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Is The Church Important?

By Harold Turner

We live in a society where there seems to be a very low estimate placed upon the church. Even among many of the people belonging to a church, the idea seems to be that the church is not very important. Many people hold the view that one can be saved, live a Christian life, and go to heaven apart from being a member of any church. Generally these people do believe that after one has been saved he should join some church with whom he may work and worship, but that such is not compulsory. Because of this view, the church has almost altogether become associated with the idea of denominationalism.

Is the church important to our relationship with God? Can one be saved, live the Christian life, and go to heaven apart from membership in any church? Is the church nothing more than a man-made denomination? These are questions that must be correctly answered before one can properly evaluate the importance of the church.

The word 'church' is derived from two combined Greek words - 'ek' meaning, out of, and 'klesis' meaning, a calling. These words combined are 'ekklesia', meaning, called out. This word is used in two ways in the New Testament: it is used in reference to the whole company of the redeemed, the company of which Christ said, "I will build my church," Matt. 16:18, and it is used with reference to the local body of Christians, 1 Cor. 1:2.

In his statement, "I will build my church," Jesus indicates some things regarding the importance of the church. We notice that he refers to this as "My church." In this Jesus makes claim of ownership. When one considers the price that Christ paid for his church, he is made to realize more, its value. In Acts 20:28 we are told that Christ purchased the church with "His own blood." And in Eph. 5:25 we are told that "Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it." It was the church for which Jesus died, and the membership is redeemed by his precious blood. In view of this, how could any person consider the church unimportant?

There is also importance attached to the statement, "I will build" my church. Only Christ places the members in his church. There is no reference or inference in the New Testament that one may join

Christ's church. In Acts 2:47 we learn that "The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." Too, in 1 Cor. 12:18, where the church is pictured as Christ's body (verses 12-27), we are told, "But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him." The Bible never makes a distinction between the saved and the church. The church is the saved; those who have been called out of the world of sin.

Is the church important to our relationship with God? We have already seen that the Lord adds to the church such as should be saved, but now let's look at Ephesians 2:16. Here we are told, "And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross..." Both Jews and Gentiles are reconciled unto God in one body. This one body is the church (Eph. 1:22-23, 5:23, Col. 1:18, 1 Cor. 12:27). To reconcile is to change from enmity to friendship. From this we conclude that the church is as important as our friendship with God. Outside the church we are enemies with God, while in the church we are reconciled with Him.

Can one be saved, live a Christian life, and go to heaven apart from being a member of any church? As we have already seen, one cannot be saved outside Christ's church, for "The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." One may be saved, live a Christian life, and go to heaven apart from membership in any denomination, but not so with the Lord's church.

Denominational bodies exist apart from Scriptural authority, and in fact, their existence is in conflict with the Bible teaching. Each denominational body has distinctive doctrines, practices, by-laws, and creeds, names, forms of government, patterns of worship, and terms of membership. The Bible demands unity of all believers in Christ. In 1 Cor. 1:10 the Bible states, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." Does this sound like God approves of denominationalism? To these same people Paul wrote, in 1 Cor. 3:3, "For whereas there is among

(Continued on Page 2)

Beginning At Jerusalem

After Jesus had conquered the grave and before he had ascended to the Father's right hand, he said unto his apostles; "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead on the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem." (Luke 24:46, 47)

"Beginning from Jerusalem!" By this expression our attention is arrested. The city of Jerusalem was the place of many beginnings, of highly important beginnings. At Jerusalem the disciples began their work under the great commission which the Lord had given them. At Jerusalem the cardinal doctrine of repentance and remission of sins in Jesus' name began to be proclaimed. At Jerusalem the administration of the Holy Spirit was inaugurated. At Jerusalem believing penitents began to be baptized unto the remission of their sins. At Jerusalem the church of the Lord was born, with the first Pentecost after the resurrection as its birthday. At Jerusalem the same church began the incomparable campaign of preaching the gospel of life and love to the benighted millions of earth. At Jerusalem Jesus began his spiritual reign as King which, praise God, continues unto our day and will continue till he shall have abolished all rule authority and power, till he has put all enemies beneath his feet. (1 Cor. 15:24-25)

The marvelous work set in motion by the Jerusalem church was continued throughout the period of time covered in the book of Acts. The apostles of the Lamb became his witnesses, not only in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, but also unto the uttermost parts of the earth. Thousands upon thousands heard the story of redeeming love and yielded to its gentle sway.

The practical lesson is obvious. Let us go back to Jerusalem for our pattern, our inspiration, the basis of our operation. He who stops this side of Jerusalem, stops too soon; he who goes beyond Jerusalem, goes too far. When men deviate from the ancient order of things, let us be bold to remind them that "in the beginning it was not so." If "in the beginning it was not so," it should not be so now. As it was "in the beginning," so may it be now and unto the end.

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EDITORS: Erwin Cowen and Harrold Turner.

Is the Church Important? (Cont.)

you . . . divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?" As Jesus prayed for his apostles, he also prayed for the church, saying, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." (John 17:20-21) Denominationalism exists in direct conflict with this prayer of our Lord.

Let me ask some questions just for thought. Did Christ give us a perfect pattern for His church? If so, are the denominational creeds and by-laws an improvement upon what Christ gave? Too, are denominational churches an improvement to the church that Christ built? If not, why do they exist? Is Christ divided? If not, can the church be His body and be divided?

The church that Jesus built, and purchased with his own blood is the most important institution on the face of this earth. There is no salvation, living a Christian life, or going to heaven apart from being a faithful member of His church. The Bible is the only rule of faith and practice that you need to guide you. From it you can learn how to become a member in Christ's church, how to worship God acceptably, how to live and serve in the Christian life. Christ gave us a perfect pattern, why would anyone want to accept anything other than this? You can be just a Christian, nothing more or less, if you will accept the Bible as your only guide. Don't let some man, or group of men, dictate your religious life, let Jesus be your only guide, for he alone is "The way, the truth, and the life, and no man can come unto the Father but by him."

If It Is Refused It Is No Pardon

By David Crawford

Many strange cases have been tried in the courts of law across our great land. Several "Cops and robbers" series which are seen on television are based upon actual cases. One only has to watch a few of these to see the unusual and odd cases courts are frequently faced with.

Surely one of the strangest cases ever ruled upon in American History occurred in the year 1829. A man by the name of George Wilson had been condemned to die. However, when Wilson was offered the pardon, he said, "I don't want a pardon; I refuse to accept it." Chief Justice, John Marshall, had the difficult task of ruling on this case. This was his ruling: "A pardon is a paper, the value of which depends upon its acceptance by the parties implicated . . . If it is refused it is no pardon." So in spite of Jackson's generous offer, George Wilson was executed by hanging.

Certainly the majority of people would consider George Wilson a foolish man indeed. Satan truly described the vast majority of mankind when he said to God, "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life." (Job 2:4) And yet the same people who would regard Wilson's act as rash and inexcusable, to say the very least, are rejecting a greater pardon offered to a world guilty of sin and condemned to die. That pardon is the precious blood of Jesus Christ, but it too, must be accepted otherwise it is no pardon.

We accept God's pardon by believing in Christ (John 8:24), by repenting (determining to turn from) all our sins (Acts 17:30), by confessing the glorious name of Christ (Rom. 10:9-10), and by being buried in water for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), and then by living a godly and faithful Christian life (Rev. 2:10, Titus 2:11-14).

The chief Justice in heaven has also ruled; "A pardon's value depends upon its acceptance by the parties implicated . . . if it is refused it is no pardon."

"The aim of the child of God should not be the attainment of 'broadness' of mind, or of 'narrowness of mind', but the mind of Christ."

"A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones." Prov. 14:30.

"In all labour there is profit: but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury." Prov. 14:23.

God's Word Gives Warning

By Lavern Stewart

Vivid language is employed to picture man's state who dies in his sins. It is said of those gathered out of Christ's kingdom, who offend and do iniquity "And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." (Matt. 13:31-43) Again in Rev. 20:15, "And if any was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire." This place of punishment is spoken of by Mark (Mark 9:43) as "Hell", and then in explanation he says, "Into fire that never shall be quenched."

The duration of punishment for the wicked will be as long as the duration of life for the righteous. In Matt. 25:46, the Bible states, "And these shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life." According to Rev. 20:10, the torment in this lake of fire is "Day and night for ever and ever."

Some have claimed that the wicked are just burned up and cease to exist, but to say "Punishment" is to say "Conscious" suffering. Note Rom. 2, which shows that God will render to the disobedient: Indignation, wrath, tribulation, and anguish." Tribulation means suffering, and anguish means extreme pain. It would be foolish to talk about punishing something that is not alive. One might throw a stick into the fire and burn it up; but he could not punish or torment the stick because it has no feeling. That one who does not serve the Lord will die in his sins (John 8:21, 24), and be separated from the Lord and heaven — this in itself would be punishment; but this is not all that will happen to him: because the passage cited teaches that he will endure pain eternally.

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"Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins." Prov. 10:12.

The Right Way

By Leslie Leonard

"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." Proverbs 14:12.

The religious institutions commonly referred to as Christian are divided into many ways with each one claiming to be the only "way". Obviously some are not of "the way" since there is such a wide variety of beliefs and practices; but it is not our place to judge since God has reserved that unto himself.

In the above text, Solomon said, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man..." We could discuss this verse and probably come up with several interpretations as to what is "The way that seemeth right unto man" and never agree; but it is not necessary to identify the way that seemeth right. All that we need to do is identify the right way, then we will be able to avoid the way that "seemeth right."

Almost everyone will agree that God's way is the only safe way. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6) Our task is not to decide which is the right way versus the wrong way, or even which way seemeth right, but which way is God's way, and this means determining which way is set forth in the Scriptures.

It seems obvious that there is a peculiar way, or a specific way, that is God's way. To say that there is a specific way implies that there is something that must be done before one can be in that way. We are forced to accept the idea that there is a way that is God's way, and a way wherein one is not doing what God requires. Our task is to go to the Scriptures, since they are the only reliable source of information, and try to determine exactly what is God's way. Or, to put it another way: what we have to do to avoid the ways of death and enter into life.

Almost everyone will agree that God requires belief and repentance. However, a study of the Scriptures should lead us to the conclusion that belief is more than simply agreeing that something must be right, and that repentance involves more than simply being sorry for our past mistakes. The belief required in the Scriptures is not just accepting the fact of God's existence, but is a belief in all that God has said; and if we believe what God has said, we will do whatever he requires of us without questioning it.

All examples of believing people in the Scriptures, are of people who put their full trust in God and submitted to obey him, even though they may not have understood why he required certain

things of them. (See the example of Abraham offering his son Isaac, Genesis 22, etc.) A refusal to have done what God asked would have indicated a lack of faith, or the questioning of His right to require something of them. So a believing person will obey God.

You may be wondering, "What about our love for God." Well, the same thing is true. If we really love God, we will do whatever he asks. Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commandments." (John 14:15) So we learn that faith and love go hand in hand, both requiring obedience.

One who loves and believes in God will want to repent. Repentance simply means that he will want to quit rebelling against God and live as God requires. Repentance is an act motivated both by faith and love. One can neither love God or have faith in Him without repenting. Hence, we can see that the right way demands belief in God and repentance from our sins.

But this is not all that God requires of us. We also learn that we must confess our faith in Jesus before men (Matt. 10:32, Rom. 10: 9-10.) We also learn that we are to be baptized. Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved..." (Mark 16:16) His spokesman, the apostle Peter, said, "Repent and be baptized every one of you..." (Acts 2:38) The apostle Paul said that we are "Baptized into Christ." (Gal. 3:27, Rom. 6:3) So baptism puts one into Christ, and Christ is the way. So baptism puts one into the way. We have learned that God requires us to believe (and love) Him. This belief leads us to repent, confess, and be baptized. We are then in the right way when we do these things. And we can know this because God has told us through his word that this is the way.

But what about the "Way that seemeth right?" Well, if the above things are required in order for one to be in the right way, then to do less than this, although it may seem right to us, is the way of death. If it seems to us that only believing, or only loving God, or only doing good, or even only believing, repenting, and confessing is right, we are in the way of death. We cannot be in God's way unless we do the things that he requires of us to enter His way; and only God's way is safe.

"The way of the Lord is strength to the upright: but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity." Prov. 10:29.

"The tongue of the just is as choice silver: the heart of the wicked is little worth." Prov. 10:20.

How Does One Get Into Christ?

By Richard England

In a previous lesson we showed the importance of our being in Christ. There being no salvation outside Christ, makes our being in Christ of greatest importance. But, how does one get into Christ? Surely we all want and need to know the answer to this.

God has revealed the wonderful message of Jesus Christ. He commissioned that this gospel be preached to "Every creature." (Mark 16:15) To refuse to believe this message is to be damned (Mark 16:16). But, to those who believe it, it is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16).

Occasionally there are those who do not understand that the word 'faith', which is a noun, may refer to the single act of belief, or may also be used to refer to the entire system of Christianity, as in Jude 3 and Gal. 3:23. By failing to understand this, they read a passage which connects faith or belief to salvation, and think they have the entire revelation of God about salvation, and claim that we are saved by, or get into Christ by "Faith only." Such is not the teaching of the Bible.

Without repentance we will perish (Luke 13:3). God has commanded all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). Repentance is no unimportant matter; it is "Unto life" (Acts 11:18). This being true, "Faith only" is not a wholesome doctrine. It falls short of what God requires of man.

"With the mouth confession is made unto salvation." (Rom. 10:10) If we do not confess Jesus before men, He will not confess us before the Father in heaven (Matt. 10:32-33).

In doing these things, or any other commands of the gospel, we are not performing works which will merit, or cause God to owe us salvation. If it was possible for a law of works to provide eternal life for man, it would have been by the law, which God gave to Israel; the Old Testament (Gal. 3:21). But, in that the law could not do this, it was necessary for the faith to be revealed in Christ.

All who are children of God are such "By faith." But where? IN Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26). When these heard "The faith" and believed it, and determined to live better, where they already IN Christ by virtue of having heard, believed, and repented? No! When they had progressed this far, they were then ready to enter INTO Christ, or PUT HIM ON, by baptism (Gal. 3:27). Notice this text

(Continued on Page 4)

The Road To Apostasy - Is It Being Paved?

By James Knight

One of the greatest dangers facing the church has always been that of apostasy. I am sure that you have heard it said many times that apostasy is just one generation away. This is true since all that one generation has to do is fail to pass the truth on to the next.

The Bible has a great deal to say about apostasy, and many warnings were given to the Christians in the first century. In Acts 20:28-30 Paul warned the elders of the church in Ephesus to "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of yourselves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears." He also warned Timothy of an impending apostasy that would come in the last days (1 Tim. 4:1-4, 2 Tim. 4:1-4).

Apostasy began early in the first century, and in the centuries that followed it became fullgrown. Soon the church of our Lord had turned her back upon him who died to bring her into existence.

The way for this apostasy was paved when men began to reject the authority of the Scripture, and to make changes in the doctrine taught in the word of God. This is easily seen as one reads religious history of the past.

Brethren, is the way being paved for another apostasy among the Lord's people? I do not want to be an alarmist, but neither do I want us to hide our heads in the sand and refuse to see what is happening in some churches of Christ in some areas. If we do, then all the churches could be swept into this apostasy that seems to be on its way.

What are some of the signs of apostasy that appear on the horizon? (1). It appears, from what I read in some papers, that there is a lack of respect for the authority of the Bible. I base this statement upon the fact that there are those who allow women to pray in public in the presence of men. They also deny that the Bible condemns speaking in tongues as was done in the early days of the church. Others are saying that fellowship should be extended to those who have not obeyed the gospel as taught in the word of God.

(2). The second sign has to do with changes that are being made, or some things that are being done, which are not in harmony with the Scriptures. There is one bulletin that I have been receiving about fifteen years from a church that was once faithful to the Lord. Recently they have begun using a CHOIR in their services on Sunday morning and evening. This is in clear violation to the teaching of the Scriptures. Congregational singing is the only kind authorized by the word of God. If this is not true, then I have a misunderstanding, and have had all my life.

Brethren, I love the church and I hate to think that the day might come when it will fall away from the truth as it did in the early years of its existence. However, I am afraid that if we do not take a stronger stand against things being done without Scriptural support, it is going to happen.

What are some safeguards that can be taken to prevent apostasy from coming? (1). Elders must insist that only the truth be proclaimed from the pulpit and in the Bible classes where they serve. If a preacher is not willing to preach only the truth, then they don't need his services anyway. (2). Christians must take a strong stand for truth as revealed in the Bible, and demand that it be preached where they worship.

I do not want anyone to misunderstand what I have written. What I have said is not to cause anyone hurt. However, I feel a keen responsibility as a gospel preacher, and as a Christian to point out these things that are being taught and practiced by some that are not in harmony with the Scriptures. I want to encourage churches and gospel preachers everywhere to take a strong stand for the truth of God, the Bible.

"He that trusteth in his riches shall fall: but the righteous shall flourish as a branch." Prov. 11:28.

"A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones." Prov. 12:4.

"Deceit is in the heart of them that imagine evil: but to the counselors of peace is joy." Prov. 12:20.

"Poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth instruction: but he that regardeth reproof shall be honoured." Prov. 13:18.

How Does One Get Into (Cont.)

from the Bible, "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."

Hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized are all necessary to being saved, or getting into Christ. In order for a thing to be used as a figure of speech, where a part stands for the whole, it must of necessity be a part of the whole. If hearing was no part of life, John 5:25 would not have been written. If faith was not a part of justification, Rom. 5:1 would not be true. If repentance was unnecessary, Acts 11:18 would be inaccurate. If confession had nothing to do with being in God, 1 John 4:15 would be meaningless. If baptism was not essential to being saved, 1 Peter 3:21 would show that the apostle Peter didn't understand the gospel. But, all these things are commands, which must be obeyed in order to get into Christ. Usually, the only part of this about which people disagree, is baptism. Yet, baptism is the very thing, that the Bible states, which puts us into Christ (Rom. 6:3, Gal. 3:27).

All who have obeyed the gospel of Jesus Christ are IN Christ. All who have not obeyed the gospel will be the recipients of the vengeance of God (2 Thess. 1:8). Where are you, IN or OUTSIDE of Jesus Christ?

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