

Fulton County Gospel News

"The Churches of Christ Salute You"

Publication No. 211780

Second Class Postage Paid at Mammoth Spring, Ark.

Volume 16

Mammoth Spring, Arkansas 72554

November, 1982

No. 3

What's Right In The Lord's Church Today?

By Mike Pace

What a joy, a thrill, to discover a body of people who want to be simply what the New Testament describes as Christians. There is a special thrill in learning of the priesthood of all believers, the absence of a "clergy" class of members and to experience a simple, scriptural assembly in which Christ is given the honor due him and his word is clearly proclaimed. It is ennobling to learn of the efforts made to return to the basic religion of our Lord, accepting only his new covenant as the rule of faith and practice.

Many can identify with the statements above. I have also had the pleasure of seeing many come to Christ and express similar sentiments. The Lord's ways and our determination to follow him are quite impressive and inspiring. There is true joy in teaching others the gospel and leading them into relationship with our Master as a part of the body of Christ.

Unfortunately, I seldom read this positive outlook towards Christ's church. More and more I am deluged with "what's wrong" and the "we are drifting" mentality that reduces Christianity to duty only, gives a pessimistic view of the body of Christ and predicts dire circumstances akin to those envisioned by those without hope in this world -- those outside Christ. The Bible presents no such grim view of Christ's church. We need to recapture the spirit, the vision, the enthusiasm and the beauty described in the inspired pages. It is good for us to speak more and more of what's *right* in the body of Christ. I gain great value in considering some very familiar passages of scripture:

1) MATTHEW 16:18 -- look at the promise that nothing shall prevail against that church Christ built. Nothing has prevailed with success. In spite of dark days, regardless of persecution, even in view of departures and division, the Lord's church is still here on earth. It has been and will be until Jesus comes. Our Lord has kept, keeps and will keep his promise.

Wherever and whenever the seed of his precious word is sown in productive soil of open hearts, the church of Christ is continuing. Enemies of the cross have *not* and will *not* succeed in destroying that body of believers in Christ that is called, biblically, the church.

2) COLOSSIANS 1:18 -- look at the relationship described. Christ is the head of his church. He is in control. He has not lost any of his power. Every promise made in scripture relative to his people is guaranteed by the one who is head of this church. Christ, the head, is yet a part of the Godhead and very much is he God. Those who predict the death of Christ's body underestimate the head of this body. We serve a *living* saviour.

3) I CORINTHIANS 12:12-13 -- look at what is said concerning each Christian. All who obey the gospel are members of this body of Christ. This idea is thrilling because it reminds me that I am related to Christ and also to others who are in this relationship with him. When I view the body of Christ as a relationship rather than as an institution, I am more likely to realize the greatness of this concept.

4) I TIMOTHY 3:14-15 -- look at the responsibility and the blessing. Christ's people are the supporters of the truth. Into our hands the gospel is given. We are now hearing more and doing more to uphold that truth than ever. Christians rejoice in the fact that there are more congregations and more proclaimers of the gospel in 1980 than ever before. In our various publications we read of more being done now than ever in areas such as Christian growth, family life, youth ministries, campus ministries, benevolent works, evangelism and many, many other good endeavors. I do not personally get involved in all things, but I do rejoice in seeing the people of God, the church of our Lord Jesus Christ, awakening to greater opportunities and to new challenges. We can rejoice that the truth is being supported.

5) MATTHEW 28:18-20 -- look at the task and see how we are doing. We all know that there is much to do. Dedicated Christians realize the difficulty in keeping up with the population growth even in

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Is It Thunder Or The Voice Of God

By Bruce Wadzeck

Recently, I was asked to speak on the objective evidences that support the authenticity of the Bible at a state university campus setting. The Christian students brought numerous skeptical friends. The crowd, that evening, numbered nearly three hundred college students. In preparation for my lecture, I began to reflect on what were the major obstacles to faith and what the scriptures pointed to on this subject.

My understanding of faith is that it is

not blind trust or exhaustive knowledge. Instead, faith is **sufficient** objective evidence to warrant the conclusion. But why is the same evidence sufficient to some and not to others. I think the real issue is often not a matter of evidence, but of **predisposition**. I think this issue is seen clearest in the Biblical account in Matthew, chapter twelve.

Controversy began to center on Jesus' attitude toward the traditional rules and

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FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS

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EDITOR Mike Pace
Publication No. 211780

Do You Have On A Vail?

By Doyle Williams

Webster tells us that a vail is, "Something that covers, screens, or conceals." "A mask, or a disguise."

Even though material vails are not prevalent to any extent today, I believe that many people are confused in the matter of religion because they are wearing a vail - not a material vail, but a religious vail. This vail keeps them from understanding the Scriptures.

One of these vails kept the Jews from believing and receiving Christ. It was the vail of ignorance. In Romans 10:1-3 Paul states they were "ignorant of God's righteousness," and this caused them to establish their own righteousness. They had a knowledge of the Scriptures, but the vail of ignorance caused them to miss their true meaning. This is one of the prominent veils of this present time. Many people of this day know their Bible very well, but are ignorant of its meaning. This causes them to set up their own systems of religion - their own commandments, ideas and opinions. In doing these things they are not submitting to God. They are like the Israelites that rejected the Lord. They are wearing a religious vail.

There are other religious vails of this age, one of which is: the inability to separate the Old Testament from the New Testament laws. This is not altogether a modern problem because the converted Jews had the same trouble. Paul told of this vail in writing to the church in Corinth when he said, "But their minds were blinded; for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart." (2 Cor. 3:14-15).

Many people are still wearing this same vail today. They have been led to believe that the law of Moses is binding today. They do not understand that the old law was annulled or fulfilled on the cross of Christ. They have forgotten, or do not know that Paul said Christ blotted "out the hand writing of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." (Col. 2:14). If they are Gentiles they have forgotten they were without the Law and strangers from the promise of the old law. Hear Paul when he wrote to the church at Ephesus: "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: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." This vail blinds them and they cannot understand, even though they were Christians, if they seek to be saved by the Old Testament law, they have fallen from the grace of God. Paul said, writing to the church at Galatia, "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." (Gal. 5:4). If you want to become a Christian and remain a Christian, go to the law of Christ and not to the law of the Old Testament. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." (2 Cor.5:17).

There is also a vail of stubbornness. Many people would, no doubt, obey the Lord if it were not for stubbornness. They know they are wrong and they have been convinced of the truth, but they will not obey it. Our Lord knew such people while here on earth. He said to them, "And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." (Jno. 5:40). They could have obeyed the Lord and come to Him, but they were too stubborn.

Many Christians that would not think of missing the assembly on the first day of the week, I fear, are still wearing this vail of stubbornness. They have worn it so long, until they have closed their eyes and stopped their ears to truths and testimony from God that would reveal them to be walking in disobedience. In nature they have become like a mule I once owned. You could get along with him fine if you did not bother his ears. They

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WHAT'S RIGHT IN THE LORD'S CHURCH TODAY?

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most communities. In 1980 the church of our Christ has done well. Improvement and increase are needed, but so is rejoicing in the good being done. Our ministries by radio and television have come a long way in terms both of quality and in terms of audience. Much of our mission work is of a more productive nature than in prior times. Various efforts to evangelize such as in campaigns are experiencing greater response than formerly known. Local efforts to equip members to evangelize are improving. Many formerly inactive congregations have been "reborn" in terms of outlook and activity that is productive. Better tools are being developed for use in teaching others of Christ. **Much Is Right in the Lord's Church Today.**

This is not a suggestion that we ignore dangers that are genuine. There is always a need to be alert to false teaching, to the allure of worldliness and to the discord contrary to the New Testament. However, dangers need not turn us into prophets of doom. We, members of Christ's body, need a renewed sense of what is right and good in the church today. We need rejoicing in the truth that Paul said is a characteristic of the love we should develop (I Cor. 13). There is much to do; there is much being done. There is growth to be made; there is growth already made. We are the redeemed, ransomed, forgiven, cleansed, sanctified people of God when we are a part of Christ's church. We have a Saviour, a Father, a King, a Comforter and a coming Christ we serve. Let us rejoice; talk up the church; talk up our relationship with Christ; believe he is a triumphant Lord and speak often of what is *right* in the Lord's church today.

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are like the snake that has been blinded by winter's hibernation. They strike at everything that disturbs them. They have long ago forgotten that the gospel of Christ was designed to change them and not to please them. They are blind to everything but their own selfish desires. The Lord describes them like this: "For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them." (Matt. 13:15).

The next veil I wish to mention is the veil of darkness. This veil is pulled over the Christian's face by hatred in his heart. This is a deceptive veil. Men will even dare say they are doing right while hating a brother. John tells us such men do not know where they are going. They are lost and do, not know it. If such men cannot be convicted of their lost condition, they are gone forever. When men are blinded by hatred, and that toward their brethren, it blinds them to everything but themselves. Their own selfwilled desires gives them an ego that will destroy the church or anyone that gets in their way. Jude describes them thusly: "These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lust; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage." (Jude 16).

Do you have a veil over your face? There are many of them, and we have mentioned only a few. Let us remove every veil from our hearts that would conceal our view of the pure unadulterated truth from heaven and obey it from the heart.

IS IT THUNDER?

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regulations concerning the Sabbath. Jesus confronted the issue head-on by healing a man with a withered hand while attending a synagogue service on the Sabbath. Then a blind and dumb demoniac was healed by Jesus. The objective evidence of these two miraculous healings were overwhelming. The Pharisees couldn't deny the healing, but they wanted to quibble over the source. They said Jesus did the miracles by the power of Beelzebub. The illogic of such a situation was apparent, and Jesus brought the logical absurdity of such a view to their attention. He pointed out that a Kingdom opposing itself can't stand; their viewpoint had Satan fighting Satan. The only other logical alternative was that Jesus cast out

Satan by the power of God. Then Jesus asked them by whom their sons cast out demons and how come they accepted one objective exorcism as of God and an identical one as Satanic. Jesus further reasoned that to burglarize a strong man, you had better be strong enough to subdue and bind him. Jesus was plundering Satan's Kingdom by the only power greater, which was the Lord's. The logic and objective evidence was certainly **sufficient** to produce faith in the observers, but some continued to disbelieve and oppose Jesus.

The real issue behind much unbelief, then and now, is addressed in the latter part of chapter twelve in Matthew. Jesus pointed out that you can tell the nature of a tree by its fruit. "You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks." (vs. 34) The real issue was the condition of the unbelievers heart. Some didn't want to believe in a Messiah who responded to the established religious order like Jesus did. The **predisposition** of our hearts causes the evidence to be insufficient, when we don't want to believe.

A person once told me that if God wanted to tell him anything he could speak to him, personally. He saw no use in a second-hand encounter with God through a book like the Bible. An incident in the Bible points up the fallacy of such a view. As Jesus was nearing the reality of the crucifixion, an account is recorded in John, chapter twelve.

"Now is my soul troubled; And what shall it say? Father, save me from this hour; but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father glorify thy name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it and I will glorify it again." The crowd standing by heard it and said it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine." (John 12:27-31)

God spoke clearly in the hearing of a crowd of average people. Most thought it had thundered while a few speculated the source was an angel. Isn't it incredible that Jesus said the voice wasn't for his hearing, but theirs, and yet none of them correctly identified the voice of God. If God had chosen to deliver his message, personally, to every individual; rather than objectively in the recorded flow of human history, many would only hear thunder! If you heard a voice speak out of the blue, how could you be sure it was God? That is why God chose the medium of human history and written accounts

for the preservation of his message.

Since seeing, first hand, a miracle of Jesus or hearing, first hand, the voice of God will not insure the faith of a person, what is the basis of real faith? After the resurrection of Jesus, he appeared to all the disciples except Thomas. When they reported this event to Thomas, he remained skeptical and said he would never believe until he experienced the resurrected Jesus, first hand. Such an encounter occurred eight days later and Thomas was led to say, "My Lord and my God."

Jesus said to him, "Have you believed you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe. Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe . . ." (John 20:29-31a)

True faith is the result of credible witnesses' testimony. The veracity of the Bible writers can be historically and socially tested. Their record is sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith. A person with a 'heart' problem won't receive the evidence, no matter how overwhelming. If I want desperately to be the boss of my own life, then no amount of evidence will convince me of the Lordship of Jesus. The issue, then and now, doesn't lie with the evidence, but the investigator's heart.

Would Jesus Cleanse the Temple Again?

By Gary Workman

On the Monday before Jesus' crucifixion he entered into "the temple of God" (Matt. 21:12) where he found sacrificial animals for sale. He then physically ejected the buyers, sellers and moneychangers and threw their possessions to the floor. This second cleansing of the temple was preceded by a similar action three years earlier, prompted by his zeal for the Lord's house (John 2:13-18).

What was it that so outraged the Lord? The answer is clear -- it was their perversion of God's purpose for the temple. That temple was designed to be "a house of prayer" (Isa. 56:7). But by turning it into "a house of merchandise" (John 2:16) they, in effect, made it "a den of robbers" (Matt. 21:13)! And God himself was their victim (Jer. 7:8-11).

The buying and selling and money-changing was not wrong in itself, but the temple was *not the place to do it*. They failed "to make a separation between the sanctuary and the profane (common) place" (Ezek. 42:20). But Jesus would not even allow anyone to carry a container through the temple (Mark 11:16). Their usage of the temple was conven-

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ient, and even helpful in providing for worship, but it was wrong!

In like manner, more and more congregations today are profaning the current "house of God, which is the church" (I Tim. 3:15), that spiritual temple which must not be desecrated (I Cor. 3:16). We speak not of what someone might do in the meeting-house, but of a perversion of the church's rightful *purpose* and *work*.

The church is to carry on with the unfinished work of Christ (John 14:12). His mission was to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10), and that must be our mission, too (John 17:18). We are a special people called for a special purpose (I Pet. 2:9-10), a spiritual house commanded to do spiritual work (vs. 5). And just as Jesus carried out his mission in three ways - preaching, teaching and healing (Matt. 9:35), so *all church work* must likewise be limited to evangelism, edification (including worship), and benevolence. The church is authorized to work in *no other areas*. But these are enough.

Our preachers need to dust off those sermons of yesteryear that are not used much nowadays and teach with renewed fervor about the authority of the Scriptures and their application to the church's work. And elders need to firmly insist to a sometimes uninformed membership that the church has no business dabbling in the secular pursuits of politics or playrooms. The Spirit-anointed work of Jesus (Luke 4:18-19) is also that which was given to the church (Rom. 12:6-8). And we must not be diverted from our task.

There is a biblical distinction between the action of Christian individuals and that of the church, itself (I Tim. 5:16). This is because there is a difference between what is God's and what is the government's (Matt. 22:21) or an individual's. Everything ultimately belongs to God, but he chooses to give to us (Acts 14:17, Jas. 1:17). Ananias' money was "his own" until he gave it back to the Lord (Acts 5:4). Such failure to distinguish between the secular and the sacred caused the Corinthians to pervert the Lord's Supper (I Cor. 11:20-22, 34).

Remember that Jesus' kingdom is "not of this world" (John 18:36) and must not be improperly entangled in "the affairs of this life" (2 Tim. 2:4). The church is a divine organism with a two-fold trust: to guard the truth (I Tim. 3:15) and proclaim it to all men (Eph. 3:8-9). This was God's "eternal purpose" for the church (vs. 10-11), and we must not violate its glory (vs. 21). Let us not, therefore, rob God by profaning its mission.

If Jesus were here on earth today, would he cleanse his temple again?

How to Become a Christian

The most important question ever asked is: "*What must I do to be saved?*" (Acts 16:30). Then, the **HOW** become equally as important. Notice the step by step process. First, we must have faith in the Author and Finisher of our faith, Jesus Christ. (Heb. 12:2). This faith comes by the hearing of the word of God. (Rom. 10:17). "*But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*" (Heb. 11:6). With the belief and trust that Jesus is the Redeemer, we must repent of sins. "*And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.*" (Acts 17:30). In repentance, we turn from sin, **STOP** serving Satan and **START** serving the Lord. (Matt 3:8, Luke 13:

3). With this new attitude we are ready to confess our faith, *That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*" (Rom. 10:9-10). Read Matthew 10:32-33. Acknowledging our faith, repentance and confession, the last step into Christ is baptism. "*For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*" (Gal. 3:27). Read Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38. Now that our past sins have been forgiven, the Lord has added us to His church and we are Christians. (Acts 2:47; Acts 11:26).

BECOME A CHRISTIAN