1952, p. 759.

¹⁶F. B. Srygley, "Perfect Agreement Reached," *Gospel Advocate*.

THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT THE CHURCH THAT JESUS LOVED

Willie E. Bradshaw



Brother Bradshaw has been preaching since 1976 and has served congregations in Kentucky and Georgia. He and his wife, Linda, have two sons, Patrick and Gregory. He graduated from the Memphis School of Preaching in 1979 and has had additional studies at Freed-Hardeman University. Well known for both his preaching ability and song leading, he has spoken on a number of lectureships and in gospel meetings and youth meetings in several states and has led singing in a number of states also. He has also done mission work in Antigua, West Indies, Freeport Bahamas, South Carolina and West Virginia. Willie has also had experience in radio and television evangelism.

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). “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. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell” (Col. 1:18-19).

CHRIST HAS SHOWN HIS LOVE FOR THE CHURCH

The Lord built the church. “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” (Mat. 16:18).

He died for it: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Eph. 5:25). Christ shed His blood for the church: “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” (Acts 20:28).

An such, he is the Savior of the body, the church: “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).

Christ is the head of the church: “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 church is His body: “And he if; 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).

All of this should prove the love Christ has for the church. I do not believe Christ’s love for the church is the question. The question is how much do we love the church? Let’s take a closer look at the church Christ loved.

REVELATION 1-3

Notice what is said to: *The church at Ephesus*—“I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love?” (Rev. 2:4). *The church at Smyrna*—“I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich)” (Rev. 2:9). *The church at Pergamos*—

But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication (Rev. 2:14).

The church at Thyatira—

Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols (Rev. 2:20).

The church at Sardis—“And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; “I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead” (Rev. 3: 1). *The church at Philadelphia*—“and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name” (Rev. 3:8). *The church at Laodicea*—“I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot” (Rev. 3:15).

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (Rev. 3:22). Let us take a closer look at church Christ loved today.

THE EXTENT OF CHRIST'S LOVE

Christ loved the church that is not so spiritual at the time. We must be more spiritual. Spiritual is what a person is, not only what he does. Being spiritual is a lifestyle as well as an attitude. Just because a person does a few external things, it is not a guarantee that he is spiritual.

Christ loved the church that in still questioning how to carry out the great commission. Jesus said, "Go."

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. (Mat. 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).

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his and his kingdom; Preach the word, be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. 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 tamed unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry (2 Tim. 4:1-5).

Christ loves the church which often questions Hebrews 10:25. Do we have to go to worship? If you call yourself obeying the gospel with the intent of not coming to worship—you have not obeyed all the gospel. "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight" (Acts 20:7). Paul abode at Troas seven days just to come together with the saints and worship. "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). "And all that believed were together, and had all things common" (Acts 2:44). "And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart" (Acts 2:46).

Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: 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 11:25-26).

The key: “If therefore the whole church be come together into one place” (1 Cor. 14:23).

Christ loves the church whose members think their way is better than God’s way. “Children, obey your parents in the Lord. for this is right. Honour thy father and mother, (which is the first commandment with promise;)” (Eph. 6:1-2). “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. but fools despise wisdom and instruction. My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother” (Pro. 1:7-8). “A wise son maketh a glad father. but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother” (Pro. 10:1). “He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth reproofgetteth understanding” (Pro. 15:32). “Her children arise up, and call her blessed, her husband also, and he praiseth her” (Pro. 31:28).

Christ loves the church whose mind is not in tune with God.

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink: Which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him! (Isa. 5:20-23).

“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise” (Pro. 12:15).

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 (Phi. 3:8).

Sometimes when it comes to church work we do not think. Why would we even think about putting a man in the eldership who does not have a wife or children? Why would we even think about making a person a Bible school teacher “just so they can be faithful”? Why are we still trying to see whether the preacher or the olden are in authority? If the Bible is so clear why is the local church so complicated?

Christ loves the church with all its problems, but he will save only the ones who are obedient to His Word and working on correcting their problems. If we really want to be the church Christ loves we shall do the following.

We will follow the path of biblical authority. We must have strong biblical Bible school classes. We must have solid biblical sermons from our pulpits.

We will follow the path of evangelism. We must take the great commission seriously. We need to evangelize our community, teaching others the way of salvation.

We will follow the path of service to others. Jesus, the apostles, and the early church were known for their kindness, compassion and mercy toward those around them.

We will follow the path of love and unity. We grow in our love for one another through constant fellowship. We grow through helping one another. We grow by praying for one another.

We will explore creative ways in which we can accomplish our goals. Where do we go from here? The church that Jesus loved (John 14:1-6; Phi. 4:4-9; Psa. 51:10-12; 2 Cor. 13:11-14).

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THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT— HAS MEMBERS WHO LOVE ONE ANOTHER

Ronnie Hayes



Ronald Ethbert Hayes, was born November 26,1954, in Birmingham, Alabama. Finished High School at Carbon Hill, Alabama, and has since attended Freed-Hardeman College, Memphis School of Preaching and Alabama Christian School of Religion. He married Cynthia Reaves and they have three children: Leah, Kyle and Anna. His first full time work was In Aubrey, Arkansas, where he stayed over six years. From Aubrey, he moved to Barn Creek where he has now started his seventh year.

There is no doubt brotherly love is commanded from God’s inspired Word. “Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous” (1 Pet. 3:8). “Let brotherly love continue” (Heb. 13:1). “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another, as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:34-35).

Seeing these commands, it seems compliance would be simple. However, the subject of brotherly love is one which is abused by many. To give you an illustration, while preaching in another state, I cited Matthew 18:15 to show a brother’s responsibility to another brother. Afterwards, one man let me know Matthew 18:15 did not apply to him! In the case of brotherly love, I can not help but wonder, how many feel like these passages apply to everyone except them? Let us see how to “love as brethren.”

THE MASTER'S LOVE GIVES AN EXAMPLE OF BROTHERLY LOVE

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not” (1 John 3:1). If we can understand the “manner of love the Father hath bestowed,” then we can know how we are to treat one another. Of course, there is no way to exhaust the characteristics of the Master’s love, but for this study we have chosen five.

Cosmic Love. By this, we mean it is universal. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). “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” (Rom. 5:8-9).

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us (1 John 4:7-12).

Isn’t it wonderful our Father loves everyone? It makes no difference if you are black or white, short or tall. God loves you and has provided a way for you to know His love.

Continual Love. God continues to love you regardless of what you do!! “The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee” (Jer. 31:3). You can see this continual love in the account of the prodigal son.

And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But 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 15:20-24).

Here is an example of the Father continuing to love the son in spite of the transgression of the son. Too often we give up our love instead of continuing. “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love” (John 15:9). Many times, we continue our love as long as things go our way, or until someone does something against us. Then, instead of brotherly love continuing, war breaks out! But, this is not the example of the Master’s love.

Conquering Love. Through love, obstacles are overcome. “Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:20-21).

But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other, and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil (Luke 6:27-35).

Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:37-39).

With God’s love, we are more than conquerors.

Connecting Love. With connecting love, we are bound together with God. “But if any man love God, the same is known of him” (1 Cor. 8:3). “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another, as

I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:34-35). One who is a Christian will practice brotherly love, not just talk about it. As a matter of fact, there is no way to separate a Christian from brotherly love. The terms “Christian” and “brotherly love” are definitely joined together. How could you separate one from the other?

Constraining Love. This love compels us. “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead” (2 Cor. 5:14). “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love” (John 15:9). When we view the Father’s love and the love of the Son, it should compel us to love. How could it not encourage us to do those things which we know are right? How could you turn your back on God’s will after you see what his love has done for you?

LOVE’S MOTIVATION: THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND BROTHERLY LOVE

“Well, they gave me a visitation card. That’s why I’m here. I was just in the neighborhood and had nothing better to do so I thought I would check on you!” Are statements like these the driving force behind brotherly love? Anyone who can see through a ladder, can see there is no brotherly love involved with such attitudes. What then are the real motivating factors?

Brotherly Love Is Pure.

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not, Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure (1 John 3:1-3).

“Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good” (Rom. 12:9). Above everything else, our love should be pure. The reason so many have problems with one another is their love is impure.

Many Christians will never be able to be close to others because of their inability to show pure love.

And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him. That he who loveth God love his brother also (1 John 4:16-21).

One of the easiest ways to show hypocritical love is to say you love God and hate your brother.

Brotherly Love Is Priceless. “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16). What price could be paid for the gift given us? We are to love in the same manner. We are not to love because someone is paying us. Our love should be priceless.

And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind, charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, in not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, in not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things (1 Cor. 13:3-7).

Christ did not even look to please Himself

We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself, but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me (Rom. 15:1-3).

Our love is not an item that can be bought, but it is an item that will cost us from time to time. “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Phi. 2:4). “Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved” (1 Cor. 10:33)

Brotherly Love Performs.

So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou

me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep (John 21:15-17).

Love has to act! Christ tells Peter, “Feed my lambs...Feed my sheep...Feed my sheep.” There comes a time when, in brotherly love, we must perform.

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:- For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me (Mat. 26:34-40).

If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit (Jam. 2:15-16).

Sooner or later, our love has to perform if we are motivated by the Master’s love.

Brotherly Love Provokes. “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works” (Heb. 10:25). To provoke means to stir up. There is no doubt brethren get stirred up, but is it unto love? Some brethren just love to stir anything up as long as it is trouble.

These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him. A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, 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 (Pro. 6:16-19).

If we manifest brotherly love as we should, we will do our best to stir up love.

Brotherly Love Is Personal. “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love

one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:34-35). These commands apply to every one of us.

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 than, 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 (Mat. 18:15-17).

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also (1 John 4:18-21).

Some Christians feel they can have their own personal vendettas against other Christians and God will not hold it against them. These passages say they are wrong.

LOVE MANIFESTED IS HOW BROTHERLY LOVE IS DEMONSTRATED

When many think of love or discuss love, it sounds as if it is some kind of sticky candy you got on your hand. Many want to say “God is Love” (1 John 4:8), as if that solves every problem in the church and out of the church. Let us see what is involved in true brotherly love.

Benevolence Is One Aspect Of Brotherly Love. “But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” (1 John 3:17). There is no way for one to claim to have brotherly love and to close his/her eyes to the needs of their brethren. I think the church at Macedonia is a great example of this.

Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality (2 Cor. 8:1-2).

According to Paul, this is a test of the sincerity of our love.

Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also. I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love (2 Cor. 8:7-8).

“Wherefore shew ye to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love, and of our boasting on your behalf” (2 Cor. 8:24). The Israelites were, to be benevolent, to remember their past maybe we should also. “Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Deu. 10:19). We are going to be judged according to what we have done in this area.

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth *his* sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed *thee*? or thirsty, and gave *thee* drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took *thee* in? or naked, and clothed *thee*? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did *it* not to one of the least of these, ye did *it* not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal (Mat. 25:31-46).

How does your brotherly love stack up in regards to benevolence?

Balance Is Another Characteristic Of Brotherly Love.

The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth; For

the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever. Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love (2 John 1-3).

We should have in our lives both truth and love. I am sure you have heard the expression "Love is blinding," but it should not be. Love is not a reason to be absent from the truth.

Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie (2 The. 2:9-11).

Are you blinded from the truth because of Love?

Behavior Is Another Way Brotherly Love Demonstrates Itself.

By behavior, I mean the way it acts. Some want brotherly love to be a fantasy where there is never a cross word, disagreement or discouragement. Believe it or not, with love sometimes discipline is necessary.

And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; 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 hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and *that* the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches (Rev. 3:14-22).

Do you think the Hebrews writer loved those brethren when he said:

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which *be* the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk *is* unskilful in the word of righteousness: for

he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, *even* those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil (Heb. 5:12-14).

I think it also interesting to note Paul ties love and discipline together to the Thessalonians.

And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ. 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 (2 The. 3:5-6).

In conclusion, we should note brotherly love secures life.

“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death” (1 John 3:14). “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments” (1 John 5:2). Can you say you know you have passed from death unto life? You can— if you love the brethren!!!!

THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT— MUST IT BE HOLY AND WITHOUT BLEMISH?

Rex A. Turner, Sr.



Rex A. Turner was born in Comer, Alabama on February 13, 1913. To his marriage to the former Opal Shipp were born three children, Mrs. June Jacqueline Long (deceased), Mrs. Mary Ellen Hargis and Rex A. Turner, Jr. He has attended: University of Alabama; Jacksonville State University; Samford University, B.A.; Jones Law School, LL.B.; Auburn University, M.S., Ed.D.; and Harding Graduate School of Religion. He served as minister of the Panama Street Church for twenty-five years, Co-President of Alabama Christian College for six years, President for twenty-five years, President of Alabama Christian School of Religion (1967-1986), and now as Chancellor. He has authored: *Fundamentals of the Faith*, *Systematic Theology*, over forty published lectures and *Gospel Lesson Commentaries* (1975-1979).

INTRODUCTION

The subject for this occasion is basically in the form of a question—“Must the Church Triumphant Be Holy and Without Blemish?” This major question breaks down into the following aspects of the main subject, or questions:

1. Must the church be pure and spotless?
2. Can such a state ever be accomplished?
3. Will God be pleased with anything else?
4. What steps should be taken in the average congregation to become the church God would have us to be?

The text assigned for this subject is Ephesians 5:25-27, and reads:

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it: that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing: but that it should be holy and without blemish.”

PAUL'S PRIMARY INSTRUCTION

Paul's primary purpose, at the point of his writing in the Ephesian epistle, was to urge and stress the necessity for good family relationships. When Paul charged husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church, He had just urged. "Wives be in subjection to your own husbands, as unto the Lord," and then He stated the specific reason: "For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is head of the church." Relative to the why that the husbands are the head of the wives, Paul had formerly written the Corinthians: "For Adam was first formed, then Eve, and Adam was not beguiled, but the woman being beguiled hath fallen into transgression" (1 Tim. 2:13-14). As the man is the head of the wife, just so Christ is the head of the church.

Paul was writing to the point of all involved in a family relationship. In conjunction with the instruction for husbands to love their wives, Paul began with the wives; then he moved to the husbands; then to the children; and finally to servants. To the children, Paul admonished: "Children obey your parents in the Lord. for this in right." He further admonished "Servants, be obedient unto them that according to the flesh are your masters" (Eph. 6:1-5).

Thus, while setting forth these social relationships, Paul charged husbands "to love their wives as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it." What a charge this was! Christ had purchased the church with His own blood! He sacrificed Himself on the tree of the cross for His bride, the church. What love He demonstrated for mortal man! What a price Christ paid for mortal man! What love He demonstrated, but on the other hand, what ingratitude is so often expressed by the church, the bride of Christ through her indifference and outright sins.

THE SUBJECT AT HAND

Now, on the basis of the question, "Must the church be pure and spotless?"—the answer on its face is "Yes, the church must be pure and spotless," but wait—the next question reads: "Can such a spiritual state ever be accomplished?", and the question is: is the church of the present lacking in loyal spiritual qualities? Thus, the answer with many will likely be either a hesitant, "Yes," or a hesitant, "No."

The question that follows reads: “Will God be pleased with anything less?” Now, who will dare to answer? After all, Jesus said: “Even so ye also, when ye shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do” (Luke 17:10). There is in reality no righteous perfection in any man or church, as such. Even Paul wrote: “but I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage: lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected” (1 Cor. 9:27). If the great apostle Paul felt so keenly the necessity for him to buffet his body, there is definitely a need for every Christian of the present order of society to make an introspection of his course of life as a Christian.

THE SOURCE OF SALVATION

As one solution to the seeming dilemma, one biblical principle in that only through the blood of Christ can any person be righteous, or have salvation. The sinner can become righteous in Christ through faith, repentance, confession and baptism (in short, the washing of water with the Word), at which time he comes in contact with the cleansing power of the blood of Christ; and he can continue in contact with that blood, through repentance, confession of sins, prayers, and righteous living. No person has ever earned his salvation, irrespective of the period of time in which he lived. Except for Christ, and His sacrificial death on the cross, there could be no salvation for any person, whether during the Patriarchal, Jewish, or Christian dispensation. These observations add up to the fact that the Christian life is a life of commitment and spiritual growth. Christians, out of their respective backgrounds, grow spiritually at different rates, or levels, but grow, they must. Peter wrote:

Yea, and for this very cause [that is, that Christians might become partakers of the divine nature] adding on your part all diligence, in your faith supply virtue; and in your virtue knowledge and in your knowledge self-control; and in your self-control patience; and in your patience godliness, and in your godliness brotherly kindness; and in your brotherly kindness love (2 Pet. 1:5-7).

In short, Christianity in a process of spiritual growth.

THE PURE AND SPOTLESS CHURCH

There are, no doubt, churches (or specifically, congregations) that would be designated pure or spotless. In the apostle John's later years of life, the Lord dictated seven letters to the respective seven churches of Asia. The order of those letters may very well be designated as follows:

1. The first letter was addressed to the church at Ephesus, a church that had lost its first love—that is, its passion for souls (Rev. 2:1-7).
2. The second letter was addressed to the church at Smyrna, a church that had true riches (Rev. 2:8-11).
3. The third letter was addressed to the church at Pergamum, a church that was doctrinally unsound (Rev. 2:12-17).
4. The fourth letter was addressed to the church at Thyatira, a church that was immoral (Rev. 2:18-29).
5. The fifth letter was addressed to the church at Sardis, a church that was dead (Rev. 3:1-6).
6. The sixth letter was addressed to the church at Philadelphia, a church that had a golden opportunity (Rev. 3:7-13).
7. The seventh letter was addressed to the church at Laodicea, a church that was lukewarm (Rev. 3:14-22).

One point to be emphasized is that only two of those seven churches would seem to qualify as “a church that was pure and spotless.” The two churches were the church at Smyrna, and the church at Philadelphia. On first thought, one could despair for the remaining five churches, but there is another factor involved. To illustrate, the Lord wrote the church at Sardis—that church that had “a name that thou livest, but thou art dead” (Rev. 3:1)—“thou hast a few names in Sardis that did not defile their garments: and they shall walk with me in white; for they are worthy” (Rev. 3:4). The principle to be pressed is that among the churches that are not “pure and spotless” there may very well be those who are righteous, and in such cases God will bestow upon them full credit for their righteousness. In the ultimate, the matter of righteous justification rests with the individual Christian.

Further, from another viewpoint, the church which may seem to be so active and spiritual on the surface may very well be lacking in true spirituality. To illustrate, the church at *Laodicea had no false doctrines* or teachers; whereas, the church at Ephesus had those who held the doctrine or works of the Nicolaitans; the church at Pergamum had those that held the doctrine of Balaam; and the church at Smyrna had a synagogue of Satan (Jews). Still further, the church at *Laodicea had no immorality*; whereas, the church at Thyatira had in its membership the woman Jezebel, a teacher, who seduced those of the church to commit fornication. For another matter, the church at *Laodicea had no tribulation*, but the church at Philadelphia was experiencing grave persecutions. Then, too, Laodicea experienced no poverty (she was rich with goods and had need of nothing), but Smyrna was experiencing deep poverty; and finally, *Laodicea had no inactive members* (they were all a little hot for the Lord) but Sardis was dead (had no spiritual activity) except for a few members. Nonetheless, the Lord had one compliment, or more, for each of the seven churches, except for one—Laodicea, the church that was hot a *little* for the Lord the church that said: “I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing” (Rev. 3:17).

THE NEED FOR A SPIRITUAL INVENTORY

In light of the foregoing, when contemplating the questions—“Must the church be pure and spotless?”, and “Can such a state ever be accomplished?”—brethren, individually and congregationally, need to take spiritual inventories of themselves, even including your speaker—“forbid the thought.”

As one aspect of a spiritual inventory, a congregation as such, and the respective members as such, should inquire as to their passion for the souls of men—not only for their own offspring, but also for those who are “unchurched,” and for those steeped in denominationalism, whether the doctrine of Calvinism, or Arminianism, or Catholicism. Such efforts should be to teach—to win souls to Christ—and not merely an effort to win an argument, rather to win souls to the truth.

As another aspect of a spiritual inventory, the respective members of the church should inquire as to their devotional life. How

much time is spent in a family devotional period, especially where children are involved? How much time is spent in Bible study, and is the study, or reading, by plan or a mere haphazard approach, so as to go through the motion of being a daily Bible reader?

As a third aspect of a spiritual inventory, the respective members of the church should inquire relative to their concern for the ill, the aged, and the poor. One great problem is that some churches of the brotherhood seem to be set on their becoming “dignified uptown” churches.

THE NEED FOR A DOCTRINAL INVENTORY

Further, when contemplating the questions—“Must the church be pure and spotless? and “Can such a state ever be accomplished?”—brethren, and especially the elders, need to take an inventory relative to the matter of doctrine. The church at Ephesus had those who held the doctrine of the Nicolaitans; the church at Pergamum, had those who held the doctrine of Balsam; and the church at Smyrna had a synagogue of Satan (Jews). Churches of today are often plagued with false teaching on the one hand and hobbies on the other. To illustrate, there is a certain contingency in the church at the present time who are asking: “Why such a prohibition, or second-rate position, for the woman in the church? Why may she not teach publicly? Why may she not help administer or serve at the Lord’s table?”

Now, a reference to a stir over the limitation of the woman in the public worship is not to infer that the problem is the only problem, or even the chief problem, of false doctrines held by certain ones who make up the fellowship of the churches of Christ. To illustrate, there are those who affirm that every thing that a Christian, as such, may do is worship; others subscribe to the Crossroads’ doctrine, and/or the Boston movement, and/or the Max King doctrine; whereas, others contend for a progressive revelation. Still others contend for freedom in religion—that is a freedom that allows respective members to believe, worship, and teach as they may individually choose to so do. Then there are those who strongly believe that the Christian is often moved or led by the Holy Spirit separate and apart from the Word of God.

Further, there is a contingency within the brotherhood who hold that all teaching should be in a positive manner—that is, one should preach or teach a positive gospel with no negatives, whatsoever. On the other hand, there are those who are always fielding for a debate, with a braggadocio spirit.

Granted, many of us who preach probably have, at times, been negative almost exclusively, whereas, the gospel certainly has a very positive quality—a great hope of eternal life. Paul wrote Timothy:

I charge thee in the sight of God, and of Christ Jesus, who shall judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be urgent in season, out of season; reprove [negative], rebuke [negative], exhort [positive], with all longsuffering and teaching (2 Tim. 4:1-2).

Now, this arrangement by Paul does not necessarily infer that two-thirds of one's preaching should be of a negative order.

NEED FOR A SOCIAL INVENTORY

Still further, when contemplating the question—"Must the church be pure and spotless?" and "Can such a state ever be accomplished?"—brethren need to take a social inventory of themselves as to how they come across to each other, and to visitors, and to those who make up their community, or communities. How genuinely interested are the members in the salvation of those who make up the community? or more still, how friendly and courteous are the members with respect to visitors, and/or who make up the community?

Are the members friendly and outgoing in their social demeanor? What attention and care do they give the elderly, the bedridden, the poor, the uneducated, and those of other races? What interest and comfort do the members extend to those in the community in times of tragedy, death, and calamities? Do the members have an "up-town" spirit or attitude, or are they of a lovely spirit like that of the Master who was always concerned for the poor and downtrodden of the masses?

NEED FOR A FAMILY INVENTORY

Still further, when contemplating the questions—"Must the church be pure and spotless?" and "Can such a state ever be accom-

plished?”—family units need to take inventories of themselves. One thing seems to be certain, no church can be stronger spiritually than the families that make up that church.

Such an inventory would inquire into some very personal matters, like what is the relationship between the husband and wife? Are they strictly loyal to each other, including their sexual relationship. Is there harmony and mutual respect, or are they usually at odds, and thus characterized by strong arguments and disagreements?

What is the demeanor of the home, including, particularly, the children? Is there family harmony, or are there many bitter disagreements with each son/daughter going his/her own independent way?

Do the members of the family devote themselves to spiritual matters, or are they usually involved in worldly activities—like the dance and attending movies, including X-rated movies? Do they drink alcoholic beverages? Are they inclined to use profanity? Do they smoke? Are they punctual in their church attendance? Do they contribute as they are being prospered?

CONCLUSION

Now, for the answer to the question, “Must the church be pure and spotless?” The answer is positively, yes! Such is not only possible, but also certain for all who daily strive to be spiritual, who confess their sins, who continue often in prayer, and who by such means stay in contact with the cleansing power of the blood. They are the pure and spotless, for they are those who continue to be free of sin through the cleansing power of the blood.

Now, for the question, “Can such a state—a state of purity—ever be accomplished?” the answer is positively “yes.” In fact, all brethren who are continuing in contact with the cleansing power of the blood constitute the pure spotless church, whether that church be composed of few or many.

THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT— WORSHIPS GOD ACCEPTABLY

Melvin Hampton



Melvin Hampton was born in Michigan City, Mississippi, on February 11, 1945. He attended school in Holy Springs, Mississippi; moved to Milan, Tennessee in 1957, and graduated from Polk-Clark High School in May 1961. He is married to the former Elnora Taylor of Milan, Tennessee, and has three children: Melvin Cedric Hampton, Melanie Down Hampton and Stehanie Ivy Hampton. He was baptized into Christ in 1973 by John Harris at the Front Street Church of Christ in Milan and began preaching about a year later. In 1977, he began preaching part time for the Hamilton Street Church of Christ, Trenton, Tennessee. That same year he began to attend the Memphis School of Preaching part time. The next year he enrolled full time and graduated in 1979. He is currently enrolled in added studies at M.S.O.P. and has attended classes of Alabama Christian School of Religion.

Worship to God is very important, therefore we must make sure that we do it in an acceptable manner.

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth. For the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God in a spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24).

The Psalmist said: “O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our Maker” (Psa. 95:6). When we that have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine come before our maker to pay our homage to Him there must be the proper attitude of heart and the proper manner in which we worship. The greatness of God demands it. *The true authority in worship is truth.* “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17).

God through His Word has set forth what He wants His people to do in worship to Him. The Scriptures are authoritative because they are inspired of God.

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).

From the Scripture we find that God is not pleased with all kinds of worship.

And Adam knew Eve his wife and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the Lord. And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstling of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? And why in thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shall thou not be **accepted**? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. and unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rate over him. And Cain talked with Abel his brother. and it came to pass, when they was in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him (Gen. 4:1-7).

From the beginning of worship, God has not left man to his own choice in what is acceptable worship to God. We learn also that acceptable worship came by faith. “So then faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). And it was by faith that Abel offered unto God his worship. He obeyed God and his worship was accepted by God. His brother did not follow the will of God, therefore his worship was rejected by God. “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh” (Heb. 11:4).

WHAT PLEASES GOD IN THE ACTIONS AND ATTITUDES OF THE CHURCH IN WORSHIP?

True worship must be characterized by the right object, the proper motive and right manner. God is the object of acceptable worship. The law of Moses required. “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exo. 20:3). When we come to the New Testament we find the words of Jesus: “Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.” John the inspired apostle had this to say,

And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen. I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which

showed me these things. Then saith he unto me, see thou do it not; for I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book. worship God (Rev. 22:8-9).

The motive of acceptable worship—in spirit. What does it mean to worship in spirit? My attitude of heart must recognize the greatness of God. God in every where (Psa. 139:7-10; Acts 17:28). God is all knowing (Heb. 4:13). God is all powerful (Gen. 1:3; Psa. 33:9). To be sincere, true worship must spring from the heart. Peter said to Simon the sorcerer, “Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God” (Acts 8:21). The heart is not right if it is a burden to attend the services. David said, “My soul longeth, yes, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God” (Psa. 84:2). We cannot worship God acceptably if we are fearful that “*sound doctrine*” will offend someone.

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 (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

When we feel the worship hour is too long we are not worshipping in the right spirit. Much more time is spent in some form of entertainment. “And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not (Gal. 6:9). “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord my strength, and my redeemer” (Psa. 19:14).

The proper manner is expressed through five avenues set forth in the Word of truth, the New Testament: The early church assembled for public worship on the first day of each week. “And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight” (Acts 20:7). All the family is to meet for worship (Heb. 10:25). When they came together on the first day of the week in one place they partook of the Lord’s Supper. Jesus instituted it (Mat. 26:26-28; Luke 22:14-20). Those in the kingdom are to partake of it (Mark 14:22-25; 1 Cor. 11:17-29). They sang; therefore, singing is an act of worship (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Prayer was engaged in (Acts 2:42; Phi. 4:6; 1 The. 5:17; 1 Pet.

3:12). They gave of their material means (Luke 6:38; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 9:6-9; 8:1-18), and took part in preaching/teaching/edification (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 4:17; Acts 11:26).

SOME DEPARTURES IN WORSHIP

The departure was predicted: Jesus warned that false teachers would come as wolves in sheep's clothing (Mat. 7:5). Peter tells us that there will be false teachers operating in the world in which we live.

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of (2 Pet. 2:1-2).

Paul also warned the elders of Ephesus that evil men would come to destroy the church, and that from among themselves, that is the elders, some would arise to lead men astray (Acts 20:29-30). Elders were appointed over each congregation, each one being independent in its operation. No elder or group of elders has any right to dictate to another congregation (1 Pet. 5:1-4). But in the process of time strong elders began to arise and take authority over neighboring congregations. This led to a contest, and conflict, to am who would rule all the churches. This desire for lordship over the church led to a complete apostasy. Paul in his first letter to Timothy said in chapter 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.

Now let us look at some of the corruption that crept into the church and led to the apostate body known as the Catholic church. The church of Christ began on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ (A.D. 33). Note what happened about 152 years later. A.D. 185, the practice of infant baptism began at the first and for several centuries following, infants were actually immersed. This is the real significance of baptism; it is an immersion. A.D. 251, pour-

ing was substituted for immersion. A.D. 394, Latin was the official language of the Mass. The Mass is a ceremony in which Christ is supposed to be offered up in sacrifice, but we know that Christ: “after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God” (Heb. 10:12). A.D. 593, the doctrine of purgatory as an intermediate place of punishment began to be taught. As you know, the Bible says nothing about purgatory. A.D. 667, or about that time, the Catholics added instrumental music to their worship. A.D. 1063, the doctrine of celibacy became official. This doctrine forbids any officials of the Catholic church to marry. A.D. 1248, indulgences were sold. St. Peter’s in Rome was built almost, if not all together, by the sale of indulgences. Catholics were thus relieved of doing penance at a price. A.D. 1311, sprinkling was authorized to substitute for baptism. Up to the twelfth century large baptistries have been found alongside smaller ones, indicating that infants were actually baptized, not sprinkled, for many centuries. A.D. 1545, the veneration of saints began. Images representing these saints lined the Cathedrals. It is evident that these people are guilty of idolatry whether they worship images or the person represented by them. In 1870, the Pope was declared infallible. There was great controversy in the Catholic church over this matter. The Pope claims to be in the place of God. In fact, he is called “LORD GOD THE POPE.”

THE REFORMATION

Martin Luther was one of the first great reformers. After attempts to reform failed and he died, his followers banded together and wrote a creed, thus beginning the Lutheran Church (1521). In 1535, the church of England began. From the church of England there came the Congregational church in 1608. From this group came another called the United Brethren (1609). 1536, the Presbyterian movement began, headed by John Calvin. 1611, John Smith baptized himself and started the Baptist church. This process of dividing and then dividing again, and again, continues even in our day.

MODERN DAY DEPARTURES

Many are having group singing in the worship for their entertainment, but the Bible commands us to sing. That means all of the congregation is to participate, and God is the only spectator. We must

have Bible authority for what we do in worship to God (Col. 3:17). There are those that are advocating that women may lead in public prayer and serve at the Lord's Table. Question? Where is the Bible authority for such? They say because of the education of the woman today she needs to be used. Yes, use her but only where God has authorized:

The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands,' that the word of God be not blasphemed (Tit. 2:3-5).

There is a kind of teaching she in to do, but not in the worship. It is hard to get some of my preaching brethren to see that in 1 Timothy 2 there are two different words used for man. In 1 Timothy 2:1, 4-5, the word is "anthropos" which stands for mankind. But in 1 Timothy 2:8, 12, the word is "aner," and it is used to distinguish a man from a woman. A man—male—husband can pray every where lifting up holy hands (v. 12). "But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence." How can she obey this command and lead in public prayer over the man? This was not Paul's doing but was God's from the beginning (vv. 13-14). Some say if the man gives her the authority she may do it, but I ask who gave man the authority to loose where God has bound? God said it and that settles it! God be true, but every man a liar" (Rom. 3:4).

MUST ONE ASSEMBLE WITH THE SAINTS TO WORSHIP?

According to the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* January 16, 1991, Billy Graham was asked this question: "Do you have to go to church if you're a Christian? I believe in God and I try to pray every day, but I enjoy my weekends and I don't really like the idea of going to church." He answered "If by this question you mean, 'Must I go to church in order to win God's favor and be forgiven of my sins and go to heaven when I die?'—then the answer, strictly speaking, is no." Thanks be to God Billy Graham is not the authority in religion. Therefore, the man asked the wrong person. He should

have gone to God's Word if he wanted God's answer, or to a gospel preacher. Let us note what the Bible has to say about the question.

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, for he is faithful that promised; And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and 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. For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins (Heb. 10:23-26).

If wilfull absence from the service was all right then why the admonition? "When ye come together in the church" (1 Cor. 1:18). "When ye come together therefore into one place" (v. 20). These scriptures would also condemn the divided assembly that is practiced by some (Rom. 15:4).

Let us go to the Old Testament for some examples of how important the assembly was. First, the Passover (Exo. 12:13-14; Num. 9:13).

And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the house where ye are: and when I am the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not smite the land of Egypt. And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generation; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever.

But the man that is clean, and is not in a journey, and forbeareth to keep the Passover, even the same soul shall be cut off from among his people: because he brought not the offering of the Lord in his appointed season, that man shall bear his sin.

The *sabbath* is another good example (Exo. 31:14-17).

Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death. for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done, but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord. whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generation, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.

God's law was to be obeyed. The same is true with the law of Christ. Christ saves the obedient (Heb. 5:8-9; 2 The. 1:7-9). We shall all be judged by the words of Christ (John 12:48). When one wilfully absents himself from the services he fails *to honor God; to*

grow spiritually; to teach the world, to worship God, to obey the command to assemble; and there is no salvation to the unfaithful. “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal” (Mat. 25:46).

CONCLUSION

To be able to worship God is a grand and glorious blessing and all of God’s children should look forward to it with great anticipation, knowing that -in -worship we gain strength to help to overcome the wicked one, to help to overcome sin and temptation, and ultimately to make heaven our home with all the redeemed from all the ages. But, we must worship according to Spirit and Truth, for this is the kind of people God is seeking to worship Him and to show forth the praises of Him that called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. The devil has always tried to stop or pervert true worship, but if we stick with the true source of authority, the truth that is set forth in God’s word, we can know that we know Him. We will not depart into denominational error from the way of truth. We will never ask the question, “Do I have to assemble with the saints?” We shall seek to worship God and to worship God acceptably.

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THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT— MUST TEACH THE TRUTH AND OPPOSE ERROR

Harrell D. Davidson



Harrell Davidson attended Freed-Hardeman College under the tutorship of men such as brother N. A. Dixon, G. K. Wallace, Frank Van Dyke, and W. Claude Hall. He also attended Harding College and the Alabama Christian School of Religion. He is married to the former Carrielyn Spurlock of Evening Shade, Arkansas. This union has been blessed with four children—three boys and one girl. He conducts several gospel meetings each year and has written for many gospel papers and at one time was the editor of *Vigil*. In December 1987, he spoke on the Manila Bible Lectureship in the Philippines and also on the Third Annual Asian Lectureship in Singapore. From there he preached in a meeting in Taipei Taiwan.

We believe the theme *The Church Triumphant* is one that needs discussing openly and emphasizing more and more. We live in a world of skepticism and doubt. We are led by Satan to wonder if we can really be Christians, members of the body of Christ, and stay faithful unto the end. As with mother Eve, if Satan can plant the seed of doubt in our hearts, he has gone a long way in winning the battle. He will soon convince no that we are going to be failures. Look at the drop-out rate in the church today. We say we are losing our young people at an alarming rate, but we wonder if the loss rate is much greater, if any, than the adult loss rate. Rest assured that Satan is busy.

It takes courage to preach the gospel. This is not a place for a fickle person. The men-pleasers seek acceptance through watered-down preaching. All too often, watered-down preaching results in a long stay at a congregation and also the ruin of that congregation. The charge is given by the inspired Paul to brother Timothy in this fashion:

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. 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 (2 Tim. 4:1-4).

This may be the most comprehensive charge found for preachers to follow. Likewise, Paul said,

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 (1 Tim. 4:1-2).

A number of things are learned from these passages. One of the main features is that gospel preaching must be distinctive. Gospel preaching is not the kind of preaching you could do in just about every denomination in America. This is precisely the problem with those who love not the truth and preach not the truth. The gravity of gospel preaching has escaped so many until we are in a minority. When we are told to preach the Word, we are not to mince about it. We are to get on with the program and leave nothing undone. The gospel is for every creature (Mark 16:15). It is to be preached to every nation (Mat. 28:19). When this is done, there will be a harvest of souls (Acts 2:41). Without the truth (the gospel), the world is condemned and lost eternally. Without faithful proclamation of the truth, preachers' souls will be lost. God's preacher, Ezekiel, was told,

Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul (Eze. 3:17-19).

Preachers are watchmen. We must deliver the gospel message that has been delivered into our hands and hearts or lose our souls. Notice what would happen if Ezekiel did not tell it all, "because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his

righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand” (Eze. 3:20). Isaiah was told, “Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins” (Isa. 58:1). Should we proclaim the whole truth? Can we not see what we are doing to our souls if we do not?

We must be careful that we do not go beyond that which is written; in fact, it is fatal to do so. “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” (2 John 9). Duty and responsibility is laid upon our shoulders, in light of all of the above, to tell the old, old story in its completeness and fullness. We must “buy the truth and sell it not.” It is the truth that will make us and others also, free from our sins (John 8:32). The church that is not involved with teaching the whole truth is in serious danger. One might ask, “Which truth?” We reply by saying, “Every truth.” Use of promotional campaigns and gimmicks has brought us so far from the basics of gospel preaching that we have forgotten what distinctive preaching is about. We must go all the way back to Genesis 1:1 and introduce our audiences to God Almighty. We must teach the truth regarding creation. Some schools on the grammarschool level are teaching that man evolved. Some might think this is too elementary. My dear friend, nothing is too elementary when it comes to the Word of God. We have to start at “square one” if we are to teach the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Instead of going to the German philosophers and getting our sermon material from their pens, let us go to the Scriptures and get our lessons from the mouth of God. Isn’t this precisely what God told Ezekiel? Get the Word from my mouth. That Word is now in book form, but it is still from God’s mouth and by inspiration given (2 Tim. 3:16-17). What in this old world is better to teach than God’s Word on any given subject? What do our members know about the Word of God? What does the world know about the Word of God? Does the church know it must depend upon God’s orders in order to function scripturally? Many would not recognize the

truth on a given subject if it looked them straight in the face. Why? Who is at fault?

The answer may be more complex than one might think. For the first point, listen to the words of Peter.

If any man speak let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability that God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen (1 Pet. 4:11).

Preachers have this grave responsibility to speak all the oracles of God. We cannot and must not sidestep this responsibility. A preacher needs to know what to say and then say it. We went to a meeting recently wherein the preacher was celebrating his 50th anniversary of gospel preaching. This sounds good on the surface. However, he did not preach anything distinctive in the entire meeting. He touched not on modesty, social drinking, and a host of other evils. “I’m alright, you’re alright, so everything is just fine.” Not true! He was preaching to a congregation that had just had a spiritual drought. By spiritual drought, we mean the lack of definitive preaching by the local preacher, who did not love the truth. He always proclaimed his love for the people by politicking and calling off names of individuals who had done some good thing, but never by telling them they were living in sin. He left that congregation in shame and degradation by his own immorality that finally came to light. This church did not have the pure gospel taught to them for a long period of time. Now they must learn all over again what pure preaching is like. They must reacquaint themselves with what the truth is on a wide range of subjects. The preacher in the meeting came so close to “driving the nail home,” but failed to hit it.

The second point, and the other side of the coin, is stated also by Peter.

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 (1 Pet 5:1-2).

Elders need to know what to stand for and then stand for it. They need to get up in the pulpit after a particularly hard sermon from the preacher and tell the congregation that this is what the Bible says,

this that has been preached is the truth, and this is where we stand. If we could just get these two matters together, truth would have a much easier course.

OPPOSITION IS GOING TO COME

You can rest assured that when the church teaches the whole truth on some subject, there will be objections. Look what has happened in the area of marriage and divorce. Someone decided that Matthew 19:9 did not mean what it said. It reminds me of a young preacher who was just starting out. He read a passage from the Bible and then said, "Now that doesn't mean what it says." This is what we have done with marriage, so much so that we have some congregations that are literally filled with people living in adultery. One such congregation through her eldership said that if they disfellowshipped all of those living in adultery, they would not have a congregation left. Brother Franklin Camp gave me some advice in regard to this subject that I have treasured over the years. He said that when folks with marriage problems came to him for advice, he opened the Bible to Matthew 19 and had them read verse 9, which says, "And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery." Brother Camp said he asked them if they understood what they had just read. If they replied that they did not, he told them to read it again and so on until they got the point. However, we have multitudes who respond an one preacher in an adjoining state when asked by an eldership where he was scheduled to preach in a meeting, what he believed about Matthew 19:9. He said he had not an yet formed an opinion on the passage. This was not the first year of his preaching days. Instead, he was and is preaching for a very large, progressive congregation...but he has not yet formed an opinion on Matthew 19-9. Brethren, we have no opinion to be formed. That is the whole point that brother Camp was making. If the passage does not mean what it says, then what would it have to say to mean what it says? Also, if it does not mean what it says, would it not be the case that any other passage may not mean what it says? Where will it all stop?

A man who puts away his wife for any reason other than fornication and marries another is living in adultery and is lost, as is his new spouse. Now, let the years roll by and the two unscripturally married persons begin to think about death and their souls' salvation. Around them are gathered their children, some of whom are still dependent upon them. They come to the church (elders or preacher) and ask what they need to do. The answer should be, "Get out of your adulterous state and repent." Then they say, "But we have children and we love each other." Every kind of emotional ploy will they seek to attach to the situation. All of the emotional things make no difference in the sight of God. He still says to put away adultery. This is not popular, but then what subject is when it comes to matters like this? We have had one person (a woman) who was living in adultery to come forward in a gospel meeting and confess this sin. We asked that she meet with the elders and they in turn wanted me to meet with all of them. We all (elders and preacher) told her that, according to the Scripture, she had to get out of this adulterous marriage and pray for God's forgiveness. She went home and the next night she was back in church. She came forward and explained that she had told her husband what must be done. They parted their ways and we had prayer with her. In thirty-five years of preaching, this is the only person that we personally know of who took this action.

This is what Matthew 19:9 indicates as well as what repentance demands. Have we let down our guard in teaching the truth on repentance? Brethren, I plead with you. We must go back to the basics and start all over again. False doctrine is taught, not about repentance only, but almost every subject you want to mention, love being no exception. Remember, one untaught generation and we face apostasy.

We know of a congregation that is now taking people into their fellowship who have been baptized with only a Baptist baptism. They admit they were not baptized for the remission of sins, as Acts 2:38 teaches. Are they in full fellowship with a congregation of the Lord's people? Not on your life! They are in fellowship with an apostate church. This is a hard saying, but it is the truth. We are to

the point that we will do just about anything to get numbers. Brother Robert R. Taylor, Jr., coined the phrase that we find amusing, but true: “noise, nickels, and numbers.” How true and how sad! There is “so-and-so” with whom we have counseled over a drug problem. Are they saved? Oh, no, we didn’t talk about the church and salvation, but they are off drugs. They are still lost, mind you, but the person is drug free. How have we left the Lamb of Calvary out of the solution to life’s problems? Some of the reasons originate with unscrupulous elders and preachers who are afraid of opposition. “It might hurt someone’s feelings,” we are told, or “It might ran some off.” If our congregations have reached this point, we need to ran a bunch of people off or teach them all about sin and sinlessness. Let’s either show them the truth or cut the numbers back.

We really do not know whether the printing press can print such words as “decreasing in numbers.” We have had a half dozen preachers about us in the last six months who have been discharged because of the numbers game. Where did God ever command numbers? Name one restoration preacher who was interested in or worried about numbers. You cannot do it! On the other hand, we can show multiplied scores of congregations that have this as their sugar stick. Preachers of yesteryear preached the Word and left it up to God to give the increase. Until we get back to the yesteryear type of mentality, we are going to go on down the long road to majoring in minors, and finally to apostasy.

Fellowship with the First Christian and Independent Christian Churches is another ploy for numbers-at-any-price. Brethren, the cost is too great. Paul admonished us: “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph. 5:11). Such fellowship that we are having is unfruitful. It is leading us to spiritual poverty. A leader in the Independent Christian Church showed how they were giving \$75,000 a month for the WBS program to a certain congregation of supposedly God’s people. Then we get up and plead with people to sign up to teach in the WBS program. Do you mean we cannot have limited fellowship in this way with these folks? What are we going to do when we get to the matter of instrumental music...or missionary societies...or women as

elders and leaders in their churches? Will the teacher tell the truth or will the money talk? Apparently the money, and not the truth, is talking.

God commanded the kind of music that would be acceptable before his throne of grace. He said, “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:19). Notice that the Bible says sing. The Bible says sing and make melody “in your heart.” We cannot make melody on a mechanical instrument of music. We have forgotten what God’s business is and what our business is. Let me explain!

In Luke 2:49, Jesus said: “wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” It was God’s business in the beginning when He had made everything that was made with the help of His Son (John 1:1-3; Heb. 1:1-3). Christ was in the business of doing His Father’s business. Are we?

It was the Father’s business to look at all the things created and call them “very good” (Gen. 1:31). It was God’s business to tell righteous Noah how to build the ark. Now, you can call me a gopher wood preacher if you want to or laugh at this old, old theology, but it has its application to us today. It was God’s business that faithful Abraham had in mind when he obeyed the commands of God in Genesis 12. It was God’s business to command the kind of worship under the law of Moses that would be acceptable to Him. Nadab and Abihu thought that God’s business was not so important and that He would accept something they wanted to offer instead of what He had commanded. We note how fire came down from heaven and consumed them because they refused to obey God’s business. On and on we could go, but let’s go to Christ. He said He must be about His Father’s business.

In John 4, when the sinful Samaritan woman came to Jesus, He commanded that “God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). Let your eyes drop on down to verse 31:

In the meanwhile his disciples prayed him, saying, Master, eat. But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of. Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him ought to eat?

Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work (John 4:31-34).

Christ's meat was to do the will of God. That was his only business. He was here to finish God's business. It had not as yet been finished or Christ would have had no reason to come to this low land of sin and sorrow.

It was God's business to give us commands as to how to be saved. Now, you can call me a five-stepper if you want, but until I die I will preach that mien are to hear, believe, repent, confess, and be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins. This is God's business and we have no right in conference or convention to change it in any way. Who would want to take away the hearing? Who would want to take away the believing? We will not, for it is the Lord's business. I cannot and will not tamper with it. Some are putting the death of Christ to an open shame, for they never even extend the invitation of our Lord. One preacher said that if you have any commitment to make to Christ, come by his office and see him. That was it! That is all there is to it! What a shame! My eyes, as with those of Jeremiah of old, run down with water at such ignorance and high disregard for the Word of God. We need to be in business with the Lord.

It was God's business to tell us how to worship Him acceptably in the Christian age—to sing, pray, give as prospered, preach, and partake of the Lord's Supper. We dare not change these matters. These things are "holy ground" and we are commanded to keep them or be lost. Listen to the matter from the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus prayed, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). I do not believe He was necessarily praying that He not die, for He had already said He came to the world for this purpose. He was here to do the Lord's will, to be about His Father's business, to finish God's work that was began a long time ago when man first sinned. Could He not have been praying that the humiliation and shame, the torture, and the trial be done away with and that He be allowed to just go on to the cross and get it over with? Either way, His plea was for the Father's will to be done and not His. Through the shame, sorrow, and gloom He had to go, from a mockery of a trial to

bearing His own cross. With nails through His hands and feet, He looked down at His mother and her sister Mary Magdalene. Beside them was the disciple that He loved. He committed His mother's welfare into John's hands and John's care into His mother's hands. His last words were "It is finished" (John 19:30). Finally, God's business that Jesus came to be involved with and finish was done. He had paid the price. He had gathered up all of the loose ends. It was finished. He came to do the Father's will. He accomplished it and such pleased God. Can we please God with less than His will? For the church to be triumphant, we must do the Lord's will.

THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT— HELPS THOSE IN NEED

Sam Soper



Son of a career Army soldier, he mended and graduated High School in Frankfurt, West Germany. He spent seven years in the Army, serving in Vietnam in 1968. Graduated Memphis School of Preaching, 1976, and Alabama Christian School of Religion, (BA degree) in 1980. Preached for congregations in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Alabama. Currently preaching for church in Jay, Florida. Spoken on North Carolina Lectures, South Carolina Lectures, and the combined Carolina Lectures. Presently serving on the Board of Directors of the Palmetto Bible Camp, located above Green, South Carolina. He has been married to Karen W. (Westmoreland) for 22 years, and has four children.

I am deeply honored to have been asked to have a part in this fine lectureship program, and count it a great privilege to have the subject assigned to me, “The Church Triumphant—Helps Those In Need.”

Whenever we begin thinking about the idea of helping others it seems only natural that the words of the writer James should come to mind. “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” (Jam. 1:27). While this passage certainly teaches that the fatherless and widows are to be cared for, many contend that James does not specify who is to do the caring. Thus, there has developed a division in thinking, which has even resulted in those, professing to be following God’s commands, being divided into different groups.

In the rationale sent to me, several questions were asked. Such as: Does the church have a responsibility to help the poor, widows, orphans and others in need? If no, how may this be accomplished? May churches cooperate in this area? Has God given this responsibility to individuals only? May help be given to saints only? May

monies be taken from the church treasury to help the needy? Should differences in this area cause a break in fellowship? As you can see I have a formidable task before me.

GOD'S LAW OF OLD

It would seem that in order to answer what God wants us to do, the logical place to begin looking would be at the beginning of God's Word. Remember the words of the apostle Paul as he tells us, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). In Acts 7:38, the nation of Israel is referred to as the "church in the wilderness" and it is said they "received the lively oracles to give unto us."

In his instructions to Israel, Moses wrote in Leviticus 19:9-10, that God had forbidden the children of Israel from harvesting the corners of their fields and the gleanings of their crops. The purpose that this was to be left, says God, was for the "poor and the stranger." The term "stranger" here used has reference to anyone not a Jew, and is used as such throughout the Old Testament. In verses 33-34 of that same chapter, God commanded that the stranger who dwelled among them was to be counted as one born of them and loved as himself. Also according to Leviticus 25:35, a "stranger" was to be shown relief, that he might live with them.

In Deuteronomy 14:28-29 we have what just might be the key text in our entire study.

At the end of three years thou shalt bring forth all the tithes of thine increase the same year, and shalt lay it up within thy gates: And the Levite, (Because he hath no part nor inheritance with thee,) and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest.

Here we have an example of collective efforts to the point of feeding the poor, fatherless and widows. My friends, is that not exactly the same idea as James has stated with regard to pure religion?

Notice also, Deuteronomy 26:12-14,

When thou hast made an end of tithing all the tithes of thine increase the third year, which in the year of tithing, and hast given it unto the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat within thy gates, and be filled; Then thou shalt say before the Lord thy

God, I have brought away the hallowed things out of mine house, and also have given them unto the Levite, and unto the stranger, to the fatherless, and to the widow, according to all thy commandments which thou hast commanded me: I have not transgressed thy commandments, neither have I forgotten them: I have not eaten thereof in my mourning, neither have I taken away ought thereof for any unclean use, nor given ought thereof for the dead: but I have hearkened to the voice of the Lord my God, and have done according to all that thou hast commanded me.

Notice what God said to Israel; He commanded that they provide for those who were strangers, fatherless and widowed and for one to be obedient he must do just that.

In other passages throughout the Old Testament we can see God indeed made provision for those who could not for various reasons provide for themselves. Notice passages like Isaiah 1:17; 58:7.

GOD'S LAW IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

As we begin to look within the teachings of the New Testament for additional instruction or guidance on this subject of benevolence, we find that three examples can be found. Two of these are dealing with churches and the other has application of an individual Christian. These three are: the *Jerusalem Church*, the *Macedonian Church*, and *Dorcas*.

First is the example of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35; 6:1-6). There are at least three things worthy of our noticing about this church.

1. The amount of giving and sharing was generous, so much so, in fact, that the inspired record tells us that there was none among them which was needy. Each and every one was sufficiently cared for by the others.

2. A spirit of community possession existed in the church at Jerusalem. Those who had material things such as property or possessions did not see them as things which should be hoarded up, they rather saw them as ways they could share with those who had need.

3. Benevolence was administered with fairness. When the neglect of the Grecian widows came before the apostles, they immediately dealt with the matter. From this it seems obvious that they believed

a part of their duties was in seeing that those who were needy were treated with fairness and that no one was neglected.

Our second example of benevolence in the early church is that of Macedonia. As Paul wrote to those Christians at Corinth to enlist their aid for the church of Judea, he used the example of the generosity of those struggling Christians of Macedonia as an encouragement (2 Cor. 8-9).

Paul said that the Macedonians' generosity was a result of the fact that they first gave themselves. However, their giving was not simply marked by generosity, but by generosity in spite of their hardships. Paul tells us that they gave according to their power and beyond their power (2 Cor. 8:3). In spite of their own poverty they recognized the need to be obedient to God and thus because of their love for God they gave sacrificially and liberally, even greater than Paul had hoped for.

Then, our third example is that of Dorcas. The story of this example of a benevolent saint is found in Acts 9:36-41. Remember if you will, the account of her death and Peter's coming and bringing her back to life. The Bible speaks of her life by saying it was full of good works and almsdeeds. That is another way of saying she was a benevolent person. When Peter arrived, the widows, in their grieving, showed Peter the many coats and other garments which Dorcas had made and given unto them. This was this godly lady's way of practicing the Lord's teachings about caring one for another. We must indeed say, that here was an example of a benevolent Christian. The evidence of her generosity and her benevolent attitude can be seen in her conduct toward others.

From these three passages we can come to the conclusion that it has certainly been a part of God's will that those who would be God's children be benevolent and generous with regard toward one another and toward those less fortunate than ourselves.

RELATED QUESTIONS

1. *Does the church have a responsibility to help the poor, widows, orphans and others in need? Has God given this responsibility to individuals only?*

There are those of our brethren who have sought to draw clear lines of difference between what an individual Christian may do and what the church may do in the service of God. I am convinced that most of the efforts to distinguish between what the individual may do and what the church may do are based on a misunderstanding of the nature of the church.

We must remind ourselves that the church is that body of people who have been saved by the blood of Christ. All saved persons are in the church. The church is described in Holy Scripture as the body of Christ, the kingdom of God, the household of God, and the bride of Christ. Several names are attributed to the church all of which give honor to God or to His Son, Jesus. These descriptive phrases and names help explain the nature of the church. They say to us that the church belongs to Christ, that the church is His spiritual body in this world, and that we as individuals are members of that body.

One might ask, "What has that to do with the work of the individual within the church and the church herself?" "A great deal! The work of the church must be determined by the work which God has given to those who make up the church, the members.

We might then ask, "Does this mean that what God has commanded of the Christian must be done by the church as a collective body?" Certainly not! Christians are given many commands which the church is not subject to. For example, a person who sins is told to repent, such as Simon in Acts 8, or the erring in James 5. The Bible teaches that the one who must repent of sins is the one who commits such sins. Both of these examples are of those within the church and yet nothing is said of the church needing to repent.

Another example of such would be the directions God has given to the elders of the local congregation. Elders are to feed the church (Acts 20:28). This is not something that the church can do for itself.

On the other hand God has given commands that apply to the entire church. Worship is just such a command. Christians are commanded to worship and this worship is the work of the church collectively. Giving is another such command. Each Christian is to give, the purpose of that giving is that the work of the church can go on. Evangelism is another of these same commands and so also is

benevolence. We are taught in the Bible that benevolence is the duty of each and every one of us who make up the church. It is a common responsibility which has been placed upon all the people of God. It is, therefore, a work of the church, which as a body of people pledged to serve God, we must do.

To say that benevolence is not a work of the church is to simply fail at seeing the nature of the church and her work.

2. *May churches cooperate in the area of benevolence?*

My answer to such a question would have to be YES! All one has to do is but notice the examples of the various churches which gave aid to the Jerusalem church during its time of need. That should settle the question once and for all.

However, I believe that the problem arises when we begin to consider the autonomy of each congregation. This is certainly a concept taught within the Scriptures. Paul instructed that each congregation is to have elders and that these elders are to have the rule over that congregation (Heb. 13:17). It would seem to follow that since each congregation is instructed to have elders, it would be contrary to that command if one group of elders in a given congregation tried to rule over another congregation. Thus, we must understand that each eldership must rule the congregation wherein they are appointed elders and over no other.

If I correctly understand the thinking and teaching of those who oppose the cooperation idea, they feel that when one congregation sends money to another congregation, say for the purpose of benevolence, then that congregation which is sending help somehow surrenders their autonomy. If somehow that congregation which was the recipient of the aid had or could force the giving of aid that would be a different issue. But how does the fact that one group decides to send help to another in any way indicate that they do not have the freedom to choose to do just that? To decide to give freely to any cause which a congregation or eldership deems as worthwhile and scriptural in no way means that they gave up any autonomy.

Do you remember the recent hurricane which devastated the coast of South Carolina? Many churches sent aid to the Lord's church in North Charleston, South Carolina. They chose to send that

help and did so because of the teachings of our Lord concerning helping those in need. And, friend, they did not give up their autonomy for one minute.

Brethren, why would the same principle not also be true in any other area of benevolence? When Jesus gave the instruction that the fatherless and widows be cared for He did not tell how that was to be accomplished. He merely says that to be “pure” we must be sure that this is a part of our religious service to God.

It has been argued by those who oppose cooperative benevolent works, that James is speaking to individuals. Their reasoning is usually based upon the use of the pronoun “himself.” However, this reasoning is not consistent with other teachings in the Scriptures. For example, consider the words of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:28-29 with reference to the Lord’s Supper, “But let a man prove **himself**, and so let **him** eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For **he** that eateth and drinketh, eateth and drinketh judgment unto **himself**, **if he** discern not the body” (emphasis added, SLS). Now let me ask this question, If “himself” in James 1:27 excludes the church from being involved in helping those in need, why would not “himself,” “him,” and “he” in 1 Corinthians 11 prevent the Lord’s supper from applying to the “entire church”?

Here is a case of inspired instructions being given as having been spoken to one, and having references to the entire body of Christ. If that can be true in one place within the Bible, why not in another?

3. How may this benevolence be accomplished?

James tells us that we are to care for the fatherless and the widows. That is the extent of his instruction regarding the care of these needy ones. We must go elsewhere in the Word of God to find any more.

Generally when the matter of caring for the fatherless comes up, we automatically think of homes established for this purpose. It usually is the case that these homes are what so many oppose. For various reasons, they have concluded that it is only possible to carry out God’s will by caring for individual children in their private homes. That is good, *if* each Christian can and will do it that way, but that is not the only way. And that is part of the problem. Those who

advocate such usually do not personally care for even one child in their own home. In some cases it is possible to handle it in such a manner. Yet, in other cases there may be reasons that such cannot be done with every person. In such a case, a home established to care for children, or many children even, becomes the best and most practical way to carry out God's command. Does that make it wrong? Certainly not! The wrong comes when someone, anyone, tries to force his or her belief upon another. If they feel that they must care for a child personally, that is wonderful. But to try to impose upon another that that is the only way it can be done makes it a different matter entirely.

4. *May monies be taken from the church treasury?*

In considering this question about the care of those who are fatherless or widows, another comes to mind. May monies be taken from the treasury of the local congregation to aid in the support of the fatherless and widows?

In 1 Timothy 5:16, the apostle Paul said, "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." Just what does Paul mean by this statement? His meaning seems fairly simple if a person who is a believer has a relative who is a widow, it becomes that person's responsibility to care for her, and she should not be allowed to become the responsibility of the church, so long as she has family to help care for her. The reason for this is so that the church might be able to help those who truly are without anyone to care for them. Brethren, it seems quite clear from what Paul has said that God intended for the church to care for widows. How can that be done without the church taking money from the church? Where is the church to come up with the funds to care for these needy widows? The answer to that question also seems quite apparent. The church is under obligation to show care, but cannot take money from the treasury of the church to do that which God commands it to do! Does that make sense to you?

This is not to say that benevolence is to be left up to the church only. The apostle Paul's teaching in Galatians 6:10 would certainly teach that all have the duty to show compassion on a person in need.

5. *Must this help be for “SAINTS” only?*

Those who oppose the helping of others usually also are the ones who insist that if help is to be rendered it must be only to those who are members of the church.

I have only one question for those who advocate such teaching. What about Galatians 6:10? Notice again the words of that passage. What does the phrase “unto all men,” mean? Who is “all”? Is that all members of the church, or all men in general? Friends, Paul said that we must be willing to help *all* men. Does not that word include both those who are in the church as well as those who are not members of the body of Christ? Maybe we need to recall those passages from the Old Testament that we discussed at the outset of this lesson. Maybe that will help us to see that God has always required that His people show love and compassion on all mankind.

6. *Should our differences cause us to break fellowship with another?*

Brethren, it is my understanding from the Word of God that matters of opinion, and that is what this issue really in, should never cause us to destroy that which brings us together.

In Acts 6, when there arose a murmuring over the neglected care of the Grecian widows the apostles dealt with the matter quickly. Possibly one reason for their quickly dealing with this matter was because of the potential danger of its dividing the body of believers. God has left to our judgment the way or ways best to accomplish His will. In everything we do we must first consider what God wants us to do.

Our fellowship together as brethren should be an important matter to each and every one of us. Our own personal desires should never be pushed to the point that they cause us to be divided, or to tear down the church of our Lord. From before the very beginning of the church it has been the desire of our Lord that all believers be united in Him.

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 17:21-23).

These words of Jesus should cause each one to realize that Jesus is highly displeased whenever there is division within the ranks of believers. Our every effort ought to be to do that which is scriptural and pleasing to Christ our Lord.

THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT THE LOCAL CONGREGATION MUST BE LED BY QUALIFIED MEN

Jerry Moffitt



Jerry Moffitt was born in San Antonio, Texas in 1941. He married Barbara (Womack) of Murfreesboro, Arkansas and has three children: Kim, Cherie, and Jeremy. The two girls are working toward degrees in nursing and criminal justice. Jeremy is in the Marine Corps. Jerry is a graduate of the Preston Road School of Preaching and has a B.S. and M.S. from Southwest Texas State University. He is the author of several books, lectureship speaker, and editor. He directed the Southwest School of Preaching for several years and also served as instructor. He directed the Annual Shenandoah Lectures for two years. He has done mission work in Vermont, Michigan and

Missouri. Barbara has had a long career in banking. They all consider Texas home, and are excited to be in the Portland area after doing work in other states.

This manuscript will embrace concepts and questions associated both with the local congregation and with the leadership of a local congregation. It is based on a basic assumption, that God has, in the Bible, a pattern or blueprint for things pertaining to His kingdom. Out of that assumption certain implications arise regarding the organization of the church, authority of elders, and qualifications of elders. We will look at all this scripturally under eight propositions. Let us look at the first one.

GOD GAVE A PLAN FOR THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH

First of all, Christ rules the church as King. Jesus said, “All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth” (Mat. 28:18). Then Christ with all His authority ascended into heaven (Acts 1:11). Paul described the situation thusly:

Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name: that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phi. 2:9-11).

Elsewhere Paul adds, “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 pre-eminence” (Col. 1:18). Regardless of what the Catholic Church teaches, there is no other head of the church whether in heaven or on earth (See Ephesians 1:22-23). Especially, we see that nowhere did God ever organize the church *universal* for action. Each congregation was and is self-governing or autonomous. No one congregation governs another congregation. Each congregation is free to govern itself, and there is no governmental agency besides or larger or smaller than the church itself H. Leo Boles wrote.

The wisdom of God is seen in such an arrangement for his churches. If one became corrupted in doctrine or affected by evil practices, other churches would not be so affected. If dissension arose in one, it would not spread to the others; if one perished, the others would not be dragged down. If a window is made of one large pane, a break injures the entire pane; but if it be made of several panes, it is not so bad to break one. The independence of the churches is a protection for each one.¹

Further, the organization of the church is seen in Philippians 1:1: “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus that are at Philippi, **with the bishops and deacons.**” Bishops or elders are the same office, the same people. In Acts 20:17, Paul calls for the *elders* of the church at Ephesus. When he speaks to them he calls them *bishops* (Acts 20:28). A bishop is an overseer of the church and deacons are servants who serve under the oversight of the elders. The word for deacon is *diakonos* and “denotes a servant.”²

Further, the organization of the church is seen in Ephesians 4:11: “And he gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.” “Pastors” refers to the work of a bishop (Acts 20:28). It is the word *poimen* which designates a shepherd of the flock. The local congregation is a flock. The

word “teachers” is not a separate category but indicates how the shepherd does his feeding. In the original they “are grouped together in such a way as to suggest that the two roles are regarded as complementary and often coordinated in the same person.”³

Does the organization of the church include apostles and prophets? Yes, but not today. Their role is in the first century, in the foundation of the church. The church is “built upon the **foundation** of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph. 2:20). Those who have apostles and prophets today not only have false apostles (2 Cor. 11:13) and false prophets (1 John 4:1), but they are in the wrong place, up in the superstructure instead of down in the foundation. We no more have apostles and prophets in the local organization today than we have Jesus in the flesh. He is in heaven, and in organization of the universal church He is the chief corner stone. He is in the foundation.

But to sum up, there is an organization for the church today. God is not a God of confusion (1 Cor. 14:39). It is local in action, not universal, and includes bishops, deacons, and evangelists who are ministers of the gospel (Eph. 4:11; Acts 21:8; 1 Cor. 3:5). An evangelist is simply a proclaimer of good news. The rest are members of the body (1 Cor. 12:12). Apostles and prophets do not work today, but are in the foundation of the church, Christ Jesus being the chief corner stone (Eph. 2:20). And most of all, may we end where we began, Christ rules the church universal from heaven as King (Rev. 17:14; Rev. 1:5; Mat. 25:34).

WHAT GOD DID NOT AUTHORIZE

When God specifies an organization, it excludes every other organization. It is just as when God specified that Jesus was his Son (Heb. 1:5); that declaration excluded all the angels. So also, when God specified what organization He wanted, it excluded every organization man could invent. To contrive others is to add to God’s word (Deu. 4:2; 12:32; Pro. 30:6; Gal. 1:6-9; 1 Pet. 4:11; Rev. 22:19).

N. B. Hardeman said, “The prophetic finger pointed to the departure from the truth and to a disposition to follow the ways of man.”⁴

I am sure he had in mind passages such as 1 Timothy 4:1-3 and 2 Timothy 3:13. But truly the disposition to follow the ways of man existed in the days of Jesus. Jesus said,

Ye hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, This people honoreth me with their Ups; but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men (Mat. 15:7-9).

Yet, in the rise of Ecclesiasticism, I want to produce a lengthy quote from Hardeman.

At the very beginning of ecclesiastical history, elders were not content to abide by the Word of God. They felt the responsibility resting upon them, and sought to make the church a prominent institution. They looked about and saw the pagan worship of the day. Many things about it appealed to their human nature, and step by step, they imitated, followed after these things and endeavored to adorn the church of Christ, and the doctrine of God, by introducing some of the pagan features. There were things in the pagan religion that appealed to the young of the church—things which were harmless *per se*. The Lord had never positively said: “Thou shalt not so do,” therefore, acting upon the broad principles of liberty and sanctified common sense, they introduced a number of things borrowed into their own worship.

Another thought came to them as they looked around about. They said, “Here are a number of worldly influences, things that appeal, that attract, that away and move men. Why not as a congregation capitalize these affairs, and thus utilize worldly influences for the advancement of the cause?” Basing the whole upon mere human reason, they saw no fault in such a procedure, and thus another departure was made.⁵

From there, there was the distinction made between clergy and lay members. Then by human reason they felt they needed a bishop over all other bishops so they devised the next logical step making an archbishop. Again, notice Hardeman:

Watch the steps thus far taken. For the individual congregation the clergyman becomes a priest; for the district congregations the bishop becomes the head; the archbishop sways the sceptre over the various districts of each state; and the cardinal exercises dominion of the states of each nation. Anybody can see the next step...From the birth of Christ upon the earth, we have drifted in history over six hundred years, until in the year 606 A.D., Boniface III was designated pope by the Emperor Phocus....⁶

Men have not changed. There are those in the churches of Christ who still see in the religion round about them things that appeal to

human nature: instrumental music, various ladies-aid societies, quaint, ornate church edifices, the features of a social club, the inclination to minister to the whole man, entertainment, psychology, current philosophy, holy days, dedication of babies and the equality of women regarding authority. So we find some churches of Christ have introduced the instrument, expensive, ornate buildings, the social agenda, fun and games, car-tune-up days, inter-personal communication techniques, the advocacy of high days, women ushers, the advocacy of women teaching men, women leading in prayer and deaconesses, etc.

Then there are those who want the churches of Christ to be a prominent institution; they do not mention that there is a price to pay. First, we must strip ourselves of everything distinctive, or at least relegate it to the unseen background, merge first with the Christian church, then the council of churches in general. As Rubel Shelly deplored, the churches of Christ are like kids playing on the sandlot when the real ball game is in the stadium up the street. Yet, none of these things are authorized by God. We want to restore pure Christianity, not absorb countless features of the departure, no matter how these things appeal to human nature, to the young, and no matter how they attract, sway, and move men. Paul's warning is clear, "Take heed lest there shall be any one that maketh spoil of you through his philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world and not after Christ" (Col. 2:8). Jesus said, "Every plant which my heavenly Father planted not, shall be rooted up" (Mat. 15:13).

With all the above, God never authorized councils, synods, conferences, confessions of faith, creeds, associations, parishes, books of prayer, catechisms, litany, clergy, priests, lay members, episcopacy, deaconesses, holy orders, archbishops, cardinals, sacraments, canonizing of saints, primates, convocations, dioceses, missionary societies, confirmation, denominations, presidents, general assemblies, constitutions, by-laws, conventions, boards, and space, alone, fails us or we could add more.

BRIEF QUALIFICATIONS OF LEADERS

Here we want to mention briefly the qualifications of elders. We will look first at 1 Timothy 3:1-7. In verse one there are two overlooked qualifications “seeketh” and “desireth” the office. A man, by exhortation regarding need and duty, may learn to seek and desire the office.

He must be without reproach (1 Tim. 3:2). This does not mean that he is perfect, or that he never made a mistake, but one cannot sustain a charge on him. As he stumbles (Jam. 3:2), he confesses it to God (1 John 1:9), and he repents of it (Acts 8:22). He may stumble, but he does not *walk* in sin (Eph. 4:17). Rather, he walks in the light (1 John 1:7). This answers to “blameless” in Titus 1:6.

He is the husband of one wife. This is a prohibition of promiscuity, polygamy, and concubinage. This verse also requires that he be married.

He must be temperate (A.V. “vigilent”). The word is *nephalios* and means to be sober, especially, but not only, in respect to drink.

He must be “sober-minded.” He is a man of sound mind. His desires and passions are well regulated.

He is “orderly.” The A.V. has “of good behavior.” He is a gentleman, not rough or boorish, but mannerly and tidy of mind.

He is given to hospitality. So are all Christians (Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:2).

He is apt to teach, didactic, capable and qualified, not just willing. He must be able to teach (1 Tim. 5:17).

He is not given to wine (1 Tim. 3:3). He is not addicted to wine, hence not a brawler. This gives no license to drink socially.

Along that line he is no striker. He is not ready with his fists.

He is gentle (1 Tim. 3:3). He has forbearance (Phi. 4:5), and he can yield to others when they are in the right.

He is not contentious. He is not a fighting kind of person. He does not love to argue.

He is no lover of money (1 Tim. 3:3). He is not avaricious, mercenary, a money lover, or stingy.

He ruleth well his own house. He superintends it. He has his children in subjection (1 Tim. 3:4). In such matters he is free from frivolity and fickleness. He may not be severe, but his deportment inspires respect. He must rule his house.

He is not a novice or a neophyte, recent convert (1 Tim. 3:6). If so, he can become “puffed up” and conceited.

He must have good testimony from them that are without. He cannot bring dishonor to the office or to the church. Yet remember, some are persecuted for righteousness’ sake (Mat. 5:10; 2 Tim. 3:12).

To Titus, Paul adds that the children are not to be accused of riot or be unruly (Tit. 1:6). *Riot* in the original is in the sense of excess (Eph. 5:18) with an emphasis on being “wasteful” in the sense of “riotous” living. They are not to be unruly in the sense of insubordinate or ungovernable (1 Tim. 1:9; 3:4).

The elder is not to be self-willed. He is not assuming, arrogant, like Diotrephes (3 John). See 2 Peter 2:10. Those who are daring and self-willed tremble not to rail at dignities.

He is not to be own angry. There are times when it is not sin to be angry (Eph. 4:26; Mark 3:5).

He is to be just (Tit. 1:8). He is upright with God. See Philippians 4:8.

He is to be holy. *Hagios* is the usual word for “holy” and primarily means “set apart for God’s use.” The word here is *hosios* and has more the flavor of purity. “It signifies religiously right, holy, as opposed to what is unrighteous or polluted.”⁷

An elder must be temperate. He needs power or control over all his passions (Acts 24:25; 1 Cor. 7:9; 9:25; Gal. 5:23).

Paul tells Titus that an elder needs to be holding to the faithful word so he can exhort in the sound doctrine and convict the gainsayer (Tit. 1:9). He clings to the Word, and can use it to convince those who speak against truth whether or not they admit their error.

To be an elder is a great task. He must not merely be a good businessman or a dynamic leader. These are not biblical qualifications. He must know the Word, and have his character forged by the Word, especially when the church congregation is in trouble or in

danger. All these qualifications help get him through troubled times.

AUTHORITY OF ELDERS

If I were Satan, the first thing I would do would be to attack the authority of elders. They are the front line of defense for the church. I would call them names like dictators and pile up nomenclature such as “Modern-day Diotrepheses.” In every way I would make them ashamed to take charge of the flock and I would make the flock feel they need not obey them. In fact, in our country, it seems to me, and throughout the church, there is a spirit of self-will and rebellion. Our young, also, have, in some quarters, imbibed the modern notion that if any one tells you what to do they are oppressing you. There may be a desire, on the part of some, for the congregation to form policy in a general business meeting and then have the elders meet and ratify it.

Yet notice these Scriptures. Hebrews 13:17 says,

Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit to them: for they watch in behalf of your souls, as they that shall give account; that they may do this with joy, and not with grief: for this were unprofitable for you.

To “obey” in this context is “not by submission to authority, but resulting from persuasion.”⁸ But that is the very thing some brethren will not do. They will not yield to the persuasion of elders. “Submit is *hupeiko* which literally means to yield under, hence to submit.”⁹

In 1 Peter 5:2 elders are commanded to exercise the oversight. *Episkopeo* (oversight) means to “look at, take care, see to it.”¹⁰

Paul tells Timothy, “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor” (1 Tim. 5:17). The word for “rule” is *proistemi*. It means to set over or place before “to be over, to superintend, preside over, rule.”¹¹

Do elders have authority? The Bible uses words like “obey,” “submit,” “rule,” and “oversight,” and the original language shows that these words are used in their usual way. Let us defend faithful elders, and do all we can to encourage brethren to esteem them exceeding highly in love for their works’ sake (1 The. 5:13).

CHURCHES OF MEN ARE ORGANIZED THUSLY

Here we have not space to treat even the main churches specifically, but we can here treat Protestant and Catholic churches in a basic way. We can view the underlying principles behind each. Then we will briefly contrast the two with Scripture.

Boettner expressed the Protestant view plainly.

As Protestants we believe in and practice democracy in church government as well as in state government. We have local organizations in which ministers and laymen with equal voting rights handle local church problems, and for the denominations at large, general assemblies or conventions or conferences, composed of ministers and elders, usually in equal numbers, who are the elected representatives of the churches.¹²

By way of contrast, Timmerman explains the Catholic system thusly:

According to these authorities, the Catholic Church is founded on the principle of a hierarchy, which refers to the systematic arrangement of higher and lower ranks of the clergy. They hold that the church is not a society where all the members are equal, but that it is composed of two distinct groups: the *teaching* church and the *taught* church. The word "hierarchy" applies especially to the "teaching" church. And even here, they say, there is a double hierarchy: that of orders, founded on the right to administer the sacraments, and that of jurisdiction, founded on the right of teaching and ruling.

Of course, you have the pope, then the cardinals, then the archbishops, then the bishops and finally the priests. In the New Testament arrangement we have neither democracy nor hierarchy. There is the aggregate church and the local church. In the aggregate Christ is the head (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22-23). We are the body (1 Cor. 12:12, 20, 27). Then there is the local church. Each local church is self-governing. Within the local congregation the elders have authority. Deacons serve by elders' appointment and are under the elders, as are evangelists and all members of the body. As we try with all our heart to serve God, why not be biblical? Away with the doctrines of men, the nomenclature of men, and the organization of men. Let our watch-word be, "Every plant which my heavenly Father planted not, shall be rooted up" (Mat. 15:13).

ARE CHURCHES OF CHRIST AUTONOMOUS?

As we investigate scripture, we find that the local churches were truly autonomous or self-governing. Even Boettner, who considers himself a Protestant, could not miss it. Notice this concession he makes:

The New Testament church was an organized band of baptized believers practicing New Testament ordinances and actively engaged in carrying out the great commission. Of that organization Christ alone was the head. Believers were related to Him and to each other as members of the body. Each local church appears to have been a self-governing body.¹³

So there was established order (1 Cor. 14:23), and churches were units separate from each other (Gal. 1:2, 22). There was no regional, national, or district organization. Each church governed itself under a plurality of elders (Acts 14:23; Acts 20:17). Under them were deacons (Phi. 1:1), and members (Rom. 12:4; 16:1-2; 1 Cor. 12:27). The elders, as we have seen, were to rule (1 Tim. 5:17). Their qualifications are found in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus chapter 1. Everything, however, in the New Testament demonstrates that the only organization for action was the local congregation, and each of those was self-governed by its own eldership.

HOUSE CHURCHES

There has been a modern-day challenge of the New Testament organizational scheme. The Boston church practices and recommends that its sister churches organize themselves into house churches. Citing passages where Christians worshipped in homes and taught house to house (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Acts 12:12; Acts 20:20), they organized into house churches. These are not full-fledged churches; nor are they intended to substitute for congregational worship on the first day of the week. They are an organizational device where members of a church can be grouped together for administrative purposes. In this organizational scheme house-church leaders are over about fifty individuals. They are all, however, under one eldership, though there may be twenty-five or more house churches. Besides the above passages, they cite the advice Jethro gave Moses regarding organizing lest he be worn out

by all the people. In all this, they claim they are restoring the New Testament church more completely. They end up with Bible Talk leaders over tens, House church leaders over fifties, and zone evangelists over hundreds. As to reasons, they cite Jethro's levels of leadership, that Christians met in houses, and that exhausted evangelists need help. Along this line, let us notice what Jackie Steersman has to say.

If you was God, having issued an authoritative document (The New Testament) which gave specific directive for the government and organization of the church of Christ, and then have your subjects cite Jethro (an authority of another day and another law), then cite the location of some of the meeting places of early Christians. then cite an example of a tired preacher, then from this to state that by your authority is commissioned the Boston System of churches under a church, evangelists over zones of churches, and ministers over house churches, etc., etc., would you consider them to be respectful of your word? Truly this is exegetical wizardry.¹⁴

No, there is no authority for a house church being under a mother church or a central church. The proof they use has more the sound of their new system than the sense of it, and very little of the sound of it. The very things they practice are the very things lacking in their proof, They do not cite an example of some lesser church being under a main church, nor do they find where one eldership is over a net-work of churches.

CONCLUSION

God gave a plan for the organization of the church. It was organized for work on a local-church basis. Each local congregation was autonomous. When ready, it was to have bishops over it and deacons serving under them. The church was not a democracy, nor was it a hierarchy. It was neither Catholic, Protestant, nor Jewish. The rise of Ecclesiasticism was a departure from the truth. But in the congregations, God gave, a plurality of qualified leaden governed. The churches of men are organized quite differently from churches in the Bible. Though some in the churches of Christ may depart from the New Testament pattern with house churches, let us stand fast in that which is truly authorized by God. In our love for the Old

Paths of God's New Testament, may we honor God, and may we glorify His King, our Lord Jesus Christ.

ENDNOTES

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³Frank E. Gaebelien, gen. ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), *Ephesians*, by A. Skevington Woods, 11:58.

⁴N. B. Hardeman, ed., *Hardeman's Tabernacle Sermons*, (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company, 1975), 111, 53.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁷Vine, p. 567.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 806.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 1110.

¹⁰W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 298, 199.

¹¹Joseph Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), p. 539.

¹²Lorraine Boettner, *Roman Catholicism* (Grand Rapids, IL: Baker Book House, 1962), p. 28.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴Jackie M. Steersman, *A Critique of the Multiplying Ministries of the Boston Church of Christ* (Lakeland, FL: Steersman's Publications, 1987), p. 64.

THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT UPLIFTED IN THE HOME

Bobby D. Gayton



Bobby and his wife, Linda, were baptized by Ray Peters in 1970 at Cartersville, Georgia. Bobby and Linda have three children: Brooke, Jason and Jonathan. He is a graduate of Memphis School of Preaching (1976) and has also received the BA and MA degrees from Alabama Christian School of Religion. He has done additional study at Troy State University (MS in counseling and psychology) and Columbia Theological Seminary where he is currently working on the doctorate degree. He has preached for congregations in Arkansas, Alabama and Georgia and is currently the evangelist at Cartersville, Georgia.

INTRODUCTION

I would like to thank the elders of the Bellview church for asking me to participate in this lectureship program. The subject assigned to me in “The Church Triumphant—Uplifted In The Home.” I personally appreciate the theme—*The Church Triumphant*—of these series of lectures. The church of our Lord will never be defeated (Mat. 16:18).

My subject deals with the effect of the home on the church. Someone said, “As goes the home, so goes the world.” Others using the same thought have said, “As goes the home, so goes the church.”

The home was established in the beginning by God to promote the happiness of mankind. In Genesis 2:23-24 the Bible says,

And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

Three great things rest upon the home the nation, civilization, and the church. The home is a pillar of the church. If Satan can destroy the home, he can undermine the church of our Lord. Can Satan accomplish the destruction of the church? No! The reason is

that the church of our Lord will never be destroyed (Dan. 2:44; Mat. 16:18; Eph. 3:20-21). However, many families within the church are disrupted by the influence of Satan. This, in turn, causes problems within the church family. Many congregations of the Lord's people will suffer because of problem in members' homes, but the church will triumph (Eph. 5:21-33; 1 Cor. 15:24).

FUNCTIONS OF THE HOME

There are a number of distinct functions of the home. First, there is the development of wholesome personality through affectionate satisfaction. *Agape* love should reign supreme in the home. The Hebrew word *dabaq*, translated "cleave" in Genesis 2:24, carries the sense of clinging to someone in affection and loyalty. Second, the home is the God-given medium through which the child (children) may be gradually introduced to the world. This process requires a number of years of careful effort on the part of parents (Eph. 6:4; Deu. 4:9; Pro. 19:18; 22:6; Col. 3:21). Third, the home is the God-given center for learning. The home is responsible for education and training of children. The public schools and our Bible schools may be called on to help the home, but these must never be relied upon as a substitute for the home (Deu. 9-10; 11:19-20; 12:5-12; cf., Gen. 18:19). Fourth, the home is responsible for the religious development of all within it. Prayer, Bible study, and family worship should be a regular part of home life. Faith acquired at home remains throughout life as a support and a safeguard (2 Tim. 3:15). Fifth, the economic arrangements suited to rearing a family calls for a distribution of labor between the husband and wife. The past half century has taken the women out of the home to help earn a living. Second income families are now a way of life. The results are not good for the home. Sixth, recreational activities are most valuable when enjoyed by the family as a whole. Husbands and wives need to spend leisure time together. Separation during leisure time often leads to a broken home. Seventh, protection and discipline of children are most effectively accomplished through the home. The home is able to exercise discipline through love, training example, and many other channels that are not possible for those agencies outside of the home. Finally, the home is the only place that God authorizes pro-

creation of the species Illegitimacy means sin, shame and suffering to everyone involved.

ALARMING STATISTICS

Before considering the effect the church should have on the home and our responsibility to up-lift Christ and His church in our home, let us notice some alarming statistics from the National Institute of Mental Health. About 50 million people are victims of physical harm at the hands of some other family member each year in the United States. Spouse abuse occurs among 16 percent of American married couples; 6.5 million children are harmed by parents or other family members every year; 8 million children assault their parents annually. The National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect adds that between 60,000 and 100,000 children are sexually abused by their own parents every year, and approximately 5,000 die from abuse inflicted by their parents.

Four of every ten females become pregnant before they turn twenty years old. More than one in every ten teenage women get pregnant each year. There are 11.6 million teenagers who have experienced sexual activity. Teenagers in 1983 had 499,038 births, 411,390 abortions, and an estimated 140,950 miscarriages. Thirty-nine percent of pregnant teens obtain abortions.

Four million dollars are stolen from employers each year. A murder takes place every 30 seconds. A rape takes place every 10 seconds. An aggravated assault takes place every 90 seconds. Vandals destroy over \$100 million every year. One out of three marriages ends in divorce.

THE EFFECT OF THE CHURCH ON THE HOME

Now the question, What effect do you think the church should have on the home? Paul in Ephesians 4:11-24 states:

And he gave some apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But

speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ. From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind. Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But ye have not so learned Christ; If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth in in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which in corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind, And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

This passage was written to the church at Ephesus and teaches the church is to play an important part in the lives of each member. The elders, evangelists, and teachers were given to the church for the purpose of instructing the saints in the full and complete will of God. God's objective here was, and is, to train and to educate the body of Christ from infancy to maturity; to perfect the saints in spiritual knowledge, that they may make the perfection of their faith the great end of their lives.

According to the statistics, have we succeeded or have we failed? One may say the statistics pertain to America as a whole. They are right. But the church is not immune to spouse abuse, child abuse, or parent abuse (mentally, physically, sexually); teenage pregnancies; abortion; thefts; murders; rapes; aggravated assault; vandalism or divorce. All of us know of someone within the family of God who has become one of these statistics, and not always as the victim. Again, have we succeeded or have we failed?

EFFECT OF THE HOME ON THE CHURCH

What effect does the home have on the church? Brethren, I would like to be very positive and say that the home is behind the church 100 percent But we all know that this is not true. There is, within the homes of America today, a lack of respect for authority and discipline. Oh, how sad, I must admit, that this in true in the church! If there is within the home a respect for the authority of the

Word of God, then all of the woes of the home we have mentioned would not be so. Each person would have respect for the other whether it be a spouse, born or unborn child, or one's neighbor. Jesus said, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Mat. 7:12).

The result of a Christian home would be the development of clean Christian character in our children and in each parent. The home should be a place where Christianity is taken seriously; where there is faith in a personal, provident God; acknowledgement of Jesus as Master, and an effort made to follow Him, engagement in prayer and some form of family worship; appreciation and recognition of the authority of the Word of God, faithful attendance and participation in the activities of the church. The home should be a place where it develops self-confidence and trust in others; where the spirit of understanding and respect enables each member of the family to grow in an environment of love and appreciation and to become his/her best self. The home should be a place where authority is not used for its own sake, but as a means to aid discipline. If the home is to be all of these things, then what effect will the home have upon the church?

Brethren, for the church to have an effect on the home and the home to have an effect on the church, then two things must happen. First, we must have respect for the authority of the Scriptures, Secondly, we must practice discipline. Abuse of spouses, children, and parents; teenage pregnancies; abortions; thefts; murders; rape; aggravated assault; vandalism; and divorce are sinful and will cause all who participate to lose their soul and miss the kingdom of heaven. (cf., Gal. 5:19-21). If the home and the church do not practice the principles of respect for authority of the Scriptures and of disciplinary actions, then the destructive forces of the devil will continue to prevail in damaging the home and thereby harming the church.

RESPONSIBILITIES TO UPLIFT CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

For the church to have an effect on the home and the home on the church then each member must accept his/her personal responsibility to love the church and to put the church first in his/her life (Eph. 5:22-33; Mat. 6:33); to be faithful and consistent in their attendance to worship and Bible study (Heb. 10:24-25; 2 Tim. 2:15); to be involved in the work of the church (Eph. 4:16; Col. 2:19; 1 Cor. 3:9); to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice (Rom. 12:15); to always speak and teach the truth in love (Eph. 4:15) considering our own selves (Gal. 6:1); to respect the Scriptures; and to practice discipline. We need to stress that each member of the church should strive to up-lift Christ and the church in his/her home by word and by deed (Col. 3:17).

BERATING THE CHURCH IN THE HOME

In 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12, Paul says the church “is” the body of Christ and that there is interrelation of the members of that body. In Ephesians 4:10-16 and Colossians 1:18, Paul concentrates on the headship of Christ over the body. “The body” means the visible expression of Christ. The only Christ that many see in His people. When Paul was persecuting the early Christian (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-2) he heard on the Damascus road this question, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” To persecute members of the body of Christ was to persecute the head of the body of Christ.

The church teaches the omnipresence of God. Have you ever asked members of the body of Christ if Christ were visibly with them how they would treat him? “Oh, I would not speed with him in the car,” or, “I would not drink.” “I would not dip, chew or puff.” “I would study the Bible every day.” “I would be at all of the services.” All of us get the picture, but do members of the church understand that the way we treat the church, its elders, deacons, teachers, preachers and every member is the way we would treat Christ if He were visibly with us?

What are we telling our children when they hear us berate the church, the elders, teachers and preachers? What are we telling the world when this happens? A re-study of the letters to the Corinthi-

ans would help all members of the church. Look at the problems of the Corinthian church. There were divisions (14); a specific case of immorality (5); lawsuits between Christians (6:1-8); immorality in general (6:9-20); and questions about marriage (7); meats offered to idols (8:1-11:1); public worship of the church (11:2-16), the Lord's Supper (11:17-24), use of spiritual gifts (12-14), the resurrection (15) and the collection of funds by the church (16:1-9). Would you like to have been a member there? Have you ever wondered what was going on in the homes of those Corinthians? Notice with me 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 and 2 Corinthians 12:13-21. What actually solved the problems of the church at Corinth? The same thing that will solve the problem of berating Christ and His church in the home and in the church today: putting the fear of God back into the church and back into the home. The only way that we can do this is to have respect for the Word of God and to practice discipline, both in the home and in the church. Brethren, if we do not do this the church will not be destroyed or defeated, but, I assure you, there will be only a remnant left!

When the church is berated in the home, God, Christ and members of the body of Christ are embarrassed, effectiveness is lost, and those who are trying to teach others are made to look like hypocrites. When members lose respect for the church, it leads them to apostasy. If the next generation is the church of tomorrow and all of the above is true, where will tomorrow's church be?

WHY WE ARE LOSING OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

Some members try to blame the church for losing her young people. But the truth of the matter is, it is in the home where our young are lost. A home where self-giving love is found is a place where God lives with the husband and wife (Eph. 5:22-33); a place where patience, kindness, protection, self-control, faithfulness, forgiveness, and commitment exist (1 Cor. 13:1-13; Phi. 4:8); where God, Christ, and the church are put first (Mat. 6:33; Phi. 4:13); where the Golden Rule (Mat. 7:12) is practiced, where the Word of God is taught and lived (Col. 3:16; Phi. 2:15); and where joy, peace, goodness, meekness, and temperance are found (Gal. 5:22-23). If every home strived to be this type of home, then we would not be

losing our young people. As a matter of fact, we would convert the world with our young people!

Another reason we are losing our young is because they do not see commitment in the home or in the church. Their parents are not committed to one another. They see conflicts that are not settled by mature people. Within the church, they see members who are not committed to Christ. When there are conflicts within the church, many of them remain unsettled. Unfortunately, our young are caught in the middle. What are they supposed to do when the Bible teacher, the preacher, the elders, the deacons and members are berated, charged and convicted by their parents?

Another reason we lose our young is that we have begun to soften the gospel. We are preaching too many “safe sermons” and not enough doctrinal sermons. Do you really believe Romans 1:16: “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”? If I believe the gospel is the only power to save, then I had better be sure that I preach only that gospel. We are losing our young because we are not preaching or teaching that gospel in its full power. Have you talked to the young of the congregation where you worship about fornication, lying, cheating, drinking, drugs, speeding, honesty, purity, cursing and modesty? Seriously, have you talked to them about where their souls will spend eternity, the one church, the one way of salvation and the true way to worship God?

The reason we are losing most of our young people is because of the neglect and unconcern of those of us who are parents. Someone said we should go to the denominational world and learn from them how to keep our young people. I did some research and guess what? They are losing over half of their youth.

The Bible says, “do not sin against the child,” (Gen. 42:22). Some of the greatest sins committed are against our children. Will our grandchildren be members of the church? Will our children and their children know the one church, the plan of salvation, the way to worship and how to live a Christian life? Are we concerned? Have we been negligent? In Psalm 78:1-8 the psalmist said,

Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable I will utter dark sayings of old: Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, showing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments. And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God.

Paul said, “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” (2 Tim. 2:2).

Finally, we are losing our young because the home has become a center for materialism and pleasure. Peer pressure among the young is tremendous. They want the status symbol of “brand name” everything. They want to play every sport the schools and recreation departments offer. On the weekends they want to see or rent movies, go to the amusement parks, concerts and teen clubs. I think I understand why they do not have time for Bible study, youth devotions, or teaching others about Christ and the church.

Brethren, the center of our homes must focus on Jesus Christ and His church. When Christ and His church are uplifted in our homes, the church and the home will be triumphant. Paul said in Ephesians 3:20-21:

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.

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THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT— IS UNITED IN ONE BODY

Bobby Liddell



Bobby Liddell was born in Birmingham, Alabama. He left Methodism in obedience to the gospel in 1972. He has attended Walker College, University of Alabama in Birmingham, Memphis School of Preaching, and Alabama Christian School of Religion. He has done local evangelism work at Central and Parrish, Alabama, and now serves the Bellview congregation, Pensacola, Florida. Bobby has served as Assistant Editor of *The Christian Sentinel*, and is now Editor of *Defender* and *Beacon*, Director of the Bellview Lectures, Editor of the Bellview Lectures Book, and staff writer for *Firm Foundation*. He has done radio and television work in several states and has spoken in lectures and meetings at home and in Southeast Asia.

Bobby is married to the former Joan Los and they have three children, Anthony Allen, Nathan Gant and Keri Jayne.

INTRODUCTION

Does God demand unity among His children or does He tolerate, even desire, division? The “church triumphant” is a church united in one body. To argue any other course is to feebly and failingly attempt to uphold the divisive doctrines and dogmas of men designed to salve the consciences of the self-willed and disobedient. God has not authored a divided body warring against itself but a united body warring against sin and Satan. Not only does God demand unity; he has shown the way of unity—following His Word, the place of unity—only in Christ, and the blessing of unity—salvation now and eternally. His Word plainly presents the absolute essentiality of unity: to please God; to live in peace, joy and love; to accomplish the work set before us; and to secure our part in the eternal unity of Heaven.

In the midst of famine in his land, Jacob sent ten of his twelve sons to Egypt to buy corn. Joseph, who had been sold into slavery by his brothers now was over the storehouses of Egypt. When approached by his ten brethren, to prove them, he accused them of

being spies. Their reply: “We are all one man’s sons; we are true men, thy servants are no spies” (Gen. 42:11). Of the rebellious and disobedient Jews of his day, Malachi asked. “Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers?” (Mal. 2:10). Should not those in Christ echo these words and agree: “We are all one [God’s] sons,” and “Have we not all one Father?” All sons of God the Father should be united in the family of God, the one body of Christ, the church triumphant.

UNITY IN THE BIBLE

The word “unity” is found only three times in the Bible, but the principle of unity pervades its pages. Psalm 133:1 records the first instance of this word. “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” Some things are good which are not pleasant. Medicine may be good but it may not always be pleasant. Discipline is good but not always pleasant. Likewise, some things are pleasant which are not good. One may find pleasure in some activity which actually does him harm, not good. Slothfulness brings pleasure to the slovenly but in not good. Immorality may bring fleeting pleasure but is not good. Truly, many things in this world which are good are not pleasant and many which are pleasant are not good. However, unity, according to God’s inspired Word, is both good and pleasant. Such being the case, wise men will surely desire unity, seek it and pay the price for it however high it may be.

Note, too, the Psalmist declares the goodness and pleasantness of “brethren” dwelling together in unity. Brethren in God’s called-out blood-bought family, the New Testament church, should dwell together in unity! Remember the words of Abram when there arose strife between his herdmen and the herdmen of Lot: “And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren” (Gen. 13:8). What was the reason Abram gave that there should be no strife? “We be brethren”! Oh, brethren, let us look to the attitude of Abram and avoid strife and seek peace for, “We be brethren.”

Strife among brethren aids Satan's deceptions, hinders the cause of Christ, gives occasion to those who reproach Christianity and greatly incapacitates one's living for the Lord. A lack of that "good and pleasant" unity will populate Hell with millions of lost souls. In view of that, one may more clearly see the concern of Christ in His prayer as He prayed that all believers should be one "that the world may believe that thou hast sent me":

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 us; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them (John 17:20-26).

The second occurrence of the word unity is in Ephesians 4:3, where the inspired penman Paul writes: "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Notice to whom Paul wrote: "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 1:1). The apostle was writing to those in the one body, the church when he spoke of what God had done in 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).

Those in the body of Christ should do all within their power to achieve and maintain Bible unity in their affections, attitudes and actions. A unity based upon mutual consent to the ideas of men or to the will of men may be obtained which is not "of the Spirit"; i.e., not the unity taught in Holy Scripture but such a "unity" will not last nor will it result in the peace "which passeth all understanding" (Phi. 4:7), nor in the blessing of the "God of peace" being present

(Phi. 4:9). Men may unite in error but such brings only eternal shame and destructive division from God and all that is holy. If all: (1) sought the direction of the Spirit supplied through the teaching found in the revealed Word; and, (2) followed that direction, unity would be a natural consequence. So too, would peace follow. Is that not a worthy cause for which men should live and die?

How we should endeavor to keep that unity in the bond of peace. Should all engage in such an endeavor, the result would be the elimination of all sects and schisms and the renunciation and cessation of all divisions and denominations. Strife and dissension would die. Doctrines of men which rend and divide would be only sad oddities for the examinations of historians. Inventions and institutions of discord and stumbling would, finally forsaken, lie in ruins never to be revived. The Sword of the Spirit (which is the Word of God according to Ephesians 6:17) would be the only weapon wielded and the opponents only sin and Satan. Never again would the body of Christ be pierced and wounded by the slashing sword of devilish division. Indeed, to injure the unity of the body of Christ, the church, rivals the cruelty of crimes associated with the cross upon which unbelievers hanged him.

The third and final occurrence of the word “unity” is in Ephesians 4:13: “Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” The unity of the faith, the fully, finally once for all delivered faith (Jude 3), the gospel, results in the unity of all who gladly receive, believe and obey it. As long as men reject God’s Word, they reject God’s desired unity. Those who substitute for, add to, subtract from or change in any way the revealed Will of God cast their vote for division of the body of Christ and damnation of themselves and all who follow their pernicious teaching (Rev. 22:18-19).

There exists neither division nor contradiction in the doctrine of the New Testament of Christ. That being the case, there exists no reason for division among those who claim to follow the teaching of Christ Followers of Christ stand as one on the firm foundation of Truth united because they are guided by God’s Will, not their own.

The prayer of the faithful is that of Christ in the Garden: “not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Mat. 26:39). Now, does it not seem reasonable that if two, two thousand or two million walk according to the same rule they shall walk together; i.e., in unity. Paul penned: “And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16).

UNITY AND DIVISION

The herdman prophet of Tekoa asked: “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3). The answer was and is an unqualified, “No!” Conversely, will two walk apart if they do agree? Some would say, “We may agree to disagree.” The meaning is: “We may maintain unity even though we disagree not only in matters of opinion but also in matters of faith and practice.” If all the world agreed to disregard God’s plea and plan for unity in order to follow the will of man, just as surely all the world would be lost. While Christians seek: “In matters of faith, unity; in matters of opinion, liberty; and in all things, charity,” such “agreeing to disagree” in matters of faith is not the way of unity, nor is it the way of charity. Neither is it the way of peace for peace is inseparable from unity. It is, however, the way of spiritual death.

Others say, “We may have unity in diversity,” though they mean not diversity but division. The church triumphant is filled with diversity but not division. For example: men from all walks of life and every nation, race and tongue enter into Christ through obedience to His Will, where, in Him, they labor according to their varying abilities. Notice the diversity. Still, there is no division in faith nor in practice!

When one seeks to legitimize denominational division by calling it “diversity” he seeks to destroy Bible unity. Of two, if one follows God’s will can he walk together with the other who: (1) believes, follows and teaches an opposing, Contradictory and unscriptural (and anti-scriptural) doctrine; (2) wears a different and unscriptural name in religion; (3) worships in a way which God has not authorized; (4) teaches a plan of salvation foreign to the Bible; and/or, (5) extends fellowship and claims unity with those to whom God does not extend fellowship and with whom God is not united?

Certainly not.? There is no unity in division regardless of what men might wish. Paul said. “speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you” (1 Cor. 1:10). The best one can hope for from division is a union (where men agree to be in union while practicing division) but not Bible unity. Such is akin to the tying of two cats by the tail and throwing them over a clothesline. There is union but certainly not unity.

UNITY AND DIVISION IN AN OLD TESTAMENT PASSAGE

Exodus 32 reveals an Old Testament instance of division among the children of God. While Moses was on the mount, the people said to Aaron, “Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we know not what is become of him” (Exo. 32:1). Such a request was clearly out of harmony with the Will of God which will He plainly revealed.

Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth (Exo. 20:3-4).

The influence which prompted their desire was the heathen worship in Egypt and the deciding factor was human wisdom. God’s pattern and God’s will was not considered. The people of Israel wanted to be like the people of Egypt; thus, they patterned their worship after the bull worship of the Egyptians. Their evil desire found fruition through the willing compromise of Aaron. He, no doubt, thought compromise with the ungodly demands for an idol god would make everyone happy and save him from the trouble of opposition. Perhaps all the Israelites were happy, but God was not. Even though they claimed to worship the Lord by worshipping the idol (32:5), simply calling unauthorized, ungodly and idolatrous activities “worship to God” did not make it acceptable to God. Neither will it today.

Upon descending from the mount, Moses found the people in unbridled depravity and was justifiably angry (v. 19). The call came from Moses for a “Unity Meeting”—on the Lord’s side. He said,

“Who is on the Lord’s side? let him come unto me” (v. 26). Notice, he did not say, “Who is not on the Lord’s side? I will come to you.” Neither did he say, “Unity is more important than being on the Lord’s side. Let us all come together.” He called for unity—of all on the Lord’s side, and he called for division—from all not on the Lord’s side.

Did Moses cause division? Was he the source of trouble and the destroyer of unity? Was he not loving enough or should he have been more tolerant? Today, some, willing to compromise with error and sell the Truth for “unity” (really union, not unity) charge those who hold fast to the Word of God with the sin of division. Is that charge valid? In the case of Exodus 32, who caused the division? Was it not those who left the Word of God to follow the will of men? Today, is it not the same? Those who reject the Word of God are the dividers and troublers, not those who hold to it.

And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father’s house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim (1 Kin. 18:17-18).

In the case of the golden calf, there was a sharp division between those on the Lord’s side and those not and three thousand men died that day as a result of division (v. 28). Men’s souls hang in the balance today and division shall surely slay their very souls; thus, the people of God can not afford to play with sin and compromise with sinners. Division is not something to be tolerated or taken lightly. If one is “loving enough” to say division is not serious, he is too loving-too loving of the world and its lusts for he is certainly not manifesting love for God, His Word and the pure body of Christ (1 John 2:15-17).

UNITY AND DIVISION IN A NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGE

The church simply cannot afford to tolerate division. In a New Testament instance, Paul addressed the problem of division at Corinth when he, by inspiration, wrote:

Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call

upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours (1 Cor. 1:2).

He did not mince words but cut straight to the heart of the matter to remove the deadly cancer which threatened the life of the body, the church at Corinth. Notice the words the Holy Spirit gave him to give to the Corinthians concerning the division which plagued them.

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. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ Is Christ divided? was. Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Cor. 1:10-13).

From this passage, it is clear: (1) division existed at Corinth; (2) such division was manifested by the brethren at Corinth saying they were of Paul, Apollos, Cephas or Christ; and, (3) by the authority of Christ, Paul besought brethren to: speak the same thing, be not divided, but be perfectly joined in the same mind and in the same judgment.

Notice how Paul reasons by asking three questions. (1) “Is Christ divided?”; (2) “Was Paul crucified for you?”; and, (3) “Were ye baptized in the name of Paul?”

To the first, “Is Christ divided?”, the answer must be, “Indeed, not!” There is, “One Lord” (Eph. 4:5). He is one with the Father (John 17:21). The Godhead of Father, Son and Spirit exemplifies unity: “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord” (Deu. 6:4). Christ is not divided; thus, His body should not be divided. Colossians 1:18 records of Christ: “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.” Can one imagine a single head having more than one body, even hundreds of bodies? What a grotesque and repulsive picture. Yet, many propose Christ is head over many hundreds of different, divided and disputing bodies. Since Christ is the head of the body, surely the body should wear the name of the head and that name only. Suppose I introduced myself by saying of my head, “This is Bobby Liddell,” but of my

body, “This is John Smith”? Equally ridiculous is the contention the Head of the church, Christ should attach to a body or bodies wearing the name of some man or method. Christ is not divided. Neither should his body be divided.

To the second, “Was Paul crucified for you?”, the answer again is “Indeed, not!” Since Paul was not crucified for the church (as was Jesus to pay the purchase price with His blood—Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25), what member of the church (for which Christ died) should wear the name of Paul or any other than Christ? Great admiration for good men does not supplant the place of Christ and His name. It is interesting to note when different denominations seek to come together in some association they can all agree the name “church of Christ” is a name which is scriptural and the one in which they can “unite,” for example, in the National Council of Churches of Christ. Let it be known the church of Christ of the New Testament has nothing to do with such unauthorized ecumenical councils and the National Council of Churches of Christ has nothing to do with the church of the Bible. None was crucified for the church but Christ. Let the church find unity in Him and wear His name.

To the third question, “Were ye baptized in the name of Paul?”, Christian must respond, “Indeed, not.” At the household of Cornelius, Peter. “commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord” (Acts 10:48). If one were baptized in the name of Paul, he should wear the name of Paul, but he should also be ready to face judgment and eternal condemnation for so doing. If one has been baptized in the name of the Lord, he should wear the name of the Lord and be ready to face judgment and eternal commendation for so doing. All those baptized according to the Will of God should wear the name of their Savior, the Christ. Thus, in Antioch, the disciples were called (divinely called from the Greek word *chrematizo*) Christians (Acts 11:26). Of Paul, Agrippa said, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” (Acts 26:28). To the persecuted, Peter wrote, “but if a man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this name” (1 Pet. 4:16—ASV). When speaking of congregations (not different denominations) of

the Lord's church, Paul said: "The churches of Christ salute you" (Rom. 16:16).

The church of Christ, the church triumphant, is united in one body which wears the name of Christ because: (1) Christ is not divided; (2) Christ, and he alone, was crucified for his church; and, (3) those members of it were baptized in the name of Christ and, thus, the Lord added them to his body, the church (Acts 2:38, 41, 47).

HINDRANCES TO UNITY

That division exists is testimony to the fact unity is hindered. What hinders unity? (1) Pride causes one to reject the will of God to listen to his own will. The proud man seeks to have his way at the expense of unity and will almost certainly sow seeds of discord and divide the body of Christ if allowed. (2) Failure to distinguish between opinion and faith hinders unity. The church has been divided by those who make opinion faith as well as those who make faith opinion. Neither is correct and both hinder unity. (3) Lack of discipline will divide the body by permitting sin to go unchecked. "But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived" (2 Tim. 3:13). (4) Lack of love for brethren hinders unity. Brother Franklin Camp said:

In division any less sinful because it grows out of hatred and jealousy?
I had just as soon be guilty of dividing the church by adding to the word of God as to cause division because of a lack of love for brethren. The end result is exactly the same, division.

(5) Heeding the words of men instead of the Word of God hinders unity. The disciples of Christ, "kept thy word," Christ said (John 17:6). The early church: "continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine [teaching]" (Acts 2:42). By so doing, they were set apart. "Sanctify them through thy truth.thy word is truth" (John 17:17). Paul wrote of a time: "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" (2 Tim. 4:3-4). (6) Going beyond that authorized hinders unity. God has set bounds and limits. When men

transgress those bounds and limits, they pose the danger of dividing the body of Christ. John, the apostle, wrote:

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).

The divisions of the church in the nineteenth century, which still hinder the cause today, were over brethren going beyond what God authorized. The Christian Church and the Disciples of Christ preferred division over unity as they preferred and held to that which God did not authorize in evangelism and worship. They obviously wanted their missionary societies and mechanical instruments of music more than unity with their brethren and with the Lord. (7) Improper attitudes hinder unity. Paul said:

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 (2 Tim. 2:24-25).

Let us all avoid any hindrance to unity and seek every opportunity to strengthen unity in the body of Christ.

CONCLUSION

The church of Christ is the glorious church triumphant. Jesus prayed that it might be united. The Bible abundantly teaches the unity of all believers in the one body. Such unity is possible, but only if men will forsake every doctrine of man and embrace the doctrine of Christ in obedient faith. All who so do shall enjoy eternal unity in Heaven one day. All who reject the unity God proposes shall be guilty of division and shall be in Hell separated eternally from God and all the faithful. Those in the body seek neither unity nor peace at the expense of Truth. Rather, unity and peace are based on and found in Truth. Let us all work together with God to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

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THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT— GROWS IN THE RIGHT WAY

Winfred Clark



Winfred Clark has preached the gospel for over forty years. He has degrees from Alabama Christian College, Jacksonville State University and the Alabama Christian School of Religion. He has taught sermon classes for several years and continues to do so as Director of the Alabama School of Bible Emphasis. For several years, he served as Director of Public Relations and as an instructor for the Alabama Christian School of Religion in Montgomery, Alabama. He is very active in writing and speaking on lectureships and in gospel meetings. He and his wife, Polly, have one son, Jimmy, who is also a gospel preacher, and a daughter, Phyllis, who is an administrator in the public school systems of Athens, Alabama.

The topic of “church growth” has become very popular in recent years. One can find numerous publications that treat the topic. Some of these are worthwhile, others are faulty. Some are careful to maintain a scriptural posture, others do not exercise this concern. But none of this should cause us to not be interested in the growth of the church.

When you speak of “church growth,” you are speaking of an increase. When you speak of an increase of the church, you speak of an increase in the number of people who are being saved. Surely, surely, all of us would want to see more people saved. All genuine Christians are concerned about the lack of growth among churches in our land.

We propose to center this study in the book of Acts. It will be there that we shall find some of the answers we desire concerning this matter of “church growth.”

HERE WE SEE SUCH AFFIRMED

Again and again we will find those passages that tell us of the growth of the church. Look at such passages as: “and the same day

there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41), “and the number of the men was about five thousand” (Acts 4:4), “and believers were the more added to the Lord” (Acts 5:14), “and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith”(Acts 6:7). On and on one could go showing such growth of the church. This becomes an affirmed fact. It is a matter of inspired history that the church of the Lord grew not long after its establishment.

Another fact of interest is this: the church grew without much of what we have. The church grew without many of the things that seem to have become so necessary today. Take for example: the growth you read of in the book of Acts occurred without church buildings. This is not to discredit a church building, but it is to say the church can grow without one. The church grew without modern technology such as radio, television, and the printed page. All of these are good and wonderful but the church at one time grew without these. It was able to grow in spite of the fact that much of the travel would seem to be extremely slow by today’s standards. In spite of this we find a record of the church growing..

One does not read the book of Acts without coming to the conclusion that the church can grow. It did at one time, it has at other times and it can again.

HERE WE SEE HOW IT WAS ACHIEVED

There are many books that are available on “how to grow a church” or the like. There are none that can surpass the one we have called the New Testament. It indeed gives the answers and we will find there are no dark, deep secrets about it.

If we go to the first recorded reference of church growth we will find, “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). This passage affirms growth. Now, how does such come about? How did it occur? Look at the background and you will see that there are some folks that had a right regard for the Word of God. That is what they preached. That is what the people heard. That is what reached the heart. Here are preachers and people who have a profound respect for the Word of God. Go back through

the chapter and you will see this emphasis such as in verse 14, “hear my words,” “this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel” (v. 16), “For David speaketh” (v. 25), “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart” (v. 37), “with many other words did he testify and exhort” (v. 40). This emphasis is the thing that brought about their conversion and thus the growth of the church.

Again, we learn of this growth by what is said later, “Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand” (Acts 4:4). How does the number come to be five thousand? By hearing and believing the Word. But what does that mean? It means the word has been and continues to be faithfully preached. It also means that you have people who would be satisfied with no less than the Word of the Lord but that they would surely be satisfied with such. The Word of God was surely in the background of this growth. Could you substitute something else for this and still have the same kind of growth? Obviously not. We can thus see again that church growth is directly connected to the Word of God. In fact it is absolutely dependent on such.

Move on to this language, “And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women” (Acts 5:14). Here we are told that believers were added. One gives pause to ask, believers of what? We have no problem deciding from this book what they believed. They believed what they had been taught and we know they were taught the will of the Lord. If you retrace your steps a few verses in this book you will see that this word was preached in spite of opposition (Acts 4:17-33). You will find that this Word was preached in spite of some things that were inconsistent to such preaching (Acts 5:1-13). They did not allow the interference of the rulers to stop them, nor did they allow the inconsistency of follow Christians to stop them. They would still preach the Word and people would continue to believe it and the church would grow.

We find further evidence of church growth when Luke will say, “And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied” (Acts 6:1). Again, “And the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7). But

one needs to go back and look at the background. He needs to see how the church came to grow in this case. He needs to see how it occurred. Look at the context. The men who preached faced some very strong opposition. In fact they had been placed in prison but deliverance had come by the hand of an angel of the Lord. They were then told to “Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life” (Acts 5:20). The next verse will tell you that they did what they were told to do. Later they are brought back before the council and even beaten but “daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ” (Acts 5:42). That is the last verse in chapter five. The very next verse will tell you of the multiplication of the disciples. Now from this it is not hard to determine why there was such growth. It will be found in the phrase, “they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.” That is the reason the church grew in such rapid fashion. This is “how” it grew.

The kind of growth that we read of in the book of Acts will not surprise anybody that believed what Jesus had taught during his personal ministry. Go back to some of the parables that Jesus taught and you will find him laying the foundation for this kind of thing. For example, “The seed is the word of God” (Luke 8:11). If that seed reaches the good and honest heart you will have increase and growth (Luke 8:15). You will not have that increase without such. You can’t separate the seed from the increase. Neither can you separate the Word of God from such increase. It takes the Word of God to produce that which the Word of God produces. Only the Word of God will produce the kingdom. You can have no increase of the kingdom without it. Any substitute for the Word does not constitute church growth, for that which is produced is not the church. It may be a crowd but it will not be the church.

Another thing should be kept in mind. There have been times since the book of Acts when the church also grew. Even in our lifetime we have seen the church make great strides in the 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, and later. But we saw great growth during those days. But how did this take place? I am persuaded that such occurred in the same way it did in the first century. That was by preaching the Word of

God. During those days men had great confidence in the Word. They had a great appreciation for the Word. There was a hunger for the Word. We didn't have much other than the gospel. Our buildings were not that fancy and in many cases not very well situated, but we were able to reach people with the gospel. Then we moved into better buildings, in better locations. Affluence set in and men ceased to have the same spiritual appetite. With this emerging in the world, we had some in the church who have tried to collect a crowd with means other than the gospel. The gospel has been given second place to pop psychology and a "happy gospel." The same clear sounds that were heard in the long ago have been muted for all intents and purposes in many places. Oh yes, you will still have crowds in many places but that does not in and of itself prove anything other than the fact that you have a crowd. That does not mean necessarily that you have the growth of the church. If that was all that you had to do then Billy Graham will be far ahead for he has the crowds. But what does that prove about church growth? Absolutely nothing. Not all large crowds indicate church growth in the sense of people being added to the church.

Yes, I know there are places where large crowds have been attracted to church buildings. It is then easy for such people to say, "We must be doing something right or we could not have this many people." But what was it that attracted the people? Why are they present? Was it because of some spiritual need being met? Was it because of any opportunity to know more of the Word of God? If so, then all should be thankful. If, however, the crowd was attracted because of something that is entertaining, or would satisfy some need of the flesh, you are then talking about something else altogether. Remember that Jesus dealt with such crowds during his personal ministry. There was a time when he fed a multitude (John 6:1-14). At a later time many of these people showed up in another place. What was the Lord's response? Listen, "Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because you did eat of the loaves, and were filled" (John 6:26). If you will read the rest of the chapter you will find that all that crowd did not continue with him. When He moved away

from the loaves and fishes to the spiritual matters that should grip their souls, you will find that many of these turned aside. But, stop to think a moment. There was a crowd present but there was not the spiritual desire that should have been. Did Jesus go back and give them more loaves and fish, with the idea, that while they are eating these I will have an opportunity to teach? No, not at all, but many of our day think that is the way the church can grow. Yes, we know it is right to feed the hungry and those who are in need, but we also know that it is not right to place all the emphasis on the physical needs or wants of man. Jesus would not allow His Word to become merely a human services effort. His thrust would have to do with the souls of men.

One of the things my brethren need to learn is that many of the things that become a means to an end will soon become ends within themselves. When we allow ourselves to use an artificial attraction to bring people in, we will soon have to change to a larger or a greater number of attractions to bring them back. Let me illustrate the matter. Several years ago, Hank Aaron hit his 715th home-run in Atlanta. This was done in the seventh inning. There was a large crowd because of the occasion. I guess the stadium was full. What happened after he hit that 715th? You guessed it, a large part of the crowd went home. Now what would it take to get the same kind of crowd the next night? Or a large crowd the night after? On and on this sort of thing would go. Even people who run family amusement parks know what it takes to get the crowd. They have to have a “new and sensational attraction.” That is not the way the church grew in the first century nor even in the twentieth century.

WE SEE HERE THE ATTITUDES NECESSARY FOR GROWTH

In the twenty-eight chapters that make up the book of Acts, one can find attitudes within the church and without that affected the growth of the church. This will become obvious in a number of ways.

Look at the attitude of those who first heard the Word on Pentecost. What kind of people were these? See how Luke describes them. They were said to be “devout men” (Acts 2:5). They were

people whose hearts could be reached with the gospel (Acts 2:37). These people would gladly receive the Word (Acts 2:41). Are you surprised to see added “about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41)? Suppose preachers and teachers came in contact with those same kind of people today, what do you think would occur? If the same kind of teaching was done the same kind of result would follow. You would have the kind of attitude that would be conducive to the growth of the church.

Take the case of Cornelius among the Gentiles. Here was a man who is said to be “a devout man” (Acts 10:2). He was also a man who “feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people” (Acts 10:2). Here is a man that was told by an angel to send for a Jew that would tell him what he was to do (Acts 10:6). You will find that he does not hesitate to do so. Not only does he send for Peter to come but he would also have many together when Peter arrived (Acts 10:27). He would say to Peter, “Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God” (Acts 10:33). With such an attitude you would have no doubt about the church growing among the Gentiles like Cornelius.

This is the same kind of an attitude you will find manifested among other Gentiles, when Paul and Barnabas were on that first journey. There was a time, when they were in Antioch in Pisidia, that they preached first to the Jews but they were not that receptive to their preaching. If you will note “the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath” (Acts 13:42). Notice, “And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God” (Acts 13:44). Now move to this statement, “And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region” (Acts 13:49). With the attitude one sees among the Gentiles in that city you are not surprised. If they had the same attitude that some of the Jews had in that place you would have had little or no growth.

These speak of the attitude of those outside the church. These attitudes cannot be discounted. They are very important. Without a proper respect for and a reverence for the Word of God you will not have this kind of growth. If the soil is not receptive then the seed

will not produce. There is no way it can do so. It takes the right kind of soil no matter how good the seed may be.

There are also some attitudes that are very important within the church if we are going to have growth. This is also seen time and again in the book of Acts. Take for example the attitude possessed by the apostles toward preaching in the face of danger. Yes, they were threatened. Note Luke's record of what the rulers, elders and scribes had to say, "But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name" (Acts 4:17). They then called them and told them not to speak or teach in that name. How will they respond? What will their attitude be? This could stop their teaching and if that is stopped then you will surely stop the growth of the church. What will they say, how will they respond? We are not left in doubt.

But Peter and John answered and said unto them. Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard (Acts 4:19-20).

Their answer was a simple "No." They could say "no" and really mean it. They are willing to lay their lives on the line in spite of the fact that they might have to die for teaching and preaching the gospel. That was their attitude. They would consider no other choice.

You will also find that these same apostles and the early church would not stand by and see the gospel perverted. There was a time when some within the church would seek to add circumcision to the gospel (Acts 15:1-3). But you will find a united effort on the part of the apostles to solve this matter once and for all. This they did in a meeting at Jerusalem and with the ensuing letter that was addressed to all concerned (Acts 15:6-29).

They would also warn of any kinds of departures from the truth for they knew exactly what this would do to the church (Acts 20:28-32). Paul was well aware of the fact that perverse teaching would produce something other than church growth. Though it is not always easy to speak of such possibilities they would do so. There was a cause that was higher than themselves and they were not going to forget this fact.

CONCLUSION

Yes, the church can grow. It can grow as God ordained and wants it to grow. This we can know by what we learn from the book of Acts. This is an inspired account of “church growth.” Here I can see it affirmed. I do not have to wonder about whether or not such can take place. I know it can for it did under the oversight of inspiration. I can also know “how” it achieved such growth. I can see a direct connection between its growth and those things necessary for it to grow. I can see that the church would go only where the Word of God was preached and received and I can see that you would have a church where such was the case. That church would grow and so would any such church today. That is the way the church grew then and this was growth in the right way.

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THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT— TAKES THE GOSPEL TO ALL THE WORLD

Guss Eoff



Guss Eoff, Jr. was born March 7, 1923 in Fort Worth, Texas. In February of 1942, he married Lla Laline Norris. They have one son, Larry, also a gospel preacher. Guss attended Pepperdine College in Los Angeles and Southwest State Teachers College in San Marcos, Texas. He has preached for local congregations in California, Oregon, Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, North Carolina and Missouri.

He also has preached in twenty countries and twenty-four states, serving as a missionary to Hong Kong for two years. Guss has been preaching for forty-nine years and now works with the church in Independence, Missouri.

At the Abilene Christian College Lectures in 1971, the theme was “World Evangelism.” One of the first speakers on the lectureship was brother V. E. Howard. His speech was entitled, “The Gospel and The Lost.” In that speech he said.

Ladies and gentlemen, if I believed the people of all religious denominations, members of all different cults and sects, as well as the nonreligious, were saved I would not be here tonight addressing you on this great and profound subject, “The Gospel and The Lost,” neither would I devote anymore time, effort, and money to the support of the church and her mission in this world. I think I would just “check out” and devote my time to business, wealth, and honor among men and just be a “good Joe” to everybody, for nobody is really lost, according to such unscriptural, fallacious reasoning. If this conclusion were true, why encourage missionaries to make sacrifices to take the gospel to heathen lands? Why not all missionaries come home to their loved ones and their families? Why not silence the gospel press, discontinue all radio and T.V. broadcasts of the gospel? Why not just be content to “keep house” for the Lord—just “hold our own” and really not attempt to preach and teach any part of the gospel that would prick the conscience of our own brethren, much less convert lost souls to Christ, for, after all, the gospel is a relative thing, sound

doctrine is out of date and the gospel is not really the power of God to save the believer. May it never be so!

These words from the lips of brother Howard twenty years ago, have just about been fulfilled today. We have just about “checked out,” become “good Joe’s,” and become content to “keep house” for the Lord.

Well do I remember the excitement concerning mission work following World War II! One of my teachers was J. M. McCaleb, a missionary to Japan for fifty years. He impressed me greatly when I was in college. I remember the Paden’s in Italy, the Fox’s in Japan. Otis Gatewood inspired me to teach the lost. I was encouraged to try to reach the lost by brother Homer Hailey’s book, *Let’s Go Fishing For Men*. Other brethren challenged me in their books. Brother Ivan R. Stewart helped me in his book *From House To House*.

In 1958, brother Ira Y. Rice, Jr., asked me to move to Hong Kong to preach and work with sister Elizabeth Bernard and the orphan children she had. Brother Rice was our pioneer missionary to South-east Asia. He and his family went to Singapore in 1955. We moved to Hong Kong in June 1959.

It was during the years that Ira Rice, Jr., Otis Gatewood, A. R. Holton, George W. Bay, George Gurganus, Reuel Lemmons, and a number of others, were calling for missionaries and churches to send missionaries, that the mission work of the church grew most. From 1953 to 1975, our missionary families grew from 229 to 800. But from 1975 to 1978 we dropped 484 families. In just three years we lost over half. According to recent research done by Sunset School of Missions, the Churches of Christ had only 280 missionary families in the field in 1989. From all indications by the end of 1990, we will have lose than 100 families in the mission fields around the world. That will be less than we had in 1953.

GOD’S PLAN TO EVANGELIZE THE WORLD

For the church to be triumphant, it must take the gospel to all the world. God’s plan to evangelize the world was given to his disciples.

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 (Mat. 28:19-20).

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).

And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of nine should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:46-47).

Brethren, we must quite thinking of the millions we must reach, and think of converting one person at a time.

The Word must be preached in order for souls to believe.

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. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For 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 of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! (Rom. 10-9-15).

As Christians, we must convert our friends and neighbors here around us. Then we must sacrifice to send missionaries to preach to the lost in other nations.

But we are not preaching to those at home, and we are not sending missionaries to the lost of the world. As a result, we are slowly dying. Our number in members are falling at home, and we are not reaching the lost in other countries.

Back in 1971, the Assemblies of God Church had four missionaries to our one. The Mormons had thirteen to our one, and the Jehovah's Witnesses had twenty-five to our one. The Seventh Day Adventists had sixty-five missionaries to our one. That was when we had eight hundred missionary families in the field. Can you imagine the figures today when we only have a little over two hundred?

JESUS GAVE AN EXAMPLE

And he spake this parable unto them, saying. What man of you, having a 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 15:3-7).

The Lord gave us an example of becoming personally involved in seeking the lost. He left the ninety and nine safe sheep and went to find the one which was lost. He searched until he found it.

Our problem today is that we stay with the safe sheep and care little or nothing for the lost. If they happen to find their way back, that's fine, but we will not spend time, and especially money, to go find them. The principle laid down here is that *we must go and find the lost*. They are not coming to us. This is true here at home as well as abroad. We must GO!

WHY DON'T WE GO?

We have all kinds of excuses. We are very good about making straw men and tearing them down. Congregations make the excuse that we are not large enough to support a mission work. What will be our answer to Jesus for not preaching here to the lost around us?

If we wait to do mission work until we are large enough and have enough members to provide money, we will never do any mission work. It will be no credit to our faith and no glory to Jesus if we postpone our obedience until we are rich and powerful.

Many of us say: "We can't do mission work, our building is not paid for, and that must come first. We have to take care of ourselves before we can help others." Think of the money we spend on buildings, but what have we spent to save souls?

Paul said, "But this *I say*, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully" (2 Cor. 9:6). Paul assures us that "bountiful sowing" results in "bountiful reaping." When we spend money abroad, it will always result in "fruit that increases to your account" (Phi. 4:17). In

other words, fruit that increases the account of the giver. Brethren, a church building is a human expedient, but preaching the gospel to every creature is a part of “the faith once and for all delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3).

If the brethren in the first century would have gone into the building business, the words of Colossians 1:23 would never have been penned. Listen to it:

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).

The church will never be triumphant as long as brethren say, “There are plenty of lost souls right here at home.” It is true that there are plenty of lost here, but there is a great difference in the lost here and the masses of lost in the whole world. Heathens here at home have Bibles and could attend services. They have radio and television to hear the gospel, but they refuse to listen. Masses of the world have never seen or heard of the Bible, and have never heard the gospel. They have never one time heard of Jesus.

There was no doubt many heathen in Jerusalem were look but the brethren sent Barnabas to Antioch.

Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spoke unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had owned the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord (Acts 11:19-28).

No doubt there were still unbelievers at Antioch, but the church sent Barnabas and Saul to Cyprus.

Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers, as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and

fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called thorn. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid *their* hands on them, they sent *them* away (Acts 1:1-3).

Some brethren make the excuse that “we can’t oversee the work on a foreign field.” How did the elders at Antioch oversee the work in Cyprus, Asia Minor and Europe? The sending church is not to oversee the mission field, but to send faithful preachers that will establish faithful congregations. If the missionary cannot be trusted, do not send him. Later, send brethren to am what is being done by their missionary.

We make hundreds of excuses while millions are lost Some say, “Mission work does not have lasting results.” How do they know? What have they done? We still have the responsibility to warn the sinner of his way.

Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked *man* shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul (Eze. 3:17-19).

A very often-heard excuse is, “The language is too hard to learn.” Learning a new language is more difficult for some than others, but if we are really interested in souls, there is no barrier too great to try to overcome. Brother Tan Ken Koon left his wife in Singapore and came to America to attend Freed-Hardeman College. He did not tell his wife, “Baby,” his plans until the day before he left. She was very upset with him. She told him, “You can’t even speak English and you are going over there to learn the Bible and become a preacher?” When she told me of this experience (in December 1990), she said, “I guess the reason he did not tell me was because he thought I would try to persuade him not to go.” Koon paid his own way to America and stayed for two years studying to become a preacher before he returned to his wife. He had just bought a house for her and then left. Koon had been a captain in the Chinese army. He became the first

fully supported Chinese preacher supported by the Chinese in Singapore. Oh, that we had that much love for the lost, that we would not fret about the language barrier.

Lilly and I went to Hong Kong and we did not know a word of Chinese. We tried to learn. We met many that could speak English. Too, we found a person that could not only speak English, but Chinese. We converted him and he translated for us. Over 200 were baptized and now there are a number of congregations in Hong Kong as a result of our starting the work in our house.

The reason many will not go do mission work is because they are not willing to give up the things they have here in America. We have made our luxuries of living into necessities. The spiritual rewards of mission work are so great that it is well worth the hardships we may have to endure. It only takes a very short time to change our life style and we become at home with simpler things. The souls we win are such a great reward!

There are many brethren, many of which are preachers, that will not leave their families to go do mission work, even if they can stay right here in America. They think more of their families than of saving lost souls. Jesus said

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 (Mat. 10:37-38).

And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them, If any *man* come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own fife also, he cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:25-26).

Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee, what shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life (Mat. 19:27-29).

There is a principle here that will not only apply to those not willing to follow Christ, but who will not give up family and things to go preach to the lost.

Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side. And a certain scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air *have* nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay *his* head. And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead (Mat. 8:18-22).

Many will not go into other countries to do mission work because they are afraid to depend on congregations to support them. There have been many missionaries brought home because the supporting congregations have lost the interest they once had in the mission field. Some missionaries have been forced to return from the field because their supporting congregation decided to build an annex to their building, or because the congregation failed to keep their members informed and excited. Many times mission budgets are cut so the sponsoring congregation can launch out in another field of endeavor.

Sometimes the sponsoring congregation changes preachers and he undermines the missionary. My wife and I sold everything we had to move to Hong Kong. Just before we went to the field, the sponsoring congregation changed ministers. We know that he was not in favor of our plans. I was warned by an experienced missionary not to go under such conditions, but the set time for us to leave was upon us. I did not know where I could find another sponsoring congregation, so we went. After being on the mission field for some time, I received a letter telling me that I was being undermined at home. The preacher was heard to say: "I have been Guss Eoffed and Hong Konged to death." The letters I received from the elders were critical of everything I tried to do. I later found that letters, financial reports, and pictures of things we were doing were thrown in the trash. The old janitor collected the pictures from the trash cans and hid them in the basement of the building, but he was afraid to say anything for fear of losing his job. He was retired and needed the work. Our secretary that was so interested in the Hong Kong work was fired by the preacher.

The elder that really stood behind our work resigned, sold his business and home and moved to another city. The result of all this was, I received one month's salary and a letter saying that was it. I had no job, no support, no place to live, and no way to support myself in Hong Kong, so we had to come home. A friend, a gospel preacher in Oregon, told me that my wife and son could stay with him until I found another job. I was heart-broken, and we had to start all over again. We had to buy furniture, a car and everything to get started housekeeping again.

Many young people who planned to do mission work have heard about such things. They happen more often than you might think, and as a result, they go into the business or professional world. The lost are left without hope! If we only had faith enough to do as God says, "Go." God took care of us, and He will continue to do so as long as we have faith and seek to do His will.

THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT—MUST TAKE THE GOSPEL TO THE WORLD

The first century church is our example. The apostles were to be witnesses.

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost in 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).

The gospel was to spread from the starting place of Jerusalem to all the world. No doubt, many were content just to stay in Jerusalem, but God had other plans. Persecution came upon the church.

And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles (Acts 8:1).

The saints went everywhere preaching the Word. "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them" (Acts 8:4-5).

After Philip went to Samaria and preached Christ, the church was established. Then Philip was led to Gaza to preach to the Ethiopian

Eunuch. No doubt this Ethiopian spread the message in his homeland. Peter was in Joppa when he had a vision. From this vision, the apostle was led to preach to the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius in Caesarea. The brethren that were scattered abroad, because of the persecution, went in many directions.

Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith. and much people was added unto the Lord (Acts 11:19-24).

The church at Jerusalem sent Barnabas as far as Antioch. Then he went to Tarsus to look for Saul. When he found him he took him to be with the church in Antioch.

Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: 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 11:25-26).

We remember how Paul and Barnabas were sent by the church at Antioch to Cyprus. From there, the pair of servants went to Asia. Eventually the gospel was preached in Achia, Macedonia, Italy and the uttermost parts of the earth. God's plan will work! It did in the first century. It will work today. The church will be triumphant if we take the gospel to the lost But if we neglect evangelism here at home, the church will die.

Let's face the truth. The church is decreasing in number instead of increasing. If the present trend continues, our members will continue to dwindle and we will not be able to support our own work at home. Congregations will shrivel, they will shrink to almost nothing. Congregations will continue to combine several groups into one and will have to sell their buildings because their memberships become

less in number year after year. What a shame! What a disgrace to our God! All because of laziness and disobedience. Yet, we continue to refuse to obey the command “go teach.”

When congregations dwindle at home, the first thing they cut is mission work abroad. Missionaries are called home and many times young Christians are left unattended. As a result, they fall away or are led into denominational error. We can see whole congregations in America drifting into error, even with preachers and elders—congregations that have been established for many years. It does not only happen on the minion field. We see preachers who are compromising the truth. When we fail to take the gospel to all the world, we lose the main thrust of excitement, we lose interest in our goal, saving the lost and our own souls.

I was shocked when Jimmy Allen said in 1977 that world population was increasing 192,000 every day. That meant 8,000 an hour. I have not heard any figures lately. I have no idea what it may be today. What are we doing to reach this mass of human beings? (That is not counting the 137,000 that died each day back when brother Allen gave the figures in 1977.)

The theme of this lecture is *The Church Triumphant*. All that is necessary for great spiritual and numerical growth has been provided. God has given us the instruction in His Word. Masses of lost souls can be saved, but we are not reaching the masses. Millions of honest, sincere souls will obey God if they will be taught. I do not want to be as sour grapes, but let's face it, we are not teaching and reaching the lost. The church will be triumphant! But will we be a part of that triumphant church if we fail “to warn the wicked from his wicked way” (Eze. 3:18)? God help us to “awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead” (Eph. 5:14). We can be triumphant! We can take the gospel to the whole world! God will bless us! We can be victorious! Let's start now with renewed zeal. We are going to turn the present condition around! Our destiny depends on it!

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THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT— THE ONLY CHURCH OF WHICH YOU SHOULD BE A MEMBER

Foy L. Smith



Foy L. Smith began preaching in 1933 and preached in several states before beginning seventeen years of evangelistic work in 1963. He has authored seventeen books, done extensive radio work and some debating, written for various publications, published his own paper, *Editorially Speaking*. Edited the Intermediate Department for *Christian Bible Teacher* for ten years, and now writes "THE LAST PAGE" for *Firm Foundation*. His travels took him all over the United States in some thirty-five meetings a year. Well known for his writing and speaking, he now preaches for the church in Highland, California, near his home in Riverside.

The very title of this lesson very plainly says that "there can be no victory without conflicts, no rainbow without a cloud and a storm." The unknown author of these words told the truth, words as true as the gospel message itself. Look at the many victories in the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, and you will see great victories because of great conflicts. Any time we triumph in our personal lives we triumph over something. We never triumph over nothing. Perhaps this is why so many today, as in past generations, never triumph at all. They refuse to engage in the battles, the difficulties, necessary to win victories—to triumph. Webster says that triumphant means "to be victorious, exulting in success, elated, to achieve, to win in mastery." He uses as an illustration some of Rome's victories in the early days, and the celebrations that ensued upon the return of her fighting men. Of course, there were times when the armies of Rome did not win, thus demonstrating the very opposite of being triumphant, which was, and in defeat. So, the opposite of being triumphant is defeat or failure. The divine side of the

Lord's church has always been triumphant. It is the human side, and that means you and me, that often fails.

An early writer by the name of Henry Smith said, "The militant church is like the ark floating upon the waters, like a lily growing among thorns, like the bush which burned with fire and was not consumed, she is always besieged, but never ruined." Oh, the many battles through which the church has come since her birth on the first Pentecost in the city of Jerusalem, A.D. 33 (Acts chapter 2). We think we have hard struggles, and we do, but take a look at "Jerusalem, which is above us all" (Gal. 4:26), and rejoice in her many victories in the early days which were hard days, indeed. The Lord's church never had it easy. He even told the apostles that they would be "hated of all men for my name's sake" (Mat. 10:22). And they were. They did not worry about whether they would be popular or not. They worried about whether they would be right or not, and they devoted their lives wholly and solely to that end, to the end of being right. How we do need brave souls today who have one main purpose in their lives, to do the Lord's bidding and be right. Not nearly right, but right all the way. To be nearly right is to be deadly wrong: "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Pro. 14:12). I do not want to go the way of spiritual death, therefore my only choice in life is to be right. There are many who ran for political offices who never win. They cherish being right above being a bunch of crooks, and winning fraudulently. There is no substitute for being right. David said long ago, "The statutes of the Lord are right" (Psa. 19:8). When Peter and John were commanded to speak no more in the name of Jesus they chose to go right on speaking in that holy name, and to "please God rather than men" (Acts 4:18-20). Did they triumph, when finally they were put to death for what they preached? Yes, they were triumphant at last. They won the final victory which counted so much. They had their temporary defeats, but they won when the winning really counted. And so, thank God, shall we!

How many today would literally give their lives for the church? That is exactly what these men and others did. They literally died for the church. And to hear men, even "men of the cloth" stand up

and smear and make fun of the church in unthinkable. To me it is blasphemous and in the accounting day they shall account. Would I willingly die for something that is non-essential? No way! Die for the church? Well, many did in the early days, and I am no better than they. John lost his head for preaching the truth and my head is no better than his (Mark 6:24). Many of us can well remember days when the easy way out would have been to hold back truth, to compromise a bit, but love for truth would not let us do it. Even the “hard sayings” of Jesus can be spoken in love and always must be so spoken (John 6:60). When we talk about the church we run the risk of offending many who are in error. We are told that Jesus “offended” many (Mat. 13:57). If we offend, and we will, we must be sure that we offend in love (Eph. 4:32). Without a doubt many marriages could be saved if husbands and wives would differ in love, and settle those differences the same way. When they start throwing brickbats real trouble ensues.

It is said that the two subjects that cause more contention among friends, even families at times, are politics and religion. Now in the realm of politics it does not matter too much. With some it does, but it should not. I am sure that husbands and wives have in many instances had real trouble because they differed on politics. This is stupid. I can remember many years ago how my wife and I cancelled each other’s vote for a Presidential candidate. But we did our civic duty and we certainly had no trouble over it. But when it comes to religion we must be united. We cannot afford to “cast our decisions” against each other. We must be united in standing on the Lord’s side. My heart goes out to households that are religiously divided. When Christians compromise with error, error will come out winning every time. A household can be just about perfect in every way but if it is divided on this all-important matter—the church, the only true church—there is havoc lurking around every corner to disrupt, even destroy that household. And even if the unbelieving companion goes along compatibly for years in all other areas, think of the joy that husband and wife missed in the one all-important area, being firmly knit together in our Lord (Col. 2:2, 19). The conversations between Christian husbands and wives is much different than be-

tween one a believer, and the other an unbeliever. More than once through these many years I have heard these words, “If I had it to do over, knowing what I now know, I would not marry him/her.” This is a sad conclusion and sometimes it never gets any better through the years. Now I, like many of you, have seen husbands win their unbelieving wives and the wives their unbelieving husbands, and this is great. Don’t ever marry someone just because that person is a New Testament Christian. There must be true love there or such a marriage will never work out. That is why the title of our lessons is so important; *The Only Church Of Which You Should Be A Member*.

COMPLETE HONESTY IS NECESSARY IN SEARCHING FOR THIS, CHURCH

The one searching must be of the disposition of the grand old song, “I’d rather have Jesus. This means that Jesus and his church must be more important than the world with all its treasure. Fame without the true church is nothing. Pleasure, power, wealth are meaningless without Jesus and His church. And Jesus cannot be separated from His church. He is the Head, and His church is His spiritual Body (Col. 1:18). How can there be spiritual life if these two are separated? Such a separation creates an impossibility (John 15:5). A common remark we have heard, some of us for half a century or more is, “Well, I’m honest in what I believe but I don’t believe what you teach about the church—that there is only one church.” We try to point out that it is not what we teach but what the Bible teaches. We can be wrong but the word is not wrong. I, personally, have been wrong so many times in my own lifetime, that I certainly would not want to trust my own ways and plans to get me to heaven. How many of us have lived in the same cities for years—some as many as thirty or forty. Yet, we get off the familiar roads and avenues and find ourselves completely bewildered! Do we try to find the right way or just stubborn go on, not sure of where we are going? We try to get on the right course, of course. Why can’t we do the same thing in religion? It’s our human pride and stubbornness

that often keep us from finding the real truth, the real road to Heaven.

Jesus is that road, that truth, and surely we in our right minds do not want to find ourselves “fighting against God” (Acts 5:39). And this is what it—is when we refuse the truth concerning the true church. It is not man fighting man, it is man fighting God. The necessary element in search for truth is a strong faith. Someone said, “Faith is the line that binds our nothingness to almightiness.” In searching for the *one church* man must have this kind of faith. “Living without faith is like driving in the fog.” We do not have to search for the Lord’s church in a fog. His way is plain (Isa. 35:8).

I do not believe that we can emphasize a more important thing than this matter of honesty that we are discussing. So much hinges upon being honest. Did not one of the famous writers say, “Be true to thyself and it shall follow as the night follows the day, thou canst not be false to any man”? This was his way of saying that the first step in the right direction is to be honest. In the parable of the sower Jesus talked about the seed falling “into an honest and good heart” (Luke 8:15). This passage is often quoted, “A good and honest heart.” This is not what it says. I well remember brother Foy E. Wallace, Jr., and the comment he often made on it. He would say, “If a heart is honest it will receive the seed. A dishonest heart will not.” And further, “The heart cannot be good if it is not honest.” So about the first prerequisite to becoming a member of the church is to be honest. Thomas Jefferson said, “The whole art of government consists in the art of being honest.” Would to God that politicians today believed that! And would to God that lawyers also believed it. Dishonesty is in every calling of life, but dishonesty in religion sinks down to its lowest depth. These charismatics who are enjoying their big hey-day today, telling their lies, perverting Scriptures while living like kings and queens, are dishonest. “You little grammies and grandpas send in your dollars and the Lord will double the amount he gives you back!” And these poor, ignorant, deluded souls are literally, in some instances, eating canned dog food and cat food and sending these rich, elegantly attired rascals their dollars! And the rascals continually beg for more. Dishonesty in religion, it is!

Tell them about the Lord's one church and they will laugh at you all over their worldwide networks. But the day is coming, yes—the day of retribution.

Lincoln said, “Nothing is politically right which is morally wrong.” We can add, “Nothing is scripturally right that is scripturally wrong.” Truly, it takes real honesty to seek and obey the gospel that will put one into the true church. Obeying the Lord is not the popular thing to do. Jesus did not appeal to popularity, else He would have joined the “Ministerial Alliance” made up of the Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, and others. Oh, they would have given Him a chief position—probably would have made Him “President” and given Him a chief seat. Rather than be taken in by them He stood firm for truth and called them what they were, hypocrites! Had Jesus given them any consideration whatever, His truth would have never reached us as we have it today, and we just might not even have the glorious church that we have today. Everything depended on His standing firm and He did. Thank His Father, God, He did stand firm and we have the only church of which people should be members today!

ARE THE POPULAR DENOMINATIONS TODAY THE LORD'S CHURCH?

This is a question that is often asked. And those who ask it at the same time give their answer. They say that all churches are the Lord's and we have no business preaching and teaching otherwise. We are accused of judging, and the words of Jesus are always given: “Judge not that ye be not judged” (Mat. 7:1). Jesus also said, “Ye shall know them by their fruits” (Mat. 7:16). The late and beloved Marshall Keeble used to say in his own unique way: “I'm not judging—I'm fruit inspectin'!” We judge a fruit tree by the kind of fruit it bears. I have an orange tree and it has never borne anything but oranges. They are about ready to pick as I write this manuscript. There will not be a single lemon on it. All the fruit will be oranges. My wife says that I, personally, come up with lemons ever so often, but that is another story and has nothing to do with the point I am making here! If we want lemons (the fruit kind), we plant a lemon

tree-apricots, the same; oranges, plant an orange tree which is what I did many years ago; plums, plant a plum tree. We always get what we plant. If the world wants BAPTISTS, plant *HITCHCOCK'S MANUAL* for Baptist Churches. If we want METHODISTS, plant the *M. E. CREED* and *DISCIPLINE*; MORMONS, sow the seeds from the *BOOK OF MORMON*; CATHOLICS, plant the seeds of the *CATECHISM*; but, if we want a NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH, the LORD'S CHURCH, THE CHURCH OF CHRIST, we plant the only seed that will produce this church; the WORD OF GOD (Luke 8:11). I really do not like to capitalize in sentences unless there is a great need for such emphasis, and that is exactly why I am capitalizing in this paragraph. When we plant only the NEW TESTAMENT SEEDS (teachings) we get a New Testament church. We may as well expect a lemon off an orange tree as to expect Christians only from man-made creeds and teachings.

I believe this is the hardest lesson for us to put across today. "Oh, you just want everyone to join your church!" We hear this cry from every direction. I have been hearing it in my work for over half a century. It never changes. The most difficult point for us to get across is that we do not have a church. The church belongs to the Lord (Mat. 16:18). It is HIS, not ours. Man has absolutely no business establishing churches. The Lord beat him to it long ago; in fact on Pentecost Day, in Jerusalem, A.D. 33 (Acts chapter 2). And His church is the only one to which we should belong.

This brings us to an all-important question:

WHAT IS NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIANITY?

We are living in a day in which every John and Mary Doe has become a professional critic—a professional watch dog. Ears are turned in every direction (to catch a line, a slip made by someone just having good, old-fashioned fun) with one intent—to criticize, to destroy if possible. There used to be a program on radio one night a week. Three or four comedians told jokes that applied to just about every prominent race and color. It was a fun program and one of the most popular programs on the air for several years. Then, all of a sudden it seemed, it became wrong to tell a joke involving any

other race—even one's own race and color. Programs were cancelled and honorable characters were assassinated and the shouts went up, "You're a racist!" And America began to lose a big part of her identity—good, clean fun, even when it involved whites and all other colors. Today, a fellow can be in real trouble with just an innocent remark, or a joke that was once considered a part of America, but now is strictly forbidden because someone, and many times thousands, takes offense and considers it nothing less than slander and ridicule. When America no longer knows how to innocently laugh, with all the races joining in, America will no longer be America in the old-time, wonderful way.

Now all that to say this: when we teach what the New Testament teaches about unity, the world retorts: "You're narrow-minded, a bigot! You're a spiritual racist! You think no one is going to Heaven but you and your little bunch!" And as hard as we may teach and try, we seem unable to get the point across that we are teaching the Lord's plan and not our own; his way, not our way. "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). In spite of this stem declaration, man continues to go in his own, ignoring what the Lord and His inspired apostles taught about unity, oneness, and how to be saved. The world needs to stop; yea, professed followers of the Lord need to stop and ask, who are Christians, anyway? We know if we understand anything about the Bible that Christians are followers of Christ. "Why, that cuts out Moslems and Jews, and many others who do not believe in Christ" That's right! It cuts out all who do not believe in Jesus. "Walk you are condemning millions of good people!" No, I'm not in the condemning business, I'm in the preaching business to save and just as Jesus will save in the final day, He also will speak words of condemnation in that day (John 12:48). It is our business to teach and preach that which is written. It is His business to execute judgment in the final day of accounting (2 Cor. 5:10).

Who are Christians? They are, as already stated, followers of Christ. They believe there is One Way because Jesus taught there is one way (John 14:6). They believe there is only one true church because that is what Jesus taught (Mat. 16:18; Col. 1:18; Eph. 4:4)

They believe that it takes preaching the truth, hearing, believing, and obeying it to be saved, and that there can be no changes, no substitutes (1 Cor. 1:21; Heb. 11:6; Acts 11:18; Rom. 10:9-10; Acts 2:38, 42). They believe that to substitute, to add to, can be fatal for the soul (Gal. 1:8-9; Rev. 22:18-19). We are taught to believe and teach what the early Christians believed and taught. What they believed and taught, when obeyed, made Christians only. We believe to be more or less than' Christians only is to be too much or too little.

Will the day come again when we cannot stand up and teach what we believe to be the only way to life eternal? Early Christians were persecuted, many unto death, for thus believing. Will history repeat itself before the end of time? We cannot claim to be Christians if we do not follow Jesus and what He taught: "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). It boils down to this. To reject the New Testament on God's plan for our salvation and unity is to label Jesus an imposter, a fake, and a fraud. God forbid! We shall defend Him and His teachings, and call Him Lord until He comes. If it is not popular, so what? If it costs us our lives, again, so what? The truth cost Jesus His life, and all the apostles died unnatural deaths, save John. He was exiled to the Isle of Patmos where he died alone. And I would not exactly call his death natural. It truly costs something to be a New Testament Christian. Too few today are willing to pay the price. We do not "join the church" as we would some lodge. We obey the gospel and the Lord "adds us to the church" (Acts 2:47).

"THE DOCTRINE YOU PREACH IS TOO NARROW!"

I am sure the day will never come when we will not hear this remark, that is, not in this world. Of all the barbs this seems to be the favorite one. "What you preach is sending everyone else to Hell!" This accompanies the first remark. Our friends and critics are wrong on both counts. The doctrine we preach is the doctrine of Christ and we are in the business of keeping people out of hell, not sending them there. It is not always easy to point out to our friends that the way to heaven is narrow (Mat. 7:13-14). The church, which

is Christ's spiritual body, is often considered to be too narrow. In the first century, from Pentecost this direction, the church was called "too narrow" and Jesus' teachings were said to be "too hard" (John 6:60). Sounds like today, doesn't it? You know in life, it seems that things that really work are narrow. Medicine is like that. Medicine frequently works on a very narrow margin, for life and death are involved. It is the same way with truth. Sometimes it cuts so deep and hurts all the way to the heart, and many think it is too severe. The surgeon may apologetically say, "This is going to hurt you but it also will save your life." Jesus said, "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free?" (John 8:32). It just simply says, no truth, no freedom. And Paul says that this freedom comes when we obey the truth (Rom. 6:17). The world hates that word "obey." The Bible is full of it and man would do well to get used to it and reconcile himself to it. Someone said, "Obedience to law is the largest liberty." And I like the words of Dr. J. R. Miller. "It is a great deal easier to do that which God gives us to do, no matter how hard it is, than to face the responsibilities of not doing it." When others arguments seem to fail and they do when put against truth, our friends often say, "Well, you just think you are the only Christians!" I shall never forget brother N. B. Hardeman's answer to that: "No, we do not speak of being the only Christians, we say we are Christians only."

You can search high and wide but you will not find a denominational preacher who will say that his denomination is essential to one's salvation. But gospel preachers will tell anyone in a hurry that the Lord's church is essential to salvation. We have to preach that which is revealed, and the Bible says that salvation is in Christ (2 Tim. 2:10), and to be "in Christ" is to be in his church (2 Cor. 5:17). And this is not church salvation as we are sometimes accused of believing. This is "Christ salvation" (Mat. 1:21). Our friends come back with many arguments, one of which comes up frequently when these matters are discussed. They argue: "It's just like going to Chicago. There are many different ways to get there, and so it is with going to heaven." However, this is not a parallel. There is only one way to heaven and Jesus is that way (John 14:6). May as well

argue that there are many Christs as to argue there are many different ways to get to heaven. And I would rather end up in heaven than in Chicago any day of the week! Jesus said that if we try to enter into heaven in any other way we are a “thief and robber” (John 10:1). Someone always says, “The doctrine you preach is too narrow for me.” Friends, the way to heaven is narrow. Jesus said that it is (Mat. 7:13-14). People like where the narrow way leads but they do not like the restrictions.

They like the liberty of the broad way but they do not like where it goes. The narrow way leads to “life everlasting.” The broad way leads to “eternal death.” We must make a choice, we cannot travel in both ways at the same time.

WHAT ABOUT HONEST, SINCERE PEOPLE?

We preach the simple, beautiful message of our Lord and many times our friends accuse us of being Judge and executioner. “What about our good, sincere friends who are of other religious persuasions?” We well know that there are many, many sincere people in denominational churches. Speaking personally, some of the very best friends we have ever had on this earth are members of human institutions called churches. There are some whom we feel much closer to than we feel to many who are supposed to be our brethren. We have much more in common with them in many ways than we do members of the Lord’s church. Have we ever tried to win them? Of course. A few times we thought we had them close to seriously considering the true church, then some big mouth member would come along and ruin it all! Their speech certainly was not “seasoned with salt,” rather; it was seasoned with judgmental, “holier than thou” pronouncements. A dear friend, one of our very best, told us just two or three years ago about some things that a member where I preached said, at least forty-four years ago! She laughed about it but it was still in her heart.

Have you ever wondered just how the Righteous Judge will deal with some of our dear friends who are so morally good, and who think they are spiritually good, who have been run off by such uncaring and unkind members who boast about how “firm” they are in

the faith? Judgment in with a Righteous God, through his Righteous Son. I know what I must preach, for with all my heart I believe it to be the truth. But, oh, how my heart does go out to such dear, precious friends who are so good, who are benevolent and gracious and kind, who think they are right. I am glad that judgment will be in the hands of Him who makes no mistaken and will make none when they stand before him. But, in the meantime I know what I must go right on preaching while in this tabernacle I dwell. I must go on preaching the great truths I have earnestly tried to set forth in this lesson. If the Word of God be true, and I have not one single doubt about its veracity, the things said in this lesson are true. They are the Word of the Almighty before whom I shall one day stand and account for every word I speak and every word I write.

It was said of Michelangelo that he had the ability to hear a great voice out of a block of stone. He would listen, then carve out a thing of beauty to take its place in some great Cathedral of his day. This, of course, is a parable. After a fashion we can put our ears to the stone of God's Word and hear the divine voices that speak by inspiration, telling us about the only church of which we should be members—the Lord's church.

THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT— HOW CAN I HELP IT TRIUMPH?

Ken Willis



Ken Willis has been preaching the gospel for thirty years. Upon graduation from Freed-Hardeman College he spent eight years in mission work in the mountains of North Carolina. In 1971, he and his family moved to Singapore to teach at **Four Sees College Of Bible And Missions** while awaiting visas for working in Malaysia. In the Fall of 1971, the Willis' moved to Malacca, Malaysia, to pioneer a congregation in that city. In 1974, they began a congregation in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia. In 1975, the Islamic government of Malaysia refused to grant any further visas, however, the Willis' have returned several times on tourist visas preaching a month each time.

Ken has preached at the Pinellas Park, Florida congregation, Eastdale in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and is currently "Outreach Minister" for the East Ridge congregation in Chattanooga. He has also preached in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Thailand, New Zealand, Fiji Islands, and the Bahamas. He and his wife, Clyde Ann, have two children: Melodee Willis Nash of St. Petersburg, Florida, and Chris, a senior in high school.

It has been correctly said that it is the *whole duty* of the *whole church* to get the *whole gospel* to the *whole world* in our generation. The spirit of New Testament Christianity is the spirit of evangelism. It began with Jesus coming to this earth on an evangelistic mission (Luke 19:10). The twelve apostles were commissioned to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Mat. 10:6). Later He gave the world-wide commission to "preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15-16). It remains a perpetual responsibility for every generation to proclaim the gospel to their generation.

But what can I do? What can every member do to fulfill his/her responsibility in getting the gospel to neighbors, the community, the town, the city, the country, yea, to all the world? A look into the New Testament at the practice of early Christians will provide some answers at what each one can do. With them Christianity was not a one-day-a-week religion! The responsibility of reaching the lost was not left to the apostles, evangelists, and elders. Their concept of

Christianity was not “holding services,” but “heralding a Savior”! Since they were successful in their generation in making the church triumph, we will make a study of their efforts and actions.

A casual look at the book of Acts reveals that their’s was a practice of *daily* Christianity. By “daily” we mean every day, on a regular basis, day by day. Phrases conveying this idea occur some twenty-two times in the New Testament. From a study of these and related passages, a composite picture of daily Christianity is formulated.

DAILY PRAYERS

“They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). While Jesus walked with His disciples, He “spoke a parable unto them, that men ought to pray and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1). He taught nothing that would disrupt the Jewish custom of “hours of prayer.”

Paul taught, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Phi. 4:6). And, “Pray without ceasing” (1 The. 5:17). Paul gave priority to prayer in 1 Timothy 2:1. “I exhort, **first of all**, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men.” It is a safe assumption that prayer was an everyday practice, and not a Sunday performance for the early Christians.

DAILY BIBLE STUDY

The practice of the Berean believers indicates the seriousness with which they received Paul’s message. “These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11). Since the church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). it is essential that we study God’s Word. “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

Jesus met the onslaught of Satan’s temptation by quoting, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from

the mouth of God” (Mat. 4:4). From Monday to Saturday without Bible study makes one “weak”!

DAILY BENEVOLENCE

“And in those days, when the number of disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring against the Hebrews by the Grecians, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration” (Acts 6:1). Here was a congregational program of benevolent work. It is not limited to saints only. “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). James said this was a mark of pure religion (Jam. 1:27), and was a proof of genuine faith (Jam. 2:15-16).

A few have actually been known to go out seeking opportunities to help the needy, rather than respond only as opportunities come to them. One congregation went to the Welfare Department asking who needed help and would appreciate it. The report was that four souls were baptized as a result of that effort.

DAILY EVANGELISM

The early church stands as an example of the spirit of evangelism. “Evangelistic enthusiasm can be seen boiling out of the book of Acts.”¹ Peter and John, though forbidden by the authorities, continued “daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:42). Upon the death of Stephen, and great persecution of the church, “Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). We need to capture and restore that urgency of the task before us. The screaming siren of a fire truck, the flashing light on an ambulance, an unexpected phone call in the night, call for urgent action. The Bible teaches that the time to begin to win souls is now. Jesus felt the urgency of his mission (John 9:4; 4:34). The driving force in his life was his love for the lost. He drove himself to the point of physical exhaustion doing the Father’s will.

Death, the judgment, and hell all speak of the urgency of the gospel (Heb. 9:27; Rom. 14:12). We must recapture the spirit of urgency in evangelism. One day we will have to give an account to God for the attitude we have toward the Great Commission! What will our answer be? The church will triumph just as long as we keep

the spirit of soul-winning alive. But that soul-winning evangelistic spirit is just as much alive as it is in you and me.

Since soul-winners are made, and not born, the church should have an on-going program of training workers.

Soulwinning is a vital matter. Unless it is taken seriously enough by a church to call for the very best planning of which the church leaders are capable, that church is falling short of God's expectations. There should be, and there must be, an over-all church planning source for any church activity if it is to succeed. Much of our church work suffers because of haphazardness. In all the movements of God recorded in the Bible we find carefully laid plans. When Noah built the ark, he followed carefully laid plans. Had he attempted to build an ark without plans he would have failed. The type of planning for a program of soul-winning will determine the eternal destiny of many souls.²

DAILY EXHORTATION

In their concern for faithful service, the early disciples were taught to “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 Bible further admonishes, “Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works” (Heb. 10:24). The spiritual were exhorted to restore the weak (Gal. 6:1), considering themselves “lest they also be tempted.”

DAILY CROSS-BEARING

Jesus demanded, “If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross **daily**, and follow me” (Luke 9:23). Paul spoke of this cross-bearing as being a “crucifixion with Christ.” “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

With Christ in our lives we can face trials and burdens in a spirit of triumph and be assured of a victory.

DAILY CONCERN

In enumerating the persecutions and sufferings he had endured for Christ, Paul concluded his list: “Besides the other things, what comes upon me **daily**, my deep concern for all the churches” (2 Cor. 11:28). At Ephesus his concern was such that he spent three years,

night and day, warning and exhorting the brethren—to the point of shedding tears (Acts 20:31). With that deep abiding concern, regardless of what came, he could say, “Therefore we do not lose heart” (2 Cor. 4:16).

DAILY RESULTS

With daily prayers, daily Bible study, daffy benevolence, daily evangelism, daily exhortations, daily cross-bearing, and daily concern, it is no surprise that there would be daily results. “And the Lord added to the church **daily** those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). Again, “So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number **daily**” (Acts 16:5).

There is a tremendous need for church leaders to equip the saints for soul-winning, and challenge every member to do his/her part in practicing *daily*. Christianity, that there may be *daily* results in the “Triumphant Church.”

STUDY OF A METHOD FOR HELPING THE CHURCH TRIUMPH

At two congregations with which this writer labored, one program proved especially effective. It was an effort to involve every member in the work of the church. While called a “Brothers’ Keeper Program,” it was a program which embraced visitation, out-reach to non-members and to weak members, transportation, daily Bible reading, daily prayers, benevolence, exhortation, fellowship—in essence, an effort to incorporate all the “Daily” activities studied earlier, to put into practice “daily Christianity.”

Here is an outline of that program, with some interesting results. The following letter was sent from the elders to every member.

There is an urgent need for more participation in the work of the church by every child of God. With this in mind we have formulated this “Brother’s Keeper” program that is tailored to the needs of this congregation. In order for this program to be successful, each member must perform the task assigned, consistently and diligently; signed by the elders.

A sheet was given presenting the PURPOSE AND SCOPE of the program.

A. To aid and assist the elders to serve the church more effectively. The elders have been charged to “feed the flock” (1 Pet. 5:2), “watch”

(Heb. 13:17), “give account” (Heb. 13:17), “take heed to self” (Acts 20:28). B. To provide a program that will encourage all members to become more involved with one another (Heb. 3:13; John 13:35; Gal. 6:2). C. To provide spiritual assistance (Gal. 6:1). D. To provide material assistance (Mat. 25:44-45).

“How Shall We Meet These Objectives?”

The elders are directly overseeing every part of this important work, and will be constantly supervising and assisting in every part of the program. The program will be reviewed periodically and modified to beat suit our needs. Next was listed the duties of the overall DIRECTOR followed by the tasks of the team leaders. Every member of the congregation was assigned to one of four teams, each headed by a “team leader.”

The real success of the program was seen in a weekly “Team Member Report Sheet” (see Appendix),³ which was the back page of the Sunday announcement folder. Members were to sign it, note the team they were in, then tally the work of the proceeding week in the space provided in the following categories: Fellowships, Phone Calls, Absentees Contacted, Benevolence, Food Prepared, Lord’s Supper delivered to shut in, Cards Sent (sick, sympathy, birthday, anniversary), Transportation Provided, Home Bible Studies (including Bible correspondence courses), Any Special Activity, Other Visits, and Daily Bible Readers.

In the first six months of 1990, a congregation of 125 members including several shut-ins, submitted 462 reports of the following activities: Fellowship—1,380, Phone Calls—868, Absentees Contacted—110, Visitors Contacted—120 (Some would have been contacted by phone), Sick Contacted—530, Outside Contacts—274, Benevolence—176, Food Prepared—343, Lord’s Supper—18, Cards Sent—1,065, Transportation—263, Home Bible Studies—184, Special Activities—631, Other Visits—219, Daily Bible Readers—352, and Visitors Brought—59. These reports were received weekly, figures tabulated monthly and presented in the team meeting (usually with a fellowship meal), and published quarterly. At all times the tone was to provide encouragement to one another, to “stir up one another to love and good works,” and to reach out to others with the gospel of Christ.

Many other programs have been and are successfully used with other congregations, but this one has been especially effective in two different states, and has been successfully adopted by other congregations.

May God use these and all other efforts to his honor, glory, to the salvation of souls, in making His church "triumphant."

Brother's Keeper Team Member Weekly Report

Name(s) _____ Team No. _____ Date _____

	Fellowships	Phone Calls	Absentees Contacted	Visitors	Sick Visits	Outside Contacts	Renewal	Prepared Food	Supper	Lord's Supper	Cards Sent	Transportation	Special Activities	Home Bible Studies	Other Visits	DBR
Sun.																
Mon.																
Tues.																
Wed.																
Thurs.																
Fri.																
Sat.																

Visitors Brought: _____

Comments: _____

ENDNOTES

¹*Everyday Christianity*, 1984 Freed-Hardeman College Lectures, p. 3.

²C. E. Matthews, *Every Christian's Job* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1951), p. 5.

³Appendix: Sample Brother's Keeper Team Weekly Report.

THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT— TRIUMPHANT AT LAST

Shan Jackson



Shan Jackson was born in Port Lavaca, Texas in 1950. He and his wife, Cynthia, have three children, Brian, Casey, and Bo. He is a graduate of Victoria College and Abilene Christian College with degrees in Psychology and Bible. He has been the local evangelist for the church in Palacios, Texas since 1983, and is Editor of the *Beacon Of Truth*. He is a staff writer for the Firm Foundation and *Contending For The Faith* and writes for several other brotherhood publications. He has been the speaker for the "Beacon of Truth" radio program since 1990.

INTRODUCTION

For our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it might be conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working whereby he is able even to subject all things unto himself (Phi. 3:20-21—ASV).

The very mention of the word "heaven" brings freshness and joy to our Christian hearts and minds. With this simple embodiment of the term we realize and accept the title of this assignment, *Triumphant At Last*. It is this triumphant reward that a gracious Father has promised to His faithful children that thrills our faith and captivates our dreams. Heaven, the triumph of the ages; heaven, the victory of the faithful; heaven, the embellishment of the Christian cause. To His elect, to coin the familiar phrase, heaven is what it's all about. "I heard about a mansion he has built for me in glory, and I heard about the street of gold beyond the crystal sea; about the angels singing, and the old redemption story, and some sweet day I'll sing up there the song of victory."

BACKGROUND

In such a discussion as this it is relevant that we consider several passages of sacred script. The first will be 2 Corinthians 12:2-4. In

this passage, the word our translators chose is “paradise” which comes from *paradeiso*, a Greek word of Persian origin which refers to the Jewish concept of “the third heaven.”¹ This third heaven rational relates a natural inference to a first and second heaven, however, the Bible acknowledges all three with the same term “heaven.” The first heaven is the realm of flighted birds, “And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Mat. 8:20). The second heaven in the realm of the heavenly bodies including the sun, moon, and stars, etc. “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork” (Psa. 19:1). The third heaven represents the habitat of God, “The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord’s throne is in heaven” (Psa. 11:4). It is to this third heaven that our Lord ascended and where He now resides at the right hand of the Father. With insight and wisdom our Father has seen fit to reveal this triumphant prize in images and glimpses and only by adding all the pieces together do we begin to see a finished and glorious picture of the ultimate dwelling place of the saved. His revelations of heaven, though enough to lead us to concepts, still does not fully portray its beauty, scope, or detail. Though our loving Father has revealed a lot He has also left enough unrevealed to stimulate our anticipation for this eternal home with its eternal bliss. “The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God” (Psa. 14:2). “Sing to me of heaven, sing that song of peace, from the toils that bind me it will bring release; Burdens will be lifted that are pressing so, showers of great blessing o’er my heart will flow.”

THE ETERNAL KINGDOM

Not only the most beautiful but also the most informative declaration concerning our ultimate triumph comes from the lips of Jesus. At the proper time our King will say to His faithful, “Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Mat. 25:34), thus ushering in the triumph at last. However, as kingdoms come and go the distinctive factor of His kingdom is its eternal nature. As the Baptizer began preparing the way for Christ his constant cry announced the coming of the

kingdom. Jesus continued this announcement throughout His ministry but was emphatic in His decree that His kingdom was not of earthly conception; however, it was difficult for His hearers to disassociate His promise of a kingdom from the vivid power and might of the physical kingdoms of their day. Even today when people think of kingdoms their thoughts are to physical ones such as the Roman, Grecian, and Babylonian. Kingdoms, headed by physical kings, whether they are awesome or awful soon fade to insignificance when compared to the eternal kingdom prepared for the faithful in Christ. Therefore, any inconvenience or suffering we share because of our position within this kingdom, regardless of the privation or persecution we receive from the world, will fade as will those outside kingdoms in the presence of our glorious King of kings.

Shortly before his death at the hands of one such earthbound kingdom, Paul wrote from his prison cell to his son in the Lord, Timothy, with these reassuring words, “And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom, to whom be glory for ever and ever” (2 Tim. 4:18). Furthermore, Peter continues this line of encouragement with these timeless words,

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 unto the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:10-11).

“Often I’m hindered on my way; burdened so heavy I almost fall; then I hear Jesus sweetly say, ‘Heaven will surely be worth it all.’”

THE ETERNAL HOME

Let not your heart be troubled. ye believe in God, believe also in me. 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 and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also (John 14:1-3).

With these thought-filled words Jesus lays the foundation of our faith in heaven. Within His teaching, and because of it, Christians of all generations have echoed and re-echoed their desire to go. To miss entrance therein is to live a life devoid of purpose and meaning. To miss heaven is to miss it all. Therefore, it is essential that

Christians have as complete an understanding an possible of the ultimate triumph that has been promised as well as the eternal blessings that await the faithful members of it

As a child, our most comforting thoughts are of home. Home, where the heart is, and in this light Jesus supplies his depiction of heaven. “In my Father’s house” as used in John 14 is an emotion inspiring illustration of the forever home of the saints; however, as point of note let us be sure that there is no confusion as to the locale of our “Father’s house.” “My Father’s house” refers to our eternal home and not to the “house of God” as mentioned by Paul in 1 Timothy 3:15 and elsewhere, Jesus in referring to the eternal domain of the faithful and not to the children of God in general, the church. This eternal home is filled with many mansions, or as some translators feel, “many rooms” which the Lord has gone on to prepare. The oft quoted truism, “Heaven in a prepared place for a prepared people” shows both truth and insight. The glorious accommodations and the timeless wonderment of our Father’s house will never be attacked by any physical catastrophe or spiritual defilement. Thus, its perfection and completeness can then be realized and appreciated for eternity. “My Father’s house.” The simple uttering of the words brings as much comfort and anticipation to a Christian’s spirit as any other words in the human language, and yet, mere words could never begin to capture the true beauty and perfection of the city waiting for the saved. Heaven, where “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Rev. 21:4). “Earth holds no treasures but perish with using, how ever precious they be; yet there’s a country to which I am going; heaven holds all to me.”

THE ETERNAL BIRTHRIGHT

Among the kings of the Old Testament, we find the rights of the firstborn demonstrated in their succession to their father’s throne; however, this favoritism was also seem in commoners as well.² Jesus, being the firstborn of the heavenly Father, was given complete authority over His Father’s kingdom. Further more, when Christ arose from the grave on that faithful third day He also became

the “firstborn from the dead” (Col. 1:18), thus entitling Him to the birthright of His Father’s kingdom. Christians, at the same time, are referred to as the “church of the firstborn” (Heb. 12:23), thus entitling us to the same birthright as Christ. “And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” as Paul declares in Romans 8:17. Therefore, the last triumph is a Christian’s birthright, having been born into the family of the King. Similar in many respects to the Israelites’ inheritance of Canaan, so God’s people, in one respect, will inherit heaven.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you. Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Pet. 1:3-5).

In this wonderful passage of Peter, we find several thoughts that begin to define our birthright. He mentions it as incorruptible and undefiled. Most, if not all, of our world’s great kingdoms perished because of corruption and defilement, however, the heavenly kingdom is not subject to these earthlike weaknesses. In this light Paul says, “While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18). This also bears out Peter’s usage of the words previously mentioned. Earthly kingdoms wane with the onslaught of time but our Father’s kingdom is not subject to time. Even our physical bodies, which will someday return to the dust of the ground, will not age or be affected once heaven is our home, this also is part of our Christian birthright. Also, an earthly kingdom is subject to being defiled, which means to render filthy and unclean, whereas the estate of the saints in heaven will never face a vandal’s scorn or an enemy’s wrath because vandals and enemies will not be present. There will be no contaminants to destroy its beauty, no spots or blemishes, or any such thing. And, as Peter quickly adds, this kingdom “fadeth not away.” Regardless of the quality of our belongings ultimately their beauty and luster will fade. Whether we talk about the finish of a new car, the paint on our houses, or the beauty of fresh flowers, all

will fade eventually. But again, the beauty of heaven will last throughout eternity with no fading whatsoever. It wears its freshness and glory forever.

The final thought as mentioned by Peter deals with a Christian's reservations. As he indicates, our place in "reserved in heaven." It will not be "standing room only" and there will be no "scalpers" at the door for our Lord has written our reservations himself when He said, "I go to prepare a place." "Sing the wondrous love of Jesus, sing his mercy and his grace; in the mansions bright and blessed, he'll prepare for us a place."

THE ETERNAL CITY

From almost the beginning of man's time, man has seen fit to build cities for his comfort and protection. Many of these cities were great and powerful but most have long since passed into oblivion. Today, our world boasts of many wonderful and intriguing places; however, history recounts cities of our past which present to our minds many questions and challenges of belief. Babylon, with its awesome beauty and walls so thick several chariots could travel abreast Jericho, with such height and thickness of walls that she was seen as unconquerable.³ Yet, all have fallen. Finally, each fell to attack, poverty, disease, and human weaknesses but not so the city of God. "For here have we no continuing city" as the writer to the Hebrews proclaimed, but in the same thought he assured, "but we seek one to come" (Heb. 13:14). The same penman also spoke of Abraham along these lines.

For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God...And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. 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. 11:10, 15-16).

However, one cannot begin to seek insight into the city itself without study of John's detailed vision from the Isle of Patmos. He saw and recorded the following,

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth. for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband ...And he carried

me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. Having the glory of God. and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal: And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel...And the city lieth four-square, and the length in an large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed. twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal.... And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it. for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof...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.... And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.... In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded bar fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree won for the healing of the nations.... And there shall be no night thaw, and they need no candle, neither light of the sun, for the Lord God giveth them light; and they shall reign for ever and ever (Rev. 21:1-2, 10-12, 16, 23, 27; 22:1-2, 5).

“We read of a place that’s called heaven, it’s made for the pure and the free; these truths in God’s word he has given, how beautiful heaven must be.”

THE ETERNAL REST

A significant part of the triumph at last will be seen in a Christian’s rest of his labors. This is a promise given by Jesus but a promise that will not be totally realized this side of eternity. His promise,

Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest Take my yolk upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yolk is easy and my burden is light (Mat. 11:28-30).

The apostle John heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write, Blessed are the dead who 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).

These Scriptures, and others of equal significance, stimulate us to ask so many questions. The memory tool, Who, What, When, Where, and Why would only scratch the surface concerning heaven.

I suppose David most accurately captured our feelings when he wrote, “Thou wilt show me the path of life. in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Psa. 16:11). However, Peter, Paul and others also gave correct words of description. Peter mentions our calling to “eternal glory” (1 Pet. 6:10), and Paul encourages us to seek for glory “and immortality, eternal life” (Rom. 2:7). Our limited minds simply cannot conceive of anything beyond this. However, before the coming of a change of kingdom must come a change of demeanor. Consider the following information.

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold I shew you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality (1 Cor. 15:60-53).

For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life (2 Cor. 5:14).

For our citizenship is in heaven: whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory (Phi. 3:20-21).

“There’s a beautiful place called heaven, it is hidden above the bright blue, where the good, who from earth-ties are riven, live and love an eternity through.”

CONCLUSION

King Solomon is recognized as the wisest man, save Jesus, who ever lived. When given opportunity to seek wealth, he asked for an understanding heart. Instead of power he sought wisdom and with this wisdom he realized and accepted the essentiality of truth. He said, “Buy the truth and sell it not” (Pro. 23:23). Now, separated by thousands of years, we still find ourselves with this same essential.

Today, as always, one must realize and accept truth concerning “The Church Triumphant—Triumphant At Last.” The Bible, the source of all truth, reveals for us everything we know about the last triumph and the ushering in of God’s eternal kingdom. And for those who are “born of the water and of the spirit” and “live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world” having added to their faith the graces that adorn the life and character of true Christianity; who live faithful, even unto death; to these, and these alone is given the promise of the heavenly home and the assurance of the triumph at last.

When I look up into the heaven’s splendor, the starry host, as far as eye doth see; I see his face in all of heaven’s glory, and feel the tug, his gentle hand on me. Kings of the earth, yes, judges great and small, Great in our God, Great is our God, ye mountains, hills, ye stormy winds that call, Great is our God, Great is our God.⁴

ENDNOTES

¹W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Publishing Company, 1984).

²J. D. Douglas, *The New Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967).

³Charles Pfeiffer, *The Biblical World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976).

⁴All references to songs were taken from *Songs Of The Church*, ed. Alton Howard (West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishers, 1977).