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THE CHURCH IN THE ETERNAL PURPOSE OF GOD

Jerry C. Brewer

The revelation of the scheme of redemption to man, which God had purposed from eternity began in both foreshadowing and precept in Genesis. After Adam and Eve sinned, they clothed themselves with fig leaves and tried to hide from God.

And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they *were* naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden (Gen. 3:7-8).

Confronted with their sin, they were rebuked and cursed by the Lord. Genesis 3:21 says: “Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them.” They had devised their own clothing from fig leaves, but God clothed them with animal skins. That foreshadowed man’s spiritual clothing—that he was helpless to cover his own sins (Jer. 10:23). Animals had to shed their blood for man’s physical clothing, as Jesus Christ would shed His blood to clothe the obedient in righteousness (Eph. 1:7; Acts 20:28).

In pronouncing the serpent’s curse, God said:

I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel (Gen. 3:15).

Contained in this germinal promise was God’s plan which comprehended Christ’s Virgin Birth, His struggle with the powers of hell, His death, burial, resurrection, His exaltation to the throne of David, and the salvation of Jew and Gentile in one body. Foy E. Wallace, Jr., wrote:

The Genesis record introduces “the seed of woman”—one who was not to be the offspring of man. Here is the germ of all prophecy. As the oak is in the acorn and the eagle

in the egg, all Messianic prophecies are here in germ (*Certified* 16).

However, God’s plan—the church—existed in His eternal purpose long before the shedding of blood for salvation was foreshadowed or a Saviour of the seed of woman was promised. Whatever God or man builds first exists in purpose, and the church of Christ existed as a blueprint in God’s mind from eternity. Out of God’s mind, His eternal purpose was unfolded to man in promise, prophecy, preparation, and ultimately reached perfection on Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2. That purpose was detailed in his epistle to the church at Ephesus by the apostle Paul.

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; *even* in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will (Eph. 1:3-11).

The spiritual blessings, to which Paul refers in verse 3, are **all** found in Christ and enumerated in the succeeding verses, which he concludes by saying we were predestinated to those, “according to the **purpose** of him who worketh all things af-

ter the counsel of his own will” (1:11). That eternal purpose is further defined in chapter three.

For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: 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 (3:1-11).

The “mystery” in verse 3 is the plan God purposed in His eternal counsel—salvation in the church. Foy E. Wallace, Jr., explained *mystery* in Ephesians 5:23 this way:

We have that same word in Romans 16:25 where the apostle said that the mystery was kept secret since the world began, but now is made known unto all nations for the obedience of faith. It is the same word *mystery* there, same English term, the same original term—*musteerion*. It means that God had a plan that was kept secret in that it had not been made known in the Old Testament. The mystery was kept secret since the world began. That means the plan of salvation existed in type and in promise and in the prophecy of the Old Testament but was in an unfulfilled, undeveloped and unfolded state, therefore it was kept secret, until the time came to make it known, to reveal it to man. That brings up again the meaning of that word, *mystery*. The original term signified a strategy—and it became a military word in

that time. The generals of the armies did not reveal their military strategy to the enemy. The term *mystery* does not mean something mysterious... It did not mean something that one could not understand—it meant something one could not know until it was revealed. The general of the army did not reveal the military mystery, the military secret, we would call it, until the time came to execute it (*Number* 45).

Regardless of whether it is God’s or man’s—a plan is first purposed in the mind. The plan of salvation (or *mystery*) which began in God’s eternal purpose was hidden through the ages until God revealed it. That mystery, which Paul says was revealed through the “holy apostles and prophets,” is that “the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel” (Eph. 3:5-6). He further indicated this in Ephesians 2, contrasting the Ephesians’ former condition:

without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world (2:12),

with their present condition:

But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, *so* making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.... Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God (2:13-17, 19).

God purposed **all** spiritual blessings in Christ (1:3), and that means **in the church**, for one cannot be in Christ without being in His church. Paul said those blessings are: salvation (1:4), being a child of God (1:5), God’s acceptance of us (1:6), redemption from sins through Christ’s blood (1:7), and an eternal inheritance (1:11). God purposed to choose those who are **in Christ**

to partake of these blessings. In His eternal purpose, God determined (predestined) that the eternally saved would be only those **in Christ**. That is **Biblical** predestination, which has no connection to that set forth by John Calvin—divesting man of free will and perverting the Biblical concept of grace with its twisted theories of predestination and election. Calvin's theology renders man a mindless entity in the hands of a sadistic God.

Calvinistic election is attributed to God's arbitrary predestination of individuals. While the Bible teaches the children of God are the elect (1 Pet. 2:9), it speaks of a class of persons, not individuals. Calvinism says the elect are those who were individually selected to salvation ("a certain number") and the non-elect are those eternally condemned individuals, both of whom were predestined to those ends before the world began. Predestination and election are Biblical terms, but Calvin perverted them in formulating his doctrine. According to Calvin, electing individuals to salvation, before the world began, God thereby predestined certain persons to salvation and others to damnation.

Holding that God's grace is only for the elect, Calvinism says certain individuals were *arbitrarily* chosen as recipients of it. Biblical predestination is concerned not with *individuals*, but the *locus* of salvation for election of a certain class of persons. That's the thrust of Paul's teaching in Ephesians 1:3-11.

As God predestined creatures with gills to life in water, so those in Christ were predestined to eternal life in Him. God does not choose individuals to enter Christ, but says that all who do are classified as His elect. A creature of free will, man chooses to obey or disobey God and when he chooses God, he is thereby elected to salvation in Christ Jesus. God's elect is constituted of all who elect to enter Christ through obedience to the gospel (Rom. 6:3-6) (Brewer 3).

Those who choose God are then His chosen people, but He chooses only those in Christ, and the only way to be His chosen people is to enter into Christ through baptism (Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 3:26-27). Since the church is the fullness of

Christ (Eph. 1:22-23), it is impossible to be in Christ without being in His church.

Thus, the church, which God purposed from eternity, promised to the Patriarchs, foretold through His prophets, prepared by John and Jesus, and established in Acts 2, is the locus of salvation and is His divine scheme of redemption. The kingdom, the church, the body of Christ, the "one new man" are all terms applied to the same institution (Mat. 16:13-19; Eph. 1:22-23; Eph. 2:15), and all refer to God's eternal purpose.

In Ephesians 1:9 the apostle called this plan the mystery of his will, and in chapter 6:19 he called it the mystery of godliness—referring to the scheme of redemption. There are not less than fifteen passages in the New Testament where this word mystery refers to the gospel plan of salvation. Now, with that word mystery in your mind, we return to our text in the last verse of Ephesians 5 where Paul said, "This is a great mystery. but I speak concerning Christ and the church." It means that this is the great plan God has revealed concerning Christ and the church. I once said that the church is *a part* of God's plan of salvation—I do not put it that way now—I put it this way: The church *is* God's plan of salvation. Everything connected with salvation is encompassed within the divine institution of the church, for which Jesus died, for which he shed his blood, and by which he purchased our salvation with his blood. The church encompasses and encircles everything that is connected with the salvation of man. The church is the divine plan (Wallace, *Number 47*).

CONCLUSION

One cannot be in Christ without being in His church, and one who is in the church is in Christ. It is the instrument of salvation for which Christ was the lamb foreordained to be slain before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:18-19), and within the kingdom are all the spiritual blessings of heaven (Eph. 1:3). It was purposed from eternity and is destined for eternity.

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QUESTIONS

1. Why is Genesis 3:15 called a “germinal promise”?
2. Name the spiritual blessings Paul enumerates in Ephesians 1:3-11.
3. Where are these spiritual blessings found?
4. Describe the difference between John Calvin’s “Predestination” and Paul’s in Ephesians 1.
5. What was the “mystery” of which Paul wrote in Ephesians 3?

THE CHURCH AS SEEN BY THE PROPHETS (1)

David P. Brown

INTRODUCTION

The Lord's church was established in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost Feast Day of the Jews following Jesus' resurrection and ascension to heaven. This is recorded by the inspired Luke in Acts 2 of the New Testament. However, in prophetic language, God unfolded His great and marvelous Scheme of Redemption to the people of the Old Testament. Specifically, it was the Old Testament prophets who revealed much about the Messiah. However, they also revealed many things concerning the church Jesus built. This is the church revealed in the New Testament that He purchased with His own blood and whose only head He is. To this one church Jesus adds all those who believe Him to be the Son of God, repent of their sins, and by His authority are immersed in water into Him for the remission of their sins (Mark 16:15-16; Rom. 1:16; 10:17; Acts 17:30; 2:38, 41-42, 47; 22:16; Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12; 1 Pet. 3:21; 1:3, 22-23; 5:26-32; Gal. 3:26-27; Eph. 1:22; 5:23; Col. 1:18). This is the church the Old Testament prophets saw.

Christians are under the authority of and they approach God through Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5). This is the case because the authority of Christ is revealed only in the words of the New Testament (Mat. 17:15; 28:18; John 12:48; Col. 3:17; Heb. 1:1-2; Jam. 1:25). However, the New Testament instructs Christians regarding the importance and value of the Old Testament to them. The following New Testament passages are some of those verses.

And he said unto them, These *are* the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and *in* the prophets, and *in* the psalms, concerning me (Luke 24:44).

Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me (John 5:39).

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).

Also study 1 Corinthians 10:1-12, Galatians 3:24-25, and the types and anti-types of the Hebrews epistle which also reveal the Old Testament's value to the Christian.

As previously mentioned, in the Old Testament, during the days of God's servants the prophets (Amos 3:7), God revealed much about the Messiah to come. By those same prophets, He also wrote of "the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15; also see Mat. 16:18; Acts 2; Eph. 4:4; 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). Down the stream of time, the inspired eye of the prophets saw the Christ and His church in figures of speech and symbols peculiar to their language. Throughout the many years of their ancient history, the prophecies came in part and parcel as the prophets faithfully performed their service to God in Israel. In prophetic language they signaled the nature and blessings that would characterize the Christian dispensation and the one church in which all true Christians reside. In so doing, they wrote or spoke by inspiration in terms of their past and present historical experience. Through hundreds of years, as the people in their culture and society were busy in the daily concourse of life, these grand revelations of the coming Christ and His house accumulated until the close of Malachi, and with its completion the Old Testament text was forever closed (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:21).

CHURCH PROPHECIES BEFORE THOSE OF THE WRITING PROPHETS

Preliminary to the study of prophecies pertaining to the church in the prophetic section of the Old Testament, we will spend some time on prophecies of the same that preceded those

found in the prophetic section. It was the inspired apostle Peter who declared to the Jews in his second recorded Gospel sermon:

Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days (Acts 3:24).

In verse 25, Peter tells us the glad news that all Christians (as that term is defined and used in the New Testament)

are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.

These inspired sentiments are the same as those expressed by the apostle Paul when to the Galatian churches he wrote:

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 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).

However, we also note that long before Abraham's time God pointed out to Eve that the woman's seed (Christ, and by implication, those who Christ came to save from their sins—Mat. 12:29; Rom. 16:20) would be victorious over the serpent's seed (Satan—Heb. 2:14; 1 John 3:8).

It was through Eve's descendants, via her son Seth, that God in clearer language further revealed through Abraham His eternal purpose in time, space, and material things (Gen. 12:1-3). Because of Abraham's great faith in God (Rom. 10:17; 2 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 11:8-19; Jam. 2:20-24), he was made the wellspring of promises that will only be accomplished and finalized in heaven (Mat. 8:11). It would be around 1800 years into the future from the time God made His promise to Abraham that through his seed all nations of the earth would be blessed (Gal. 3:16, 29; 4:4).

By the predictive element of prophecy, God's salvation plans were further revealed. It was revealed that Judah, Abraham's great-grandson

through Jacob, would be an ancestor of Jesus Christ. In this prediction, *Shiloh* ("bearer of peace") and *King*, the wielder of a scepter and, thus, the legislator of law (John 12:48; Rom. 8:2; Gal. 6:2; Jam. 1:25), was declared:

The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh come; And unto him *shall* the gathering of the people *be* (Gen. 49:10).

Clearly this prophecy tells us that the people who obey Shiloh are gathered to Him and that it could be fulfilled in none other than Jesus and His church (Mat. 16:18-19; John 14:6; Acts 2:37-38, 41-42, 47).

We remind the reader that Peter in his sermon referred to Samuel as one of the prophets (3:24). So, he was not only the last judge of Israel but a prophet as well. Peter said that Samuel predicted "these days" (of the New Testament church). In 2 Samuel 7:16, Samuel pictures the church as a house and a kingdom: "And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever." Plainly, the prophet declared that both the coming house/kingdom were certain and eternal. Thus, long before the church of Christ was referenced as a house (1 Tim. 3:15) and a kingdom (Mat. 16:19), Samuel applied these terms to the realm of the saved, the church.

It is very interesting to note that Samuel anointed David to be King of Israel and that God appointed David to be a prophet. So, Peter, by direction of the Holy Spirit, declared him so to be when he preached:

Men *and* brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne (Acts 2:29-30).

This was done to point out an important aspect of the church. Her members are strictly volunteers, having humbly chosen to submit to the authority of the King, in heeding and obeying the Gospel call concerning salvation from sin. In

obeying the Gospel, the Lord adds those people and no one else to the “called-out,” the church (Psa. 110:3; Rom. 1:16; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:37-38, 47; 1 The. 1:7-8).

THE CHURCH IN THE PROPHETICAL SECTION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

By means of symbols and figures of speech peculiar to their cultures and societies, God often revealed His messages concerning the coming Messiah and His church. For example: To the Jews, *Egypt* meant “bondage,” *Babylon* brought to their minds “captivity,” and *Canaan* caused them to think of “the promised land, flowing with milk and honey.” Thus, the Jews, in these and like figures of speech, saw freedom from all oppressors in their own land. Also, since God accommodates men as He created them to understand His will to them, He uses terms of this world that are on man’s own finite level of understanding such as attributing to Himself hands, feet, eyes, ears, and the like. God, therefore, communicates to man that He has the power to perform anything that man, through his physical powers, can do and far more.

When we consider the Old Testament prophets, we note that there are “oral” and “writing” prophets. Before the time of the divided kingdom, there were no writing prophets. Of the 14 writing prophets, eight of them wrote of the church of Christ via the previously noted symbols and figures characteristic of their language as it was developed by their culture.

As far as the Bible is concerned, the prophetic section of the Old Testament is divided into “Major” and “Minor” prophets. These terms do not mean that the prophets called *Major Prophets* are more important than those called *Minor Prophets*. They are labeled *Major* and *Minor* only because of the length of their works—the works of the Major Prophets being longer than those of the Minor Prophets.

THE PROPHETS WHO PROPHESED ABOUT THE CHURCH

The eight prophets writing about the Lord’s church are from both the Major and Minor Prophets. They are: Joel, Amos, Isaiah, Micah,

Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, and Zechariah. In these three chapters, we will study what each prophet wrote regarding the church.

Joel

Joel was one of the twelve Minor Prophets. His name means, “God (Jehovah or the Lord) is God” and He worked in the Southern Kingdom of Judah in the 9th century in about 835 BC. He possibly worked at the same time Elisha was prophesying in the Northern Kingdom, Israel.

The particular part of Joel’s prophecy concerning our study is found in Joel 2:28. The passage reads:

And it shall come to pass afterward, *That* I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions.

This prophecy pertains to the beginning of the church. It would begin with an outpouring of miraculous power of the Holy Spirit. This was no strange language to the people of Joel’s day. A common occurrence of *outpouring* was an indicator to the people of an overwhelming by something or someone. In this case the one who did the *overwhelming* is the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Godhead.

To the people of his day Joel’s usage of *all flesh* meant that miraculous power from the Holy Spirit would be poured out on both Jews and Gentiles alike. Also, when Joel used *servants and handmaids*, the people would have understood that said power from the Spirit would be poured out without distinction of social class or economic standing.

Notice what the apostle Peter said on the Day of Pentecost when the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit (immersed or baptized in supernatural power from the Holy Spirit). The apostle clearly stated, “But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16). It is in the context of Joel’s prophecy of these miraculous events that Peter made his remarks, explaining to the people who were witnessing this one-time-in-history-event, what was happening to the apostles on that Pentecost Day. With the outpouring

of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost of Acts 2, Joel's prophecy began to be fulfilled. Thus, the work of the Holy Spirit in the infant church as announced by Peter sets the context of and defines the work of the Spirit in the church until the last apostle had died—and until the last person died on whom an apostle of Christ had laid his hands to impart a miraculous gift (Acts 8:6-7, 14-18; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; 2 Cor. 12:12; 2 Tim. 1:6).

When we ignore Joel 2:28-32, we fail to see a vital inspired definition and foundation for understanding the Holy Spirit's work in the church while the apostles were busy carrying out what Jesus called them to do. Much that is taught regarding the work of the Spirit since the apostolic age has failed to take into account the difference

in how and why the Spirit operated in the infancy of the church before the New Testament was completed from how He operates in the church since its completion. As far as God's providence for His people is concerned, who all knows what Deity does on the behalf of Christians? The Bible is clear that God providentially cares for His children (Mat. 6:33), but for finite humans to get bogged down in the particulars, specifics, and details only known and done by Deity regarding His hour by hour care for the church particularly and the world in general is futile on our part.

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the various aspects of the writing prophets as opposed to the oral prophets.
2. Genesis 49:10: "Shiloh" refers to what person and how do we know such?
3. "By means of symbols and _____ of speech peculiar to their cultures and societies, God often revealed His messages concerning the coming Messiah and His church."
4. As an explanation to the events on Pentecost of Acts 2, Peter said "this is that which was spoken by" what prophet?
5. The prophetic section of the Old Testament may be divided into Major and _____ prophets. Discuss the differences between them.

THE CHURCH AS SEEN BY THE PROPHETS (2)

David P. Brown

THE PROPHETS WHO PROPHESED ABOUT THE CHURCH (continued)

Amos

We turn now to the prophet Amos, another of the twelve Minor Prophets. His name means “Burden” or “Burden-Bearer.” He worked in the Northern Kingdom of Israel at Bethel around 775 BC when Jeroboam was King. Obadiah, Joel, and Jonah preceded Amos and immediately following him were Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah.

Amos was a citizen of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. He lived in the little town of Tekoa, about 12 miles southeast of Jerusalem. He dressed sycamore trees (a large tree that produced fig-like fruit, more accurately named a sycamine tree) as one of the ways this *country man* made his living.

God called him to go to Bethel and prophesy against the place. This is one of the cities where wicked Jeroboam had set up a calf for the people to worship. He set up another calf in Dan for the same reason (2 Kin. 17:16). This was an effort on Jeroboam’s part to keep the people from returning to Jerusalem in the Southern Kingdom to worship at the temple and thus be reunited with them.

When we urge preachers to go to the prophets to learn how to preach the Gospel, Amos is a prime example of what we mean in sending them to the prophets to learn how to preach the message of salvation—to reprove, rebuke, and exhort as they faithfully preach the Word (1 Tim. 4:1ff). Amos knew how to make his message clear and apply it to the needs of the people.

Amos 9:11-12 is the passage that tells us about what the prophet saw concerning the church of the living God. It reads:

In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, And close up the breaches thereof; And I will raise up his ruins, And I will build it as in the days of old: That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all

the heathen, Which are called by my name, Saith the LORD that doeth this.

A common object in the mind of the Jews of the prophet’s day was the tabernacle of Moses. The tabernacle was so much a part of the people’s life that the prophet could use it to teach about the church. Thus, the church as seen by Amos was the restored tabernacle of David. But, what was the tabernacle of David? It was the united kingdom of Israel. That kingdom had been broken down. Solomon was warned of God as to the consequences of his sins. Regarding this warning, the Divine record reveals:

And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart. For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, *that* his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as *was* the heart of David his father (1 Kin. 11:3-4).

Thus, Solomon was told that the kingdom would be taken from him, but Solomon did not listen to God. Hence, when the son of Solomon, Rehoboam, came to the throne, his foolish ways caused the ten northern tribes to form the Northern Kingdom of Israel, ruled over by Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

However, Amos saw David’s tabernacle raised up as in the days of the United Kingdom, and with it the division between Israel and Judah destroyed. He also included the remnant of Edom and all nations that were called by God’s name.

Notice what transpired in the church following the conversion of Cornelius (the first uncircumcised Gentile to obey the Gospel), his household, and later in the Gentile church in Antioch of Syria. On account of certain Jews in the church teaching the church at Antioch that Gentiles must be circumcised to become Christians, Paul and others journeyed to Jerusalem to find out from where this false doctrine originated.

Notice the reference to Amos' prophecy in the following quotation. Luke records:

And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men *and* brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things (Acts 15:13-17).

Following Peter's comments, James quoted from Amos, thus, showing that the prophecy had already been fulfilled. How was this prophecy fulfilled or filled full? The Tabernacle of David (the church) had already been set up, the breaches filled, and, thus, Israel and Judah were reconciled in the church. Before the time of the conference in Jerusalem, recorded in Acts 15, the Gospel had been preached to the Jews, the Samaritans, and the Gentiles. Thus, the restored Tabernacle of David, about which Amos spoke, was the church of Christ.

Isaiah and Micah

Isaiah was a prophet in the Southern Kingdom of Israel and one of the four Major Prophets. His name means: "God is Salvation." Several descriptive terms are applied to him, but, in my opinion, the one that is outstanding is that he was "The Messianic Prophet." This is the case because he writes so much about the Messiah to come. His prophetic work covered about 60 years (740-680 BC), and he lived about 750 years before Jesus with his work covering the rule of four of Judah's kings. At the time Isaiah was working in Judah, Hosea was prophesying in the Northern Kingdom of Israel and Micah to both kingdoms.

Micah was another one of the twelve Minor Prophets. His name means, "Who is like God?" His prophecies cover from about 736 to 710 BC. He worked at about the time of Hosea in the Northern Kingdom of Israel as Isaiah worked in the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

In studying what these two prophets saw concerning the church we note that they viewed the church as a house established on the top of the mountains and exalted above the hills. Notice that their prophecies centered on what was familiar to the Jews—a house.

Isaiah wrote Isaiah 2:2-3 around 750 BC. About the same time, Micah wrote what he did in Micah 4:1-2. Besides Isaiah predicting that Jesus would be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14; see also Gen. 3:15), of the church these prophets declared:

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.

When these two prophets wrote of the house of the Lord, they had in mind "the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). As to its being established in the top of the mountains, they foresaw the church occupying the most exalted position of any institution on the earth. Concerning all nations flowing to it, the idea they had was that a constant stream of people (Jews and Gentiles) would stream continually into the church. When they wrote that "many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD" they saw the church under Christ's great commission steadfastly with much zeal ever proclaiming and defending the Gospel of Christ to a world lost in sin (Mat. 24:14; Mark 16:15; Acts 8:4; Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 9:14; 15:1-4; Eph. 6:15; Phi. 1:17; Gal. 1:6-12; Jude 3). Further, when these prophets wrote of how God "will teach us of his ways, And we will walk in his paths," they understood that the church would be characterized by a dedicated effort of edification—keeping the saved growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ (2 Cor. 12:19; 1 The. 5:11). This would also involve corrective church discipline, necessary to keep the church

pure and a part of saving souls (1 Cor. 5; 2 The. 3:14-15; Gal. 6:1-2).

When these two prophets wrote, “For the law shall go forth of Zion, And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem,” they viewed the church beginning in Jerusalem with the preaching of the Gospel message in its fullness for the first time. Thus, any church beginning anywhere else other than Jerusalem on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ is not the church that the prophets saw, that Jesus promised to build, that He purchased with His own blood, and wherein are located all those He saves from their sins (Mat. 16:18; Acts 2:38, 41, 47; 20:28).

Remember, in keeping the Lord’s commandment to tarry in Jerusalem, though the apostles did not know it at the time, they were waiting to be empowered by the Holy Spirit who would come on them from on high (2:4-8), as Joel had prophesied. With the coming of the Holy Spirit on the apostles (Christ’s chosen witnesses and ambassadors of the court of heaven to earth—2:42; 5:32), the house of God (the church of the living God) began.

Isaiah and Micah also foresaw the peaceful nature of God’s household members—those who flow into it. Israel of old was required to engage in carnal warfare to take their home land and keep it from being overrun by its enemies. However, the house of God of which these prophets wrote would not be characterized by carnal warfare.

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

Nevertheless, the church is always engaged in a spiritual warfare by wielding the “sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17). The church of Christ is fundamentally a teaching institution. It is spiritual truth that her members preach, defend, and by which they live exemplary Godly lives before one another and a world lost in sin (Mat. 28:19-20; Luke 24:46-49; Eph. 5:8). Only a cursory reading of the life of Christ and Acts reveals a constant militant effort on the part

of Christ and the church to preach and defend the truth of the Gospel as they lived according to God’s will for them. This reveals to us the kind of militancy that differs so drastically from the conduct of Israel of old and that of spiritual Israel, the Lord’s church. It is also a militancy that has been lost to many church members today, members who have bought into the devil’s doctrine that, if you love people, you do not teach them the truth because you dare not hurt their feelings by showing them their sins that separate them from God. However, the peace that God intends Christians to possess is that of knowing God has forgiven one’s sins and one is living faithful to God, justified before Him, and reconciled to Him in Christ—the church (Rom. 3:21-27; 5:10; Eph. 1:3; Col. 1:20-21).

In God’s house, Isaiah saw a memorial and an everlasting name.

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

Notice too that the prophet foresaw that in God’s house, He would give the *place* or *memorial* that would be instituted by Jesus Christ. On the night of our Lord’s betrayal Mark records:

And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake *it*, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body. And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave *it* to them: and they all drank of it. And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many. Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God (Mark 14:22-25).

Isaiah also saw a weekly observance of that memorial. He wrote:

And it shall come to pass, *that* from one new moon to another, And from one sabbath to another, Shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the LORD (Isa. 66:23).

Notice that “from one new moon to another, And one sabbath to another,”—that is once each week or between one Sabbath and another, “Shall

all flesh [both Jews and Gentiles] come to worship before me, saith the LORD.” Therefore, the memorial about which Isaiah wrote is observed by faithful members of His house (Christians) on every first day (the Lord’s Day) of every week.

Isaiah also foresaw all classes of people would be saved or reconciled to Him in His house. He says that eunuchs would be authorized to enter God’s house (56:3). The Law of Moses did not allow a eunuch to enter the assembly of God (Deu. 23:1). In the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch we see this prohibition removed in the Gospel of Christ. Thus, the eunuch, along with all others who are willing to obey the Gospel, are welcomed into the house of God (Rev. 22:17; 1 Cor. 6:9-11).

The great prophet wrote of a new name that would be given to the members of God’s house.

For Zion’s sake will I not hold my peace,
And for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest,
Until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness,
And the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth.
And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness,
And all kings thy glory:
And thou shalt be called by a new name,
Which the mouth of the LORD shall name (Isa. 62:1-2).

He also saw that all nations and tongues would come into God’s house. He declared that from them, the Gentiles, “And I will also take of them for priests *and* for Levites, saith the LORD” (66:18-21). This would have been impossible if the Jews continued to be amenable to the Law of Moses. Clearly the argument used by the inspired Hebrews’ writer to prove that since Christ was the High Priest, then the Law of Moses must have been abrogated (also see Col. 2:14). This is the case because the Law authorized priests to come only from the tribe of Levi, but Christ came from the tribe of Judah. The same would be the case regarding priest and Levites coming from the Gentiles. As the inspired writer to the Hebrews pointed out: “For *it is* evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood” (Heb. 7:14). Since the Law of Moses was silent about priests coming from any tribe but that of Levi, and since Christ was the High Priest over God’s

house, it must be the case that the Jews would no longer approach God under the authority of the Law of Moses. Why? Because it had ended and there was and is a new law through which all men would approach and serve God—the New Testament of Jesus Christ (Mat. 28:18; Heb. 8:6-13). Thus, the same evidence and reasoning done to show why Christ is High Priest in God’s spiritual house would be the same evidence and reasoning to prove how priests and Levites could come from uncircumcised Gentiles (1 The. 5:21).

This everlasting new name would not be given to the members of God’s house until the Gentiles were to be brought into it. On the day the church began (Pentecost of Acts 2), the members were referenced as believers and disciples, and among them were proselytes (non-Jews who chose to believe in and adhere to the Law of Moses—Acts 2:10). This would require male proselytes to be circumcised.

When the Samaritans were baptized into Christ for the remission of their sins, they were referenced in the same way those converts to Christ on Pentecost were—as believers and disciples. However, following the conversion of the first uncircumcised Gentile, Cornelius with his household (all of them Gentiles), we read, “And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch” (11:26).

Acts 13:1 tells us:

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.

Through these prophets, that included the apostle then known as Saul (later Paul), the Holy Spirit gave the commandment for Barnabas and Saul to go on their first preaching tour. Thus, in view of the totality of the teaching of the New Testament on the work of the Holy Spirit via the miraculous gifts as listed in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 and like passages, as well as the work of the apostles in their ambassadorial capacity, there is no stretching of the facts to conclude that, through these prophets, possibly Saul him-

self, that God revealed by the Holy Spirit that the individual members of His spiritual household would be called by a new name—Christian. Therefore, from the pen of the apostle Peter we read:

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:

which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

Thus, we better understand why Peter wrote, “Yet if *any man suffer* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf”—“in this name”—ASV, 1901 (1 Pet. 4:16).

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

QUESTIONS

1. True/False The prophet Amos was from Judah and lived in the town of Tekoa.
2. True/False Isaiah and Micah were contemporaries in their prophetic work.
3. True/False Isaiah and Micah saw the Lord’s church as a house.
4. True/False In 1 Timothy 3:15 the apostle Paul identified the house of God to be a kingdom.
5. True/False Isaiah 62:1-2 tells of a new name that would be given to members of God’s house.

THE CHURCH AS SEEN BY THE PROPHETS (3)

David P. Brown

THE PROPHETS WHO PROPHESED ABOUT THE CHURCH (continued)

Jeremiah

Jeremiah, one of the four Major Prophets, wrote two of the five Major Prophet books—Jeremiah and Lamentations. His name means “God throws,” and he prophesied to the Southern Kingdom of Judah from about 627 BC until about 580 BC. Because of the destruction of Jerusalem due to their sins, he is known as the “Weeping Prophet.” His contemporaries were Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Daniel, and Ezekiel.

He wrote from the beginning of his work until the fourth year of Jehoiakim’s reign. He dictated his prophecies to his secretary, Baruch. The prophet suffered greatly for his faithfulness to God in the message he preached to the Jews. In his hometown of Anathoth, he was threatened. Priests and false prophets of Jerusalem put him on trial for his life. He was also placed in stocks and was forced to flee from King Jehoiakim. The false prophet Hananiah humiliated him in public and he was thrown into a cistern. Finally, he was forced to flee into Egypt against his will.

The “weeping prophet” labored for more than 40 years prophesying condemnation to those Jews who were hardened by their sins. Because of the refusal to repent of violating God’s Word for so many years, his was a message of doom and gloom for Judah and Jerusalem. However, in the midst of God’s unrepentant people in their last days of freedom, he wrote a message of hope. The message was:

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, That I will make a new covenant With the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers In the day *that* I took them by the hand To bring them out of the land of Egypt; Which my covenant they brake, Although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After

those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, And write it in their hearts; And will be their God, And they shall be my people (Jer. 31:31-33).

In a failing decadent and immoral society, cursed of God for their sins, and in the last years of their existence, Jeremiah saw the church as a new covenant written on the inward parts of the hearts of men. Thus, even in prophecy the church was presented as a ray of hope in a very dark world. It also implied that God was not through with fleshly Israel, but would, through a remnant, perform the things He originally promised to do through them.

All men of that time understood the nature of covenants. God made a covenant between Him and the Israelites when they were fresh from bondage in Egypt. This happened when Moses, typical of Christ, led them out of Egypt. Jeremiah knew that covenant well. Sadly, and to their hurt, Israel had of long time repeatedly broken God’s covenant. Judah’s evil conduct had even exceeded that of the Northern Kingdom of Israel before they were overcome by Assyria as punishment for their sins. Jeremiah tells us how God saw their evil ways when he wrote:

I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: They commit adultery, and walk in lies: They strengthen also the hands of evildoers, That none doth return from his wickedness: They are all of them unto me as Sodom, And the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah (23:14).

It was to this evil people that God, in His infinite wisdom, had Jeremiah write that there would be a day coming and a people in the future who would have written in their inward parts and in their hearts God’s law.

Again, we refer to Hebrews in the New Testament. Remember that the inspired writer argued that since Jesus is High Priest over the house of God (the church), and since Jesus is from the tribe

of Judah, then there must have been a change of the Law. This was the case, as noted previously, because the Law only authorized priests to come from the tribe of Levi. He wrote:

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. For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people (Heb. 8:6-10).

Jeremiah is saying that for the Lord's church to truly exist, men must in a very real sense have God's new covenant written on the inward parts of men's hearts. Thus, as the apostle Paul wrote, in becoming Christians men obey

from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:17-18; also see 6:3-10).

Thus, the church is seen in the new covenant as it motivates, directs, and guides its members in this world to live on the highest spiritual plain possible (Gal. 5:22-24; Jam. 1:25). Indeed, the covenant written on our hearts causes us to "Set...[our]...affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2).

Daniel

Daniel's name means "God is my Judge." He was another one of the four Major Prophets. He came from and worked among those of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Amazing though it is, Daniel's life and prophetic work covered the whole 70 years of the Babylonian captivity. He was taken into captivity when he was around 16

years old and was specifically chosen to serve in the government. His life may be described as one of faithful, consistent, and uncompromising obedience to God's will, prayer, and great courage in very trying times. His contemporary, the prophet Ezekiel (Jeremiah was also contemporary with Daniel), cites Daniel three times for an example of righteous living.

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had a dream but forgot it. It was Daniel who was finally called upon to remind the king of his dream and interpret it. As Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream, he said:

Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness *was* excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof *was* terrible. This image's head *was* of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, His legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay. Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet *that were* of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth (Dan. 2:31-35).

In interpreting the dream Daniel pointed out that:

1. The head of gold is the Babylonian Empire (2:37-38)
2. The breast and arms of silver is the Medo-Persian Kingdom (2:39)
3. The belly of brass and its thighs represented the Grecian Empire (2:39)
4. The legs of iron and feet part of iron and part of clay are the Roman Empire (2:40-43).

Daniel declared that, in the days of the fourth kingdom (the Roman Empire), the God of heaven shall set up a kingdom that would last forever. Daniel beheld a stone cut out of a mountain without human involvement. He watched the stone grow and fill the whole earth.

That small stone of the king's dream was a common object to Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar. But, it was a fitting representative to certain characteristics of God's house, the church. It was cut without hands, thus, indicating that man had no part in its order, arrangement, and design. How hard was the stone? Hard enough to break in pieces the great and terrible image of gold, silver, brass, and iron of the king's dream—the four great world empires, namely the Babylonian, the Medo-Persian, the Grecian, and the Roman. However, this hard stone grew until it filled the earth completely.

In writing the Colossian epistle, Paul writes of the kingdom existing with him and the Colossian brethren being in it (Col. 1:13). In writing Revelation, John also placed himself and those to whom he was writing in the kingdom of Christ (Rev. 1:9). If nothing else existed in the New Testament about the kingdom of Christ, we would know from these Scriptures alone that there is no kingdom of Christ to be established in our time at some future date. In fact, Paul tells us that when Christ comes again it will be to deliver up the kingdom to God, not to establish it (1 Cor. 15:24-25).

Further, we also see *church* and *kingdom* used interchangeably to refer to the same institution. Paul's epistle was addressed to the church in Colossae, but he said they were in the kingdom (Col. 1:2, 18). Revelation was addressed to the seven churches of Asia (Rev. 1:4), but he also wrote that they were in the kingdom (1:9). In His ministry, Jesus used *church* and *kingdom* interchangeably when He promised to build His church and give to Peter the keys of the kingdom (Mat. 16:13-19). Thus, the house of God (the church—1 Tim. 3:15) and the kingdom of Christ are two of the Scriptural terms used by the sacred writers of the Bible to reference those Jesus saved from their sins (Acts 2:47).

This stone, the church, began in Jerusalem with a relatively small group of people on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2). However, in time, it would conquer and break the infamous and terrible Roman Empire. In fact, even as the church underwent the throws

of apostasy, it broke down the empire in less than 500 years.

Ezekiel

Ezekiel was another one of the four Major Prophets who came from the Southern Kingdom of Judah. He was a priest whose name means "Strengthened by God" or "God Strengthens." He worked for about 22 years, completing his book in about 565 BC. He began to work while Jeremiah was still active, and it continued into the beginning of Daniel's efforts. He was about the same age as Daniel. Ezekiel did his work in Babylon before Jerusalem's complete destruction as Jeremiah did his work in Jerusalem during its last days.

In Ezekiel 34:11, 22-23 the prophet wrote:

For thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I, *even* I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out.... Therefore will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle. And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, *even* my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd.

In John 10:14-16 Jesus said:

I am the good shepherd, and know my *sheep*, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, *and* one shepherd.

Jesus Christ, the Son of David, was/is the fulfillment of Ezekiel's vision relative to the one sheepfold and the one shepherd. The Shepherd with his sheep following him is a beautiful picture of the faithful church, composed of Christians only, the only place Christians are to be found, following, as it were in the footsteps of Christ (Col. 3:17; 1 Pet. 2:21; 1 John 2:6).

Zechariah

Zechariah was one of the twelve Minor Prophets, his name meaning "God Remembers" or "God Has Remembered," and he was a contemporary of Haggai. He was born in Babylon and brought up by his grandfather, returning to

Palestine when the Jewish exiles under Zerubbabel and Joshua (Jeshua) the high priest returned. Zechariah was the prophet who exercised an important role in causing the work on Zerubbabel's temple to resume.

In one upsetting night, Zechariah had a series of eight visions in 519 BC. Five visions were to comfort and three were of judgment. He saw the church as a temple and an open fountain. Again, the temple and the fountain were quite familiar to Zechariah and to the people of that time. Important characteristics of the church are presented by the temple and the fountain.

Opposition to rebuilding Zerubbabel's temple caused the work on it to cease. Ezra tells us:

Then they [Samaritans] came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye *do*; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esar-haddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither (Ezra 4:2).

When those Samaritans were denied their request, they opposed its rebuilding in any way at their disposal. Their efforts to stop the building of God's temple resulted in the work being postponed for 16 years (4:4-24).

The prophets Haggai and Zechariah were sent to provoke the people of Judah, especially the governor (Zerubbabel) and the high priest (Jeshua), to resume the work on the temple. The work began again in the second year of the reign of Darius and was finished four years later—in Darius' sixth year.

Zechariah was very much involved in encouraging Zerubbabel. Zechariah declared:

The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; His hands shall also finish it; And thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you (Zec. 4:9).

It was in this context that God said to Zechariah:

And speak unto him, saying, 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. And the crowns shall be to Helem, and to Tobijah, and to Jedaiah, and to Hen the son of Zephaniah, for a memorial in the temple of the LORD. And they *that are* far off shall come and build in the temple of the LORD, and ye shall know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you. And *this* shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God (6:12-15).

From this prophesy we learn certain facts about the kingdom. It would be a spiritual temple built by the Branch (Christ), not by Zerubbabel. The Branch would be both a king and a priest. The Branch would sit and rule on His throne and would be a priest on His throne.

The combination of a priest and a king in one person was an entirely new concept for the temple. Further, it necessarily projects a rule and a role which had characterized only one other man, Melchisedec—King of Salem and a priest of the most high God during the time of Abraham. Thus, the Branch (Christ) would sit and rule on His throne as He also served as a Priest on His throne. We see the culmination of the vision of Zechariah in Hebrews 6:20. Herein it is stated of Jesus, "Whither the forerunner is for us entered, *even* Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec." The point is this, Christ is now priest sitting and ruling on His throne (1 Cor. 15:25-26; Heb. 9:11; Rev. 17:14).

In the waning days of Zechariah's life, and decades following the completion of Zerubbabel's temple, the prophet saw the church as an opened fountain. He wrote:

In that day there shall be a fountain opened To the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem For sin and for uncleanness (Zec. 13:1).

Throughout the Middle East, fountains and springs were common. In a very arid climate, they were very necessary for life, and early settlers of the region gathered around these oases of water. An "open fountain" was a common one in the figures of speech for those people of that day.

At the time of the vision, the fountain that Zechariah saw was not open. It would be opened

“in that day.” Thus, God had a specific point in the distant future from Zechariah’s time when He would open the fountain. Further, it would be opened for “sin and for uncleanness,” not for bodily or ceremonial uncleanness. Indeed, the Divine concept is this: the fountain would flow when the precious blood of the Savior was shed in His crucifixion—shed for the remission of mankind’s sins. In instituting the Lord’s Supper, Jesus said of the fruit of the vine, “For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Mat. 26:28). Thus, when the repentant believer who has confessed Christ as the Son of God is immersed in water, he must know he is being baptized into the death of Christ wherein our Lord shed His blood. Notice what Paul wrote to the church at Rome, reminding them of what they had done to obtain remission of their past sins.

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness of his* resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin (Rom. 6:3-6).

CONCLUSION

Thus, as God moved toward that first Pentecost Day in Jerusalem following the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of His only Begotten Son, in the intervening years the prophets received divine information concerning the church of Christ. As noted in the beginning of this study, His revelations to the prophets concerning the church were in figures of speech common to

their day and familiar to the people to whom the prophets prophesied.

How carefully God planned the church! His planning is clearly seen in the specifics of the church in the mind of God before the foundation of the world; this planning that He revealed through the prophets. Thus, the church was no accident. It was carefully prepared from the beginning and gradually revealed throughout the Old Testament. As someone has written, “God planned His work and worked His plan.”

At the end of the world, on the final Judgment Day of all men, those outside of Christ and those who in the church who did not remain faithful to Him will undergo the wrath of the Lion of the tribe of Judah. This will be the case because of their rejection of His mercifully extended hand of salvation as presented to them in His Gospel (Psa. 2:7-9; 6:8; Mat. 7:23; Rev. 19:15). On the other hand, God’s own people, the “called-out” and blood-bought church, who served Him faithfully in the same on this earth, will leave the judgment to dwell with Him eternally in glorified bodies like our Lord’s, in which those saved from their sins by Christ’s blood will enjoy the amazing and unending glories of heaven (Mat. 25:34; Rev. 2:10; 1 Cor. 15:42-45; 2 Cor. 5:1; 1 John 3:2). As the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus:

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. 5:26-27).

To that end let us labor faithfully in the church the prophets saw (1 Cor. 15:58).

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

QUESTIONS

1. Jeremiah prophesied that in the future there would be a people who would have the law of God written in their hearts. Discuss what this means.
2. Whose dream did Daniel interpret and what is the meaning of it.
3. Daniel saw the church as a _____.
4. Ezekiel saw the church as a flock of sheep. In what way is the church like a flock?
5. God carefully planned the church, and His planning is clearly seen through the work of the Old Testament _____.

PREPARATORY WORK BY JOHN AND JESUS

Harrell Davidson

Suppose for a moment that you are living in the first century. Maybe you had heard of or had read one of the prophets of old who had written of someone that would come introducing a kingdom and one who would be king over that kingdom. You had some ability to know that *make paths straight* meant “getting things cleared out for this special person.” With that in mind let us consider:

How would you introduce that person? We make a great fuss over advertising Gospel meetings and the like, of selling the person to possible attendees. Is that the approach you would make *selling* a king?

Where would you choose to do this? Would you pick some big coliseum or arena where many people would definitely be in attendance?

What would you say and how would you say it? Would it be like a town crier? Would you begin by telling those in attendance that this person had a B.A. degree from this university, an M.A. from another, and a Ph.D from so and so? My late brother Billy, in a local work where a college president was to speak in a meeting was asked to introduce him as Dr. so and so. Bill replied that indeed the person had a doctorate, but he was there for a Gospel meeting and would be introduced as brother so and so! We well imagine that this did not go over well since he was asked to introduce him differently.

What kind of attire would you have put on? On and on this conversation could go by looking at today’s standards. But notice:

For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. And the same John had his raiment of camel’s hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey (Mat. 3:3-4).

Did you say in the “wilderness” was where the introduction was taking place? And did you say

that “camel’s hair, and a leathern girdle” was his attire? It is written that this was a voice crying out. “He said, I *am* the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias” (John 1:23).

This would not set well by today’s standards. Men have almost always wanted to be elevated someway or somehow. Look what I have done, etc. However, John the Baptist was introducing Christ to the world as a voice in the wilderness—not in Jerusalem—crying out about a kingdom that was coming. Yet, those in Jerusalem and Judea went out to hear the introducer and to be baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.

Prophets of old had told of this.

The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, And every mountain and hill shall be made low: And the crooked shall be made straight, And the rough places plain: And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, And all flesh shall see *it* together: For the mouth of the LORD hath spoken *it* (Isa. 40:3-5).

Malachi, who prophesied about four hundred years before John the Baptist, wrote:

Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: And the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, Even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: Behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts (Mal. 3:1).

Everyone should see that all of this was different by many of the standards used today. John’s message had many aspects. His focus was on a kingdom and the Lord who would receive that kingdom. His message was also about repentance which indicates a change in the mind of the people that would result in a change of conduct. He was telling them to repent for the kingdom is at hand.

When in college, the late brother H. A. Dixon said in class one day, that *at hand* meant “holding out your arm—outstretched—and turn up your fingers.” *At hand* meant then and now, right around the corner, not some two thousand or more years where some are still looking for an earthly kingdom in Jerusalem where Christ will one day reign a thousand years! There is not one scintilla of Scripture that supports that claim. Thus, it is false doctrine, the design of which is to send souls into eternity unprepared.

Imagine again standing near, not knowing exactly who Christ the Messiah was when He walks by and The Baptist says, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Of course, John’s words were inspired of God. As John was spoken to, so he spoke. John’s work was preparatory to get people ready for the Christ of the cosmos, the cross, and the crown.

An announcement was made to John and the world when Christ was baptized by John to fulfill all righteousness when a dove representing the Holy Spirit lit on Jesus. Our Almighty God said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mat. 3:17). The Son of God was God’s answer for sin that started in the Garden of Eden long ago.

In the beginning, the message of John and Jesus was about the same. Jesus said, “Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (4:17). Most every Word from the mouth of the Lord was designed to prepare the way for His kingdom. His work was that of the Father in heaven.

Jesus early spoke what we call the beatitudes. While many heard these (multitudes—5:1), probably the lessons were more designed toward the twelve whom He had started calling in the last of Matthew 4. These were beautiful attitudes that all should develop, even today, though in the model prayer He exhorted those to pray for the coming of the kingdom (6:10), and we have the kingdom already in existence since it was at hand in those days. Not these days! In fact, the Lord said:

And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you,
That there be some of them that stand here,
which shall not taste of death, till they have

seen the kingdom of God come with power
(Mark 9:1).

If a generation is thirty to forty years, and it is, it occurred during the time of some of those living in that day and hour and not in a millennium yet to come.

The four Gospel records state facts a little differently. The terminology is different from that in both Mark and Luke. They both talk about the kingdom of God while Matthew talks about the kingdom of heaven. What better terminology could be used to show that the kingdom was spiritual? Note what this suggests: (1) It shows its Divine origin. It has its origin in God. (2) It is spiritual in nature, and *heaven* is used to denote spiritual things. What better word could be used? Suppose I talk about heaven! Do you think I am talking about a physical kingdom? (3) It is a universal kingdom. It is not national—not just for Palestine, but for the entire world. What better word could Matthew use to turn attention to things above? (4) The kingdom is not racial or fleshly, but spiritual. It is for everyone. It will be based on faith. The king that Matthew will set forth is a king that is from God.

Jesus spoke in parables so men could understand the nature of the kingdom. He did miracles so men could be led to believe. The records of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are stated differently due to the fact that they were all written to different people. Mark records only about four parables of about thirty-one Jesus spoke. However, Mark’s record gives us about twenty-one of the miracles that Jesus did. Matthew wrote basically to the Jews who needed to understand the nature of the kingdom. Mark seems to be written to those in Rome, and they needed proof; thus the miracles. Luke, a doctor, was written to the common or forgotten man. John was the all-encompassing Gospel. All four inspired writers were introducing Christ and the Gospel of the kingdom to the world.

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

QUESTIONS

1. Who were John the Baptist's parents?
2. How much older was John than Jesus?
3. Were John and Jesus related?
4. Where did John begin his ministry?
5. Where did Jesus begin His ministry?

CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

Danny Douglas

We sometimes hear it said: “Give me Jesus, not the church.” Faithful brethren have been accused of “talking too much about the church and neglect Jesus.” Is it possible to emphasize the New Testament church, to the neglect of Christ? We will set forth to prove that preaching and exalting the Lord’s church means preaching and exalting Jesus Christ!

CHRIST AND THE CHURCH: PREACHING CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

The pattern for preaching, teaching, and doing what pleases God, is the New Testament. We also are to: “Hold the pattern of sound words which thou hast heard from me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 1:13—ASV). Under the Mosaic order, God gave the pattern that the Israelites were to follow for the physical Tabernacle (Heb. 8:5; Exo. 25:40). Likewise, in the New Testament, God has given the pattern for the spiritual house of Christ (1 Pet. 2:5), the church, which is: “the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man” (Heb. 8:2).

In the New Testament, we have the pattern of what constitutes sound doctrine; namely, the doctrine of Christ, which we must abide in and speak (2 John 9; Tit. 2:1). Preachers in the New Testament preached Jesus Christ (Acts 5:42; 9:20; 2 Cor. 4:5). “Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them” (Acts 8:5). Yet, in preaching Christ, Philip also preached the kingdom of God—the church: “But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (8:12). Furthermore, in declaring the whole “counsel of God,” Paul rendered himself “pure from the blood of all *men*” (20:26-27). This preaching included the preaching of the kingdom of God (20:25). Thus, we will not be guiltless before God if we fail to preach His

kingdom, the church (Rev. 1:9; Col. 1:13; John 3:3-5; 1 Cor. 12:13).

When Paul, as a prisoner, reached Rome, he met with the Jews. The inspired historian Luke indicates the purpose of this meeting, and that was to persuade them concerning Jesus and the kingdom of God:

And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into *his* lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and *out of* the prophets, from morning till evening (Acts 28:23).

While a prisoner, Paul continued in “Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ” (28:31).

CHRIST AND THE CHURCH: CHRIST AND THE CHURCH ARE INSEPARABLE

The connection between Jesus Christ and His church is so close that the Scriptures speak of the church as His body: “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body” (Eph. 5:23). Paul uses the figure of the human body to illustrate the relationship between the Lord and the members of His body:

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also *is* Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether *we be* Jews or Gentiles, whether *we be* bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:12-13).

He powerfully illustrates the close connection between all the members with one another and between all of them and Christ (cf. 12:14-26). He then states: “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular” (12:27).

During His earthly ministry, Jesus declared that there would be “one fold, *and* one shepherd”

(John 10:16). In Ephesians, Paul beautifully expresses the fact that all in Christ are reconciled and brought near to God by His blood, through the cross, in the one body:

But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even the law of commandments contained* in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, *so making peace*; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh (Eph. 2:13-17).

Paul taught that there are many members of Christ's body, but there is only one body: "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Rom. 12:4-5). The doctrine of the one body, that is, the one church (Eph. 1:22-23), is also taught in various other Scriptures (1 Cor. 12:12-13, 20; Eph. 2:16; 4:4-6). "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful" (Col. 3:15).

When Jesus said, "upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Mat. 16:18), He was speaking of the universal church of Christ. In this vein Paul was speaking when he declared that, "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Eph. 5:25). *Church* is also used to refer to the local church of Christ, that is, the local congregation, as in Romans 16:16, where Paul said: "The churches of Christ salute you," or in writing to "the churches of Galatia" (Gal. 1:2). Likewise, the apostle John wrote to "the seven churches which are in Asia" (Rev. 1:4).

CHRIST AND THE CHURCH:

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH

Jesus Christ is the "head of the body, the church" (Col. 1:18). Christ and all the members of His body are connected to Him and to one an-

other. After quoting these Scriptures: Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:23-24; 4:11-16, 25; 5:19-21, 1 Corinthians 15:25; 12:27-30, Colossians 1:18; 2:18-19, brother J. Ridley Stroop states:

From these statements it is clear that Christ is the head of the church, and the church is subject to him: that the church is his body, and he is the head of the body; that the body is made up of many members, who are also members one of another (86-88).

Paul speaks of the body as being "knit together," and closely connected to, and dependent upon Christ, when he speaks of the "Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God" (Col. 2:19).

Furthermore, the local church is overseen by elders (Acts 11:30; 14:23), which are also called pastors (shepherds) or overseers (bishops) (Phi. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:2) (Stroop 88). Their work is to tend and oversee the flock of God (1 Pet. 5:1-3). In his speech to the elders of the Lord's church at Ephesus, Paul charged them with overseeing and feeding the church of God: "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). The elders or shepherds have the rule over the congregation (Heb. 13:17) and are in subjection to the Chief Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:25; 5:4). The elders are to see that His Word is taught, carried out, and obeyed in the local congregation. He has all authority in heaven and on earth, and all is to be done in His name, that is, by His authority (Mat. 28:18; Col. 3:17).

In the absence of two or more qualified men for the eldership (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9), God allows the faithful men to lead the congregation and carry out the business of the church (1 Tim. 2:8-14; 1 Cor. 11:3). Yet, the congregation will not be fully organized, and things will be *wanting*, until qualified men are appointed to the eldership (Tit. 1:5).

Deacons, faithful men who meet the qualifications set forth in 1 Timothy 3:8-13, are special

servants appointed to a specific work under the oversight of the elders. Possibly we find the first example of deacons in the “seven men” who were appointed to the task of “the daily ministrations” in the church at Jerusalem to ensure that both the Grecian and Hebrew widows received the proper care. They were appointed “over this business” (Acts 6:1-6).

The Lord’s church at Philippi had bishops (elders) and deacons, and all the members were saints: “Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons” (Phi. 1:1). Indeed, every member of the body of Christ is important, and all have a great work to do (1 Cor. 12:12-27; 15:58). “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular” (1 Cor. 12:27). Every member belongs to the body of Christ and is to submit to Christ as the Head (Eph. 5:23-24; Col. 1:18).

THE MISSION AND WORK OF THE CHURCH

The mission of the church is to save souls and to glorify God. “Unto him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Eph. 3:21). This mission is seen in: (1) evangelism, in which the lost are brought to Christ by the Gospel (Rom. 1:16); (2) edification, when the church builds itself up and defends the Gospel (Phi. 1:17), laboring to keep the members in a saved condition (Col. 1:22-29); (3) benevolence, where good works glorify God, operating to save the lost (1 Pet. 2:12; Mat. 5:16). These all fit harmoniously with the description: “the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15).

Therefore, the work of the church of Christ is three-fold: (1) Evangelism (Mat. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 8:4-5; 13:1-5), (2) Edification (9:31; 1 The. 5:11; Acts 20:28, 32), and (3) Benevolence (Jam. 1:27; Gal. 6:10; Acts 6:1-6; 11:29-30).

The Lord commands His body to teach “the gospel of Christ” to the lost, because it is “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16; Mark 16:15-16). This is evangelism. Therefore, when the local church goes out into the community to

conduct Bible studies, or when it supports the preaching of the Gospel over the radio, TV, internet, tracts and other printed media, and in Gospel meetings, this is evangelism. Moreover, when the church supports the preaching of the Gospel on the mission field or sends out brethren to do so, this is also evangelism.

The church is made up of true worshipers (John 4:22-24). In the worship (in sermons and even in the singing—Col. 3:16), in Bible classes, in Bible lectureships, Gospel meetings, and at other times when the Word of God is taught, saints are edified or built up spiritually (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 20:32). It is the duty of overseers (elders) to see that the flock of God is fed spiritually and edified. They are charged to: “feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (20:28; cf. Mat. 4:4). This is edification, and it is an important work of the church. We are commanded to “edify one another” (1 The. 5:11), and Jude exhorts the brethren to build up “yourselves on your most holy faith” (Jude 20). We read of the growth, faithfulness, and edification of churches of Christ in Acts 9:31:

Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

Benevolence is doing good and extending help to those in need. The Scriptures authorize the church to do this to both saints and non-saints. Paul, in writing to “the churches of Galatia” (Gal. 1:2) enjoined upon them: “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all *men*, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (6:10). The heavenly Father is benevolent to both the evil and the good, and we are to be like Him (Mat. 5:43-48). The New Testament sets forth examples of the church extending benevolence and cooperating among themselves in so doing (2 Cor. 8:1-5; 9:1-2, 12-13; Rom. 15:25-33; Acts 11:29-30).

As far as religious institutions are concerned, only the Lord’s church is ordained and is approved of God. Jesus taught that anything which God has not authorized will be destroyed: “Ev-

ery plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up” (Mat. 15:13). The church is the bride of Christ, and all who are in the Lord’s church are married to Christ, “*even* to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God” (Rom. 7:4).

WORKS CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version, unless otherwise indicated.
Stroop, J. Ridley. *The Church of the Bible*. Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1962.

QUESTIONS

1. Do the words of this song, “For Christ and the Church,” express Scriptural principles (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19)?

“For Christ and the church” let our voices ring,
Let us honor the name of our own blessed King;
Let us work with a will in the strength of youth,
And loyally stand for the kingdom of truth.

“For Christ and the church” be our earnest prayer,
Let us follow His banner the cross daily bear;
Let us yield, wholly yield, to the gospel’s power,
And serve faithfully every day, every hour.

“For Christ and the church” willing offerings make,
Time and talents and gold for the dear Master’s sake;
We will render the best we can bring to Him,
The heart’s wealth of love, that will never grow dim.

“For Christ and the church” let us cast aside,
By His conquering grace, chains of self, fear, and pride;
May our lives be enriched by an aim so grand;
Then happy the call to the Savior’s right hand.

Chorus
For Christ, our dear Redeemer,
For Christ, the crucified;
For the church, His blood hath purchased;
The church, His holy bride.

by E. E. Hewitt.

2. Does the New Testament make a distinction between preaching Christ and the church?
3. How will carrying out benevolence in a Scriptural manner lead to the salvation of souls?
4. If the church fails in the area of edification, what damage will result? Does warning against sin, false doctrine, and other dangers, edify the church?
5. How will striving to glorify God produce harmony and unity in the local church? Will it also engender evangelism?

THE CHURCH ESTABLISHED

Douglas Post

“CHURCH” AND SEMANTIC RANGE

Our topic assumes the *church* exists and is referred to in God’s Word—the Bible. In fact, from the pages of the New Testament we can identify that which is known as the *church*, as well as how and when it came into being in the first century (Mat.16:18; Acts 2:47; 5:11; 8:1-3; 1 Tim. 3:15; etc.). Nonetheless, there is much misunderstanding when it comes to the concept of *church* as the nursery rhyme, “Here’s the church, and here’s the steeple, Open the door and see all the people,” well demonstrates. Throughout the years *church* has been referred to as an “organism,” an “organization,” an “assembly,” and an “institution.” The fact is, all these terms can refer to the concept of *church*.

After all, an *organism* is the whole made up of related parts; an *organization* is a group of people organized for a purpose; an *assembly* is the coming together of individuals to form a whole, having a purpose; an *institution* is an organization or group gathered together for public, social, or religious purposes. We can readily see that one word, such as *church*, may allude to several different concepts (rarely at the same time). Concepts are ideas represented by words, and words are vehicles of thought. Words often change meaning over time, while spiritual concepts remain static. God revealed certain ideas through the use of words, but these concepts are eternal, being in the mind of the eternal God (Eph. 3:10-11). Words are subject to change, but these concepts, which they describe, are static and/or eternal.

It is clear, then, that defining the word *church* is a bit more complex than merely relying on its lexical, etymological, and contextual perspectives because words comprise the social nature of human language. While these aspects are important to know, so is the word’s “semantic range,” which means knowing how people have used a particular word elsewhere. For instance, in the 1980s,

knowing the lexical, etymological, and contextual components of *bad* could not assist my understanding, being unaware of how it was being used. *Bad* evolved, being used to mean “good,” “hip,” “cool,” or “awesome.” The lexical, etymological, and contextual aspects, were of no real value to me because this was unclear to me. A football player might be referred to as *bad* because he was actually a great player, or a song was said to be *bad*, but it was actually popular and well liked. Therefore, the semantic range of *bad* was greater than the lexical, etymological, and contextual meaning, because *bad* was used differently than how I understood it.

Gay well illustrates a word having more than one concept due to word usage. Moreover, some tell us that while knowing a word’s lexical definition and etymology is important, **context** is what really matters in defining a particular word. While context is *king* in determining a word’s meaning, it is not everything. A word is not a blank canvas for one to apply his or her preconceived colors and shades of meaning. Regarding semantic range and context, E. D. Hirsch states:

It is sometimes said that “meaning is determined by context,” but this is a very loose way of speaking. It is true that the surrounding text or the situation in which a problematical word sequence is found tends to narrow the meaning probabilities for that particular word sequence; otherwise, interpretation would be hopeless. And it is a measure of stylistic excellence in an author that he should have managed to formulate a decisive context for any particular word sequence within his text. But this is certainly not to say that context determines verbal meaning. At best a context determines the guess of an interpreter (though his construction of the context may be wrong, and his guess correspondingly so). To speak of context as a determinant is to confuse an exigency of interpretation with an author’s determining acts. An author’s verbal meaning is limited by linguistic possibilities but is determined

by his actualizing and specifying some of those possibilities (47-48).

In other words, there are times when the **context may not be able to assist our understanding of a text**, especially if a particular word is not being used in the socially approved or conventional manner. Therefore, while context is generally *king* in determining word meaning, what really drives the meaning is the way the author uses the word within a particular framework of thought. Consider the *context* as King Louis XVI and the semantic range (word usage) as the people storming the Bastille. “King Context,” followed by his lexical and etymological entourage, have the rule and authority over a word, until the people speak, capturing it and using it for their own purposes. How people use a word at a given time can have the final say in the matter. Scholar Daniel Wallace says it this way:

Often linguists say that the word being examined should have the meaning of “X” with “X” being only what one can determine from the context. But this is an unreasonable demand on any word. If **every word** in a given utterance had the meaning “X” then we simply could not figure out what any utterance ever meant.

Without getting deep into its history, *church* reaches back to the Greek word *kuriakos*, meaning “of the Lord” or “pertaining to the Lord” (Perschbacher 251). This concept was applied to *ekklesia* by various peoples over time. However, the *ekklesia* means “called out,” and in the Greco-Roman world, according to Josephus, typically referred to a gathering of individuals or an *assembly* (Arndt, Danker 303). Once again, this demonstrates how one word may have multiple concepts or ideas, not just one. Some contend *ekklesia* means *assembly* only, but that is simply a fallacy based on *etymologizing*. As noted previously, etymology may be helpful, but only if the writer or speaker is aware of it. Otherwise, we must rely upon the writer’s use of the word. When we consider the multiple concepts associated with *ekklesia* and *church*, we can simply, correctly, and assuredly say that they mean any group of people, having something in common—a community of

Christians, submitting to Christ and His Word, regularly coming together in one place on Sundays to worship God (1 Cor.11:20; 14:23).

CHURCH—KINGDOM CONCEPT

The church is **eternal**. This is the concept taught in Scripture. This concept was in the mind of our eternal God. He devised a plan to save mankind, of which the **church** is part:

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

As noted previously, the **church** refers to Christians. In describing these people, Peter writes:

But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9).

Here we see the *overlap* of **church** and *ekklesia*. These people belong to the Lord (Rom. 14:8; 1 Cor. 3:23), having been called by God through His Gospel (2 The. 2:14). The **called out** (*ekklesia*) are **of Christ** (*kuriakos*) since He purchased them with His blood (Acts 20:28), having died for them (Eph. 5:23-25, 32).

The **church** of the New Testament is often described by various metaphors or figures of speech. For instance, in Ephesians, alone, an epistle exalting the church, Paul refers to it as a body (1:22-23); one new man (2:15); fellow citizens, household or family (2:19); building and temple (2:21); habitation of God (2:22); saints (4:12); kingdom (5:5) and as a bride (5:25-27, 32). The New Testament is replete with such metaphors describing the church. However, one metaphor has tremendous significance, relating directly to the rule of God, and that is **kingdom**. In his debate with Ben Bogard in 1938, dealing with the establishment of the church, N. B. Hardeman stated:

The kingdom, friends, has always existed, and let’s get some things about it that will help us to understand it. It existed in *pur-*

pose, in the mind of God; it existed next in *Promise*, as delivered unto the patriarchs, and it existed in *Prophecy*; and then it existed in *Preparation*; and last of all, when the New Testament went into effect, it existed in *Perfection* (178).

A **kingdom** is associated with authority and dominion, ruled by its sovereign king. There is no such thing as a kingdom without a king and vice versa. Ferguson makes the following observation:

In Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, the primary meaning of “kingdom” is “kingship,” that is, royal power of kingly rule. The words more often refer to the “reign” than to the “realm” in which the rule is exercised, to the dominion rather than the domain (19).

We read in Daniel how God took Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom away from him, but what He actually took was his kingship—his authority and rule (Dan. 4:30-31). While the concept of **kingdom** necessarily involves physical, geographical aspects, it is the concept of kingship and exercise of authority that is under consideration. Jesus affirms this concept, saying, “the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:20-21).

As Daniel, Jesus addresses the abstract characteristic of the **kingdom**, its spiritual nature. The **kingdom of God** is within a person, where God rules the heart by means of His Word. This same idea is described by the Hebrews writer:

I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people (Heb. 8:10; 10:16; cf. Jer. 31:33).

This figure of speech contemplates God’s rule over the heart or mind (the intellect)—the inward man—quite simply, God’s influence through His Word. God is said to put His law in minds, writing it on hearts, the very same way He *draws* people to Christ:

No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, “*And they shall all be taught by God.*” Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me (John 6:44-45).

This drawing, putting, and writing does **not** occur supernaturally and directly, but through the process of teaching, hearing, and learning. Through this process the kingdom is said to be within an individual, influencing and ruling the inward man. The Parable of the Sower is fundamental in understanding that only two are involved in this process: (1) God’s Word (seed) and (2) Good Soil or “good heart” (Luke 8:11-15). God provides the **seed**, designed to appeal and influence the mind but the individual, having a good heart, must provide the proper response. Of this kind of individual, Jesus says: “Blessed *are* those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled” (Mat. 5:6). The apostle Paul explains the entire process this way: “

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 unless they are sent? As it is written: “*How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!*” But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “LORD, who has believed our report?” So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:14-17).

God does not work directly and supernaturally *writing* His law on the heart as Calvinism teaches. God’s power to save has always been by the Gospel, which one must hear, believe, and obey (Rom. 10:14-17; 1:16-17; cf. Acts 2:41; Jam. 1:21). Moreover, concerning the Jews, Paul writes: “being ignorant of God’s righteousness,” they sought to “establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God” (Rom. 10:3). Christ replaced Moses; i.e., the Gospel replaced the Law of Moses (7:1-6), but the Jews continued teaching circumcision was necessary for justification binding it upon the Gentiles. This teaching, of course, was not part of the Gospel, not even being mentioned (Acts 15:24). In fact, Christ was the “completion of the law for righteousness to everyone [Jew and Gentile] who believes” (Rom. 10:4; 1:16; cf. Gal. 3:19-28).

The Law terminated at the death of Christ (Rom. 10:5; Eph. 2:15; Col. 2:14). The Law, serving as a *guide* in bringing the Jews to Christ, was until Christ (Gal. 3:19-24). When the faith (Gospel) came, they were no longer under that guide—the Law (3:25). The faith (New Testament) came after the death of Christ, the testator (Heb. 9:15-17), removing the Law and the necessity of circumcision. Concerning Deuteronomy 30:11-14, Paul continues showing how the inspired instruction of Moses was not difficult to understand and obey. His message was explained at its revealing, and the Jews did not need to go elsewhere for further explanation or wait for Divine illumination (Rom. 10:6-7). Paul writes: “*The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart*” (that is, the word of **[the] faith** which we preach)” (10:8). Paul provides a New Testament application here, demonstrating that we also have the ability to understand **the faith** without some imagined need for a direct operation of the Holy Spirit on our minds (Divine Illumination). Unaided and without Divine manipulation of our minds, we are able to understand that which is written (Eph. 3:4), and our understanding allows the message to influence our hearts in obedience (2:5-16; cf. Ps. 119:11). As has always been the case, therefore, the King rules His kingdom (citizens) through His Word, the seed of His kingdom, which is His body—the church (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4).

CHURCH—KINGDOM ESTABLISHMENT

While **church** and **kingdom** do not carry the same lexical meaning, when it comes to semantic range (word usage) within the New Testament, they are synonymous—different expressions for the same institution. For instance, Jesus told His apostles He would build His church, then one verse later said, “And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Mat. 16:18-19). Here we see the synonymous relationship between church and kingdom.

The **kingdom** is the prominent theme of the Gospel accounts. John the Baptizer came, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (3:2). Jesus began His ministry saying “Repent,

for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (4:17), and did so for the remainder of His ministry, even when instituting the Lord’s Supper on the night before His crucifixion:

Assuredly, I say to you, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God (Mark 14:25).

One of the criminals, hanging on a cross next to Jesus, pointed to a time yet future of Christ’s kingdom saying, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom” (Luke 23:42). Coincidentally, the kingdom or church was **never** established during the earthly life of Christ, but we also note that at His Final Coming He will deliver the kingdom back to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24). Therefore, the establishment of the kingdom or church, must be at a time after Christ’s Resurrection and before His final return. However, we know the bread and “fruit of the vine” (Lord’s Supper) were shared among the first century Christians (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:23-27); so we are getting closer to identifying when the kingdom or church was established.

Now we focus our attention on some Old Testament passages to see what they teach concerning the kingdom. The first passage we note is the predictive promise God gave to David:

I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.... Your throne shall be established forever (2 Sam. 7:12-16).

One from David’s lineage would be a King, ruling over His own kingdom forever, but He would not rule over David’s kingdom, physical Israel. Of course, we know Jesus is of the lineage of David (Rom. 1:3), and it was known before His birth He would be given the throne of David (Psa. 16:8-11; Acts 2:30; cf. Luke 1:32).

Related to the spiritual nature of the kingdom (Luke 17:20-21; John 18:36), is the concept of a “spiritual Israel,” which, of course, is the “Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16). This Israel was comprised of those who were not to regard “circumcision” as anything (6:15-16). They were the “Jerusalem from above” (4:26), also called the “children of promise” who were “born of the Spirit” (4:28).

They were the “sons of God through [the] faith of Christ Jesus” upon being “baptized into Christ” (3:26-27). They were a people no longer under the authority of the Law of Moses, but they are under the authority of Christ and the faith or Gospel (3:25). They are referred to as “the churches of Galatia” (1:2). This was the spiritual Israel, which was during the first century.

The prophet Daniel interpreted king Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, which envisioned four world empires: the head of gold represented **Babylon**, the breast and arms of silver represented **Medo-Persia**, the belly and thighs of bronze represented **Greece**, and legs and feet of iron and clay represented **Rome**. Daniel provides an unmistakable starting point since he identifies Babylon, represented by the head of gold, as the first of the four world empires revealed. Daniel then speaks of an indestructible kingdom that would stand forever:

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

It is here indicated as to when this **kingdom** would be set up: “in the days of these kings,” which was the fourth empire, Rome. Moreover, in Daniel 7, we are informed of the specific time when the “Son of man” would receive “dominion and glory and a kingdom”: when “Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days” (7:13-14). When read carefully, we see the “Son of Man” **ascending** “with the clouds of heaven” to the Father (the “Ancient of Days”). David declared that the “King of glory” who is the “Lord of hosts” would enter through the “everlasting doors” as King of His kingdom (Psa. 24:7-10).

Regarding the Christ, the prophet Zechariah tells us He would rule from His throne and would do so as a priest (Zec. 6:12-13). While He was a priest (Heb. 3:1), He could not serve as priest on earth (8:4). After His resurrection when He was given Rule, He would become a priest—“High priest over the house of God” (10:19-21). Jesus could not serve as King and priest until af-

ter His resurrection (See Jer. 22:28-30 and Mat. 1:11-13). Regarding the house of God, we know it is the church (1 Tim. 3:15) and according to Isaiah this house would be established in Jerusalem, where the law, the Word of God, would be proclaimed (Isa. 2:2-4). Related to this, Jesus said some would not die till they witnessed the kingdom come with power (Mark 9:1). Moreover, Jesus told His apostles to wait in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on High (Luke 24:49). The apostles were in Jerusalem where they were baptized in the Holy Spirit, receiving miraculous power from the Spirit, which made them His apostles (Acts 1:4-5, 8; 2:1-4). It was at this time, the apostles preached the first New Testament message of Christ, offering salvation through the name or authority of Jesus (2:38). It was on Pentecost that Peter proclaimed Christ’s kingship and rule (2:22-36).

There is no mistaking the fact that the kingdom came with power on Pentecost, and from Jerusalem the law of the Lord went forth. It was also on Pentecost the church was established (2:47; 5:11). At the time of his letter to the Colossians, Paul tells us that church was in existence (Col. 1:18) but that the brethren had been “delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love” (1:13). Finally, John writes, saying that he was in the kingdom with those to whom he was writing (Rev. 1:9). When we put all of this information together (Psa. 119:160), we easily see the church and the kingdom are synonymous, having both begun on Pentecost.

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QUESTIONS

1. What is “semantic range”? What is important to understand *context*? What is its weakness?
2. What is the “church-kingdom” concept? What is a significant concept associated with *kingdom*? What is the means of God’s rule in the church-kingdom?
3. How does God *draw* people to Christ? How does He *write* His law in minds and hearts?
4. What is a prominent theme of Christ’s ministry?
5. What is the “Israel of God”? According to the evidence, when was the church-kingdom established?

THE CHURCH IDENTIFIED

Philip Smith

INTRODUCTION

If one were to ask the average person on the street to identify the church, one might receive several responses, depending on each respondent's knowledge of the Bible. One might answer that the church is that building with the steeple on the top. Another might say that the church is identified by a sign in front of the building stating that it is a Baptist, Methodist, or any one of the many religions in the world today. A third might reply that the church consists of all the denominations that worship God in whatever way they choose.

However, the process of identification involves finding identifying marks. This is true whether one is turning in a report of a robbery or looking for a lost child. In this chapter, I intend to discuss identifying marks of the church. These are vital to our salvation because Jesus is the Savior of the church, and the Scriptures teach that there is only one church (Eph. 5:23; 1:22-23). If we are to be saved, we must be members of that church of which Jesus is the Savior.

When I speak of "the church," I mean the church that Jesus built and established on the first Pentecost after His resurrection. This church is composed of baptized believers that God has added to the church. It is the church of which Jesus is the Savior and that will enter eternity with God. It is not a denomination, nor any organization built or begun by man. It is the church of Christ, built by Him, purchased by Him, and of which He is the head.

We cannot identify the church simply by taking man's word for it (1 John 4:1-6). Nor can we identify the church by merely choosing one that *feels* right (Jer. 10:23). We can do so only by its identifying marks, or the pattern for it, found in the Word of God (Heb. 8:1-6). Let us now turn to God's Word and identify the church.

THE CHURCH WAS BUILT BY JESUS CHRIST

The first identifying mark is that Jesus built it (Mat. 16:18-19). All other *churches* were built by men. Not only did Jesus build His church, but He also purchased it with the price of His own blood (Acts 20:28). No man-made religion has ever been purchased with the blood of Jesus Christ. As builder and purchaser, Jesus is the owner of His church. This cannot be said of any denomination. No man-made religion will satisfy those who truly seek the Lord. Each individual must ask if he or she is a part of the church that Jesus built or part of a man-made religion.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH

Another identifying mark of the church is its organization. The religions of men have such governing structures as earthly headquarters, the pope, synods, councils, and others. However, the *headquarters* for the church of the Bible is heaven (Heb. 8:1) where Jesus reigns with all authority as head (Mat. 28:18; Eph. 5:23). Jesus sent forth His apostles as ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20). The apostles spoke and wrote as the Holy Spirit guided them (John 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:13). Therefore, their words are the commandments of the Lord (14:37). There were also New Testament prophets who spoke by inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 3:5) and whose words are true and binding. Both the apostles and inspired prophets are long gone, but their inspired words come down to us through the Holy Scriptures.

Each New Testament congregation, where men were qualified, had a plurality of elders (Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5). These men were also called *presbyters*, *overseers*, *bishops*, *pastors*, and *shepherds*. We can understand their work through these descriptive terms. The elders are charged with shepherding the congregation of which they are members (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 3:4-7; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:1-3). Because they shepherd the flock of God they must meet qualifications specified in God's

Word (1 Tim. 3:8-13; Tit. 1:5-9; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). It is important to note that the elders function as an eldership. No elder can rule in matters of expediency in and of himself.

Deacons are special servants to the elders. Paul, in his first letter to Timothy, gave qualifications that each deacon must meet (1 Tim. 3:8-13). As special servants to the elders, deacons may be given both spiritual and physical work to do relating to the church. While a deacon may become an elder, deacons should not be thought of as “junior elders” or “elders-in-waiting.” Where elders and deacons are fulfilling their roles, the work of deacons is worthy and brings glory to God. We also find preachers and teachers in the New Testament church (2 Tim. 2:2; 4:1-2; Heb. 5:12; 1 Pet. 4:11). Some terms that describe all members of the church are *Christians*, *brethren*, *children of God*, and *saints* (Acts 11:26; 20:32; Rom. 8:16; Phi. 1:1). Any religion that does not follow this pattern of organization is not the church that Jesus built.

ITS RULE OF FAITH

The rule of faith in the church is the New Testament (Heb. 12:24; 8:6; Gal. 1:8-9). No uninspired writings will do. The church rejects creeds, church manuals, and human traditions as being inspired or binding. Faithful Gospel preachers in the Lord’s church preach the inspired Word of God (Mat. 15:9; 2 Tim. 4:1-4) and will neither go beyond it nor fall short of it; they speak as the oracles of God (1 Pet. 4:11; Pro. 30:6; Gal. 1:8-9).

THE WORK OF THE CHURCH

The work of the church is also described in the New Testament. The church is to do the work of evangelism (Mat. 28:19-20; Acts 8:3-4; 1 Tim. 3:15). The work of edification is also commanded (1 Cor. 14:3, 12; Eph. 4:16; 1 The. 5:11). The New Testament church also engaged in benevolence (Acts 11:27-30; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; Gal. 6:10). There are no more works of the church. Any religious organization that goes beyond these works or falls short of them is not the church that Jesus built.

THE WORSHIP OF THE CHURCH

The worship of the church consists of five acts, two of which are to be done only on the first day of the week. The New Testament church partakes of the Lord’s Supper only on the first day of the week (Mat. 26:26-29; Acts 20:7). Giving into the common treasury is also done only on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:1-4). The New Testament does not authorize any other means of providing funds for the work of the church. Worshiping God through music is another act of worship. The kind of music found in the New Testament church is singing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16)—and never that which mechanical instruments produces. Singing is not restricted to the first day of the week but can be practiced on any day (Jam. 5:13). The church of the New Testament worshiped God in prayer (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 14:15). We may pray on any day of the week (Jam. 5:13). Preaching is a part of New Testament worship (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 14:2-3; 2 Tim. 4:1-2) and may be done on any day of the week (Acts 4:1-4). These are the five acts of worship authorized in the New Testament. There are no more, and there can be no removals, substitutions, or additions. Any religious organization that alters God’s pattern for worship is not the church that Jesus built.

THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

The church has the definite purpose of glorifying God (2 The. 1:11-12; 1 Pet. 4:14). While it is true that we are not to hide our light under a bushel, it is also true that we are not to do our works to receive praise of men (Mat. 6:1, 5; 23:5). Any religious organization that glorifies men or seeks the praise of men for itself, instead of for God, is not the church that Jesus built.

HOW LONG WILL THE CHURCH LAST?

The church that Jesus built will last eternally (Dan. 2:44; Heb. 12:28). When Jesus returns, and this earth and the heavens are dissolved (2 Pet. 3:10), He will deliver up the church to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24). Its faithful members will enter their heavenly state where their persecutions and trials will end and where eternal peace

and joy will reign in the presence of God and our Savior Jesus Christ.

ITS TERMS OF ENTRANCE

How does one become a part of the church identified in the New Testament? One must believe the Gospel (Rom. 5:1). One must repent of his sins (Acts 17:30-31). One must confess that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Rom. 10:9-10). One must be baptized in water for the remission of his sins (Acts 2:38; 1 Pet. 3:20-21). When one is baptized, his sins are washed away (Acts 22:16), and God adds him to His church (2:47). One must now begin a new life of serving and worshiping God according to His Word (Rom. 6:3-4; 12:1-2). God's Word promises a home in heaven to all those in Jesus' church who faithfully

serve Him to the end of their lives (Col. 1:22-23; Rev. 2:10; 14:13).

CONCLUSION

We have examined several identifying marks of the church that Jesus built. Only the church we read of in the Bible is the church of which He is the Savior (Eph. 5:23; 1:22-23). Those who are not in the church that Jesus built are not among the saved (Acts 2:47). The Gospel call is for you, dear reader, if you are not a member of the Lord's church (2 The. 2:14). Will you obey that Gospel and let God add you to the church we read about in the New Testament?

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

QUESTIONS

1. Where does the New Testament teach that the "tabernacle made without hands" is built according to a pattern?
2. Why is it vital to our salvation to be a part of the church described in the New Testament?
3. Name four identifying marks of the church that Jesus built?
4. If Jesus built His church and He is the savior of the church that He built, what does that tell us about man-made "churches"?
5. Is it true that that the only difference between the church that Jesus built and man-made *churches* is that the church preaches baptism for the remission of sins?

THE CHURCH AND ITS SALVATION

Ron Cosby

My responsibility is to show the connection between the church and salvation. We introduce our thoughts with the words of Jesus and the record of the Holy Spirit on the subject.

And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven. 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 (Mat. 16:17-18).

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls... Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved (Acts 2:41, 47—KJV).

With the information in these texts, the reader can logically conclude that the church and salvation go hand in hand. Other passages enhance the reader's understanding that the church is the saved and the saved is the church. With this information before him, the reader is justified to conclude that the statement, "Be saved and then later join the church of your choice," is false instruction. He could also discern it is false to say, "The church does not save; **so it is not important which church you join.**" Before anyone forms a false conclusion concerning what has been introduced, we quickly add this thought: One can be saved without being a member of a denomination, **but he cannot be saved without being a member of the church of Christ!** When we say, "the church of Christ," we speak of the very church that Jesus successfully established (Mat. 16). It is the church of Christ because He built it, and because it is His. The church of Christ is the God-designated spiritual entity in which Luke proclaims that "the being saved ones" were added by the Lord.

MAKING CLEAR A FEW PRINCIPLES

Because of the possibility of misunderstanding, we address three principles. First, a distinction must be made between those who are safe and those who are saved. Children, as well as those who are literally childlike in mind, are safe. They have no sin; therefore, they do not need to be saved.

A distinction must also be made between the salvation of those after Christ's death on the cross and the salvation of those before the Gospel dispensation. Before the death of Christ, penitent believers such as Noah, Ruth, and the thief were saved according to the law under which they lived. Neither Noah, Ruth, or the thief lived under the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2; Acts 2:38).

Furthermore, a distinction must be made between those who are saved and those who have fallen from grace. Sadly, not all members of the church of Christ will be saved because some "are severed from Christ" (Gal. 5:4). Being a member of the church has never eternally insured salvation in the New Testament, any more than being an Israelite insured salvation in the Old Testament (1 Cor. 10:1-12).

BEING MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH YET NOT A MEMBER OF ANY DENOMINATION

How is it possible for one to be saved as a member of the church, yet, not join any denomination or spiritual organization? The Holy Spirit gives us a clear answer (Acts 2:1-47). On the Day of Pentecost, those who had murdered the Lord of Glory were told of their guilt before God (2:22-23). The apostles preached the Gospel to all who would hear. The message pricked their hearts and they immediately cried out unto salvation (2:37). The clear answer to their inquiry for forgiveness was "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins" (2:38). Those who obeyed were added to the church (2:41, 47). Su-

perior Greek Manuscripts correctly include the word ἐκκλησία (*ekklesia*).

Luke has recorded that **the Lord** added the “being saved ones” to the church. Obviously, this means that the church is the saved, and the saved is the church. At the very moment a sinner is saved, he is immediately added to the church by the Lord of Glory Himself.

JESUS DIED FOR THE CHURCH

Paul proclaims that Jesus died for the church.

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 (Eph. 5:25-27).

A sane person does not throw away millions of dollars for nothing. Jesus did not throw away His precious life for a worthless, non-essential *church*. In the Lord’s value system, the church was worth His blood, and His blood is worth all that is in all the worlds.

What could God give that would cost Him? The one and only thing He could give, He gave. He gave Himself:

knowing that ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers; but with precious blood, as of a lamb without spot, *even the blood* of Christ (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

Our sins cost God dearly. Only the shed blood of Jesus could blot out the sins of the soul because nothing else could accomplish what needed to be accomplished for man to have eternal life. Jesus’ blood was a steep price to pay.

Consider why it took the blood of the only begotten Son of God. What is the one thing that Deity cannot manufacture, make, create, or bring into being? This question has nothing to do with those that ask, “Can God create a square circle?” or “Can God create a rock too heavy for Him to lift?” Looking around, we observe trees, mountains, riches, such as money and gold, human beings, and an entire universe. God can

and did create these. But what is it Deity cannot make? Deity cannot make Deity. He cannot create Himself.

When we apply this thought to Jesus’ sacrifice, we understand that the only thing that cost God is that which He could not manufacture—Himself. If the cost of a soul had been dollars, He could simply have had them appear out of thin air or make His own printing press. If a soul’s cost had been an entire galaxy, He could have simply spoken it into existence. However, to sacrifice Himself would be to give the one thing He could not manufacture or speak into existence. It is the one thing that truly cost Him!

Thus, *precious* in 1 Peter 1:19 takes on a much greater meaning—precious because of its extreme rarity. Billions of diamonds could be created by God, but they would no longer be rare. Billions and billions of galaxies have been created by God. Jesus is indeed unique—one of a kind. He is the only begotten Son of God. Diamonds lose their value in the midst of supply. Galaxies lose their value in the midst of the knowledge of their vast numbers. The precious blood of the One Who died for you and me cannot be duplicated. He is the rarest of them all. The following exchange from Burton Coffman helps us to see the value of Jesus’ death.

Once, as this writer traveled southward on the Missouri-Pacific from St. Louis to Little Rock, a Unitarian noticed my reading the New Testament; and he said: “You Christians have your arithmetic all wrong. How could the atoning sacrifice of one man wipe out the sins of billions of men?”

The reply was: “Indeed, you are right. The sacrifice of one man would not even wipe out that one man’s sins, much less the sins of all men. Your mistake, Sir, is in your failure to see that Jesus Christ was in no sense whatever only one man. He was and is The Son of God, God manifested in the flesh; and that Holy Being’s atoning sacrifice was more than sufficient to wipe out the sins of all the myriads of men who ever lived.”

Furthermore, with this **precious** blood **He purchased the church**.

Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:28).

Clearly, the church and salvation are coupled.

GOD ILLUSTRATES THE CONCEPT OF THE CHURCH AND MAN'S SALVATION

God's written examples help men to grasp the idea that sinners are lost outside His chosen realm of salvation. Over the centuries, God has repeatedly designated and recorded various realms wherein men ought to be, so they could be saved from impending natural disasters. When God destroyed the world with a flood, Noah built God's designated realm of physical salvation: The ark (Gen. 6). Though Noah admonished the people of his day to enter the ark, they refused. By refusing God's ark of salvation, all on the outside perished. All on the inside were saved.

A second realm of physical salvation occurred in the days of Joshua when they destroyed Jericho. God's spies warned Rahab of the coming destruction upon all in the city. Based upon her faith, the only way for her to escape death was by following the instructions which the messengers of God gave her. She could escape harm by placing the scarlet thread in the window of the house and staying inside.

Behold, when we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet thread in the window which thou didst let us down by: . . . And it shall be, that whosoever shall go out of the doors of thy house into the street, his blood shall be upon his head, and we shall be guiltless: and whosoever shall be with thee in the house, his blood shall be on our head, if any hand be upon him (Jos. 2:18-19).

Such temporal preservations stand as ordained analogies of the spiritual deliverance in the church.

These illustrations bring to our attention a vital point. When one is added to the church by the Lord, he has a moral, ethical, and spiritual obligation to avoid joining another so-called "God-

serving entity," whether that be a denomination, or spiritual club, or church. However, he must seek the assembly of the highly-prized people of God and attempt to unite, associate, serve, and worship with them (Heb. 10:25ff; Acts 9:26). After all, since the being-saved-one is added to the Lord's church, what could possess him to join a man's church? Nothing! A church that even they acknowledge has nothing to do with your salvation. To do such would be like Noah entering the ark and then jumping ship into the Titanic. To do such would be like Moses sprinkling blood on his door post and then taking a chariot to Pharaoh's house for supper. To do such would be like Rahab tying a scarlet thread on her window and then running over to her neighbor's mansion to watch the action from their window. Jerry Martin's words need to echo through the hearts of men:

When men today learn that the Lord promised to build His church and they have had a part in building up "another" church they ought to fall on their face sore afraid (1).

Being added to the church is equivalent to the sinner being baptized into the one body by the instructions of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). When the sinner is baptized into Christ (Col. 2:11-13—KJV), it is equivalent to being translated into the kingdom (1:12-14). Being added to the church is equivalent to being built and fitly framed together in the temple of God, which is His kingdom and household (Eph. 2:19-22; John 3:3-5). Salvation is in the kingdom, the temple, the household of God.

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QUESTIONS

1. What is the one thing that Deity cannot manufacture, make, create, or bring into being?
2. Besides the ark of Noah and Rahab's house, name another designated realm wherein men were saved from an impending natural disaster.
3. Do Superior Greek Manuscripts use the word ἐκκλησία (*ekklesia*) in Acts 2:47?
4. Why will a sinner be saved when he is baptized into Christ?
5. What did sinners do on Pentecost to be added to the church?

THE CHURCH AND ITS WORSHIP

Douglas Post

COMING TOGETHER

The New Testament texts indicate the early Christians were regularly *συνερχομένων* (*coming together*) ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ (*in church*) on Sundays (1 Cor. 11:18, 20; 14:23; 16:1-2; Acts 20:7). These same texts followed with instructions for how they were to conduct themselves when gathered together. Called to salvation by the Gospel (2 The. 2:14), the early Christians were God's people, "in Christ" (1 The. 2:14). Their new relationship with God was the result of being "baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13), the church (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4), because "to be in the church is to be in Christ, and to be in Christ is to be in the church" (Welch 165).

Some take exception, demanding one is baptized into Christ, and added to the church, even in the face of the clear and unmistakable expression, *baptized into one body*. This is not an either/or proposition as some try to make it. When one is baptized into Christ he is baptized into His body, and vice versa. What is ascribed to one (Christ) is ascribed to the other (body). Quite simply, Luke's inspired "added to the church" (Acts 2:47), is defined by Paul's inspired "baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13). Different expressions meaning the same thing. Moreover, the previous verse must be considered:

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also *is* Christ (12:12).

Paul is contrasting the physical body and the spiritual body. Just as the physical body has many members yet is "one body," so also the spiritual body. Having many members with varying roles, the church is still "one body," but "so also is Christ." Here is an example, among many, in the New Testament, of metonymy. Within the context, *Christ* and *one body* are synonymous.

Now, being one "in Christ" by virtue of their obedience to the Gospel (1 Pet. 4:17), first century Jews and Gentiles shared a new identity "sons of God" (Gal. 3:26-28; cf. Eph. 2:13-16). Collectively, these early Christians expressed their salvation, serving as examples for how our salvation in Christ is to be properly expressed. That is, if we practice what they practiced, doing what they did, then we will be what they were (Christ's church) and get what they got (eternal life). Much like the Jews who assembled in synagogues on the Sabbath, the early Christians were coming together on the first day of the week. Interestingly, the term *συνερχομένων* (*coming together*) is related to the word *συναγωγή* (*synagogue*). While the early Christians came together on Sundays (in one place), expressing the salvation they enjoyed as one body, we now focus on the primary reason for their assembling together—worship.

A PREVIEW OF NEW TESTAMENT WORSHIP

Isaiah begins drawing attention to a new era and the coming of the New Testament church (Isa. 2:2-4) and ends in similar fashion, as Dub McClish notes:

Chapter 65 begins with the great prophecy of the calling of the Gentiles: "I am inquired of by them that asked not for me. I am found of them that sought me not: I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name" (Isa. 65:1). This is an undeniable reference to the beginning of the Christian age when the gospel was to be taken to all the nations, to all the world, and to the whole—manifestly to the Gentiles (Mat. 28:19; Mark 16:15) (349).

Isaiah is contrasting physical Israel and spiritual Israel, or the "new Jerusalem" (Isa. 65:18), which later Paul identifies as the Jerusalem from above (Gal. 4:26), the Israel of God (6:16), and the church (1:2). Continuing his focus on the New Covenant and the establishment of the

Messianic kingdom, the church of Christ, Isaiah writes:

“For as the new heavens and the new earth Which I will make shall remain before Me,” says the LORD, “So shall your descendants and your name remain. And it shall come to pass *That* from one New Moon to another, And from one Sabbath to another, All flesh shall come to worship before Me,” says the LORD (Isa. 66:22-23).

The “new heavens and the new earth” (an idiom for a new away or new system) will consist of “all flesh,” meaning Jew and Gentile (Acts 2:17, 39), coming together for worship in this new system. Isaiah is saying all mankind will be coming continually to worship God. Foreshadowing this *new era* of worship, Isaiah utilizes *New Moon* and *Sabbath*, representing fixed times, which coincided with Jewish worship. These occasions, which were of a collective nature, prefigure the worship under the New Testament. *From* (*mid-dê*) is repeated the emphasis of a continual procession of worship. As the Jews gathered *congregationally* at fixed times, so would spiritual Israel—the church. This predictive arrangement, not only flies in the face but hits between the eyes, of those denying the collective or congregational aspect of worship. A fringe element has arisen insisting worship is of an individual nature only. Some are even demanding that while worship is a “good thing,” it is optional. However, Isaiah was unaware of such things and his prediction was very clear concerning a regular collective gathering for worship:

Concurrent with the fact that there will be a new church age, Isaiah predicts that worship then will be completely in agreement with God’s commands (cf. Isa. 56:6). Isaiah clothed this new spiritual truth in the idiom of his day, but the new age will allow “all flesh” to worship in a patterned way (John 4:23-24).

Under the Old Testament system, worship was at prescribed “moons” and “Sabbaths.” So, in the “new heavens and new earth,” worship will be prescribed, faithful, and regular. Those today who say there is no pattern for the New Testament church and her worship need to explain how Isaiah could prophesy an age of patterned worship! Did Isaiah miss

it, or do the “new hermeneutic” advocates of a no-pattern New Testament miss it? (Mosh-er 334).

A few points must be considered before proceeding. The context in which Isaiah 66:22-23 finds itself is between qualities God desires and eternal punishment to transgressors. At the beginning of the chapter, God says: “On *him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, And who trembles at My word*” (66:2), then at the end, He says: “For their worm does not die, And their fire is not quenched” (66:24). To *transgress* means “to go beyond, go out of, go away, or step over.” When a football player catches the football but steps on the white boundary line, then he has stepped out of bounds. He has transgressed the boundary leaving the field of play. When applied spiritually, it means leaving the boundaries of God’s Word, stepping out of its confines (Mat. 7:13-14; 1 John 1:7; cf. Psa. 119:105), the result of which is from a carelessness in handling God’s Word (2 Tim. 2:15). While a contrite heart has a healthy respect for God’s Word or *trembles* at it, the defiant are those who willingly “step out of bounds,” having little regard for the authority and boundaries of the faith (cf. Jude 3).

WORSHIP WOES

In the 1800s, in the formative period of the Restoration, brethren were coming out of denominationalism, restoring the *Ancient Order* by preaching the “Primitive Gospel.” However, for the past forty years, our progressive brethren have been wanting to go back into denominationalism, acting and speaking like them. Many have already added instruments to the worship of God. Some, in what is termed the *Egalitarian Movement*, are allowing women to preach and teach—and even serve as elders. Others are making a mockery of the Lord’s Supper in making a meal out of it. Other false teachers have even minimized the requirements of salvation by minimizing the essential nature of baptism. Many argue that to retain the young and keep them from leaving the church, they have to make an appeal to denominationalism. Taking the route that appeals to heresy will never retain the souls

of anyone. Being at odds with God is not the way to have a relationship with Him. Folks cannot be called out of the world if they go back into it, and that is exactly where denominationalism is.

Turmoil exists in churches of Christ today because of careless regard and disrespect for the authority of God's Word. While claiming worship to be a significant aspect in the life of the church, progressives do not tremble at God's Word, going beyond what is written (1 Cor. 4:6). By progressing out of the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9), they have actually minimized the worship they claim is significant. When confronting the Pharisees and their various false doctrines, Jesus said: "*And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men*" (Mat. 15:9). False teaching, especially in adding innovations to the worship of the church through the perverting of the Word of God, will nullify and make void one's worship, regardless how heartfelt it may be. There are, indeed, eternal consequences for those who rebel against the Lord (Isa. 66:24). Setting aside God's Word, while claiming to worship Him, simply brings unintended consequences where "their worm does not die, And their fire will not be quenched" (66:24), an image used by Jesus, Himself, describing eternal punishment (Mark 9:42-48).

Moreover, some of our brethren have become indifferent, seeking *balance*, while ignoring the boundaries of fellowship. Some, with a cavalier attitude toward Bible authority, have become enthralled with every new doctrine that comes down the pike. Notable brethren, with self-exalting craftiness and trickery, happily twist the Scriptures as they lead multitudes to destruction. Others, having banal obsessions, promoting their *pet* doctrines, are causing endless divisions. In describing all of these, Paul says they "do not receive the love of the truth" (2 The. 2:10).

WORSHIP INVOLVES TRUTH; TRUTH INVOLVES PATTERN

The idea of loving the truth and trembling at His Word is, in part, found in John 4:23-24:

But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father

in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

Jesus reveals there is such a thing as "true worshipers," implying there is such a thing as "false worshipers." Worshiping God in "spirit and truth" is what makes the difference. Jesus had already given this Samaritan woman bad news, and some may be shocked to learn that He told the woman that she and her people were ignorant, saying to her, "You worship what you do not know" (4:22). What had she and her people been doing all this time? Quite simply, they were not offering God "true worship," implying they were not "true worshipers." The Samaritans had not been worshiping God correctly for centuries, worshiping at Mt. Gerizim rather than in Jerusalem. From their perspective, they drew near to God with their mouth, but from God's perspective, they only provided "lip service" (cf. Mat. 15:8). Again, worship and/or worship actions are fruitless when folks are disobedient in other areas. The Samaritan woman and her people were deficient, and it was not unkind or unloving for Jesus to say what He did to her. Worshiping is significant, worshiping correctly does matter! While we must worship "in spirit," in genuineness and sincerity, we must also worship God according to "truth"—His Word (John 17:17; cf. 8:31-32).

Recognizing worship must be in accord with Truth is as vital to the Lord's church as is Truth itself. While God's Word is designed to regulate and control our behavior, we must submit to its authority. As finite beings, we have the proclivity to make wrong choices, often because of the desires of the heart (Pro.14:12; Jer.10:23; 17:9). This is certainly true when it comes to spiritual matters, including worship. Colossians demonstrates this with a case study:

In his letter to the Colossians Christians, Paul addresses a heresy that was a threat to their faith. It consisted of a variety of elements, including Judaism, Gnosticism (a pagan system claiming supernatural insight), the worship of angels; etc. One component of this philosophy, strongly condemned, was called "will-worship" (2:23). Exactly what is will-

worship? J.H. Thayer notes that will-worship is, “worship which one devises and prescribes for himself, contrary to the contents and nature of the faith which ought to be directed by Christ” (Greek Lexicon, p. 168). Or, as W. E. Vine observes, will worship is “voluntarily adopted worship, whether unbidden or forbidden” (Expository Dictionary, IV, p. 236). This New Testament admonition is totally at variance with the modern notion that worship is unregulated (Jackson 112).

Like the problem mentioned in Colossians 2:23, there are some in churches of Christ today who are willing to leave the confines of the Truth regulating our worship and instead worship God according to their own whims and desires. The progressives among us are self-willed, imposing worship practices completely foreign to the New Testament of Jesus Christ. The fact is, in rejecting the Truth, they reject the pattern of the New Testament. As the church cannot be separated from Christ (and vice versa), neither can pattern from Truth (and vice versa).

While Truth is designed to regulate human behavior, it is also designed to be understood and followed. However, we must handle it correctly (2 Tim. 2:15). Concerning the church at Corinth, Paul said he “planted” and Apollos “watered,” but “God gave the increase”:

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase....as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:6-11).

Jesus said He would build His church (Mat. 16:18). He laid the foundation. The work continued involving others who followed, including the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20-21: cf. 1 Cor. 12:28). The construction continues, and Jesus continues building His church through the agency of His church (Eph. 3:10-11). The *blueprint* has been provided to follow, namely His Word (John 12:48; cf. 8:31-32). Following His blueprint, we can be sure we are building the way He desires. When the church began on Pentecost, the new disciples “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the break-

ing of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). They devoted themselves in acts of worship, vital to the church, and continually devoted themselves in the apostle’s doctrine (cf. 2 John 9), adhering to their inspired teaching. New Testament doctrine is the basis of the New Testament church, which is why Paul said, “Preach the word!” (2 Tim. 4:2).

When it comes to preaching and teaching the Truth, we must not go to the left or to the right (Jos. 1:7) or go beyond what is written (1 Cor. 4:6). We must speak exactly as God speaks in His Word (1 Pet. 4:11), or, as the Greek expresses, speaking “**just as** the oracles of God.” Doing *just as* or *exactly* as the Father commanded, is what Jesus did: “but he comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me” (John 14:31—NIV). *Exactly* derives from the Greek word *kathōs*, which is also found in 1 John 2:6: “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as [*kathōs*] He walked.” Since Jesus is our example in everything, we can do no less, in doing exactly as He did. Therefore, we must speak, and do exactly what is taught in Scripture.

The New Testament, or the faith, is the blueprint of the church for all we teach and practice. The apostle Paul directs our minds to authority, saying: “And *whatever* you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Col. 3:17). *In word and deed* refers to teaching and practice. *Deed* is the same word for *works*, which some declare are not essential for salvation. However, Paul specifically says we must do only authorized work, contradicting those who say work(s) are not essential for salvation. To say on one hand that doing only authorized work is essential, then, on the other, say the work we do is not essential is a blatant contradiction. Paul specifically says that “whatever” we **do** “in word or **work**” that we do only all those things that are “authorized” or “in the name of the Lord.” Doing what is authorized relates back to allowing “the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom” (3:16). When we allow God’s Word to rule our hearts in all spiritual matters, we will do only that which is *legislated*.

NEW TESTAMENT WORSHIP

When it comes to understanding the Bible and interpretation, many folks quickly become anti-logic, anti-reason, and anti-implication, confusing rational thinking with Rationalism. God, communicating His Will to mankind through direct (explicit) statements, examples, and implication is antithetical to some, since the use of reason is involved. Reason is *kryptonite* to all anti-logicians. Paul reminded Timothy to “hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me” (2 Tim. 1:13), and seven verses later he says: “And the things [the pattern] which thou has heard from me...commit thou to faithful men” (2:2). He taught Timothy the pattern, and he intended for Timothy, and all faithful Christians, to commit the same pattern to others. This implies a perpetual pattern to be taught and followed. The pattern of sound words serves as our authority for all matters of faith and practice. The very fact Christ and the apostles are examples inherently involves a pattern or blueprint: “Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern” (Phi. 3:17).

We know there is such a thing as ignorant worship because Jesus told the Samaritan woman, “You worship what you do not know” (John 4:22). In that same encounter, we learn there is wrong worship, since the Samaritans were worshiping God in Gerizim rather than Jerusalem. Paul told the Athenians they were ignorant, worshiping a God they did not know, and such ignorance would not be overlooked (Acts 17:23, 30). Jesus said there is such a thing as “vain worship” (Mat. 15:9), and Paul said there is such a thing called “will-worship” (Col. 2:23). Of course, we also learn there is such a thing as “true worship,” as well as “true worshipers” (John 4:23-24). Worship is either acceptable or unacceptable, but what makes the difference? Worship must be done in sincerity and genuineness of mind (“in spirit”), with a willingness to do only that which accords with God’s Word (“in truth”).

We find a clear pattern in the New Testament in its teaching and example, “in word and deed.” We can clearly see what they did and did not do.

What we find lacking is the church assembling for the purposes of offering animal sacrifices, the burning of incense, having priests mediate between man and God, and all other Old Covenant worship practices. We do read about them coming together on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2), finding them praying, singing, preaching and teaching, giving, and partaking of the Lord’s Supper. In one passage alone, we find three acts of worship: “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). Here we find teaching (doctrine), the Lord’s Supper (the breaking of bread), and prayer, being offered up as acts of worship. An *act of worship* is something done collectively, upon being assembled together, with the intent of paying homage or honoring God. The most common Greek word for *worship* is *proskuneō*, which means “to kiss the hand toward,” “to do obeisance,” “to prostrate oneself,” which is closely akin to the Hebrew word, *shachah*. These terms convey the idea of bowing or prostrating oneself before a superior or before Deity. It is a sign of respect, reverence, and honor.

Worship is often viewed in the imagery of *sacrifice*. Collectively, Christians are priests and a holy nation (1 Pet. 2:5, 9); they are referred to as “spiritual Israel” (Gal. 6:16)—the church of Christ. As priests and a holy nation, Christians offer up sacrifices, but these sacrifices may not be just any kind of sacrifice—any kind of sacrifice we wish to offer. On the contrary, we are to “offer up spiritual sacrifices **acceptable** to God” (1 Pet. 2:5). Those who do not offer acceptable sacrifices are said to be “disobedient to the word” (2:8; cf. 2:2). We get a glimpse of *worship as a sacrifice* from the life of Abraham. His offering up of Isaac as sacrifice was called *worship*. Here we see worship involves an **act**, or acts, **dedicated** to God. Worship, therefore, is something we do, which has a beginning point and an ending point. Some contend all we do in life is worship, but here we see that there is an obvious distinction between what is *worship* in the sacrifice of Isaac, with what Abraham and Isaac were doing before reaching the place God told Abraham to go (Gen. 22:2-5).

Hebrews offers much regarding the imagery of sacrifice. We learn *singing* is called the “sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips” (Heb. 13:15). The absence of mechanical instruments of music is obvious in the New Testament. Ephesians 5:19 literally says, “singing [*ado*] and plucking [*psallo*] the strings of your heart to the Lord.” However, a good rendering is “singing and playing your heart to the Lord.” *Ado* means “to sing” and *psallo* means “to pluck,” but when used with *ado*, it means “to play.” When used alone, *psallo* means “sing.” However, if *ado* is present, it means “play.” Ephesians 5:19 specifically provides the instrument to be played, the “heart,” which is the only instrument authorized by God.

The Hebrews’ writer also tells us that acts of **benevolence** (giving) are also sacrifices Christians offer up to God (Heb. 13:16; cf. 1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8:1-7; 9:13; Phi. 4:18). When it comes to **prayer**, the Hebrews’ writer provides the imagery of the High Priest offering up gifts and sacrifices for sins, and, as such, we may approach the throne of grace with our needs and desires (Heb. 4:14-5:1). The Greek word for *prayer* is *proseuchomai*, which is a derivative of the Greek word *proskuneo*, the very word for “worship.” Therefore, when Christians either assemble or not, and prayer is offered, they are worshipping God. Of course, the **Lord’s Supper** is all about sacrifice, and remembering by partaking of those emblems representing His body and blood. This, again, is an act or something that is to be done. Moreover, like the priests of old, and in sacrificial form, we are to:

draw near with a true heart in full assurance
of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an

evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of *our* hope without wavering, for He who promised *is* faithful (10:22-23).

Finally, we are told that the Word is living and powerful, able to influence the inward man (4:12). Paul says we are to “**Preach** the word” (2 Tim. 4:2). The Hebrews’ writer speaks of the Lord’s Will, as found in the second Covenant (New Covenant). It is that very Will that sanctifies, along with the Sacrifice of Christ, His blood of the New Testament (Heb. 10:9-10; Mat. 26:28). It is to this covenant we are to hold and proclaim (Heb. 2:1-4). Proclaiming the good news of the New Covenant or Testament for which Christ died (9:15-17) is the message that brings about salvation (Rom. 1:16-17; Jam. 1:21). That message is designed to influence the conscience or inner man, to effect the appropriate spiritual sacrifice of denying self, taking up one’s cross to follow Christ (Mat. 16:24). So, the church of Christ comes together to worship the Lord.

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QUESTIONS

1. How is the church like a synagogue? What does it mean to be baptized into Christ?
2. What was prophesied about the church?
3. What kind of error in worship practices are being promoted today? What is the cause of such error?
4. What example of Christ are we to emulate?
5. Explain how Scripture describes worship as sacrifice.

ORGANIZATION IN THE CHURCH

Geoff Litke

The God of heaven demonstrated His majesty in creation. The universe displays remarkable order from its broadest categories of galaxies, solar systems, and planetary systems down to its smallest categories such as cell structures, atoms, and sub-atomic particles. It is no wonder why David the Psalmist of the Old Testament said:

The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, And night unto night sheweth knowledge (Psa. 19:1).

Casual observers and diligent researchers alike notice not only the abundance of order, but the repetitive similarities in various areas of creation. Perhaps, it is only on an anecdotal level, but who can look at a model of an atom and not think of a solar system?

The creation tells mankind some things about God. The apostle Paul wrote:

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse (Rom. 1:20).

One lesson to learn from the foregoing observations is that God is a *patternist*.

The apostle Paul, correcting behavior within the churches, appealed to the fact that God is a *patternist* saying, "For God is not *the author* of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints" (1 Cor. 14:33). Paul moved from principle based on God's character to application when he said, "Let all things be done decently and in order" (14:40).

On several occasions the God of order gave patterns with the expectation that the recipient follows them with great precision. In the old world of the patriarchs, God gave Noah a pattern to build the ark which resulted in the salvation of Noah and his family (Gen. 6:14; Heb. 11:7). In building the ark, Noah took disorganized materi-

als specified by God in His plan and organized them to conform to God's plan.

Under the Law of Moses, God gave a pattern for building the tabernacle (Exo. 25:40; Heb. 8:5). In the same context where the Hebrews' writer references this fact, he includes a reference to the order of the priesthood, drawing from his previous discussion in chapter seven (7:14). Christ could not serve as a priest on earth because He did not fit the qualifications in God's pattern. Considering these things, several observations are in order. First, under the Old Testament, there were certain roles people served which others did not. Second, those roles had certain qualifications. Third, God considered this organizational structure part of His pattern.

Under the New Testament, God expects His pattern to be followed (1 Cor. 4:6). Paul instructed Timothy on things concerning the household of God in his first epistle to the young preacher (1 Tim. 3:15). In his second epistle, he exhorted him: "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 1:13). The original word used for *form* in this verse is the Greek word ὑποτύπωσις. The Greek Lexicographer Joseph Henry Thayer reports on the use of this word in the verse as follows:

an example, pattern: πρὸς ὑποτ. τῶν μελλόντων πιστεύειν κτλ. for an example of those who should hereafter believe, i.e. to show by the example of my conversion that the same grace which I had obtained would not be wanting also to those who should hereafter believe, 1 Tim. 1:16; the pattern placed before one to be held fast and copied, model: ὑγιαίνοντων λόγων, 2 Tim. 1:13 (645)

These two verses (1 Tim. 3:15; 2 Tim. 1:13) by themselves show a great deal about the purpose and content of Paul's letters to Timothy. Paul's mentee was to labor in the church preaching God's pattern (4:2) thereby setting things in or-

der. Among the things to set in order were the offices in the church of elders and deacons (of which more will be said later).

Paul wrote to Titus, another evangelist, with similar instructions on elders and deacons and said:

For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldst set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee (Tit. 1:5).

Timothy and Titus were to appoint elders so these congregations could be maturely organized (Acts 14:23). They were not to appoint them haphazardly, nor on their own authority or subjective whims, but they did the appointing by preaching and applying God's pattern.

Contrary to the information just seen, many people do not believe God cares about how His church is organized, or they feel free to organize it according to their own views. In contrast to these denominations, the Lord's church is comprised of individual autonomous congregations. Acts shows the disciples coming together in local congregations identified by geography. The New Testament is largely made up of letters addressed to individual churches as units. These two facts clearly set forth the apostolic order for the existence of congregations. The head of the church is Jesus Christ, and each congregation must answer to Him and no one but Him (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18; Eph. 5:23). This precludes elaborate denominational structures with earthly headquarters and hierarchy.

When the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Philippi, he made a direct address to the officers of that congregation: bishops and deacons (Phi. 1:1). *Elder* and *deacon* are both ordinary words used in a technical sense. This fact often confuses people moving from a denominational background to Biblical truth, but it does not have to be so confusing. A man may go to a restaurant and be told to wait for a table. While the man is waiting on a table, the man is not the waiter. In an orchestra a musician may be sitting in the first chair, but not be the first chair violinist. *Elder* generally means older person, but technically refers to the office. *Deacon* generally means a servant, but just because

one serves does not make them a deacon serving in that office. Paul grouped the word *deacon* together with *bishop* in Philippians 1 and along with qualifications in 1 Timothy 3, showing they were technical terms referring to offices.

Elders lead the congregation. They have the burden and responsibility to ensure the congregation follows the Word of God in matters of obligation, they have the authority to lead the church in matters of option to expedite the God-given work of the church.

Most English translations use a total of six terms to refer to the singular office of elder. These six terms are represented by three terms in the original language. A king may be called a monarch, a ruler, a lawmaker, or many other terms, but there is only one king. In an office environment a manager may be referred to as a boss, team leader, direct report, or other such terms, but really be one single position. In the Bible these three terms emphasize different aspects of the singular office. The New Testament never refers to an elder or pastor serving by himself over a single congregation. The pattern is for a plurality of elders to lead a congregation—unlike the denominational single pastor system.

In Acts 20, Paul journeyed to Jerusalem, but along the way at Miletus he called for a group of men from the church; this group was the eldership of the church of Ephesus (Acts 20:17). The word translated *elders* is from the original word *πρεσβύτερος* from which the English word *presbyter* is derived (1 Tim. 4:14). Paul met with these men to give them instructions and warnings explaining that they were over the flock (Acts 20:28). *Flock* in this verse is a pastoral term referring to the congregation. Paul continues to explain that leadership deviations would mark the great apostasy (20:29-30; 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:1-9; 4:1-4). Paul tells the elders that the flock is in their care, pointing out that the Holy Spirit made them the overseers thereof. *Overseers* is translated from the original word *ἐπίσκοπος*, which is often translated as *bishop* (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:7), and also from which the English word *episcopal* comes. *Overseer* perfectly describes someone looking after and managing. Finally, Paul charged these elders and

overseers to feed the flock. The term translated *feed* is the verb form of the word ποιμήν which is elsewhere translated *shepherd* and once translated *pastor* (Eph. 4:11; 1 Pet. 5:1-3). The pastoral care the elders ought to have for the flock is very much like a shepherd for his sheep (Psa. 23). Just like in Acts 20, the leadership of the church is comprised of a plurality of elders, and the single pastor system common in denominations has no Biblical support. Understanding these three terms eliminates confusion and helps define the actual role and work of the eldership.

The Holy Spirit makes overseers through the preaching of the Word as the men hear the Word growing to meet the qualifications. The Holy Spirit excludes some from serving in this capacity as the qualifications themselves eliminate some. The preacher's role is to preach the Word (2 Tim. 4:2). The qualifications for elders and deacons are found in 1 Timothy 3 and in Titus 1. Anyone considering serving or encouraging a church to ordain them should study the passages carefully. In summary, there are the preliminary qualifications of blamelessness or irreproachable character. There are family qualifications: men to the exclusion of women; married men in contrast to single; those who have demonstrated their leadership abilities through child-rearing. There are negative qualifications; an elder must not be self-willed, drunk, quick tempered, violent, or covetous. In contrast he must have the positive qualifications of hospitality, loving good, sober, just, holy, temperate, ready, willing, and able to teach. Finally, he must

not be a novice and he must generally have a good report among non-Christians.

Likewise, God gave qualifications for the office of deacons. A deacon is a man serving in the church with authority subordinate to elders to discharge the will of the Lord and the plans of the eldership. Anyone can be a servant, but only those who meet the qualifications must hold office. Consider their qualifications.

Likewise *must* the deacons *be* grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being *found* blameless (1 Tim. 3:8-10).

The deaconship is a spiritual position as demonstrated by the need to hold the mystery of the faith in a good conscience. The deaconship is a position of action as shown by the need to select men who are first proven.

The God of order gave a perfect plan to lead the church in discharging its responsibilities and to deal with the obstacles in doing so. Men often corrupt the Lord's plans in every area of service, but compromising the leadership of the church poses a systemic threat which often results in total apostasy of the church. May men seek His will and follow God's plan for organization in the church.

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QUESTIONS

1. What does the repetition in the patterns of creation emphasize about God's desire for order?
2. What examples in the Bible show that God expects man to follow His pattern in detail?
3. What are Timothy and Titus told to do to organize the churches?
4. Using the Biblical definition of each office, how does having elders and deacons maintain order in the church?
5. How do the character qualifications of each office and basic Christian behavior demonstrate God's use of repetition in patterns?

THE CHURCH AND ITS PREACHING

Jim Miller

To truly understand the preaching of the church one needs look no further than the New Testament. Before the church was established John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness. Until that time preaching and teaching pertained to the Old Testament, the Law. John's preaching was different. It was the beginning of the preaching of the kingdom. John preached that the kingdom was at hand (Mat. 3:1-3). After Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, Peter stood up with the other eleven apostles on the day of Pentecost and delivered the first Gospel sermon. His preaching was plain and simple: they had killed the Christ, God raised Him from the dead, He was now sitting at God's right hand, and they needed to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:14-38). From that time forward, the apostles would preach the Gospel (Good News) everywhere they went. These preachers, led by the Holy Spirit, laid the foundation for those to come. They would teach Christ crucified. They would rebuke, reprove, and exhort with longsuffering, just as Paul instructed Timothy (2 Tim. 4:1-4). The apostles were charged with the spread of the Gospel. Mark 16:15-16 states:

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.

Since we are to be imitators of both Christ and the apostles, we have this same charge.

The Gospel gives purpose and meaning to preaching. Some still believe the *Gospel* is to be preached only to the alien sinner so he can come to Christ, and that *Doctrine* is only to be taught to those who have been saved. I know of no one that would deny the Gospel of Christ is for the sinner; however, we must ask why it would stop there. Paul stated that he had not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). So,

we see that the Gospel is embodied in the complete teachings of Christ and His apostles. There is no distinction between the two. Paul wrote:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed... For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men... But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness (Rom. 1:16-18; 6:17-18).

Preaching **must be sound**, and every Christian must demand that it be. The purpose of preaching is to bring others to Christ and edify those in Christ, thus saving souls from hell. It is to correct those who go astray and bring them back to their first love. It must also be done in a manner that will clearly instruct not just the sinner but the Christian who is living a righteous life. Paul instructed the young preacher Timothy, "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me" (2 Tim. 1:13). Titus was told, "But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine" (Tit. 2:1). He was also instructed to hold "fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers" (1:9). We also read these words in Titus 2:8: "Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you." Knowing that the church is made up of all who believe and have obeyed the Gospel, it is the duty of all Christians to preach and teach sound doctrine.

The preaching of the church cannot be contaminated by the opinions of man. We are instructed not to add to nor take away from God's Word (Deu. 4:2; 12:32; Rev. 22:18-19). The

opinions of man (or his own interpretation of God's Word) is a failure to teach and preach the truth. Sound preaching seeks to bring men to God and give God the glory, not ourselves. The church's preaching teaches men how to live lives that will be pleasing to God, thus securing us a home in heaven when the time comes. Preaching must also be balanced; it cannot be all rebuke and reproof; it must also exhort and comfort when needed.

Satan has had a field day creating all manner of different religions. If you do not like what you hear, simply pick up and go somewhere that teaches what you agree with. The sound preaching of the church is looked upon today as **un**-Christlike because it will not bend and twist God's Word to suit men. The social *gospel* of so-called love, peace, and good-will has come to dominate this world. In actuality it leads people straight to hell. This is why our preaching must continue to be sound, based only on the Word, as it is written. We must continue to preach both the positive and the negative aspects of God's Word, which is what sets us apart from the world. In Galatians 1:6-7, Paul states:

I marvel that ye are so soon 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.

Paul went on to say:

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any *man* preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed (1:8-9).

Again, this teaches us that true preaching sets us apart from the denominational world.

Perhaps now more than ever we need to heed the words of Paul when he instructed Timothy:

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).

The cry for progress expresses itself in new trends of preaching. Preach a kinder, gentler *gospel*; we do not want to hear about hell and be rebuked for wrong doing. This has led not only to the fall of sound churches but our society also. The preacher who becomes tired of teaching the first principles that Christ and the apostles set forth is tired of the only doctrine that can bring men to God. I remember reading somewhere that Ben Franklin said that *progress* is a good word, but he expressed a fear that brethren misunderstood it. Franklin went on to say that these who cried for *progress* showed an extreme dislike for a "Thus saith the Lord" and for an "It is written."

Each generation has faced its own form of apostasy, the preacher that puts forth both the good and the bad equally from Scripture is called legalistic or even anti in some cases. However, the preacher today that waters down the teaching of the Bible is called enlightened (truly progressive) and understanding. I think Cled E. Wallace put it best when he wrote, "The Right Kind of Preaching." He said the following:

Much is being said about the right kind of preaching and writing. Charges of "hard" and "soft" are being bandied back and forth. With as plain a book as the New Testament in hand and with its abundant supply of examples of the very best preaching and writing, it ought not to be a difficult thing to determine the kind of both that should be done.... Men who say the most about "the right method of approach", "constructive articles" etc., betray the fact that a lot of their ideas come from modern psychology, materialistic philosophy and sectarian sources, rather than from Jesus and the apostles. It is futile to do a lot of talking about the method of approach, when you never **approach**. It would improve some preachers and writers if they could forget about the method and go ahead and **approach** (1).

It has been a long time since brother Wallace wrote those words, but they still apply today. The

church today faces many more and different challenges than back in 1939. Yet it must continue to preach that form of sound doctrine espoused by the apostles and in the written Word.

When the church preaches the whole counsel of God, *babes* in Christ will be led to observe all things Christ commanded (Mat. 28:18-20). The preaching of the church should always be designed to lead the alien sinner to believe and obey. The basic principles taught by the church should lead men to desire to become useful members of the church such as elders, preachers, and teachers.

The Scriptures tell us that the church is the house or family of God (Eph. 3:15; 1 Tim. 3:15), and each of us should be seeking to be the best member we can be. It should be understood that the preaching of the whole counsel of God directly relates to the growth and spiritual strength of its members. Those at Ephesus were told that the church manifests the many-sided wisdom of God and that it is here according to His eternal purpose (Eph. 3:10-11). The world must be taught to understand that all believers are members of the same body (church), making us fellow heirs and partakers of Christ's promise through the Gospel. Paul wrote about the church and the promise in Christ to saints who are built together in this temple which is for a habitation of God (2:14-3:12). We will do well to continue in that promise if we will continue to preach and teach only what God authorizes us to.

It is the weak preaching on the part of many that has been the reason for denominational concepts sneaking into the church. This digression and apostasy has caused much damage in the Lord's church, to the extent that many who wear the name "Church of Christ" are nothing more than impostors. Once the church allows such apostasy, they become nothing more than a denomination that meets in a building once occupied by the Lord's church. The church must continue to make every effort to ensure that what is being taught is the truth and only the truth. I was once part of a congregation where the preacher was really loved by those who attended. It did not take long to figure out why; his priority was

to teach only the accounts of the life of Christ. I do not remember ever hearing anything preached from Acts or the epistles. There is no doubt we must teach the Christ's life but **not** to the exclusion of the rest of the Bible. No one can deny we need to preach Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2), yet today this "Christ-centered" preaching (as many call it) has been taken to the extreme. What we see today is a liberal doctrine parading around under this banner of "Christ-centered preaching," and it is actually an insidious doctrine put forth by Satan. We must stand against it at every opportunity.

The Lord's church stands apart from all others in that we never take a neutral stand when it comes to the Word of God. For many years, churches have been led astray by the liberal mind set of neutrality. Jesus taught in Matthew 12:30 against neutrality. He said, "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad." Neutrality has no place in the Lord's church. Jesus said, "But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil" (Mat. 5:37). The church that embraces a neutral attitude opens itself up to all kinds of error. The true church takes the same stand that Paul took when he said:

Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I *am* pure from the blood of all *men*. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. 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 20:26-28).

For many years there has been a trend toward compromising the Truth in the church. One of the big compromises is what we call *softism*. In other words, these churches say to preach only the positive truths of Scripture, giving us an ambiguous message. "Do not deal with sin," has been the call for too long. The true church established by Christ will not fail to preach on the hard subjects such as immodest dress; marriage, divorce, remarriage for unscriptural reasons; church disci-

pline; fellowship; homosexuality; the social gospel; denominationalism. These compromisers do not preach the distinctive characteristics that separate the church from the denominations. Many preachers and churches are more like professional politicians than children of God. They listen to find out what the people want, then give them what they want to hear (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

The Lord's church today preaches the Truth: the good, the bad, and the ugly. It has remained faithful to the once-for-all-delivered message just as Jude taught: "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort *you* that *ye* should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). The faithful church will always stand upon the principles of speaking only where the Bible speaks, staying silent where it is silent, and calling Bible things by Bible names. To do any less would be shameful.

The church and preacher who preaches the whole counsel of God will deal with sin as a reality, always showing from the Scriptures that sin exists as a fact in the lives of men and women because "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23; 1 John 1:8). God's preacher will show that those sins bring spiritual death (Rom. 6:23; Isa. 59:1-2; Eze. 18:4). The church is to preach so men seeking forgiveness will turn to the Son of God who died and shed

His blood on the cross of Calvary (Mat. 1:21; 26:2; John 3:16; 1 Pet. 3:18). He will preach that it is only through man's obedience to the Gospel of Jesus Christ that he receives the salvation offered (Heb. 5:9).

The church and its preaching will be specific just as Peter was specific on Pentecost when he said to the Jews in his audience: "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23). Just as John the Baptist was specific when he told Herod he was living in adultery—John was specific in telling him about his sin (Luke 3:19).

Finally, the church and what it preaches will never be accused of being like the Pharisees in Christ's day. Jesus said to the scribes and Pharisees: "But in vain they do worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men" (Mat. 5:9). Every church should be following what Paul said to the brethren at Colossae:

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ (Col. 2:8).

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QUESTIONS

1. What have we learned about the first preachers and the church?
2. What have we learned about the purpose of preaching?
3. What is the church to preach?
4. In what manner is the church to preach?
5. Is all preaching sound?

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Lee Moses

In developing an understanding of and an appreciation for the Lord's church, it is crucial that one develops an understanding of and an appreciation for the church's mission. The church's mission is one of its key identifying marks. Without knowing the mission of the church, one cannot rightly distinguish the Lord's church from the multitude of man-made religious bodies professing affiliation with Christ. Without knowing the mission of the church, Christians certainly cannot accomplish that mission. Without knowing the mission of the church, it is impossible for a group even to be the Lord's church.

While the word *mission* itself occurs nowhere in the English Bible, the church from its inception has been entrusted with a specific and lofty mission. A *mission* is an assigned task or set of tasks, but a mission also implies goals. When brethren allude to the mission of the church, they often mean the **activity** of the church, or the **means** by which the church is to carry out its mission. All three are closely related, but they are not identical. What universal goals has the Lord laid before His church?

TO SEEK AND TO SAVE THE LOST

Jesus Christ described His mission thusly: "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

No one ever embarked on a greater mission. No one traveled further; no one sacrificed more to embark on or to accomplish a mission (John 3:13; 1:1, 14; 2 Cor. 8:9; Phi. 2:6-8). God's great desire is the salvation of men's souls (John 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9), and Jesus came to seek the fulfillment of His great desire. The value of one human soul surpasses that of all material human wealth (Mat. 16:26), and Jesus paid the necessary ransom to secure the eternal safety of all human souls—souls which otherwise were destined for eternal destruction (2 Cor. 5:14-15; 1 Tim. 2:6; 1 John 2:2). Hannibal's assault on Italy, Colum-

bus' voyage across the Atlantic, Admiral Byrd's expeditions to the North and South Poles, the Apollo space missions, even the D-Day landing at Normandy—the great missions of human history all fade into insignificance under the great shadow of Christ's mission to seek and save lost humanity.

By the time Christ ascended into heaven, He had clearly accomplished His earthly mission (John 17:4; 19:20). Yet, there remained lost souls to seek and to save; there would be manifold generations to come of lost souls in need of seeking and saving. Surely the Lord would not ignore them (cf. Acts 10:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:4).

Before Jesus made His heavenly ascent, He handed over that mission to others, initially His apostles.

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach ["make disciples of"—ASV] all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen (Mat. 28:18-20).

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).

Note the parallels between Jesus' own self-described mission—"to seek and to save the lost"—and this mission He gave to His followers. Jesus came to "seek." As Jesus had left His heavenly home to seek and save the lost, His followers were to "Go"—to **seek** the lost. When they found the lost, they were to "make disciples" of them. As those lost who heard their message believed it and responded by being baptized, they would then be **saved**. Thus, Christ's followers

would accomplish the second half, and ultimate goal, of Christ's mission.

Christ has indeed charged all the church with the responsibility of seeking and saving the lost. Christ initially entrusted this mission to His apostles; but Acts makes clear that this mission became a church-wide responsibility very early. Jesus spoke of His apostles carrying the Gospel to "Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). However, as the proclamation of the Gospel spread outside of Jerusalem, non-apostles were among those fulfilling the responsibility of proclaiming the Gospel in these different areas (cf. 8:1, 4-12; 11:19-24). Even as the apostles "made disciples," they were to teach those converts "to observe all things whatsoever" Jesus had commanded the apostles; thus, the converts were under the same obligation as the apostles. Paul wrote Timothy:

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).

Teaching—or, put another way, seeking and saving the lost—was a responsibility handed down from Paul to Timothy, to "faithful men," to "others" they taught, to the writer and reader of this manuscript, to those whom we have the opportunity to teach.

In addition to "seeking and saving the lost," Christ described His own mission another way: "And he said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent" (Luke 4:43). The very reason Christ was sent to earth was to preach the kingdom of God, the imminent church, to various cities. When He later said He had "come to seek and to save the lost," He was not contradicting Himself—He was expressing the same mission in different terms. He would save lost souls by preaching the good news of the coming kingdom to them—preaching its imminence, and the need of preparing to enter it by believing in His Deity, repenting of sins, confessing Christ before others, being baptized in water, and living a life of devoted ser-

vice to the Lord (Mat. 4:17; 10:32-33; 16:24-27; John 3:5, 16; 4:1; 8:24).

The church saves the lost by doing the same—preaching the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, teaching souls what they must do to enter it. Jesus Christ did not save the lost by "holy wars," theatrical productions, juggling for Jesus, or interfaith basketball leagues.

When the church endeavors to save the lost and does so by the Lord's authorized means—preaching the Gospel—its responsibility is limited. Yes, the church is to seek and save the lost, but if the lost refuse to believe and obey the Gospel preached, such obstinate souls carry their blood upon their own heads (Acts 18:5-6; cf. 13:45-46; 20:26-27; Eze. 3:17-21). There is nothing more the church can do.

However, the twenty-first century church is clearly falling short in its efforts to **seek** the lost. As such, it is falling short in its capacity to **save** the lost. Jesus left the riches of heaven that men might be saved; are Christians willing to leave the comfort of their homes and air-conditioned church buildings that men might be saved? Where is the evangelistic zeal of the church of past decades and centuries? Where is the door-knocking, the religious discussions with Christians and their neighbors, the in-home Bible studies? Do Christians remember the significance of their mission and the authority of the One who gave it?

Millions are groping without the Gospel,
Quickly they'll reach eternity's night;
Shall we sit idly as they rush onward?
Haste, let us hold up Christ the true Light
(Teddlie & Carruth 340).

TO PERFECT THE SAINTS

Were the church's mission solely to seek and save the lost as described above, the church would have no responsibility toward the saved. However, this is simply not the case. The church is to "do good"—particularly spiritual good—"unto all *men*, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10). Christians are admonished, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (6:2). The church collectively and individually bears spiritual re-

sponsibilities toward each member. The church has a responsibility to keep the saved, saved, to prevent the slipping from falling, and to reclaim the salvation of saints who have fallen. Note what Paul said to the church at Colossae:

And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies...yet now hath he [Christ] reconciled In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight: If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and *be* not moved away from the hope of the gospel... Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; *Even* the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what *is* the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily (Col. 1:21-29).

As Paul and other Christians proclaimed the Gospel, they did so not only to save alien sinners—they did so to help Christians “continue in the faith grounded and settled, and *be* not moved away from the hope of the gospel” (1:23). Not all who begin the Christian race finish their course, regardless of promise: “Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?” (Gal. 5:7; cf. Mat. 13:20-21). The Calvinistic doctrine of the guaranteed “perseverance of the saints” is false; thus, saints need to extend their efforts toward helping themselves and other saints persevere.

Furthermore, the church has a more ambitious mission toward each member than simply keeping him stagnant in a *saved* condition. Paul labored that he might “present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (Col. 1:28-29). This word for *perfect* (Gr. *teleios*) carries the idea of “meeting the highest standard,” “mature,” and “fully instructed” (Bauer 995-96; Lightfoot 169-71). While a freshly-baptized Christian is already perfect in the sense that he is “holy and unblame-

able and unreprouvable in [the Lord’s] sight,” the Lord expects spiritual progress. Every Christian is to function and work within the body of Christ (Eph. 4:16). Every Christian is to grow in knowledge and spiritual graces (2 Pet. 1:5-8; 3:18; cf. Heb. 5:12; 1 Pet. 2:2).

Perfecting the saints is closely tied to *edification*. Many churches have introduced unscriptural innovations in the name of *edification*, but this is because they fail to understand what true edification is, and they fail to understand that there are specifically authorized means of edification. Edification is not, as some believe, simply to make brethren feel better. The words for *edify* and *edification* literally refer to the process of constructing a building (one might think of the related word *edifice*). Every Christian spirit is a building in the process of construction, and the church helps in this process of spiritual building and fortification. The church at Thessalonica was commanded, “Wherefore comfort yourselves together [“exhort one another”—ASV], and edify one another, even as also ye do” (1 The. 5:11).

Note that part of this edification comes through *exhorting* the brethren. Brethren must be reminded and urged of the value of living the Christian life, of how to live the Christian life, and of deterrents to the Christian life. Paul writes a few verses later:

Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded [“encourage the fainthearted”—ASV], support the weak, be patient toward all *men* (5:14).

The church must go on high alert when it becomes clear one of its members is in spiritual danger:

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted (Gal. 6:1; cf. Jam. 5:19-20).

Practicing church discipline, including withdrawal of fellowship when needed, is essential to maintaining the holiness of the bride of Christ and to presenting every member perfect in Christ. The church at Corinth was to withdraw from its

fornicating member “for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 5:5; cf. 2 The. 3:14-15). Church discipline is all too often neglected “to keep the peace,” even though this neglect allows children of God to forfeit peace with their Father. The church must maintain vigilance:

Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble *you*, and thereby many be defiled (Heb. 12:15).

Christian living itself helps to edify and perfect brethren. As Paul said, “Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample” (Phi. 3:17). Seeing others live the Christian life provides encouragement that it **can** be done; it helps provide instruction as to **how** it is done. Kindness in speech, time spent in personal Bible study and prayer, modesty in attire, and abstinence from worldliness can do far more good than the Christian so living may realize. This writer will forever value the experience he had as a new Christian of observing more mature Christians living out their faith, practicing in their lives everything that was preached from the pulpit, sung from the pews, and taught in the classes. As one unknown poet noted (originally written by Edgar Guest but altered many times including this rendition):

I'd rather see a sermon than to hear one any day,
I'd rather one would walk with me than merely show the way.
The eye's the better pupil, more willing than the ear;
Fine counsel is confusing but example is always clear.
The best of all the preachers are the men who live their creed,
For to see the good in action is what everybody needs.
If you let me watch you do it I can see just how it's done;
I can see your hands in action, but your tongue too fast may run.
And the sermons you deliver may be very wise and true,
But I'd rather get my lesson from observing what you do.

For I may misunderstand you and the high advice you give,
But there is no misunderstanding how you act and how you live.

The church fulfills its mission to perfect the saints by preaching and practicing the Gospel of Jesus Christ:

And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified (Acts 20:32).

Paul asked the beloved saints at Thessalonica:

For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Are* not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy (1 The. 2:19-20).

Every elder, deacon, preacher, and member should have the same desire and sense of mission toward his brothers and sisters in Christ.

TO DEFEND THE TRUTH

Jude wrote:

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

A discussion of “the common salvation” would undoubtedly have proved conducive toward seeking and saving the lost and toward the perfection of the saints. Nonetheless, the Holy Spirit “constrained” Jude to exhort Christians that they should “earnestly contend for the faith.” He was not turning away the church from its mission in so exhorting. Rather, he was setting the church on a key part of its mission.

Christ spent much of His ministry refuting error. Jesus warned His disciples, “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees,” a warning against their false doctrine (Mat. 16:6, cf. 16:12). He did not limit such warnings to private settings. His long public discourses frequently attacked false doctrines of the Pharisees and Sadducees (5:20; 23:1-39). When they attempted to assert their false doctrines, He refuted them on the spot and did so

publicly (9:10-13; 15:1-20; 22:23-33). Christ's apostles similarly stood up against any error that presented itself (cf. Acts 8:20-23; 11:2-18; 13:8-12; 15:1ff; 17:16-17; etc.). Paul wrote, "I am set for the defence of the gospel" (Phi. 1:17), and indeed he and his fellow-apostles were—as should be all Christians of every age.

Neither Christ nor His apostles are present on earth to defend the Gospel against the attacks it is currently weathering. The church today carries the responsibility of upholding the Truth and refuting error. Paul penned:

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them (Rom. 16:17).

Christians are responsible for making others aware of doctrines contrary to "the doctrine which ye have learned"—the Gospel (16:17; cf. 1 Cor. 15:1)—and of those teaching such error.

Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel (Phi. 1:27).

Many times, the Holy Spirit informs the church that she is to be engaged in a *fight* (1 Cor. 9:26; 1 Tim. 6:12), waging *warfare* (2 Cor. 10:3-4; 1 Tim. 1:18; 2 Tim. 2:3). For what cause is the church to be fighting? Against whom is the church to be fighting? How is this to be done? "We do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal)" (2 Cor. 10:3-4). Ours is not a physical battle against fleshly foes. Paul proceeds to explain that his warfare—and, thus, the church's warfare—involves "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (10:5). What are these *imaginations* (or "reasonings, sophistries"—Bauer 598) and *high things* (or "things which posture arrogantly"—Bauer 1046) exalting themselves against the knowledge of God? They are false doctrines; all false doctrine stands contrary to the true knowledge of God revealed in the Scriptures. The

church must exert similar efforts toward "casting down" false doctrines as Paul exerted.

The church's general attitude toward the Truth's defense has notably softened in recent decades. In the 19th and most of the 20th centuries, the church focused a great deal of its energy toward debating proponents of false doctrine. Christians knew that their friends and neighbors who believed false doctrine would be lost if they continued therein. They also knew that debates exposed error and revealed Truth, so they encouraged, supported, and attended public debates focusing on crucial doctrinal issues. Through these widely-attended events, many souls were saved (cf. 2 Tim. 2:25-26), brethren were strengthened in their knowledge of and confidence in the Gospel (cf. Col. 2:7; 2 Pet. 1:12), and the church grew. "And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily" (Acts 16:5). For various reasons, there has been a pronounced shift from debating in recent decades. It is unlikely that the church's concurrent loss of evangelistic zeal, diminishing of brethren's Scriptural knowledge, and lack of growth is altogether coincidental.

Churches professing to be churches of Christ have manifested their utter failure to defend the Truth in other ways as well. Elders and preachers have favored "non-controversial preaching," seeking to avoid offending members or others in attendance. One preacher made the statement, "I don't preach anything negative—there's too much positive in the Bible to preach about." The undue focus on numbers in attendance at worship services has undoubtedly contributed to this softened stance and this denial of the Divine decree to defend.

In spiritual warfare as in physical, it is wholly impossible to make a defense without opposing invading forces. Also, make no mistake, demonic forces have invaded and infiltrated what is delineated as the Lord's territory. Peter wrote:

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, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction (2 Pet. 2:1).

False teachers have lived in every age, and only a compound of severe naïvety, willing ignorance, and gross negligence allow most of today's "churches of Christ" to remain in denial of false teachers' present existence and the existential threat their doctrines pose.

Paul spoke of "false brethren" he encountered, stating, "To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour" (Gal. 2:5). Why was Paul so adamant? He explained his reason: "That the truth of the gospel might continue with you" (2:5). Do we want the truth of the Gospel to continue with us, with other churches, and with the church of generations to come? For the church of Christ, defending the truth is not an option—it is a necessity; it is an obligation; it is a key component of its mission.

TO GLORIFY GOD

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

Just as the works of Jesus Christ and the apostles glorified God (Mat. 9:8; 15:31; Luke 5:26; 7:14-16; Acts 11:18; 21:20; Gal. 1:24), so the church has been placed on earth to glorify God in heaven. As Jesus addressed His disciples, He spoke of their high calling:

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Mat. 5:14-16).

Again, the *ye* to whom He spoke was His disciples (5:1-2), and His disciples would ultimately be identical with the church (Acts 6:7; cf. 2:47). The church is to serve as "the light of the world," reflecting the glory of the three Persons of the Godhead. The church is to radiate that light so brilliantly and so prominently that it cannot be obscured. "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

The church's worship, which has glorifying God as its primary focus, is part of its mission. God seeks true worshipers (John 4:23-24), and the Lord's church from its inception has answered that call (Acts 2:42). Occasionally, brethren will refer to "preaching the Gospel" as the sole mission of the church. However, this would leave four of the five authorized acts of the church's worship outside the purview of the church's mission. Indeed, preaching the Gospel serves to glorify God, but it is not the only way the church is commanded to glorify Him. When a brother or sister forsakes the worship of God Almighty, that person forsakes the mission he accepted when he claimed Christ as his Lord.

One must understand that God is not glorified by means of man's own choosing. Priests Nadab and Abihu learned this lesson the hard way, as God struck them dead for their self-selected means of worship (Lev. 10:1-2). Following their deaths:

Then Moses said unto Aaron, This *is it* that the LORD spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace (10:3).

Nadab and Abihu were privileged to serve as priests in the tabernacle, and thus to "come nigh" God—however, they failed to sanctify Him in their worship, and they failed to glorify God before the people when they offered worship of their own choosing. Countless churches fail to glorify God because they seek to glorify Him by means of their own choosing.

The church's holiness and purity of living glorifies God.

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; cf. 1 Pet. 1:14-16).

Sadly, the church has largely catered to worldly pressures and become worldly itself, "by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of"

(2 Pet. 2:2). Rather than bringing glory to God, such churches lend apparent credence to the anti-Christ blasphemy of the secular and denominational world (Rom. 2:24; cf. 2 Sam. 12:14). To apostate Israel, God said:

And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I *am* the LORD, saith the Lord GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes (Eze. 36:23).

Only a holy church declares a holy God.

The world may not **acknowledge** that the church's works glorify God. Recall what the Jews at Rome *knew* about the Lord's church: "as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against" (Acts 28:22). It is not uncommon that the more holily and righteously a church and its members conduct themselves, the more the world will speak against it. As Mark Twain sardonically noted, "Few things are harder to put up with than the annoyance of a good example." Jesus told His apostles:

If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you (John 15:19).

Regardless of the world's response, the church must continue doing that which glorifies God:

Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by *your* good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation (1 Pet. 2:12).

WHAT IS THE PLACE OF PHYSICAL BENEVOLENCE?

Commonly, the mission of the church is said to be evangelism, edification, and benevolence. The reader may have observed that this manuscript outlines a fourfold mission that nowhere includes physical benevolence. "Physical benevolence" is stressed because each component of the church's mission involves benevolence—spiritual benevolence. As the Lord created the church a spiritual institution (Luke 17:20-21; Col. 1:13), the church must maintain its focus on the spiritual (2 Cor. 4:18; Rev. 3:17-18).

Nonetheless, occasions will arise when physical needs cannot be neglected. Jesus Christ did not come into the world to feed the world's poor or heal the world's sick. Such simply was not His mission. Nevertheless, when He saw those in physical need, He addressed their needs:

Then Jesus called his disciples *unto him*, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way (Mat. 15:32).

And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them (4:24).

Christ's miraculous means of addressing those needs was intended to confirm His Word and His identity, but His love and compassion motivated each instance where He met someone's physical needs.

Churches of Christ are to follow the example of Christ, and they are to be motivated with the same love and compassion that motivated His actions. "Let all your things be done with charity ["in love"—ASV]" (1 Cor. 16:14).

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; cf. Jam. 2:15-17).

"Pure religion and undefiled" includes meeting the physical needs of the afflicted (Jam. 1:27), and no church is excused from practicing pure and undefiled religion.

Faithful churches of Christ will inescapably be active in physical benevolence. However, this does not make it their mission. Upon occasion, churches may find it necessary to build or improve upon physical buildings to serve as meeting places. Various members may regularly be involved in building maintenance and cleaning. However, it is not difficult to see that the mission of the church is not to build and maintain meetinghouses. Churches will have to pay bills,

but paying bills is not the mission of the church. Similarly, churches will participate in physical benevolence, but physical benevolence is not the mission of the church. Indeed, “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all *men*, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). However, let the Lord’s church never lose sight of her true mission—her spiritual mission.

CONCLUSION

The Lord built His church for a purpose; He entrusted it with a crucial fourfold mission. A heavy responsibility lies with the church to seek and save the lost, to perfect the saints, to defend the Truth, and to glorify God. Such efforts will not go unopposed. Present forces are working against the Lord’s church. To many, her mission appears more daunting than ever. This should motivate faithful Christians all the more in the urgency of their charge.

When wicked and formidable foes threatened Britain’s very existence, Prime Minister Winston Churchill exhorted:

Upon this battle depends the survival of the Christian civilization. Upon it depends our own British life and the long continuity of

our institutions and our Empire. The whole fury of the enemy must soon be turned on us. Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties and bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will say, “This was their finest hour.”

Much more so, now is the time for soldiers of Christ to charge into the fray for the Cause of Christ.

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QUESTIONS

1. How did Jesus describe His mission? How do we know that Christians today have the same mission?
2. How is the church to perfect the saints?
3. Does the church bear responsibility when false doctrines are spread?
4. What are some passages of Scripture charging the church to glorify God?
5. Is physical/material benevolence part of the church’s mission? Why or why not?

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE CHURCH

Bruce Stulting

INTRODUCTION

Fellowship is one of the most profound expressions found on the pages of the Bible. The bond of fellowship among Christians is difficult for non-believers to comprehend. However, it has been the center of controversy since the beginning of Christianity. This is true, in part, because both denominationalists and Christians have misused *fellowship*. It has also been an area of trouble because some are confused as to where the line of fellowship is to be drawn.

The first time *fellowship* is used in the New Testament is on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Luke records how Peter and the other apostles had plainly and positively set forth the conditions of salvation. They spoke of Christ's life, death, burial, resurrection, and coronation. Upon learning this, some were pricked in their hearts and cried out for help (Acts 2:37). Peter answered them in verses 38-40. Their response was that "they that gladly received his word were baptized" (2:41). Luke then records the fruits that immediately began to be manifested by these new disciples. "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (2:42). Notice how *fellowship* is joined together with apostolic teaching, the Lord's Supper, and prayer. This new fellowship, the church of Christ, was a fellowship of the saved: "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (2:47).

THE NEED FOR THIS STUDY

Since *fellowship* is a Bible topic it is worthy of our study. We need to preach, teach, and write on this subject because it is the center of much confusion and misunderstanding. A clear understanding of fellowship would clear up many of the problems currently facing the church.

We need to study *fellowship* to create a deeper bond among those of like precious faith. Without true Biblical fellowship, we cannot "Rejoice

with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep" (Rom. 12:15).

FELLOWSHIP DEFINED

God does the defining of fellowship, and it is His right to do so. There are three Greek words used in the New Testament that convey the idea of fellowship. Thayer defines them as:

1. συγκαινωνέω, "to become a partaker together with others, or to have fellowship with a thing" (593)
2. μετοχή "a sharing, communion, fellowship" (407)
3. κοινωνία, "fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation, intercourse" (351).

In summary, fellowship is a group of people who enter into an agreement and share a common goal. They work together to obtain that goal by pooling both their resources and efforts. A local congregation illustrates this meaning. Christians work together to accomplish the commands of God. They are partners in a common effort, participating to reach a common goal.

THE BASIS AND LIMITS OF FELLOWSHIP

God alone has the right to determine: (1) the boundaries of fellowship, (2) whom He will fellowship, (3) whom we are to fellowship, (4) the blessings of true fellowship, (5) when fellowship is to be withdrawn, and (6) when fellowship is to be restored. God does the legislating because He is in authority over every aspect of Christianity.

The fact that there is great division in the body of Christ is alarming. This should be a matter of grave concern to every Christian. Yet we must recognize that, although division is a great evil, unity in error is certainly not the solution. We should not seek a *possible* basis for fellowship. There may seem to be many *possible* ways to attain and maintain unity and fellowship. However, there is only one way that will satisfy God. The need for fellowship is less important than

the need for Truth! We desire unity and fellowship (Psa. 133:1). That which we desire must be obtained lawfully (Scripturally), lest the desire become **lust!**

THE BASIS OF CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP IS PLAINLY SET FORTH IN THE SCRIPTURES

In his discussion of the unity of Jews and Gentiles in Christian fellowship, Paul stated: “And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby” (Eph. 2:16). Here the emphasis is not directly related to the unity of the Jews with the Gentiles. Although that is important, the real emphasis is on the fact that **both** are reconciled with God “in one body.” Reconciliation with God is the basis of their unity and fellowship. In fact, the basis for all unity and fellowship lies in the fact that Christians are united in fellowship with God (1 John 1:3).

To illustrate this principle, consider a wagon wheel with a hub from which spokes radiate. The spokes are not joined together directly, but they are joined by being connected to the hub. To maintain the design of the wheel, the spokes must be united indirectly through the hub. The only way to join the spokes together directly is separate them from the hub. This results in the design of the wheel being lost, and it will fail to function. The spokes may have union—but not unity.

This principle is true of fellowship. John wrote:

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ (1:3).

In comparison with our wagon wheel illustration above, God and Christ represent the hub and Christians represent the spokes. Christians (spokes) achieve fellowship by being united with God and Christ (hub). However, all *unity* (union) obtained in any other way involves being separated from God and Christ. When this occurs, the design of fellowship is lost, and the intended purpose cannot be obtained.

FELLOWSHIP IS INCLUSIVE AND EXCLUSIVE

The very design of fellowship implies the possibility that one may be included or excluded from it. The basis for inclusion and exclusion are the same—that is fellowship with God. Both Jew and Gentile were made one in Christ (Gal. 3:28). Only Christians (as the Bible defines *Christian*) can be included in fellowship. Being one in Christ simply means that we have fellowship with everyone who is in Christ.

It becomes essential that we determine who is in Christ. As we turn to God’s Word for the answer, we find that one is “baptized into Christ” (3:27). The baptism into Christ is a burial with Him in water (Rom. 6:4; Acts 10:48). There is only one baptism (Eph. 4:5), which is a burial in water for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). This limits fellowship only to those who have been so baptized.

ONCE FELLOWSHIP IS OBTAINED IT MUST BE MAINTAINED

Fellowship can be extended only to those who remain in the truth (2:42), which requires one to walk in the light (1 John 1:6-7) and abide in the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9). Fellowship can only be maintained with all who fear God and keep His precepts (Psa. 119:63). Consider the following Scriptures:

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.... And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count *him* not as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother (2 The. 3:6, 14-15).

A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself (Tit. 3:10-11).

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly;

and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple (Rom. 16:17-18).

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).

I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth *them* out of the church. Beloved, follow not *that which is evil*, but *that which is good*. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God (3 John 9-11).

Fellowship must be withheld from those who refuse to remain in the truth. If we fellowship unsound brethren, we condone their lifestyle and bring dishonor to Christ. Paul stated:

I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person (1 Cor. 5:9-13).

If we fellowship brethren who are false teachers, we condone their error (2 John 11). We can-

not extend the right hand of fellowship to brethren who are false teachers, who are living immoral lives, or whose behavior is in serious conflict with Christian principles.

CONCLUSION

To the church at Philippi, Paul wrote:

If *there be* therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind (Phi. 2:1-2).

What a joy it is to extend the right hand of fellowship to those who are like-minded in Christ.

However, we must never forsake the Truth for the sake of fellowship. The Bible plainly teaches that we are to recognize as God's children only those who have done what the Bible teaches is necessary to attain such a status (John 3:3-5; Gal. 3:26-27). Furthermore, it is certain that there are at least some situations in which a disciple is to be cut off (excluded from) the fellowship of the church. The faithful must "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*" (Eph. 5:11).

Much more could be written on the great subject of fellowship. All Christians should be keenly interested in fellowship and are encouraged to further study this topic. It is the hope and prayer of this writer that God will continue to bless all true believers with the joy of fellowship that comes from true unity.

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QUESTIONS

1. What are the meanings of the three Greek words translated *fellowship*?
2. What are six things God has a right to determine regarding fellowship?
3. What is the basis for inclusion into the fellowship of the faithful?
4. From whom should fellowship be withheld?
5. What should never be done for the sake of fellowship?

THE CHURCH AND MORALS

Wayne Blake

INTRODUCTION

Christians today (particularly our youth) are inundated with conflicting views of morality. People have different opinions concerning what is right and wrong. What once was accepted as good and true is now challenged. Our governments are redefining the concept of marriage. Businesses often operate with ethics that sanction lying and stealing. How does one know what is right and wrong in areas of morality? Everyone has a different standard.

The definition of morality is that which “is a doctrine or system of moral conduct: conformity to ideals of right human conduct: virtue” (“Morality”). There are systems of morality for all aspects of life, in business, in interaction with people, etc., as well as religion. All people have a set of conduct, either good or bad. The greatest delusion the devil has placed in man is the idea that it does not make any difference what one believes. We see this play out when we hear people talking about sincerity, church choice, as well as living a moral life.

The answer for the faithful Christian is simple, but for the vast majority of the world it is not. Many have *standards* they use to understand what might be right or wrong. Many put their authority in:

Feelings

Many adopt the thought that if it feels good, then it must be all right. The Bible warns against trusting in feelings (Pro. 14:12; 28:26; Jer. 10:23). Many people have destroyed themselves by following their feelings.

Conscience

Many believe that their conscience can be their guide. Paul served God with a good conscience throughout his life, even when he was persecuting Christians (Acts 23:1; 26:9-11). Our conscience is like a clock, which works properly only if set properly.

Friends

Everyone else is doing it; therefore it must be right. However, consider the words of Jesus when He described the end of the majority (Mat. 7:13-14). If you followed the majority in Noah’s day, you would have died in the flood. If you followed the majority in Joshua’s day, you would have died in the wilderness.

Ministers

Some believe if the preacher (rabbi, priest, etc.) said it, it must be true. They reason that surely these “men of God” could not and would not lead them astray. Yet notice the warnings given by Jesus, Paul, and Peter (15:12-14; 2 Cor. 11:13-15; 2 Pet. 3:1-3, 12-15, 17-18). Following the wrong minister can lead to corruption and lost souls.

These are only a few *standards* people use today use to decide what is right and wrong. We must be careful not to trust in the wrong ones.

DISCUSSION

The Bible is the best source to find what God regards as moral upright living. It also gives us examples of those who are not moral and upright:

As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat *is* an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps *is* under their lips: Whose mouth *is* full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet *are* swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery *are* in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes (Rom. 3:10-18).

What a sad commentary on the majority of those living today! There are none righteous, none who can stand before God and say that because they have lived such a “good or moral” life

that God owes them salvation. There is none, not one! We must understand that we are never going to be good enough to go to Heaven on our own. Even our own ideas of what is right do not match up close to what God demands. Lying, cursing, hatred, bitterness, murder, destruction, and misery are parts of our so-called *Christian* nation today. There is no fear of God before our eyes. The root of the problem—no fear of God. This is why we see destruction around us every day, yet so many claim to be lovers of God.

We look around our world and see many who have destroyed their lives as well as the lives of others. They carry on as if they have done good and yet stand before God condemned. This begins many times in childhood.

Misspent Youth Can Curse Your Soul

We see so many young people today living in homes that God does not authorize nor condone. Many children are left to fend for themselves because the parents are either not at home or are busy with their own lives. In the young we see that many do not understand that they will reap what they sow (Gal. 6:7-8). What they do as a youth can permanently affect their future—not just in eternity but the future in this life.

They show great rebellion. Some rebellion is natural for all of us in various stages of our lives, but in youth, if not contained, it can cause great harm to the individual as well as others. We see in our society the joy in the eyes of some when they rebel against their parents, teachers, police, etc. We see school shootings, parents being killed, as well as police officers, because of the rebellion against authority. We forget that God has commanded that we submit to authority (Rom. 13:1-2; 1 Pet. 2:13-14). Rebellion against authority has caused many young people to spend their lives in prison.

Many young people think nothing of lying. Once you are caught in a lie, your credibility is shattered. Your word means nothing; you can no longer be trusted. This has adverse effects on your relationships and your employment.

Stealing is another area where we see things getting worse and not better. Shoplifting and oth-

er such crimes are rampant among many young people. We all remember the images and video when the hurricane flooded New Orleans. People in chest-deep water were stealing and carrying off big screen television sets (some dragging in the water) because of the idea of getting something free. This also destroys trust and causes suspicion.

Fornication is not only getting worse, but is encouraged, even at very early ages. Children see their parents sleeping around and watch television shows with jokes made about such behavior. Sex among young people is very popular and encouraged. Virginity is ridiculed and looked upon as something strange. Our youth do not pay attention to the high price for such activity, such as diseases, pregnancy which leads to abortions or forced marriages which often end in divorce. The numbers of couples that are living together have topped the numbers of divorces in our country.

Solomon said, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man" (Ecc. 12:13). There are two types of young people—the wise and the foolish. The first is the:

Foolish child

The foolish child does not remember God in his youth. This begins in the home. He will not listen to the advice of others. He has to learn everything by himself. So, this leaves the child to invariably make a mess out of his life (in health, marriage, or even career). He seems to spend a good portion of life undoing foolish actions done in his youth. Many suffer from the consequences of their foolish actions. Many reasons can be given for such, but the most important is that their parents not instilling in them a love and fear of God.

Wise Child

This child remembers God in his youth. He has good examples shown to him that the only true way to live is with God as his only authority figure. He follows the advice and commands of God as well as the advice of trusted others. He looks around and sees the mistakes others have made and learns from those mistakes. He begins his life with a solid foundation and a good head

start. He is able to accomplish more good in life. He enjoys pleasurable memories and does not regret his horrid past. What a difference in the quality of life there can be when one makes the right choices in his youth.

The wise child will show his wisdom by learning to respect authority, which begins with his parents (Eph. 6:1-3). He learns to control his body, as Paul did (1 Cor. 9:27). He understands the need to obey the Gospel and be a New Testament Christian (Gal. 3:26-27). He then begins to grow and bear the fruit of the Spirit (5:22-24).

To remember the words of Solomon in one's youth, will enable a person to learn lessons that will follow him all his life. Life will be better and richer for one on the right side—God's. Look at other things Solomon understood about life:

- Nothing is better than to enjoy simple things and what you do each day (Ecc. 2:24).
- The ability to enjoy what you have and what you do comes from one source, God (2:24-25).
- God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy to the man good in His sight (2:26).
- The wicked man acquires things, but it will eventually be given to the good (2:26).
- Man should rejoice each day and do good (3:12).
- Every man should enjoy the good in his labor, which is a gift from God (3:13).
- The joy in one's work is his heritage, not what may happen after he is gone (3:22).

- In the day of prosperity, rejoice, and in the day of adversity, contemplate (7:14).

In all this, Solomon concludes that we should eat and drink with a merry heart, express our joy in how we live, live joyfully with the wife whom we love, and enjoy our youth, remembering we will be held accountable (9:7-9; 11:9). We are to remove sorrow and put away evil, remember God in the days of your youth, fear Him, and keep His commandments (11:10; 12:1, 13).

CONCLUSION

Although most of this is pointed toward the youth, we who are older need to value our place in this, also. We are the example for our youth. We want our kids to grow up and be faithful to God and not go about seeking to make their own definition of faithfulness or morality. It all comes to down to how much we want to go to Heaven. Are we willing to give up our souls to live like the world and be like the world? To find joy in this world, we must remember our Creator, fear Him, and keep His commandments. We must take heed to what His Son and our Savior says to each of us through His Word (Heb. 1:1-4). We cannot change the minds of the world until we change our minds toward our God and His Word.

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QUESTIONS

1. Before we can even understand morality in religion, we must first do what?
2. Our youth are our most valuable source for change where?
3. The youth learn from what source first?
4. To understand what is truly important what did Solomon say?
5. How can I make sure that I am seeking God first in my life?

THE CHURCH AND SELF-DISCIPLINE

Jerry C. Brewer

INTRODUCTION

Solomon wrote, “He that *hath* no rule over his own spirit *is like* a city *that is* broken down, *and* without walls” (Pro. 25:28). One normally thinks of the withdrawal of fellowship when speaking of the church and discipline, but that final action is never necessary when each member of the body of Christ practices Biblical **self-discipline** or rules “over his own spirit.” *Self-discipline* is “self-control,” which is the meaning of *temperance* in the New Testament. According to Steve Hamilton:

“Self-control” (or “temperance”) is derived from the Greek word *enkrateia*, (Strong’s #1466) (transliterated as *egkrateia* in some sources), meaning “mastery of one’s appetites and passions, power over oneself in the sense of persistence or restraint,” or “the virtue of one who masters his desires and passions.” It is also interesting to note that *egkrateia*... would be listed as one of the described traits of an elder in Titus 1:8, 6 and would ultimately even become the source of names and foundational beliefs of latter emerging groups. “Egkrateia” appears in three instances in the New Testament (Acts 24:25, Galatians 5:23, and in 2 Peter 1:6) and is translated “temperance” in the KJ version and “self-control” in the NASB (some argue that “temperance” is a more Biblically accurate definition of the original intent of the word).

Of such self-control, Paul wrote:

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring *it* into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway (1 Cor. 9:24-27).

Self-discipline begins with the decision to follow Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mat. 16:24). To deny self is self-discipline, and one who is unwilling to place the Lord ahead of his own desires **cannot** be a follower of Christ. To deny self is to cultivate the traits of those of whom Jesus spoke in the Sermon on The Mount: “Blessed *are* the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (5:3). Of this passage, Foy E. Wallace, Jr., wrote:

The word *poor* is usually descriptive of what a man has, or does not have, but the expression *poor in spirit* refers to what a man is. It carries the idea of dependence on something other than one’s self. Jeremiah declared, “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.” (Jer. 10:23). The one who is poor in spirit depends upon God for direction, and that will lead him into the kingdom. It is opposite of the command of the world’s resources which breeds the independence of self-sufficiency and human wisdom.... The kingdom of heaven which had been announced was a sphere of divine grace which only the obedient spirit could enter, and the phrase “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” are words which pointed to Pentecost when the kingdom that was drawing nigh was established. A prophetic description of the character of its constituents is set forth in the metaphors of Isaiah 35:8-10: “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.” The wayfaring men are men who fare by the way and are not acquainted with the territory through which they are passing, and they must be guided. The fools of the passage are not simpletons but are descriptive of men who realize the need of guidance, who know that they cannot guide themselves (12-13).

The poor who lack material necessities are dependent upon others for those things. So it is with those who desire salvation. They must first recognize that they **are** spiritually poor—utterly bereft of the means to save themselves. The recognition of that fact and the determination to deny self is the beginning of salvation.

SELF-DISCIPLINE IN THE CHURCH

The key to self-discipline in the church is Paul's statement, "I keep under my body, and bring *it* into subjection" (1 Cor. 9:27). Self-discipline begins with the inner man, or the spirit, for that is where all decisions begin—whether to serve God or to serve Satan. The inner man controls all actions of both the alien sinner and the Christian, and those actions are expressed through the body. R. L. Whiteside observed:

Obedience is from the heart. The spirit expresses itself through the body. Hence, we are commanded to present our "members as instruments of righteousness unto God." And so also does the spirit sin through the instrumentality of the body. Though committed through the instrumentality of the body, sin comes from the heart. "For from within, out of the heart of men, evil thoughts proceed, fornication, thefts, murders, adulteries, covetings, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, railing, pride, foolishness: all these evil things proceed from within, and defile the man" (Mark 7:21-23) (136).

The man who rules "over his own spirit" is self-disciplined, and he makes his body either a servant of righteousness or a servant of sin. The key is: "his own spirit." The spirit—the inner man—is that which is converted to Christ by being born again (John 3:5-8), and it is the spirit of man which controls all his actions. In his comments on Romans 6:12, brother Whiteside wrote:

Paul addresses that part of man which has the control of the body and which is, therefore, responsible for what the heart does. The body is a mere instrument to be used by the inner man, the spirit, for good or bad. The spirit is charged not to let sin control the body. ...God gave the human being certain appetites and passions for his own preservation and for the perpetuity of the human

race; but the purpose to hold them in check, or the plans to gratify them either in a lawful or unlawful way, are formed in the heart (135-36).

Self-denial in becoming a Christian **must** continue in every Christian's life if the church is to function properly. No entity is stronger or healthier than its constituent components, and a chain is no stronger than its weakest link. The human body is composed of individual cells, and when any of those fail to function, the body suffers. So it is with the church. It is composed of individuals. Peter said:

ye also, as lively [or "living"] 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).

Any stone, or priest, in the house of God that is weakened or spiritually sick adversely affects the entire body. That was demonstrated in the sin of Achan, who took forbidden spoils from Jericho (Jos. 7).

Ours is an age of individual **irresponsibility**, which accounts for much of the weakness and apostasy that is rampant in the church today. The idea that members of the church can *corporately* fulfill their personal obligations to the Lord is irresponsible and is manifested in the proliferation of unscriptural organizations to do the work that individuals should and must do. For many Christians, money is the means of doing the Lord's work. It is easier for the individual to contribute a few dollars to some *cause* than to expend time and energy to attend to the needs of others himself. The Christian parent often shirks his personal responsibility to bring up his children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4) by delegating that duty to a "Youth Director."

In some churches, elders delegate their personal responsibilities to the preacher, creating a "pastor system," in which the preacher is responsible for overseeing, shepherding, and restoring wayward, weak members. The elders are charged with those things, not the preacher (Acts 20:28). Christians fail to study the Scriptures themselves, allowing error to creep into the church because it is easier to listen to the preacher and accept his

word than to “try the spirits whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1). These few examples indicate a lack of self-discipline by individual Christians that weaken the church and lead to apostasy.

CHRISTIANITY BEGINS AND ENDS WITH THE INDIVIDUAL

Every person on earth is individually responsible to God and accountable to Him for the life he lives. “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:12). I cannot obey the Gospel for my children or my parents, nor can they obey the Gospel for me. Obedience to God is an individual matter. Being a Christian begins with self-denial in obeying the Gospel and between that and the judgment is mandated a life of self-discipline for each of us.

Self-discipline is not the responsibility of the elders, Bible class teachers, or the preacher. As self-discipline in the church begins at conversion, it continues and matures in individual spiritual growth. Peter commanded, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Pet. 2:2). It is the Christian’s responsibility to discipline himself to maintain the spiritual vitality of the church and fellowship with his brethren. Without self-discipline, there is no fellowship with God and, consequently, no fellowship with our brethren. Biblical fellowship is first vertical—with God—then horizontal—with each other—and that is attained and maintained only by walking according to the Truth.

If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin (1 John 1:6-7).

The cells of our physical bodies remain healthy and function properly when we take care of them by providing proper nourishment and exercise. The individual Christian is a spiritual cell in the body of Christ. For that spiritual body to function and remain sound, the Christian must discipline himself by ordering his life according to the Scriptures. God provides all of man’s physical needs for healthy bodies.

Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you (Mat. 6:31-33).

Likewise, God has provided everything in His Word that the Christian needs to function as a healthy component of the church.

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, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

He who disciplines himself according to the Word of God lacks nothing.

According as 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: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make *you that ye shall* neither *be* barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall (2 Pet. 1:3-10).

Each member of the church must discipline himself for the church to remain pure. When we do that, we “shall never fall,” and “an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (1:11).

When the Christian **fails** to discipline himself and refuses to repent, a spiritual cell in the body of Christ malfunctions and will affect the entire body, if it is not corrected. It then becomes the responsibility of the church to remove that member, as one would sever a gangrenous limb and to

withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us... note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed (2 The. 3:6, 14).

They who will not discipline serve themselves. Paul said to, “mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly” (Rom. 16:17-18).

CONCLUSION

A refusal to practice self-discipline begins in the heart and ends with a full withdrawal of fellowship by the church—a public recognition and declaration that the impenitent one is not walking “in the light.” When self-discipline is practiced by every member of the church, that final action is never necessary.

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QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to “deny self”?
2. Define the word *discipline*.
3. Consider the account of Achan in Joshua 7. How did his lack of self-discipline affect Israel, and how was that remedied?
4. Who is responsible for maintaining fellowship in the church?
5. How is fellowship maintained in the church?

THE ALL-SUFFICIENCY OF THE CHURCH

Philip Smith

INTRODUCTION

The church is the greatest institution upon the face of the earth. If we are to please God, we must recognize that the church is all-sufficient for all that God gave it to do. There are no substitutes, additions, or modifications to God's pattern for the church that can improve it in any way. When men are unhappy with the church as it is revealed in the New Testament, then these same men, of necessity, believe that they know more than God (Jer. 10:23; 1 Cor. 1:20-28).

FOR ITS WORK

There are three works that God gave the church to do. In each case the church is fully sufficient to carry out these works. First, the New Testament church was active in evangelism (Acts 11:19-24; 1 Tim. 3:15). There is no need to build a substitute organization, such as the missionary society, to do the work of evangelism. The New Testament church did not rely on such to spread the Gospel. We have the record of Paul's work of evangelism throughout most of Acts. While various congregations supported him as he preached the Gospel (2 Cor. 11:8-9; Phi. 1:5; 4:15-16); there is certainly no record of the existence of a missionary society. To say that we need to build another organization to do the work of the church in evangelism is to deny the wisdom of God in establishing His church and giving it this work.

Second, the Lord's church is also completely sufficient for the work of benevolence (1 Cor. 16:1-4). New Testament **congregations** helped the helpless financially where needed. We also learn that congregations cooperated in this work. We have numerous examples of New Testament churches helping those in need (Acts 4:34; 11:29; Rom. 15:26; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8:4). There is no authority for building another organization to do the work of benevolence, such as a disaster relief organization, which is parallel to a missionary society. Man's attempts to improve

God's way with man-made organizations for benevolence are a denial of the wisdom of God and the all-sufficiency of the church to do the work God gave it.

Third, the Lord's church is also all-sufficient in the work of self-edification. After listing the New Testament offices of teaching (some being temporary), Paul states that these offices were for the edification of the church (Eph. 4:11-12), which is accomplished through teaching the Word of God (Acts 20:32). While men have confused spiritual edification with entertainment and social activities, there is no spiritual edification where the Word of God is not taught. All alternatives to God's pattern of edification are a denial of God's wisdom regarding the church.

FOR ITS WORSHIP

The worship of the church consists of five acts. These are:

1. Partaking of the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:23-30)
2. Giving our money (1 Cor. 16:1-4)
3. Preaching or teaching (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 2 Tim. 4:1-4)
4. Praying, (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 14:14-16)
5. Singing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).

It is sad that people are often very unhappy with the simplicity of New Testament worship and have corrupted every one of these acts.

The Lord's Supper, which is observed only on the first day of each week (Acts 20:7), consists of partaking of the fruit of the vine and unleavened bread (Mat. 26:26). It is a memorial of Christ's suffering and death on the cross (26:26-28; 1 Cor. 11:23-25). However, it has been corrupted by inventing the doctrine of transubstantiation, partaking of it at times other than every first day of every week, combining it with funerals and weddings, and by making it part of simultaneous worship acts (singing while partaking).

Giving on the first day of the week to support the work of the church (16:1-4) has been corrupted by such money-raising schemes as raffles, car washes, rummage and parking lot sales, gambling (bingo), and by asking non-Christians for financial or material support for the work the Lord gave His church to do.

Faithful preachers of the Gospel proclaimed the whole counsel of God in the worship assemblies of the New Testament church (Acts 20:7, 26-27). While their purpose was to convert and edify, sometimes people were offended and left the faith or even persecuted the faithful (Gal. 4:16). Still, faithful saints understood that their first obligation was to please God and not man (1:10). Preaching in the church's worship periods has been corrupted with the use of drama, skits, preaching everything but the Bible, and "no guilt" preaching.

In prayer we glorify God (Mat. 6:9), give thanks to Him as the giver of all good things (1 The. 5:18; Jam. 1:17), and make our requests to Him (Phi. 4:6). People are not satisfied with praying in the simple manner found in the New Testament but have corrupted prayer by such things as turning the lights out for the purpose of creating a "more spiritual mood," praying to Jesus instead of the Father, holding up one's arms in the air while swaying back and forth, and chain prayers. For some reason people are not satisfied with simply praying as authorized in the New Testament but feel that they need to add something to create a mood or perhaps, like the Athenians, who loved to hear or tell some new thing (Acts 17:21), they love to practice some new thing.

The New Testament church worshiped God by singing songs of praise, adoration, and edification in which the entire congregation participated (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Men have added mechanical instrumental music, choirs, solos, and praise teams to worshiping God in song. God was specific: the melody is to be made in the heart (Eph. 5:19), not on a harp, organ, piano, guitar, or any other mechanical instrument of music. While this may please the ears of men, it does not constitute worshiping God "in truth"

(i.e., according to the Truth of His Word) (John 17:17).

The Lord does not need our additions, substitutions, or enhancements to His worship (John 4:24). While some may want to alter the Lord's pattern to entice the worldly minded, God's revealed New Testament worship is all-sufficient, and to deny this is to deny the wisdom of God.

FOR ITS GOVERNMENT

The government of the church is revealed in the New Testament. Jesus Christ is the head of the church (Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18). As such, He has all authority (Mat. 28:18). Each congregation is autonomous under Christ, and in congregations where men meet the qualifications, there is a plurality of elders who have authority in matters of option and expediency.

Deacons are special servants to the elders and aid them in their work. All members in a congregation, whether elders, deacons, or others, are to grow and be active in the work of the Lord (Eph. 2:10).

The headquarters of the church is in heaven where Christ sits on the throne of David (Acts 2:30-36; Heb. 8:1). This is sufficient, but men have established earthly headquarters in various places for their religions. However, the Lord's church is on a higher plain (John 18:36). Those who are over these man-made religions make rules on matters of faith and obligation and thus reject the authority of Jesus Christ (Col. 3:17). Many of these *churches* have a single "pastor" over each congregation. These *churches* are not satisfied with God's government as revealed in the Bible. They believe their way is a better way. In this they, of necessity, imply that they are wiser than God.

FOR ITS RULE OF FAITH

The rule of faith for the Lord's church is the Word of God (1 Cor. 2:13; 14:37; 2 Pet. 3:16-17). God's Word is sufficient to furnish both individuals and congregations unto every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The church does not need man-made statements of faith, creeds, catechisms, or traditions (Pro. 16:25; Mat. 15:9). We have God's Word, and we must neither take away

from nor add to it (Rev. 22:18-19). The church is the pillar and ground of the Truth (1 Tim. 3:15), and God's Word is Truth (John 17:17). The church is to keep and uphold God's Word. To add to or take away from His Word is to deny the wisdom of God.

FOR ITS PURPOSE

The purpose of the church is to glorify God (2 The. 1:11-12; 1 Pet. 4:14). It does so in its worship, work, and in the lives of its members. Some would use the church to elevate and glorify themselves (Mat. 6:1-2; 1 Tim. 6:3-5; Tit. 1:11; 2 Pet. 2:3). Some would change the purpose of the church to make it a political organization, preaching a social *gospel*, thereby robbing God of His glory. Some would elevate benevolence above the other works of the church, thus making the church into something akin to the Red Cross, thereby minimizing and/or ignoring evangelism and thus robbing God of His glory received in the saving of lost souls (Mark 16:15-16). Let us always remember that when the Lord's church follows His Word, God is glorified.

FOR ITS TERMS OF ENTRANCE

The terms of entrance for the Lord's church are all-sufficient. They consist of hearing the

Gospel (John 5:24), believing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (3:16), repenting of one's sins (Acts 17:30-31), confessing one's faith that Jesus is the Son of God (8:37; Rom. 10:9-10), and being baptized in water for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). When people comply with these terms, they *enter* the Lord's church because He thereupon adds them to it (2:41, 47). While men may argue that all one needs is God's grace or one's own faith, the fact is that God's Word is quite clear. God will not add one to His church unless he follows the aforementioned pattern found in the New Testament. God is True, and we must accept His Word concerning salvation (Rom. 3:4).

CONCLUSION

The church is all-sufficient to enter heaven (Phi. 3:20). If we are to enter heaven, we must not go outside the church that Jesus built. There simply is no other way that leads to that heavenly home.

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

QUESTIONS

1. Does the fact that New Testament congregations cooperated in evangelism, benevolence, and edification authorize the formation of separate organizations through which congregations may carry out these works?
2. In view of declining membership numbers in some congregations, why would it not be wise to make our worship more entertainment oriented by such things as drama, special singing, and no guilt preaching to attract and keep members?
3. If a congregation does not have men Scripturally qualified to be elders, would it be better to be unscripturally organized than Scripturally unorganized?
4. Why would it not be helpful to develop a "statement of faith" so our young people might more easily know what we believe?
5. Name one way for each act of worship that men have corrupted the simplicity of Biblical worship.

THE CHURCH INDESTRUCTIBLE

Ron Cosby

Upon this rock I will build my church;
and the gates of Hades shall not prevail
against it (Mat. 16:18).

It is either very bold or extremely foolish for anyone to announce the endlessness of a new product or entity. In 1956, John Cameron Swayze uttered the famous words, “Timex takes a licking and keeps on ticking.” Out of the millions of Timex watches sold between 1956 and 1960, 20% of the American watches sold, it is rare that one is still ticking. No one ever claimed that the Titanic was “unsinkable.” However, the words “practically unsinkable” by the company’s president became “unsinkable” to passengers, officers, sailors, and the media. An unknown Titanic crew member is reported to have once said to an embarking passenger, “God Himself could not sink this ship!” She went under four days into her maiden voyage.

In contrast, we hear the bold words of Jesus. He promised that neither the destructive forces of this world or the unseen world could destroy His church. Two thousand years later, she still stands. Such boldness outshines the foolishness of men.

THE BOOKS OF PROPHECY

Over the centuries, chosen men of God who penned the Bible have boldly announced the never-ending nature of the Messiah’s spiritual realm. Seven hundred years before the church was established, Isaiah boldly proclaimed, “of his government and of peace there shall be no end” (Isa. 9:7). A hundred years later, Daniel predicted the indestructible spiritual realm of God (Dan. 2:44; 7:13-14). Read again Daniel’s predictions to see God’s definition of indestructible: “never be destroyed...stand for ever,” and “shall not pass away...shall not be destroyed.” Paul shows that Haggai predicted that the church would never end, using the figure of being shaken. The *shaking* in his prophecy applies to Judaism and her

fall, but the “kingdom that cannot be shaken” applies to the church and her not passing away (Heb. 12:28, cf. 27; Hag. 2:6).

Paul, himself, preached the continuation of the church: “unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever” (Eph. 3:21). Additionally, we have the promise of Jesus (Mat. 16:18). The men of God who proclaimed this bold prediction were right. **She still stands!**

THE BOOK OF ACTS

In its infancy and growth, men sought to destroy the church through physical intimidation and injury. Luke’s history book records the repeated afflictions.

Let us threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. And they called them, and charged them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:17-18).

But Saul laid waste the church, entering into every house, and dragging men and women committed them to prison (8:3).

Now about that time Herod the king put forth his hands to afflict certain of the church (12:1).

The magistrates rent their garments off them, and commanded to beat them with rods. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: who, having received such a charge, cast them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks (16:22-24).

I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall 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 (20:29-30).

The Jews persecuted God’s people for three decades. Nevertheless, Paul, while still under arrest in Rome, continued “preaching the kingdom

of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness” (28:31).

Though the aim of the enemy of the cross was the complete destruction of the Lord’s bride, **she still stands**.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Revelation 12 informs John’s readers of several battles between heaven and hell. Within this description is a major point that gave great hope and encouragement to Christians in the first century. **Satan has lost and will lose** (Rev. 12:10). This still rings true today.

From the fall of man, Satan had repeatedly tried to prevent the birth of the Redeemer. Yet, one night, in the little town of Bethlehem, the Messiah was born, and all heaven rang out with the joyous message of salvation. However, Satan did not give up. While the Child was on the earth, Satan’s servant sent killers to “Ramah” to murder the Child. He failed. When the Child became a man, Satan sought to stone Him, and he tried to throw Him over a cliff. Though failing in these, Satan did succeed in crucifying the Redeemer. However, this murder was at God’s prescribed time (Acts 2:22-24). Unknown to the devil, by this ungodly act of crucifixion, he ruined his own overall plan of defeating heaven. Jesus came forth victoriously from the grave to ever reign. The Great Red Dragon lost (Rev. 12:1-6). One day, we too shall come forth from the grave (John 5:28-29; 1 The. 4:16).

John depicts this centuries-old spiritual fight in highly symbolic language in Revelation 12:7-10, concluding that Satan “prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out” (12:8-9—KJV). That is right! He lost.

Satan then turned his main attention to the woman, launching great persecution against her (12:13-16). However, the earth delivered her from total destruction. He lost—again.

Satan then makes war against the seed of the woman (12:17). Based upon what we have learned of the spiritual battle that Satan has waged against God, against the woman, and against the Child, what do you expect the outcome will be

in this continued war, as he seeks to afflict and persecute the seed of the woman? He will lose.

So, he lost, and he will lose! Do we need to know every detail of every symbol in Revelation 12 to find comfort and hope? Not really. We know Satan lost, and we know that the church of the Lord still stands.

John recounts the details of this attack in the following chapters of Revelation. However, in chapter 19, he tells of the church’s victory over the harlot and the beasts. After showing Satan’s agents were defeated, John connects their demise with Satan’s defeat (Rev. 20). This is the binding of Satan. They were his agents of deceit. Being defeated (Rev. 19), he could deceive the nations no longer (Rev. 20).

This venue limits our giving the details of the fight and failure of the Sea Beast, the Land Beast (13:7, 15), and the Harlot (17:5-6). Let John’s words of joy concerning their judgment suffice. “Hallelujah; Salvation, and glory, and power, be-long to our God...he hath avenged the blood of his servants (19:1-2).

Though Satan will renew his attack with other agents, John’s prediction of the future existence and victory of the church is boldly asserted (20:9). Revelation 20 ends with the Devil being “cast into the lake of fire and brimstone” (20:10). Friend and foe alike need to heed Paul’s dire warning against those who seek to harm the sanctuary of God. “If any man destroyeth the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, and such are ye” (1 Cor. 3:17). These are the words to the church at Corinth.

THE BOOKS OF HISTORY

History books verify the church’s indestructibility. Man has tried to destroy God’s spiritual realm of the saved throughout the generations, but without success. At the instigation of the Jews, Rome afflicted the church. With the great fire in Rome, Nero stepped up the state’s persecution. At his death, Rome’s first round of persecution waned. Twenty years later, Diocletian picked up the mantle of devastation; it soon ceased. In AD 303, another Roman Emperor named Diocletian issued an edict to destroy Christians and their

sacred book. Ironically, 25 years later, the new emperor Constantine commissioned Eusebius to prepare 50 copies of the Scriptures at the expense of the government. Voltaire (1694-1778), the famous French philosopher, was a brilliant atheist. He wrote several tracts deriding the Bible. He once made a very bold statement, announcing that within a hundred years the Bible would be a forgotten book. Today, Voltaire is forgotten, and The Book remains on the best-seller list.

While attending the Elk City School of Biblical Studies, we first heard of Dr. Hans Grimm, a German scholar, born in 1899. He wrote a book titled, *Tradition and History of the Early Churches of Christ in Central Europe*. This work contains valuable information regarding various Christian movements in Europe. The information covers several centuries. He recorded the struggles of the decreasing faithful in Europe and Asia. With great disappointment, he observed, “the flame of apostolic faith was about to be put out.” Then, to his delight, in 1955, he discovered the American Restoration Movement. Upon his meeting brethren from America, he wrote these joyous words:

But in the same month I met for the first time in my life a member of the restored churches of Christ of America. What he had to tell me was none other than the faith of my ancestors which I had taught and practiced all my life.... [T]he American Restoration Movement had been totally unknown to us. And now the fact that the Lord had built up his church beyond the Atlantic, just in time, when his last followers in Europe dwindled, hit me like a thunderclap.

The torch did not die out. God had kindled it again and put it on a lamp-stand and it gives light for everybody in the house.

CONCLUSION

Benjamin Franklin was incorrect when he declared, “Nothing is certain except death and taxes.” Based on the bold words of Jesus, the prophets, the historian Luke, and the events of history, we boldly add to these certainties the assurance that the gates of Hades shall never prevail against the church. History also records that individual congregations will fall away. Time and again, Bible schools that we have established, godly educational institutions members have built, and congregations preachers have planted have fallen away.

Do we therefore stop establishing and building? Absolutely not! That is why the church will always exist. Through the preaching of the seed of the kingdom, God has assured all mankind that the body of Christ will continue. Though your voice may be small, never stop preaching. Never lay down the sword of the Spirit. Then, when the light goes out here, it will indeed shine bright over there. Though history has shown us that she will falter here, it has also shown us that it will arise over there. The light of the church may have seemed to be going out again and again. However, she is indestructible. How fortunate we are. We are that church. Let us work to kindle this great flame in the lives of others.

Paul said it best: “*we are* pressed on every side, yet not straitened; perplexed, yet not unto despair; pursued, yet not forsaken; smitten down, yet not destroyed” (2 Cor. 4:8-9). The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it!

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All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

Grimm, Hans. *Tradition and History of the Early Churches of Christ in Central Europe*. Austin, TX: Firm Foundation, 1963.

QUESTIONS

1. What historical event helps to bear out that the church is indestructible?
2. What has mankind produced that is endless?
3. Who won the battle between Jesus and Satan when Jesus was crucified?
4. Besides Jesus, name three prophets who spoke of the endlessness of the church?
5. In the historical account of Acts, what nation was most responsible for seeking the destruction of the church?

THE CHURCH ITS ETERNAL DESTINY

Harrell Davidson

The church and the kingdom are the same institution. Men are adjusted in their thinking to kings who reign, and then another takes their place. The king was not permanent, nor was the kingdom.

In 1 Samuel 8, the Israelites wanted a king so they could be like the nations around them. They selected Saul to be their first king. God permitted that to take place, but David was really God's first chosen king. After David, there would be Solomon and so on. This process went on for many years until the subjects of the kingdom were so sinful that God caused them to go into Babylonian captivity. No kings of Israel survived the captivity, and Israel as a nation was no more.

Isaiah wrote of a kingdom that would begin on a Pentecost day in the future. In fact, about seven hundred years before the new kingdom would begin. He 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 (Isa. 2:2-3).

When "the word of the LORD" began to be preached in Acts 2, it was the fulfillment of the prophecy about which Isaiah wrote. He also wrote about a virgin birth in Isaiah 7:14, which is a clear reference to Christ who would be born in Bethlehem in Judah—not Jerusalem. He would write in Isaiah 9: 6-7:

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 Won-
derful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The ev-
erlasting 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.

About these verses Adam Clarke wrote in part:

This is an illustrious prophecy of the incarnation of Christ, with an enumeration of those characters in which he stands most nearly related to mankind as their Saviour; and of others by which his infinite majesty and Godhead are shown. He shall appear as a child, born of a woman, born as a Jew, under the law, but not in the way of ordinary generation. He is a Son given—the human nature, in which the fulness of the Godhead was to dwell (65).

Indeed, Christ would come in this world to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). He said He would build "my church" (Mat. 16:18), and He died on Calvary, shedding His precious blood that He might purchase it (Acts 20:28). He said that it would be during the lifetime of some living at that time (Mark 9:1). Nathaniel said in John 1:49 that Jesus was "the King of Israel." So, we have a King and a kingdom that began in the first century as the prophets said it would be. Let us examine this kingdom further.

Daniel wrote of a kingdom that would never be destroyed in Daniel 2:44.

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

Notice the phrases *never be destroyed* and *it shall stand for ever*. How different this would be from all other kingdoms that would come and go, being replaced by another one. This King would be the only that would become the rightful King after His death. Christ had to ascend to receive His kingdom.

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

Add to his statement that of our Lord in Luke 19:11-12:

And as they heard these things, he added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear. He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return.

Undoubtedly the people around Jesus were looking for a physical kingdom and crowning Him there at that moment. However, He told of a going away and receiving a kingdom and one day returning. After His death, burial, and resurrection, God gave Him that kingdom with all power or authority. “And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Mat. 28:18). He commanded preaching to every soul on earth so the kingdom could grow to be the everlasting kingdom.

His kingdom is not physical, and maybe this is hard for mankind to comprehend. It was not a political kingdom. He was not a political king like others. His kingdom was not established by force either. His kingdom would be in the mind and hearts of the people. Men needed to learn that this kingdom was on the inside of man in his mind and heart. It demands our thoughts and our wills—our hearts.

The Jews were concerned about physical things, wanting another physical kingdom. They were concerned about temple benefits—something that would appeal to the flesh or the physical aspect of man. They and we need to know that, if one lives for material things, then for sure His kingdom is of this world. Christ said that His kingdom was not of this world in John 18:33-37.

Receiving His kingdom, He gave it to the apostles.

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 (Luke 22:29-30).

Jesus has said earlier, “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (12:32). The day Jesus was born His mission was to be the King over a spiritual kingdom (John 18:37).

His kingdom is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*” (Eph. 2:20). Christ is the chief or corner stone that was rejected by the Jews. Again, Isaiah, writing of this, said:

Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, A tried stone, a precious corner *stone*, a sure foundation: He that believeth shall not make haste (Isa. 28:16).

That kingdom that began some two thousand years ago is eternal and will be given up by the Son to the Father in the resurrection.

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

“Then cometh the end”! *Then* means the point in which God is aiming at. There is a time that God is pointing to, and that will be the return of Christ. We do not know when that will be, but it is the time that God is pointing to. He has that laid out. All the things in the past and things happening now are pointing to that event. To me this is very interesting—that God has so arranged things (planned it) that He has a particular point that everything is moving toward. Every day we

live we are moving in that direction. The important thing is to be ready every day. It could be tomorrow, the next day, or in a thousand years.

There are several things of interest in these verses. The resurrection is the guarantee of all of these things. As surely as the tomb was empty, the resurrection is coming. If you ever wonder if there will be a resurrection, ask yourself the question, was the tomb of Christ empty? If that tomb was empty, then we will be raised. Judgment is also sure. Paul said to those in Athens that God hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world (Acts 17:31). The only way to avoid judgment is to get Christ back in that tomb and Him not be raised. Not only will there be a resurrection, it will guarantee a judgment. There will be a time when grace will end. God's grace is extended to all men today, but there will be a time when the day of grace will be over. Christ, in His mediatorial work, will turn all things back over to God. This means that God's grace is related to time that we have to live here. When He returns, the day of grace is over.

Not only that, this will be the end of Satan's work. Have you ever thought that if Christ was not raised, then Satan has won the day? Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 15:28 is talking about this very thing. If Christ is not raised from the dead, God is not all in all. Another thing to think about is that the struggle of this life will be over. We will have a spiritual body. Paul said that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Never again will a Christian have to struggle and fight against Satan, sin, and evil. All the struggles and trials are gone. The Bible describes this place as one wherein dwelleth righteousness. No sin dwells there. What it must be like to live in a place like that! The resurrection of Christ is vital to the Gospel scheme of redemption. To deny it is to repudiate the whole Gospel.

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QUESTIONS

1. What was the purchase price of the church?
2. How many years before Christ was Isaiah?
3. When was Pentecost?
4. What is another word for the kingdom?
5. Where is the kingdom today?

WHAT'S RIGHT WITH THE CHURCH

Geoff Litke

The world today burns on a dangerous cocktail of consumerism and cynicism. As a result, every person believes he is an expert on whatever arena in which he is speaking, and his expertise usually remains in the negative. Angry political analysis rules the media outlets on both ends of the spectrum of liberalism and conservatism. The online consumer review culture fuels this mentality. Corporate responses to the shifting winds ensure this attitude will flourish. It comes as no surprise that the same mentality plagues religious thinking. The previous era's mega-church movement catered to consumerism.

Today's waning emergent church does the same for a different set of consumers, each confirming that the consumer always knows best. The cumulative effect of this thinking is that everyone knows what is wrong with the church but with very little education about the church.

The same people who fancy themselves experts on what is wrong with the church have little or no understanding on what the church is, its purpose, or Biblical design. Knowing what is right with the church insulates people from the unchecked negativity. Knowing what is right protects the church from efforts to change the glorious plan revealed in God's Word into something which reflects society's cultural whims. This positive thinking about God's design would also protect church members from becoming bitter towards the church when other members fail them or hurt them. The church is perfect, and people are quite imperfect.

Understanding something's value and goodness begins with understanding its designed and intended purpose. The apostle Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus explaining his preaching and said:

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. 3:9-11).

God desired to make His wisdom known. The method God chose to accomplish this desire was unveiling the church for all men to see. This was God's eternal purpose. God devised a plan to save man from sins by providing a perfect sacrifice. This is the unfathomable wisdom which saves man. Those saved people are the redeemed. Those saved people are the evidence of God's goodness and wisdom, not because of what they have done, but because of what God has done (1:1-9).

Many people seek wisdom in all the wrong places when it is displayed all over the earth by the church. This is one reason it is so important for the church to live consistently with God's plans (2:10; 4:1).

One man came to Jesus asking what to do to inherit eternal life. This man had come to the right source. The Lord referred the man back to the written Word. The inquirer wisely responded to Jesus:

And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself (Luke 10:27).

The Lord's response showed several things when He said, "And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live" (10:28). First, eternal life is found along that which is right. Second, the life is found not just in having heavens' design for salvation, but in following or doing it.

When the Lord said the lawyer had answered right (or rightly), the word he used for right was the word ὀρθῶς (*orthos*) from which comes the

English word *orthodoxy*. Sadly, what gets promoted as orthodoxy often opposes the Biblical teaching. Sadder still, today's culture is usually more repulsed by a desire for "orthodoxy" than any doctrine itself. The other part of the English compound word *orthodoxy* comes from is the same root as the word for *doctrine*. Good doctrine brings life and unsound doctrine brings death. What is right with the church? The doctrine of Christ is right with the church. In fact, a church teaching another doctrine ceases to be His church.

Many in the Lord's day were "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Mat. 15:9). Without the right doctrine one cannot rise to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:17). Paul told Timothy concerning the church, the household of God, "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (1 Tim. 4:16). If Timothy did not have the right doctrine, all of his efforts would be a failure. It would not matter what was popular. The time would come when the expert consumers would desire something other than orthodoxy and would find customer sensitive teachers to cater to their particular market inclinations. Paul prophesied about that time saying:

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).

The antidote to this environment is to preach the Word, and to put the brethren in remembrance of sound doctrine (4:1-2; 1 Tim. 4:6).

The apostle John clearly showed the essentially of right doctrine when he 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).

Without the right doctrine there is no fellowship with God.

Only in the church can man find the right fellowship. From its very beginning, the church enjoyed fellowship. On the first day of Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ, the church was established. Those who received the message that day and obeyed received fellowship with the Father through the Son and had joy in fellowship with each other. Consider how Luke records this event in Acts:

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 (Acts 2:42-47).

The right doctrine led to the right fellowship. Their fellowship was not just with one another, but with the Father. Man breaks fellowship with God through sinning (Isa. 59:1-2; Rom. 3:23; 1 John 3:4). The apostle John showed how fellowship comes by the right doctrine, this doctrine brings fellowship with the Father through Christ, and with others who likewise walk in the light and ultimately brings full joy.

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin (1 John 1:3-7).

When churches try to have fellowship with the unsaved and the apostate, they break their fellowship with God (Eph. 5:11).

The church has the right hope. The joy expressed by the disciples on the day of Pentecost came not only from knowing they were saved but understanding what that salvation meant. The apex of Peter's sermon that day spoke of a risen Savior. Peter said:

Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it (Acts 2:22-24).

Peter went on to tell of David's prophecy concluding by saying:

Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses (2:30-32).

The church is a holy people set apart for God's purposes. A recurring theme throughout the Bible is how hope, in particular, sets God's people apart from the world. Those in denominations are like the Gentiles before the church of whom Paul spoke:

That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world (Eph. 2:12).

When the world observes a true confidence in a future resurrection based on the historical event of Christ's resurrection, it makes them question. This is the backdrop of Peter's later statement:

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear (1 Pet. 3:15).

The church lives differently, dies differently, and the world asks "Why?" Peter had previously explained what that meant concerning the hope and holiness connection when he 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: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy (2:9-10).

If the world can see the work of the church, the lives of its members, their determination to live in hope according to the doctrine, and their joy in fellowship, then they too will know what is right with the church.

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All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

QUESTIONS

1. How does the church show the manifold wisdom of God?
2. Do men's failures render God's plan (the church) a failure? Explain.
3. Can a church be faithful with the wrong doctrine? Give one verse.
4. What is the significance of beginning with the resurrection to explain the church?
5. According to the apostle John, where does fellowship with other Christians begin? Explain.

THE CHURCH AND DENOMINATIONALISM

Wayne Blake

INTRODUCTION

While many people are attracted to the good news of the grace of God offered through His Son Jesus Christ, certain questions often linger in their minds. They look around and see so many different denominations and wonder why there are so many, yet each with differing doctrines. They often wonder why there is not any unity among those who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ. They may wonder where the division came from and whether it is possible to be simply a Christian, following Jesus without being a member of a denomination. Some might feel that the differences are not all that great, while some might feel that division is good because it enables people to find a church that suits them personally.

We begin first with defining *denomination*. A *denomination* can be defined as:

A distinct religious body within Christianity, identified by traits such as a name, organization, leadership and doctrine. Individual bodies, however, may use alternative terms to describe themselves, such as church or sometimes fellowship. Divisions between one group and another are defined by authority and doctrine; issues such as the nature of Jesus, the authority of apostolic succession, eschatology, and papal primacy may separate one denomination from another. Groups of denominations—often sharing broadly similar beliefs, practices, and historical ties—are sometimes known as “branches of Christianity” (“Christian”).

In simple terms, a denomination is a group of at least two congregations that are joined together under some governing body; by definition they are *denominated* from all congregations that do not submit to the same authority. Some examples would be: The Roman Catholic Church is a denomination made up of those churches that submit to the pope in Rome; The Eastern Orthodox Church is a denomination made up of those

churches that submit to the patriarch of Constantinople; The Anglican Church of England is a denomination made up of those churches that submit to the archbishop of Canterbury; the Lutheran Church is made up of those churches that submit to the Synod in Missouri (or other Synods); The International Church of Christ is made up of those churches that submit to the Boston Church of Christ. These are just a few of the hundreds of denominations in the religious world today.

As we progress through this discussion, we will determine what is wrong with denominationalism and conclude with what is right with the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

DISCUSSION

First, denominationalism is unscriptural, and it is without Scriptural authority. There is no basis in the Bible for local churches being divided up into various denominational bodies. There is no denomination that can go to the Bible and say, “See that passage? There is our church (denomination)!” In the New Testament, local congregations were independent and self-governing. The organization was limited to the local congregation, with elders (also known as pastors, bishops, overseers, presbyters) appointed to oversee only the congregation of which they were members (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Pet. 5:1-2). The only authority above the local church in the New Testament was Christ and His apostles. Once the church began, apostles were not replaced after their death. Through the Word of God, the authority of Christ and His apostles continues. Individuals, synods, conferences, etc., that presume to usurp authority over local congregations do so without Scriptural authority.

Second, denominationalism is anti-scriptural. Not only is it without Scriptural support, it is contrary to what the Bible teaches. It is contrary to the prayer of Jesus for unity among His be-

lievers (John 17:20-23). It is condemned by Paul in his epistle to the church at Corinth where he wrote that there be no division among believers and that sectarianism is a sign of carnality (1 Cor. 1:10-13; 3:3-4). Denominationalism opposes the efforts of Christ on the cross (Eph. 2:14-16). Jesus died to break down the wall of division as well as reconcile man to God in **one** body. Just as sinning works against the efforts of Christ on the cross, so it is with denominational division.

Third, denominationalism is harmful to the cause of Christ. Jesus knew that unity among His disciples would be demanded so the world may believe (John 17:21). In view of Jesus' words, we should not be surprised when unbelievers are slow to accept the Gospel coming from a divided church. Many people point to the divided condition of those professing to follow Christ. They look to atheists and agnostics that use religious division as an excuse not to believe in God. Those who profess non-Christian religions (such as Islam, Judaism, etc.) will often use denominationalism as a reason not to believe in Christ. Denominationalism has also given support and encouragement to cults like Mormonism who started in reaction to the denominationalism of Joseph Smith's day. Those who call themselves "Jehovah's Witnesses" use religious division to encourage people to follow their strictly-controlled organization.

Following are well-known quotes from those whom denominations now carry their name: From Martin Luther, the leader of the Reformation Movement and the Lutheran Church that now carries his name:

Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.

The first thing I ask is that people should not make use of my name, and should not call themselves Lutherans but Christians. What is Luther? The teaching is not mine. Nor was I crucified for anyone... How did I, poor

stinking bag of maggots that I am, come to the point where people call the children of Christ by my evil name?

From John Wesley, reformation leader, among the Methodists and Weslayans:

Would to God that all the party names and unscriptural phrases and forms which have divided the Christian world were forgot, and that we might all agree to sit down together, as humble, loving disciples, at the feet of our common Master, to hear His word, to imbibe His Spirit, and to transcribe His life in our own! (Watson).

Charles Spurgeon, one of the greatest Baptist preachers 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 endure forever (Hall).

There are many more quotes that can be found of those whom are seen as the *founders* of various denominations. This shows that they realized that denominationalism was sinful and did not want their names associated with the movement.

To this day, the words above have not come to pass, and denominationalism with its division seems to be as strong as ever. All is not lost, because throughout the world more and more people are throwing aside their denominational shackles. They are following Jesus in the freedom of the Gospel. How is this possible?

The Lord's Church in the first century AD

The Lord wants us all to be in His church. A person looking for the truth regarding the New Testament church can find what they are looking for with much study and an open mind. Leaving the denominational shackles behind the Lord wants all to be in His church. The world came into existence around 4004 BC. The first 2500 years man was able to worship and obey God through the Patriarchal Law. At Sinai, 1500 BC, the Mosaic Law was given and the Hebrew (Jewish) people were under that law while the rest of world continued under the Patriarchal Law. At the cross, some 4000 years had transpired, and the Gospel was given to the whole world (Jew

and Gentile), and the Patriarchal and Mosaic dispensations were put away. A new Law was established, which was the Law of Christ, or the Gospel, on Pentecost around AD 33.

The Lord's church was promised by Jesus and was built as was promised (Mat. 16:18). *Church* comes from the Greek word *ekklesia*, which means "a called-out group, an assembly, a congregation." Therefore, Jesus promised to create His own group of people who have been "called."

How does this *calling* take place? According to the apostle Paul, we are called by the Gospel of Christ (2 The. 2:14). On the first Pentecost after the ascension of Christ, we see that by preaching the Gospel Peter "called out" those who were willing to express their faith in Jesus (Acts 2:38-41). Notice that those who gladly responded in faith, repentance, and baptism were "added." To what and by whom were they *added*? We find the answer in verse 47: "Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." The day of Pentecost was the beginning of the Lord's church (His *ekklesia*). This "called-out" assembly or group was created when the Gospel was proclaimed, and people responded to it.

At first, the church only existed in Jerusalem. As the Gospel spread, the people responded to it. Groups of those saved people in various cities met together. Each group became known as a church in the local sense (in contrast to the church "universal" which is made up of all those saved throughout the world). During Paul's first missionary journey, many such churches were established (14:21-23). By simply teaching the Gospel of Christ, a local church was formed when those who obeyed the Gospel joined together in their work and worship.

Though united in Christ, these local churches were independent of any human association or federation of churches. Christ directed them through His inspired apostles, as they taught them how to worship and work together (2:42). Sometimes this teaching by the apostles was done directly, other times they appointed others (1 Cor. 4:17). Just as often, the teaching was done through the epistles or letters written by the

apostles (14:37; 1 Tim. 3:14-15; 2 The. 2:14-15; 3:14).

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, denominations are a new thing brought along by mankind not God. The early church was not a denomination, and faithful men and women in those and modern-day congregations across this land are not members of a denomination. One might ask then, "What is the way out of religious division or denomination?"

Accept the call of the Gospel

Remember, Christ calls us into His *ekklesia* (church) through the Gospel. Therefore, we can begin by obeying the same instructions that Peter gave on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38). Based upon our faith, when we repent of our sins and are baptized for the remission of those sins, we would then receive the same blessings as did the 3000 on that day: **salvation!** By being saved in this manner, we **know** that the Lord truly adds us to His church just as He added them (2:47).

Follow the example of the early Christians

The early Christians continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine (2:42). They joined no other religious organization, and **neither should we!** By being in Christ, we are automatically united with all others who are in Him. As members of the Lord's church, we should study carefully the New Testament description of the church that continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine. This description is found in Acts and in the Epistles which follow it. It is here that we find instruction from the Lord's apostles on how to worship the Lord acceptably, to be scripturally organized as local congregations, and to live and work together as Christians, spreading the Gospel of Christ through word and example.

Since the apostles were guided by the Holy Spirit, we may be sure their instructions were exactly what Jesus wanted them to be! If we duplicate the early churches by following the apostles' instructions, we will simply be called "Christians" (nothing more and nothing less) and we can be certain that the Lord is pleased with us. As Jesus said to His apostles about those who would receive or reject their instructions:

He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me (Luke 10:16).

Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness. And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his

commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak (John 12:44-50).

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QUESTIONS

1. When mankind breaks into organizations that have a central ruler or leadership, what is that called?
2. When we follow just the Bible, we can be just what?
3. Leaders of leading denominations came to what conclusion?
4. Will we be judged in the last day by whether or not we are in harmony with God’s Word?
5. The New Testament church can be replicated from doing what?

THE MILITANT CHURCH

Michael Hatcher

INTRODUCTION

God used many figures in describing the church of Christ: a bride, the household, a family, the body of Christ, etc. One figure that is often overlooked, especially today, is that the church is like an army. *Militant* is defined by Webster as “engaged in warfare or combat: fighting” or as defined in the online dictionary, “vigorously active and aggressive, especially in support of a cause... engaged in warfare; fighting.” Thus, in discussing the militant church, we are discussing the church being the army of Christ.

The marching orders of the church are set forth in the Scriptures:

This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare (1 Tim. 1:18).

Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses (1 Tim. 6:12).

Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 2:3).

I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith (2 Tim. 4:7).

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

While the Bible refers to individual Christians as soldiers (2 Tim. 2:3), it also refers to the church as an army.

And the armies *which were* in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth 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 and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on *his* vesture and on his thigh a name

written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS (Rev. 19:14-16).

As we discuss this subject, I would like for us to view it from both the standpoint of the individual Christian and the church as a whole.

MARKS OF A GREAT ARMY

To be a great army, one must have a great commander-in-chief. The church’s commander-in-chief is the Lord Himself. He is the one who has all authority (Mat. 28:18) and is

Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come (Eph. 1:21).

Every soldier is to lovingly and zealously obey Him without question or hesitation.

There is also the need for great officers who serve under the Commander-in-chief. The church needs great officers carrying out the orders of the Lord (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 3:5) and guarding the flock under their oversight (Acts 20:29-31; Tit. 1:9-11). These men must provide the spiritual nourishment for the flock (1 Pet. 5:2).

If there are not great fighters, then no army can be great. Likewise, the church needs great fighters preaching the Gospel of Christ. Preachers must teach people what they must do and what they must not do. They also have the obligation to rebuke sin and false teachers (including naming names when necessary; 1 Tim. 1:19-20; 2 Tim. 2:16-17) and their false teaching. They must:

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering 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. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry (4:2-5).

There is also the need to have great rank-and-file soldiers to do all kinds of tasks. While the frontline soldiers get the attention, they could not do their job without the work of many others doing their job behind the scene. Thus, in the army of God, God recognizes the importance of each and every member (1 Cor. 12:22-23; Eph. 4:16). Without these workers the church would suffer great losses.

MARKS OF A GREAT SOLDIER

To be a great soldier (as we all need to be), one must first **be in** an army. While it would be possible to perform some of the functions of a soldier without being in an army, the usual connotation of the word would prohibit such. To accomplish great things in warfare takes great teamwork. That means that to be great soldiers we must fight together and not against each other (1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 6:1). This speaks to the unity for which Christ prayed (John 17:20-21) and we are taught to possess (1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:3-6). However, if someone becomes a traitor by teaching false doctrine, we cannot work with or aid that person (Rom. 16:17-18; 2 John 9-11).

So, we must be in the **right** army. We see multitudes who are zealous and who think they are in Christ's army, when they are not. "They have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge" (Rom. 10:1). As such, while they think they are in the army of God, they are actually in the devil's army (2 Cor. 11:13-15; Acts 20:29-31). To be in the right army, one must actually be in the army of Christ. To be in that army, one must obey the Gospel (which means upon hearing God's Word, believing, repenting of his sins, confessing his faith in Christ, and being baptized in water for the remission of his sins). Additionally, he must not leave that army; he must be living a life of faithfulness to God, obeying the commands of his Commander-in-chief.

Not only must one be in the right army, he must **wear the right uniform**. Failure to wear the proper uniform is a serious offense as is not wearing the uniform when one is supposed to be wearing one. As was noted previously, Christians are soldiers in the army of God. However, we are always to be wearing our uniform. The Christian

puts on Christ (Rom. 13:14; Gal. 3:27) and never puts Him off. He is to put on the new man of righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4:24; Phi. 1:11) and live so as he reflects the principles of the Gospel of Christ (1:27). We, as Christian soldiers, are to put on the panoply of God:

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints (Eph. 6:10-18).

Proper training is essential in doing one's job. When one enters the military, he is sent to basic training where they learn the fundamentals that all soldiers must know. It is a period of intensive training so they can be prepared to enter the battle. After basic training, there are specialized schools to learn specific jobs. When one becomes a Christian, he must be trained well. However, ours is a spiritual warfare with just one weapon: "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (6:17). The Bible is the only weapon we possess, and we must be properly trained to wield this spiritual sword effectively. Our weapon is a mighty weapon (2 Cor. 10:3-4; Heb. 4:12). What type of a soldier would a man be if he only had one weapon and did not know how to use that one weapon well? The training we must have comes from a study of and learning of the Scriptures (John 6:45; 2 Tim. 2:15).

No one can be a great soldier if he never goes to the battlefield and **engages in the warfare**—he

never fights. We, as Christian soldiers in the army of Christ, must be on the frontlines of the battle against Satan and all his allies. We need elders who demand strong, bold preaching of the Truth and **all** the Truth (not just some parts of it). Likewise, we need preachers who will not shun to declare the whole council of God (Acts 20:27) and do so with boldness (4:29). We need members who will be supportive of Gospel preachers. Members, however, cannot leave the work to elders and preachers; they must be actively involved in every aspect of the work of the Lord.

Then to be a great soldier one must be **obedient** to the orders of his commander. In an army a soldier is taught to obey his superior and to do so immediately and without question. In the army of God, we are also taught to obey and submit to our Commander-in-chief. "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (Jam. 4:7; see also Mat. 28:19-20; 1 Pet. 5:5-6; etc.). In the conversion process, one must repent. Repentance demands that we stop doing everything that is contrary to the orders of our Commander and start doing everything that our Lord wants us to do—those things He has authorized in His Word.

SOME APPLICATIONS

We need to take the battle to those who do not believe in God: atheists, agnostics, and skeptics. They have literally nothing to offer man, and we have everything to offer. They have no evidence and proof of their nihilistic philosophies, while we have plenty of available evidence for the God of the Bible.

We are in a battle with Satan regarding moral matters. The immorality and ungodliness of our nation is shocking. We not only live in an immoral nation but one that is now amoral. We need all soldiers of Christ (all Christians) to be teaching the truth regarding the basis for and what those morals are. We need to be exposing (Eph. 5:11) the immodest apparel, fornication and adultery, homosexuality, dancing, drinking alcohol, illegal drug use, covetousness, materialism, gambling, impure speech, etc. We need to be out in the fore-

front of "teaching [everyone] that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Tit. 2:12).

We are in a fight with denominationalism and all their various challenges to the one church Jesus built (Mat. 16:18), purchased (Acts 20:28), is head over (Eph. 1:22-23), and which He is going to save (5:23-27). Denominationalism has attacked every aspect of the church of Christ, no matter what it might involve: terms of entrance, worship, work, organization, etc. We need to be fighting against every denomination that exists and showing their errors, along with the truth of God's Word. We need to be taking the battle to the denominations instead of playing footsies with them, as so many are doing today.

We must regain a militant spirit in evangelizing the lost. The Great Commission (Mat. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-47) has been termed the marching orders of the church. Now, we simply seem to open the doors of the building and invite others to come in, but never go out evangelizing. We must restore that attitude of the early church that when "scattered abroad [they] went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4), and then we, like them, might turn the world upside down (17:6).

CONCLUSION

The church, as a whole today, has laid down their sword and tried to make peace with the enemy. Alexander Campbell wrote of Christ:

Hence the Prince of Peace never sheathed the sword of the Spirit while he lived. He drew it on the banks of the Jordan and threw the scabbard away. (41).

Likewise, each and every Christian today needs to do the same thing and stop trying to compromise with Satan and his forces.

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QUESTIONS

1. What are the marks of a great army?
2. What are the marks of a great soldier?
3. Why is the church considered an army?
4. How can a Christian become a great soldier?
5. What must be done to those Christians who do not engage in the battle?

THE CHURCH AND LIBERALISM

Lee Moses

The church of our Lord Jesus Christ, as glorious as it may be, is not without flaws. No, no flaw can be found in its Divine origin, design, or headship. Its flaws are found in its human membership, the “living stones” that comprise the church. When warning of apostasy to come, the apostle Paul had said to Christians, more specifically to elders of the Lord’s church, “Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things” (Acts 20:30). The greatest threats to the church and within the church of recent decades are the “perverse things” sheltered under the umbrella of liberalism.

DEFINING LIBERALISM

Liberalism denotes a denial of the plenary verbal inspiration of Scripture. It denotes a denial of Christ’s virgin birth and other miracles recorded in Scripture. It refers to a diminishing of the significance of sin, the reality and eternity of hell, and the necessity of the blood atonement of Jesus Christ. Liberalism can also pertain to the “change agents,” who seek to reshape the church into something they find more pleasing. Nailing down a definition of liberalism can prove almost as difficult as getting a liberal to tell you precisely what he believes.

Pertinent dictionary definitions of *liberal* include, “Open to new behavior or opinions and willing to discard traditional values” and “(esp. of an interpretation of a law) broadly construed or understood; not strictly literal or exact” (“Liberal” 1006). Amending these specifically to define *spiritual* liberals, the first definition would then read, “Open to new behavior or opinions even when antithetical to Biblical teachings and willing to discard traditional values **even when those values are based on Biblical teachings.**” The second definition would read, “(esp. of an interpretation of **the Bible**) broadly construed or understood; not strictly literal or exact.” Brother David P. Brown observes, “All false doctrines are

either liberal or anti” (4). As the doctrines contrived and promulgated by anti preachers and teachers bind what God has never bound, so the doctrines contrived and promulgated by liberal preachers and teachers loose what God has never loosed.

Liberalism seeks to rob the Scriptures of the authority God has vested in them. This is the central attribute of liberalism. The religion taught and practiced by liberals may bear some resemblances to that of the Bible, but it is not derived from the Bible. Liberals do not approach the Bible as their true source of religion, as they fail to acknowledge the authority inherent in the Bible. Roy Deaver wrote:

Liberalism believes in God, but not in the God of the Bible. Liberalism believes in Christ, but not in the Christ of the Bible. Liberalism believes in inspiration, but not in the inspiration the Bible claims for itself. Liberalism believes in “truth,” but not in “truth” as presented by the Bible (5).

Within liberalism one can find such sub-categories as modernism, ecumenism, and the “change movement”—each of which contain a select number of the liberal doctrines mentioned at the beginning of this section. What they all hold in common is a disregard for and loosening of the Divine authority of the Scriptures.

LIBERALISM’S HISTORY OF RAPID DEVELOPMENT AND DEPARTURE

One can trace liberalism back to the serpent in the Garden of Eden. The serpent denied that God truly meant what He said, which constituted an assault on the authority of God’s Word. Unwitting minions of that ancient serpent have followed his footsteps throughout history. Consider how shortly after receiving the Ten Commandments and agreeing to God’s covenant at Sinai the Israelites lost faith and violated those terms by descending into idolatry (Exo. 32:1-6). It was not long after the glory of the Lord sancti-

fied Israel's tabernacle for worship that the people refused to enter the Promised Land when God commanded them to enter. When God afterward refused them entrance for forty years, they insisted on invading the land of Canaan—when they had no Divine authority to do so (Num. 14).

It never takes long after the introduction of the religion of God to an area before malcontents begin casting doubt on the clear words of the Lord. Mere decades following the introduction of restored New Testament Christianity to the United States, the vast majority of brethren chose to reject Bible authority in favor of such innovations as the missionary society and mechanical musical instruments in worship. The preferred designation at that time was *digressive*, but their mind set was essentially the same as the liberalism of today.

The colleges that once provided the brotherhood with Scripturally knowledgeable preachers became the earliest incubators for liberalism.

A SHAPE-SHIFTING THREAT

One might speculate on where liberalism will go in the future—will significantly more liberal congregations quit calling themselves “churches of Christ”; will they become part of the Christian Church denomination or become another denomination altogether; what new doctrines will they conceive and embrace? It is difficult to know exactly what the liberalism of 20 years from now will be like. Liberals tend to be “wave[s] of the sea driven with the wind and tossed” (Jam. 1:6). Like Proteus of Greek mythology, a liberal can change his shape mid-conversation.

T. S. Eliot astutely observes:

That Liberalism may be a tendency towards something very different from itself, is a possibility in its nature.... It is a movement not so much defined by its end, as by its starting point; away from, rather than toward, something definite (12).

What one writer observed about postmodernism also applies to liberalism:

He is not content to adapt to what he finds [in Scripture]; the postmodernist feels that he must be a change agent. He honestly feels that the traditional church cannot survive

without his expertise and guidance (Sanders 208).

ANGLES OF ATTACK

Liberals have favorite angles of attack they like to take against sound brethren.

You're Outdated

Liberals will call sound brethren “throwbacks,” “mossbacks,” “dinosaurs”; anything to assert their superior relevance. However, when apostasy has occurred, one must go back to the “first works” (Rev. 2:5). The “good way” is still found in the “old paths” (Jer. 6:16). Christians are not called to relevance, they are called to faithfulness.

We Actually Practice Christianity The Way It Used To Be

Liberals want to have it both ways. They claim they are doing something new, exciting, and revolutionary while sound brethren are stuck in the past. At the same time, many liberals claim they are practicing Christianity as intended, while conservatives practice a corrupted, Johnny-come-lately version of Christianity. Speaking of liberalism and fundamentalism within Protestant denominations, and even as he took jabs at the other side, Harvard professor Kirsopp Lake admitted:

It is a mistake often made by educated persons who happen to have but little knowledge of historical theology, to suppose that fundamentalism is a new and strange form of thought. It is nothing of the kind. It is the partial uneducated survival of a theology which was once universally held by all Christians. How many were there, for instance, in Christian churches in the eighteenth century who doubted the infallible inspiration of all Scripture? A few perhaps, but very few. No, the fundamentalist may be wrong, I think he is. But it is we who have departed from the tradition, not he, and I am sorry for the fate of anyone who tries to argue with a fundamentalist on the basis of authority. The Bible and the corpus theologicum of the church are on the fundamentalist's side (qtd. in Gilley 14).

If only the liberals within professed “churches of Christ” would display the same honesty!

You're Unloving And Judgmental

Liberals misuse and abuse select passages of Scripture to attack the Truth and those who love Truth. Select *sugar sticks* include Matthew 7:1, "Judge not, that ye be not judged." Of course, Jesus was not prohibiting making judgments altogether, but specifically **hypocritical** judgments. As He went on to say, once a wayward soul had corrected his own sins, he would be much better equipped to address others' sins (7:3-5). Later in the same sermon, Jesus warned His hearers to "Beware of false prophets...by their fruits ye shall know them" (7:15-20). They were to examine and identify false teachers—this clearly required a judgment to be made. Christ certainly condemned hypocritical judgment and false judgment (John 7:24), but the Christian today who correctly identifies a false teacher does just as Christ instructed. As far as the accusations of being *unloving*; rebuking sin is not unloving (Lev. 19:17; Luke 17:3-4). Neither is insisting on obedience to the commandments of Christ; for Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

WHY OPPOSE LIBERALISM

Faithful Christians must oppose liberalism because liberalism opposes the authority of God's Word, and therefore liberalism opposes God Himself. The psalmist wrote, "I will worship toward thy holy temple, And praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: For thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name" (Psa. 138:2).

Faithful Christians oppose liberalism because liberalism causes churches of Christ to lose their

identity, and to become a denomination (Rev. 2:5). Faithful Christians oppose liberalism because it causes people to lose their souls (Mat. 7:21). They also oppose it because liberalism unopposed has far greater success than when it is opposed.

Sadly, liberalism has had great success because watchmen, particularly the elders of the Lord's church, have neglected their responsibility. It is up to today's faithful to determine, "They shall proceed no further" (2 Tim. 3:9).

CONCLUSION

The church, as God designed it and as Christ rules it, is flawless. Yet, among its *living stones* fundamental flaws have arisen, and liberalism clearly comes of human origin. It can spring up and spread very quickly, shifting shapes with the winds of change. Liberalism is presently assaulting the souls of men, the Word of God, and the bride of Christ. Let faithful Christians arise to oppose this insidious threat!

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QUESTIONS

1. Give a one-sentence definition of liberalism.
2. What are some subcategories of liberalism?
3. What is an early example of liberalism? How is it similar to the liberalism of today?
4. What are some angles of attack liberals take? What are the errors in these attacks?
5. What are some ways to oppose and defeat liberalism?

ARE WE GOING TO TAKE THE BACKBONE OUT OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST?

Bruce Stulting

A Bible class reading was from Daniel 6:3 about Daniel exceeding others because “an excellent spirit *was* in him.” The boy that was asked to read the passage misread it as, “an excellent spine *was* in him.” This is actually a good description of Daniel! Daniel was a brave and courageous servant of God.

One of the so-called Christian graces in 2 Peter 1:5 is *virtue* which is “moral courage.” For our lesson we will call it *backbone*. Christians need to have backbone. God wants us to have that. Backbone is essential for a soldier in battle. This is especially true of the Christian soldier. To “lay hold on eternal life,” one must “fight the good fight of faith” (1 Tim. 6:12). At the end of his life, Paul was able to say, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7).

Spiritual strength includes steadfastness, bravery, faith, and honesty. Such does not come by accident but is deliberately developed. God has no use for cowards. Consider the words of the Hebrews’ writer:

Now the just shall live by faith: but if *any man* draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul (Heb. 10:38-39).

It takes backbone not to be “of them who draw back.”

ARE WE GOING TO TAKE THE BACKBONE OUT OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST?

Present Trends

While this is not true of the entire church, the symptom is widespread and ought to raise an alarm in the minds of all faithful Christians. The fact is, for the most part, sin is being winked at, worldliness is not rebuked, and lukewarmness is prevalent. Pride is becoming more evident in

many members especially among preachers and elders. It is apparent that many are seeking the popularity of men rather than the favor of God. Sunday morning Christians seem to be the fad of the day, and Gospel meetings are becoming weak gestures. There seems to be a *ministry* for everything except soul winning. This results in much activity, but very little spiritual growth. Efforts are being made to change our style of preaching, remodel the Gospel, and *modernize* the church.

Contributing Factors

(1) Maybe success! It is easy to outgrow our plea and forget from whence we have come. (2) Perhaps less opposition is the cause. Once we had to fight hard in defense of the truth. Often, we were challenged to defend our teaching, and there were many debates. Now, debates are few and far between. (3) Because new converts have not been indoctrinated, the church has been filled with members who do not know the restoration movement. Paul instructed Timothy:

Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee (1 Tim. 4:16).

(4) Many have been influenced by denominationalism and have accepted their compromising attitude toward doctrine and morality. (5) Shift in the focus of preaching. Preaching that was once hard and demanding has become soft and apologetic. Doctrinal preaching has been replaced with pep rallies where doctrine is hardly if ever heard. The trend is to turn away from so-called *negative* preaching, and now we have largely *positive* sermons where sin is hardly ever mentioned. It appears that preaching that *offends* anyone is unacceptable. The “politically correctness” of the world has invaded the Lord’s church. Among other things, these are contributing fac-

tors that result in taking the backbone out of the church of Christ.

WHAT DOES GOD EXPECT?

Scriptures on Firmness

The faithful Christian is required to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). For this cause, Paul was “set for the defence of the gospel” (Phi. 1:17). To ready himself for battle, the Christian soldier must put on his armor. Paul especially emphasized:

Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Eph. 6:16-17).

When we find those in error, we must “rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith” (Tit. 1:13). As good stewards, we must keep that which is committed to our trust (1 Tim. 6:20). Paul warned:

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).

Truth is Fixed, Unalterable, and Unchanging

The truth in the above passages is everlasting and cannot be altered to fit into a changing world. Jesus said:

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

In his revelation, John said:

And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works (Rev. 20:12).

Those who abandon the Scriptures abandon all hope of salvation. James warns:

Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is en-

mity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God (Jam. 4:4).

In Hebrews, we are warned:

For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries (Heb. 10:26-27).

EFFORTS ARE BEING MADE TO MODERNIZE OUR PREACHING AND HUMANIZE THE CHURCH

There has been much said recently about *balanced* preaching. This is just a remake of the old, “Don’t be so negative!” of days gone by. However, we need to remember that God’s Word is often negative. For instance, eight of the Ten Commandments are negative (Exo. 20). Paul told Timothy to reprove, rebuke, and exhort which is two-thirds negative (2 Tim. 4:2). We cannot stand for something without standing against something. We cannot love God without hating evil (Psa. 97:10). The Psalmist said, “Therefore I esteem all *thy* precepts *concerning* all *things to be* right; *And* I hate every false way” (119:128). Because some refuse to stand for anything, they fall for everything.

Then there are those who say, “Just preach the Bible and let everyone alone.” If this were followed, there are parts of the Bible we could not preach. For instance: (1) Genesis 1:1 is out because it would offend the atheist. (2) Exodus 20:3 is out because it would offend the heathen. (3) Hebrews 11:6 is out because it offends the universalist. (4) Hebrews 10:25 is out because it would offend some of my brethren.

We are told that firmness is not in keeping with the spirit of Christ. However, Jesus was very firm in His preaching (Mat. 23). Furthermore, His preaching often offended His hearers. In response to the preaching of Jesus, “many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him” (John 6:66). Jesus did not apologize or soften His message. Rather, He said to the twelve, “Will ye also go away?” (6:67). Jesus condemned the Scribes and Pharisees for offering lip service

to God, which rendered their worship vain (Mat. 15:8-9): “Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?” (15:12). Rather than compromising for the sake of numbers, Jesus warned, “Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch” (15:13-14). There is no place for a watered-down Gospel.

WAYS IN WHICH WE ARE TAKING THE BACKBONE OUT OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

Legalizing Sin Takes the Backbone Out of the Church of Christ!

In recent years legislation has been passed to legalize various immoral actions. The legalization of alcohol, marijuana, abortion, same-sex marriage, no fault divorce, etc., does not nullify the sinfulness of these acts. Has God’s Word changed in all these years? Man-made laws do not alter the truth of God’s Word. Nor does it change the way God looks upon sin. “For ever, O LORD, Thy word is settled in heaven” (Psa. 119:89). Always remember that sin is missing the mark and God is the one who sets the mark. Regardless of the laws that man may dream up, it will not change the fact that sin is still sin. Our approval or disapproval of an action ultimately means nothing. God is the one who will decide what is sinful through the standard of the Bible (John 12:48).

Following the Opinion of the Majority Takes the Backbone Out of the Church of Christ.

Look at how many people accept premarital sex, but that still does not make it right (1 Cor. 6:18; Heb. 13:4). A surprising number of people are beginning to accept homosexuality. Poll numbers accepting it as a valid *lifestyle* are rising. But the Word of God plainly condemns such behavior (1 Cor. 6:9-10). *Effeminate* means “men who have made themselves like women and become the passive partner in a homosexual relationship.”

These are just two examples of what happens when people compromise for the sake of the ma-

ajority. However, we must never “follow a multitude to *do* evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest *judgment*” (Exo. 23:2). Not only are those who commit such sins condemned, but also those who support sinful behavior (Rom. 1:32).

When We Change the Name of Sin, We Take the Backbone Out of the Church of Christ.

Look at how society changes the names of sins to take away the negative social connotation. Murder of unborn babies becomes abortion or termination. The Bible repeatedly speaks of life beginning in the womb at conception (Job 31:15; Ecc. 11:5; Isa. 44:2, 24; Jer. 1:5; Luke 1:41-45). This clearly demonstrates that abortion is the murder of someone that has been internally formed by God, not the simple termination of an inanimate “fetus” (Psa. 139:13).

Fornication and adultery becomes a love affair, making love, having sex. We have already seen that the New Testament condemns fornication between married and unmarried persons. Homosexuality becomes gay, alternate lifestyle, life choice. Homosexuals refer to “life partners” but the Bible says, “Abusers of themselves with mankind,” “reprobate,” “against nature,” and “sodomites.”

Alcoholism becomes a disease or simply a problem. Simply put, changing the names of sin makes it less offensive, and that is exactly what the world desires. Whatever we choose to call it, it is still sin. No matter what the name, it still influences us for evil.

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! (Isa. 5:20).

When We Make Excuses for Sin, We Take the Backbone Out of the Church of Christ.

In Genesis, sin entered the world. If you look closely at the account, you will notice that Adam blamed Eve and God, while Eve blamed the serpent (Gen. 3:12-13). With the first sin, came the first excuse. We try everything to explain away

our sin. Every sin man can think of has been blamed on a bad childhood or abuse.

Although there are some things that can tempt people to commit evil, it is still sin and cannot be excused. For example, what about the man who marries and divorces five times because he said he was molested as a child? What about the person who divorces for the cause of spousal abuse but not for fornication? What about the person who is a drug addict because he wants to escape the memories of abuse? What about a couple who says, “We are really in love,” or “We are engaged,” so they commit fornication?

I am not trying to be harsh, critical, or unloving, but offering some excuse for our sin is not going to get us out of it. We are held accountable for our sins, and that is that. We must be zealous and repent (Rev. 3:19).

When We Make Allowances for Some Sinners, We are taking the Backbone Out of the Church of Christ.

For some reason unknown to me, we have a terrible habit of excusing sin based on who is committing it. We see congregations where the preacher or the elders are in sin, but no one does anything because of the position those men hold (1 Tim. 5:20).

If the apostles or Jesus Christ saw someone in sin, you had better believe that they did not excuse someone because of his position. Consider how many times Jesus condemned those in power above Him, or consider how many times Paul had the opportunity to condemn sin in gov-

ernors or kings (Mat. 16:21-23; Acts 24:25; Gal. 2:11-14).

We absolutely cannot allow ourselves to be carried away from the condemnation of sin by the position of others. I do not care if it is your mother, father, or someone you deeply respect; if he is in sin, he needs rebuking (Jam. 2:9).

CONCLUSION

We must learn from the past. Apostasy soon came upon the early church just as it was foretold in prophecy (1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 The. 2:3-4). Over the last one hundred plus years, digression has developed because we have forgotten the motto, “Speak where the Bible speaks; be silent where the Bible is silent.” Remember this principle of life: What has happened can happen again! Apostasy has happened; it can happen again.

It is this writer’s hope and prayer that this lesson will encourage us to put the backbone back into the church of Christ. We must rally around the cross of Christ and defend it against all attacks. To do so takes backbone. Without it we are lost.¹

ENDNOTE

¹ Much of the lesson was gleaned from a sermon by the same name found in Leroy Brownlow’s book of sermons titled “Sermons You Can Preach.” The man who converted my wife and me, Roger Barron, gave this book to me over 30 years ago. It is one of the first books to be placed in my library and is still yielding fruit (Brownlow Publishing Company, Inc., Fort Worth, TX, 1958).

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All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the meaning of *backbone* as used in this lesson?
2. Why is backbone in the church important?
3. What factors contribute to taking the backbone out of the church of Christ?
4. Describe the preaching of Jesus and the apostles.
5. What are some ways that we are taking the backbone out of the church of Christ, and can you name others?

RESOLVING CONFLICTS IN THE CHURCH

Gene Hill

INTRODUCTION

The title for this discussion defines the area of concern to be that of the church and relations among the members of local congregations and all of those who make up the universal body of Christ (Acts 2:47; Gal. 6:10). We have a spiritual connection with Christ and with all those who have that same relationship (1 John 1:5-10). That relationship, both horizontal and vertical, is based on walking in the light.

My *American Heritage Dictionary* defines *conflict* as “a state of open fighting; warfare; and a state of disagreement and disharmony: clash.” *Resolve* means: “6. to find a solution to: solve.... 8. To bring to a usually successful conclusion: resolve a conflict.” What we have then is that the reason for any fighting, disagreement, or disharmony has been identified and a resolution has been effected, bringing the conflict to an end. In short, either harmony has been restored or established for the first time.

In discussing this topic, it is important that we also understand **who** we are talking about. When we say *the church*, we refer solely to that religious institution prophesied of by Isaiah (Isa. 2:1-4; 1 Tim. 3:15), promised by Christ (Mat. 16:18), first preached by the apostles (Acts 2:14ff), and in which Christ placed those that heard and gladly received and obeyed the Gospel (2:36-41, 47). Jesus gave us a parable that deals with those who responded to the Gospel and how they continued to respond in living out their lives (Mat. 13:18-23; Luke 8:11-15). This parable provides some background in helping us to know and understand why people do the things they do.

THE ISSUE

Conflicts may arise over things that are incidental in nature such as whether we should meet in an upper chamber because an early congregation did (Acts 20:8), whether one day should be esteemed above another if at all (Rom. 14:5),

or whether one or many cups ought to be used in partaking of the fruit of the vine during the Lord’s supper (Mat. 26:26-30). Some examples of a doctrinal nature that would arise could be concerns such as how many living spouses one may have at any given time with the surrounding circumstances (19:3-9; Mark 6:17-18; 10:1-12), the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship assemblies (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), and who would be a proper candidate for baptism if baptism is even necessary at all (Mark 16:16). The lists of things that cause conflict are endless. So, what is to be done when conflicts arise on these or other matters that may and will come along to destroy congregational peace?

REASONS FOR CONFLICT

The parables of the sower (Mat. 13:18-23; Luke 8:11-15) and of the fishnet (Mat. 13:47-51) provide insight into the hearts of members of the kingdom. We have church members with hearts that are shallow in knowledge and spiritual desire, hearts that are worldly, and hearts that are good who are sincerely desiring to achieve spiritual heights. Jesus further informs us that some church members are wicked (13:49). Verification of these charges is seen in the accounts of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), Simon the sorcerer (8:9-24), and the Corinthian fornicator along with those enabling him (1 Cor. 5).

There were church members who actively and purposefully opposed Paul through their preaching (Phi. 1:15-20). Congregational leaders were not above examination of their actions (Acts 20:26-31). Relatively minor personal issues likewise need to be resolved (Phi. 4:2).

THINGS NECESSARY FOR RESOLUTION

A common authority must be accepted by all parties. Whereas this ought to be obvious, it needs to be kept before us at all times. The Bible is the revealed mind of God to His creation—man (John 14:26; 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:7-13). This

revelation provides all things that pertains unto life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). It is the one thing upon which all can be of the same mind and same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10; Phi. 3:16).

A common desire to resolve issues is also crucial to conflict resolution. Spiritually serious minds seek God's kingdom and His righteousness above all other concerns (Mat. 6:33; Rom. 3:21; 10:3; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phi. 3:9; 2 Pet. 1:1). When it comes to the righteousness of God that is by faith in Christ, there is simply no room for personal opinions or desires. It takes a spirituality that recognizes Christ's law to resolve any issue facing a congregation (1 Cor. 14:37).

We must also possess a sense of personal responsibility. Whatever anybody else is doing, I am personally responsible and accountable for what I do, think, and say. I am the one to seek a solution for any issues arising between me and anyone else, whether or not I am the one responsible for the breach in fellowship (Mat. 5:23-26; 18:15-20). Whenever anyone approaches me with an issue, real or imagined, I am to actively participate in finding a true solution to the problem.

PROCESSES

In Matthew 5:21-23, Jesus discusses the mind set and thinking which leads one to commit, or to be willing to commit, grievous sins against a brother. His point was that such things need to be resolved in context of the action itself. That context is individual and personal. If, while bringing my gift to the altar, I recall that I have committed such sins against my brother, I am to immediately resolve these things (5:23-24). Should I not take the initiative, then I am liable for the consequences of unresolved sin (5:25-26)?

Jesus also addresses the responsibilities of the offended brother, what his responsibilities are to the offender, and how he ought to proceed to resolve the issue (18:15-20). Observe that he is not to pout, to complain, or to gossip. He is to be proactive and personally go to the offender and specifically inform him exactly what has been done and how to resolve it. If there is no repen-

tance forthcoming, the offended brother is to return with witnesses to verify the efforts put forth. The next step, if there is no repentance (18:17), is to tell the church, and if the offender will not hear the church, he is to be treated as a heathen and publican (18:17), which is effectively to have fellowship withdrawn from him (Rom. 16:17; 2 Cor. 2:6-7).

The reason for such activities is to win back the soul of the brother guilty of sinful behavior (Luke 17:3-4). It is the pulling back of a soul that is on fire from the flames, a soul that is on fire (Jude 23). Our hope is to be able to extend forgiveness to the penitent (2 Cor. 2:6-7).

What are we to do with public affronts to sound doctrine? (Tit. 1:9-11; 2:1). Paul confronted Peter to his face, in public, for his transgression and wrote it up (Gal. 2:11-16). He told Timothy about his dealings with Hymenaeus, Alexander, and Philetus who were making shipwreck of their own faith and that of others in their false teaching concerning the resurrection as if it were past (1 Tim. 1:18-20; 2 Tim. 2:17-18). Demas, a close association and fellow worker of the apostle, was named publicly for his falling away (Col. 1:14; Phm. 24; 2 Tim. 4:10).

The disorderly are to be withdrawn from, the lazy are not to be fed, the disobedient are to be noted, and we are not to have company with the disobedient. Yet, all of these are to be admonished (2 The. 3:6-15). Dividers and offenders are to be identified and avoided by the faithful (Rom. 16:17). Brethren that are fornicators, covetous, idolaters, railers, drunkards, extortioners are not to even to be eaten with (1 Cor. 5:11). Rather, they are to be delivered to Satan and purged from among the faithful (5:1-7).

The faithful are to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness (Eph. 5:11). All of the previous examples have been dealing with the behavior of individuals, but the principle applies to congregations of God's people. By what stretch of the imagination are we to not associate with the immoral individual lest he spiritually contaminates us (1 Cor. 5:6), and, yet, when it comes to a congregation of brethren, other congregations are powerless to spiritually protect

themselves from immorality and from having their reputation for spiritual purity besmirched? However, it is readily apparent from even a casual perusal of Scripture that there is no account in which one congregation ever marked and avoided another congregation, withdrawing association from them. It is the case that the principles concerning dealing with personal affronts and the teaching of doctrinal error applies across the board to any interaction among brethren. How could it be otherwise?

What if the church in Pergamos did not purge out the Balaamites or those practicing Nicolaitanism? Could a church on the outskirts of Pergamos continue to fellowship them after the Lord fought against them? (Rev. 2:12-17). Five of the seven Asian churches were warned to repent. If they did not and the Lord removed their candlestick, as He said He would do to the Ephesian church (2:5), could the previous fellowship continue with the Lord's approval? Who wants

to walk with those walking in darkness and out of fellowship with the Lord (1 John 1:6-10; Eph. 5:10)?

Conflicts have their origin in the mind of the flesh (2:1-3). This mind is carnal and opposed to true spirituality (Rom. 8:5-8; 1 Cor. 3:1-3). This carnal mind is only interested in things of the world and is opposed to things of the spirit (1 John 2:3-5, 15-17). Paul informs us plainly what true Biblical spirituality is: "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37). It is only when we recognize and abide in the commandments of the Lord that we have any hope of unity.

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QUESTIONS

1. What characteristics does the relationship based on walking in the light have?
2. What parable gives us insights into why people do the things they do?
3. Describe the heart conditions of church members and which parable teaches this?
4. What must first be accepted by all parties to conflict before resolution can take place?
5. Who bears responsibility in resolving conflict?

THE CHURCH WALKING BEFORE GOD

Gene Hill

INTRODUCTION

It is not within the scope of this chapter to discuss the prophetic nature of the church other than to note prophecy regarding it in Isaiah 2:1-4. Please see Paul's use of prophetic language writing to Timothy in discussing behavior of a Christian (1 Tim. 3:15). Nor will we be discussing church government, an important element in identifying the church founded by Christ, other than seeing that a congregation properly constituted will be overseen and led by faithful, scripturally qualified men (3:1-7), assisted in that effort by other men likewise qualified through Scripture to serve as deacons (3:8-13).

It is proper for us to define our terms when discussing things spiritual in nature. The church, as a body, is indeed a thing spiritual in nature. "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). In Acts 2:47 we find, "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." While writing to Timothy, Paul says:

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).

Furthermore, Paul tells us that God made Christ head over all things to the church, which is His body (Eph. 1:22-23). Then he reverses that order in addressing the Colossians that Christ is head of the body, the church (Col. 1:18). Especially regarding the nature of the church, Paul reveals that there is only one that makes up this kind of organization. "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling" (Eph. 4:4). In Ephesians 4:4-6 there is a series of ones. If there is more than one of any of these seven, then it would be reasonable to believe there could be more than one of any or all of the rest.

The religious institution we read about upon the pages of the New Testament is singular in nature. This is the case because the Lord promised to build it, added only the saved and all the saved to it, and Paul gave specific instructions to Timothy how he was to behave while in it.

MEMBERSHIP IN THE CHURCH

Jesus is able to establish entrance requirements for church membership (Heb. 5:8-9) since He is head over all things to the church (1:22-23), approved of God (Acts 2:22), with assurances given to us in that God raised Him from the dead (17:31). Jesus said that those who are properly taught and who have learned will come to Him (John 6:44-45; Isa. 54:13; Jer. 31:33-34; Joel 3:16-17). Such ones then validate their learning in believing that Jesus is the Messiah (John 8:12, 24; Isa. 9:2; 49:6). Believing in Jesus as the Messiah will lead one to repentance (Luke 13:3), and then to confessing Him as Lord and Savior (Mat. 10:32-33; Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:9-10). Since faith is a consequence of hearing and believing truth, trust results and leads us to being baptized to obtain the remission of sins (Mark 16:16). Sins are purged by blood (Heb. 9:21-22; 10:9-10, 22), and Jesus shed His blood for this purpose (Mat. 26:28). We contact His blood in baptism (Acts 22:16; Rev. 1:5; 7:14; Eph. 5:25-27), receiving sanctification (1 Pet. 1:22-23; Heb. 9:21; 10:22; 13:12) and imputed righteousness (Jam. 2:20-24). This is the new birth (1 Pet. 1:23) that puts us into the kingdom of God (John 3:3-5).

Those souls whom the Lord added to the church on the day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2:14-47, did what Jesus commanded to receive by grace His blessing of salvation. It is these people we discuss in this lesson of "The Church Walking Before God" (1 John 1:6-10).

IT IS A WALK OF FAITH

Scripture tells us, "No man hath seen God at any time" (John 1:18). Yet we can know that "he

is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb. 11:6). We can know this because, “The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament sheweth his handywork” (Psa. 19:1). God has not left Himself without witness for the earnest seeker of truth to find Him, for whom he seeks and his heart yearns (Mat. 5:44-45; Acts 17:14; John 5:39).

Once it is understood that God exists, the Bible is His final revelation to man (1 Cor 2:7-13; 13:4-8), and that obedience to His Gospel takes place as discussed, the process of maturing in the faith begins in earnest. Our search for deeper Biblical truth begins and never ends until we close our eyes in death, exhale the last time, and our spirit departs this tabernacle of flesh (2 Pet. 1:12-14).

WALKING BEFORE GOD

With the prophesied change in covenants having been fulfilled (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:6-13; Col. 2:14), the church is now the Israel of God (Rom. 2:28-29; 9:6-8). As our text points out, spiritual Israel’s best interests will be realized when we do those things God has commanded and leave all else undone (2 Cor. 5:7; Mat. 15:8-9).

Hear what God told Jeremiah:

For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you (Jer. 7:22-23).

This same lesson applies to God’s people today just as much as it applied unto Israel of old. Jesus says as much in Matthew 6:33.

This walk is bounded by the Word of God (Col. 3:17). It is characterized as walking in the light (1 John 1:6-7). To walk in the light, Scripturally speaking, we will be using God’s Word as our sole guide in faith, work, and worship. In walking in the light, we are fulfilling God’s will for His children (Psa. 119:105, 130). The **only** sure way of knowing we are pleasing to God is

to do all of that and only that contained in the Scriptures (1 John 2:3; Psa. 119:172; Mat. 3:15; Eph. 2:9-10).

In walking before God, the church accepts the mind set of Christ as He addressed Paul on the road to Damascus. Hear the Lord Himself:

And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and *from* the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, *and* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me (Acts 26:15-18).

The world is lost in sin and bound for eternal damnation unless their current walk is diverted from the way called *broad*. Whereas Jesus went about doing good (10:38), and we are to do good unto all (Gal. 6:10), the work assigned to the church is not welfare and benevolence but rather evangelism (Mat. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:44-49).

All that the local congregation does or accomplishes is done through the hands of its individual members. Each member, by virtue of individual sanctification (1 Pet 1:20-23; Heb. 13:12), is a member of the royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9-10) tasked with praise of God (Heb. 13:15) and obligated to a life worthy of a sanctified priest (1 Pet. 2:11-19). Jesus likens His followers to salt, light, a city, and a light set on a candlestick. The illustrations have the purpose of God being glorified (Mat. 5:13-16). The stated purpose of creation and faithful disciples of Christ is to glorify and honor God and from which activities God receives pleasure (Rev. 4:11). The only lifestyle befitting those professing to be followers of Christ is one that models their Lord and Master, Jesus. Christians are to be in the forefront of those seeking to live godly lives.

Our behavior is to be impeccable. Faithful Christians heed Paul’s directions in 1 Thessalo-

nians 4:1-7 and refrain from fornication. Men are treated respectfully and women in purity (1 Tim. 5:1-2). Marriage is an honorable relationship designed by God as the sole outlet for sexual needs (1 Cor. 7:1-5; Mat. 19:1-9; Gen. 2:21-24).

Our speech is to be seasoned with salt used only to edify (Col. 4:6; 3:16). Corrupt communication is never to flow over our tongue, pass our lips, much less to be considered in the first place (Eph. 4:29; Mat. 12:34-37; Jer. 17:9). Paul urges Titus to speak only sound doctrine which cannot be condemned causing those that are contrary to be ashamed.

TITUS 2:1, 8

When a congregation of God's people walk before God, they are walking in a way and manner which glorifies God, saves their own souls, those that are interested in the truth, and at the same time will bring persecution from the world.

“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). Walking before God brings strife into families (Luke 12:49-53), disrupts society (Acts 19:23-41), yet brings peace with God (Eph. 2:11-22).

Look to the writings of the prophet Jeremiah. See how not walking in the old paths condemned the nation of Israel.

Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where *is* the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk *therein* (Jer. 6:16).

May we ever seek the face of Jehovah, the Lord God Almighty with a tender heart and a listening ear.

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All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the true nature of the church?
2. What will those that are properly taught and learned of God do regarding Jesus? What Scripture is cited as teaching this?
3. What passages were cited to defend the proposition that we can know that God exists?
4. Jesus appeared to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus and gave him a mission. What was that mission and what passage is given?
5. What is to be the characteristic of our speech, and how is our speech to be used? List Scripture used in support of this.

THREE DIVINE INSTITUTIONS

Danny Douglas

The “Three Divine Institutions” are: The Home (Gen. 2:18-24; Eph. 5:23-25; 6:1-4; Mat. 19:4-6), The Church (Mat. 16:18; Eph. 3:21; 5:25), and The Civil Government (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-14; Tit. 3:1). They are Divine because God has instituted all three of them.

THE HOME

The first institution which God established is the home. God declared that He would make “an help meet” for Adam, the first man (Gen. 2:18). God brought all the living creatures before Adam to see what he would call them, but still “there was not found an help meet for him” (2:20). Jehovah God had a better plan in mind and knew exactly what Adam needed in creating Eve, the perfect “help meet” for Adam:

And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man (2:21-22).

God created man in His own image, both male and female, which could be said of no other living creature.

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them (1:26-27).

Jesus reminded the Jews how that God had ordained marriage between the man and woman in the beginning. He also warned them that this Divine work is not to be tampered with!

And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made *them* at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and

they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder (Mat. 19:4-6).

Furthermore, God blessed this arrangement: “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Gen. 1:28). Only the woman was suitable for a conjugal relationship with the man. A beast or another man would not do! Those who promote *marriage* between two males or two females, are committing perversion and an abomination against God (Rom. 1:26-27; Jude 7)!

The home is the place where God has ordained that children are to be reproduced—and not out of wedlock (Heb. 13:4; Mat. 19:4-6; Gen. 1:28). Children are to be loved and cared for (Tit. 2:4-5; 1 Tim. 5:8). They are to honor father and mother and to be brought up in the Lord’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;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:1-4; cf. 2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15-17; Deu. 6:4-7; Luke 2:52).

THE CHURCH

God’s plan provided for a way for people to be saved from sin and to be a part of the spiritual house of Christ called the church (1 Pet. 2:5; 1 Tim. 3:15). This plan was not an afterthought on God’s part but was in the eternal plan and purpose of God, as stated by Paul:

To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly *places* might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose

which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:10-11).

It is in the church that God is glorified: “Unto him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (3:21).

The salvation of man and the establishment of the church came at a great price—the sacrifice of God’s only begotten Son and the shedding of His “precious blood” (1 Pet. 1:18-19; John 3:16; 1 John 3:16; 4:9-10; Eph. 1:7; Rom. 5:9). Hence, we read of the “church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). Christ is “the head of the body, the church” (Col. 1:18), and He is the Savior of the body (Eph. 5:23). He “loved the church, and gave himself for it” (5:25). Jesus Christ is the Owner and the Builder of the church, as He stated: “upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Mat. 16:18). This promise was fulfilled on the first Pentecost Day, ten days after the ascension of Christ (Acts 1:1-11), when the Holy Spirit brought the saving message of God down to sinful man, and miraculously guided the apostles to preach the Gospel (2:1-4, 14-41; cf. 1 Pet. 1:12; Rom. 1:16). Those who obey the Gospel are saved and added by Christ to the church (Acts 2:38-47; Mark 16:15-16). “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47), but those who disobey Christ will be eternally lost (2 The. 1:7-9).

The fact that in the one body of Christ, the church, both Jew and Gentile have been reconciled to God through Christ by the cross is affirmed by Paul: “And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby” (Eph. 2:16; cf. 4:4).

The *church* (*ekklesia* in Greek, the called out), which Christ established (Mat. 16:18), is made up of those who have come out of the world and into Christ and been delivered by God “from the power of darkness” and translated “into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col. 1:13). The body of Christ is comprised of true worshipers, who worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). They live to glorify God and obey Christ (Luke 9:23;

Mat. 5:16; 28:18-20; 1 Pet. 2:21). As Jesus said: “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15; cf. 14:21-23).

CIVIL GOVERNMENT

Paul describes civil government as the “powers that be” and declares that they are “ordained of God” (Rom. 13:1). Those who resist these powers resist the ordinance of God and will bring upon themselves damnation: “Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation” (13:2).

Peter wrote in this vein: “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well” (1 Pet. 2:13-14). Paul, again, states this principle to Titus: “Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work” (Tit. 3:1). The only exception would be when civil law would have citizens to act contrary to the law of God. God, the highest authority, must always be obeyed. “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

IMPORTANT LESSONS

Paul declares that civil authority is for the welfare of man (cf. Rom. 13:3-6). “For he is the minister of God to thee for good.” This is also true of the home and of the church. Since the all-wise God is the Designer of all three institutions, we can be assured that they have been established for the welfare of mankind. For example, God has established the home and family for the happiness and well-being of each person (Gen. 2:18; Psa. 68:5-6; Eph. 5:20-6:4; 1 Cor. 7:1-2). Membership in the Lord’s church also provides many blessings: love, discipline, exhortation, edification, fellowship, comfort, instruction, oversight, warning, correction, and many other blessings, which help the Christian to remain faithful and go to heaven (Heb. 3:13; 12:12-15; 1 The. 5:11-14; 2 The. 3:6-15; Acts 2:42-47; 20:28-32; 1 Pet. 1:22; 4:8; Eph. 2:19-22).

Second, each institution which God has ordained is sufficient to fulfill the purpose for which God gave it. Disregard for any of these three God-established institutions is disobedience to God Himself, as Paul affirmed to the Roman Christians (Rom. 13:1-2). Each institution plays its own distinctive role in God's plan, and therefore no one of these institutions should seek to supersede the role of another, nor the authority inherent therein.

Hence, disobedience to the authorities established within each institution constitutes disobedience to Divine Authority, such as disobedience in the home of the wife toward the husband (Eph. 5:23-24; Col. 3:18; 1 Cor. 11:3); or of the children toward their parents (Col. 3:20; Eph. 6:20); or disobedience toward the eldership by members of the local church, including such by any of the elders (Heb. 13:17; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-3; 1 Tim. 5:19-21). Here are some examples which indicate ignorance and/or disregard for the Three Divine Institutions.

1. The Crossroads Movement incited its young adherents to rebel against their parents when unnecessary to do so (Acts 5:29)—to bring them under total control of their leaders.

2. In his debate with Guy N. Woods, Roy Cogdill argued that homes for orphans and homes for the aged are “contrary to the scriptures when built and maintained by the churches of Christ” (18). Brother Woods pointed out that brother Cogdill would have the church to take over the functions of the home, and that we “cannot confuse these distinct realms” (35). Brother Woods also pointed out the Scriptural authorization to have a home for children who have lost a home, with adults in charge of the children *en loco parentis* (in the place of a parent), based on the principle of guardianship stated in Galatians 4:1-2 (32). Indeed, God's Word authorizes the support of a home for destitute widows and for the fatherless (1 Tim. 5:16; Jam. 1:27). “A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, *Is* God in his holy habitation. God setteth the solitary in families: He bringeth out those which are bound with chains: But the rebellious dwell in a dry *land*” (Psa. 68:5-6).

3. It is sinful to disobey civil law, when unnecessary, such as failure to pay taxes, disrespect toward the police, disregard for traffic laws, etc. (Mat. 22:16-21). Christians are not to use their liberty in Christ as a “cloak of wickedness” (1 Pet. 2:16—ASV) to excuse them from obedience to the law of Christ or to civil law (1 Cor. 9:21; 1 John 3:4; Rom. 13:1-2).

4. Another example is the doctrine of the re-evaluation and re-affirmation of elders. There is no Scriptural authority for removing a Scripturally qualified elder from the eldership by a certain percentage of popular votes among the members (Col. 3:17; Mat. 28:18; Heb. 13:17).

5. The existence of para-church organizations, established by men to do the work which God ordained the church to do, disrespects God's Divine Institution, the church. For instance, the very existence of the American Missionary Society (AMS) implies that men have designed a more effective way to teach the lost than God's design for evangelism through the “church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15; cf. Acts 8:4; 13:1-5).

6. Members of the church who are negligent in their service to Christ and His blood-bought body, the church, exemplify a disdain for God's plan. Some examples are: forsaking the assembling of the saints (Heb. 10:25), failure to give as one has been prospered (1 Cor. 16:2), allowing earthly affairs to interfere with the “work of the Lord” (15:58), or failing in any way to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Mat. 6:33).

7. A father who refuses to work and provide for his own family (1 Tim. 5:8; 2 The. 3:10; Eph. 4:28) or who fails to provide spiritual leadership and instruction, including the important role that God has granted unto him (5:25-29; 6:4) does not appreciate the God-ordained home.

8. A woman who fails to love her husband and her children, and to care for her God-given responsibilities in the home, does not respect or appreciate her home and family and the distinct and important role that God has given her (Tit. 2:4-5; Eph. 5:23-24, 33).

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All Scripture references are taken from the *King James Version*, unless otherwise indicated.

The Cogdill-Woods Debate. Guardian of Truth Foundation, 1958.

QUESTIONS

1. How might a member of the church seek to use his liberty in Christ as a “cloak of wickedness” (1 Pet. 2:16) to excuse himself from obedience to God or the government?
2. What are some other examples in the church or outside of the church which manifest a disregard for any of the three Divine institutions: the home, the church, and the civil government?
3. Have some brethren allowed or encouraged the church to take over the role of parents and the home by way of “Youth Directors” or “Youth Programs” within the local congregation? Can you provide how that this is the case?
4. How does Roman Catholicism or Islam show a disdain for the God-ordained institution of civil government by their efforts to enforce their laws through civil law?
5. Can it be seen that disrespect for Divine authority toward civil law runs parallel to disrespect for Divine authority in the home and in the church? If so, how is this the case?

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