

# Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

"...Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body." – Ephesians 5:23

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## If You Hate The Church, You Hate Jesus!

Part Two

### The Essential Nature of the Church

by Ted J. Clarke

#### Introduction

Our previous article showed the inseparable connection between Christ and the church. He is the **head** and the church is His **body** (Ephesians 1:21-23). When Saul of Tarsus was persecuting the church, the Lord asked him, "Why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 8:3; ;9:4). It can rightfully be said that those who hate or belittle the Lord's church are, in effect, despising Christ. We also showed several reasons why some people hate the church of Christ, even though the church is merely trying to follow the teaching and practice of Christ.

Those who hate the church either do not have a proper respect for it, or they have not taken the time to see that if they are going to hate the church for the reasons we cited, they are going to have to hate Jesus for the same reasons. Please investigate the Scriptures we provide and reason upon their teaching (Isaiah 1:18). We do not write these things in order to upset anyone, but we believe that we have some important understandings that need to be taught.

This article will investigate why the concept of the Lord's church is not respected by many supposedly religious people and will establish the essential nature of the church, praying that those who do not have a proper estimate of the church will come to do so.

#### The Church in God's Plan

One of the greatest enemies of a proper respect for the Lord's church is the popular doctrine of premillennialism. This is the denominational idea that Jesus first came to establish an earthly kingdom in Jerusalem, but when He was rejected by the Jews God had to come up with an alternate plan as a kind of emergency measure. Premillennialism sees the church as an "insert" or "parenthesis" in God's plan and that it will be replaced when Christ comes and estab-

lishes the kingdom of God on earth for a thousand years, after which events will lead finally to a heavenly eternal kingdom. Since many denominations simply believe that the church is a temporary, stop-gap measure taken by God, they do not give the church the honor it deserves. Such religions do not think that it matters much what the church does and teaches, for they do not believe that it represents God's true intention. Believing as they do, that the earthly kingdom (reign) of Christ was and still is God's first plan, they set their minds on this supposed future state and ignore or belittle the true role of the Lord's church in this present time. However, such an attitude toward the church cannot be upheld by the Scriptures, nor can anyone prove that Jesus came the first time to establish His earthly reign from Jerusalem. The whole doctrine of premillennialism is complex, but we will show its major features to be false and destructive of a healthy attitude toward the church Jesus purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28).

**First**, Christ never claimed to have come the first time to set up an earthly kingdom. In fact, He expressly stated the opposite, saying, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). **Second**, when the Jews were willing to make Him an earthly king Christ refused to allow them to do so (John 6:15). **Third**, the church and the kingdom are the same institution identified by these two descriptive phrases (Matthew 16:13-18). It is identified as the church (assembly) because we are "called out" from the world's way to follow Christ. It is also a kingdom because Christ reigns and we are His loyal subjects. Other times this relationship which the saved have with God is called His house, vineyard, army, etc. **Fourth**, the fact that **Christ now reigns as King and that we are now in His kingdom** shows that He set up

His kingdom/church the first time. "He (God) has delivered from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son (Christ) of His love" (Colossians 1:13). Verse 18 of this same chapter shows that the relationship of the church, with Christ as Head and Christians as the body, refers to this same institution. **Fifth**, the church was in God's original plan as a part of the mystery "according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Ephesians 3:9-11). God did not have to scramble and think up some emergency plan when the Jews rejected Christ's mission. The church was in His eternal purpose and was also called the kingdom. God foreknew that the Jews would reject His Son and crucify Him. Their doing so played right into the eternal scheme God had devised. The church was the very kingdom or house of God which the prophets said would be established (Daniel 2; Isaiah 2; Acts 2; 1 Timothy 3:15). Isaiah 53, which foretold of Christ's death for the sins of the people, was written 700 years before Christ's first coming and was specifically applied as referring to Jesus (Acts 8:32-35). Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension to His throne was all a part of God's eternal plan, not a delay in establishing the kingdom (Acts 2:22-47). The church is God's kingdom on earth! There will be no other. When Christ comes a second time, it will not be to establish His kingdom for He already reigns over it (Colossians 1:13; Acts 2:30-36; Revelation 1:9). His second coming will be to receive those who are in His kingdom and to usher them into the everlasting kingdom of God in heaven (1 Corinthians 15:20-26; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Peter 1:10-11). There will be nothing left of this world on which to build a kingdom (2 Peter 3:1-13). In God's plan there is no place nor time for Jesus to return and set up an earthly kingdom in Jerusalem. Too many look for another kingdom to come to earth and do not respect the church as being that promised kingdom of Old Testament prophecy.

#### Essential Elements in God's Church

Respect for the church must be main-

(Continued on page 2)

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tained because it is the body of the saved. **This does not mean that the church is our savior**, but that by a proper relationship with Christ one is saved and is made a part of the saved body by God. Paul said, "...Christ is the head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body" (Ephesians 5:23). Jesus saves us when we respond in faith and obedience to the gospel message and "the Lord [adds] to the church daily those who [are] being saved" (Acts 2:36-47). For one to say, "I'll take salvation in Jesus but I want no part of the church," is to reject God's plan and His work of adding the saved to Christ's body, the church. Of course, membership in the church of Christ has its obligations, which many do not want to admit. The apostle Paul noted that we ought to "grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by **what every joint supplies**, according to the effective working by which **every part does its share**, causes the growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:15-16). One cannot ignore such responsibilities in the church and expect to be saved.

The church also glorifies God in worship. One can engage in private solitary worship to God in meditation, Bible reading, prayer, and good works, **but it is also true that the church is essential to glorify God in assembled worship**. In Paul's great letter on the church he reminds us, "to Him [God] be glory in the church by Christ Jesus

throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Ephesians 3:21). God seeks our worship both as individuals and in an assembled capacity (John 4:23-24). We are "Not [to be] forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some" (Hebrews 10:25). Assembling together on the first day of every week is a part of the worship God requires (Acts 2:47; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34; 16:1-2). The Lord's Supper is a weekly remembrance that one must not despise. Neglect in assembling to observe this memorial grows, in part, out of a hatred for the weekly assembly, but in effect it is hatred against Christ, in whose memory the feast is set (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). If you despise the worship of the assembled body of Christ, which is to be conducted according to the revealed will of God, in reality you are hating the head of the body, Christ, and God who sent Him (John 15:18-23).

The church is also God's essential missionary institution. The Great Commission was given to the apostles with the provision that they pass on to others what Christ had commanded them (Matthew 28:18-20). Paul said that the church is the house of God and is to be the "pillar and ground (foundation) of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). The church has the obligation then to proclaim and to defend the truth, holding it up for the world to see and calling on all to follow it because it is **truth**. The church in Antioch was a mission minded church which served as a base of operation for much of Paul's evangelistic labors (Acts 13:1-18:23). The churches in Rome and Thessalonica also received commendation for spreading the faith in their regions and beyond (Romans 1:8; 1 Thessalonians 1:8). While each of us has individual obligations to teach others, there is a work that the local church is to do, as seen by the Scriptures above. To refuse to cooperate with other members in the body of Christ is to weaken the work the body can do and to ignore directions from the head, who is Christ. You simply cannot hate the church and the work it does without hating the Lord whom it serves (Ephesians 1:21-23).

Conclusion

Much more could be said to set forth the essential nature of the church, but if you are not convinced by the Scriptures presented in these two articles, it is not likely more of the same would convince you that Christ's church is necessary. All we ask is that you be like the noble Bereans in Acts 17:11 and search the

Scriptures for yourself whether or not these things are so. By reading the verses anew in this study, you may find fresh insights that you or your preacher have overlooked. Do not say that you love the Lord, when you hate His church.

**SPIRITUAL GROWTH**

by Ted Knight

In Eph. 4:11-16 the apostle Paul addresses the subject of spiritual growth. Paul knew that every Christian needed to be equipped to serve the Lord in the most effective way possible. When one becomes a Christian, he is to devote himself fully to the cause of Jesus Christ from that time forward. He or she must develop into a full-grown person and not be like "children tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine."

The subject of spiritual growth is one that has concerned church leaders for many years. The need for spiritual growth represents one of the most critical needs of the church of our Lord today. Many individuals have not developed as they should have following their initial obedience to the first principles of the gospel of Christ. As a result, thousands of members of the church are not faithful and the leadership of the church must spend a great deal of time wondering about the wandering sheep.

Spiritual growth following baptism is just as much a part of the great commission as baptism. Matt. 28:19-20. The Lord never intended for a person to be baptized and then just stop and make no further progress spiritually. He knew that if one does not continue to grow and develop, that person will eventually fall away and die.

The New Testament is filled with encouragement to grow spiritually. In Heb. 6:1-2 we are told, "**Let us go on to perfection...**". We must not dwell in a state of spiritual infancy but go on to adulthood. In I Cor. 3:1-2 Paul scolded the Corinthians because they had not grown beyond the state of a spiritual baby and they could not take strong meat.

What can we do to promote spiritual growth in our life? How do we avoid the calamities of so many who have failed to grow spiritually and have died in apostasy? Is there a program of spiritual growth which one may develop in his or her life that will cause that person to become strong in the Lord? Let me sug-

gest some things that I believe will help us to grow spiritually.

**First**, there must be an awareness of the need to grow spiritually. I am afraid that the reason many do not grow is because they feel no need for growth. Do you remember the Laodiceans in Rev. 3:14-18? When they looked at themselves, they saw people who were "rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing." But, when the Lord looked at them He saw people who were "wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." What a difference in the Lord's estimation of them and their judgment of themselves! Is it possible today that we have become so self-sufficient, self-satisfied, and sophisticated that we feel no need of spiritual growth? Why, in many cases people absolutely look at you in complete bewilderment when you suggest that they might need some help from the Lord, or that they might be in danger of being lost eternally. Our achievements are many, our intelligence level is so high, and we have so much of this world's goods that we are almost insulted when it is suggested that we need to apply those principles of spiritual growth to our lives.

The apostle Paul is a great example of one who realized that there was a need for continued spiritual growth. In Philippians chapter three Paul reveals that he did not feel that he had reached the level of growth that some of them evidently felt they had reached. He was striving to reach forward and grow more and more. In 2 Tim. 3:13 he asked Timothy to bring the parchments and the books when he came to see him in jail. Why? He was an old man who was about to leave this earth, so why ask for those things? He simply saw the opportunity and the need for further study and growth. In I Tim. 4:7-8 this great Christian emphasizes the need for spiritual exercise so that we may grow.

I challenge you to look honestly and seriously at your spiritual condition. Do you see the need to grow? If not, you need to have your spiritual vision checked! If you do see the need for growth, let me suggest some other things.

**Secondly**, if you expect to grow spiritually, you must have a desire to grow. It has been said that we do about anything that we want to do. I suppose that is right. If we fervently desire to grow spiritually, we will do so.

Notice carefully what Peter wrote in I Peter 2:2: "**As newborn babes, desire**

**the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.**" Notice the connection between the words, "**desire and grow.**" It is absolutely certain that one will not grow unless there is a desire to grow. Growth and development will not come miraculously. If we wait until we are struck with some power from on high before we grow spiritually, we will die as babes.

Some in the New Testament had not grown because they did not want to grow. Note what the Hebrew writer says in Heb. 5:12. They should have been teaching the word to others, but they still needed to be taught instead. Why? In verse 11 we are told that they had become dull of hearing. They no doubt were like those whom the Lord described in Matt. 13:15. They had just closed their eyes, ears, and hearts to the truth. They didn't want to hear, see, or feel.

Could our spiritual growth problem possibly come from our having the attitude of the man who was told by his brother, "I wish you'd stop smoking, I know you could if you would." "Yes," the man replied, "I could if I would, but I can't would!" There is no doubt that we **could** grow, but only when we **desire** to grow! How great is your desire for spiritual growth?

**Thirdly**, if one expects to grow spiritually, one must put **first** the Kingdom of God and His righteousness in his or her life. You know the passage don't you? It is in Matt. 6:33 where our Lord

Himself instructed us to put the Kingdom of God and His righteousness **first** in our life.

A great deal is said in the word of God about the heart. Jesus taught, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:21). Is your heart set on spiritual growth and development? Are your affections set on things above and not on things of this earth, as Paul directed us in Col. 3:1-2? Friends, we cannot focus all of our attention and effort toward things of this life and expect to grow in spiritual matters. We must get our priorities in the correct order, and the Lord has established that order in Matt. 6:33. Until there is a determination on our part to serve the Lord **first**, we will not grow spiritually.

**Fourth**, if we expect to grow, we must study the word of God. Go back to I Pet. 2:2 again. Notice that Peter says, "Desire the **sincere milk of the word** that ye may grow thereby." Spiritual growth will only occur when we study our Bible and apply what we learn from it to our daily life. Note such passages as John 6:63; 2 Tim. 2:15; I Tim. 4:13-16; Acts 20:32 and many others, where we learn of the value of the word of God in our lives. The word of God is not an old-fashioned, out-dated, irrelevant book which fails to meet the needs of modern man. It is still quick and powerful (Heb. 4:12). The gospel of Christ is still God's power to save the world (Rom. 1:16).

No person will ever grow spiritually unless the word of God is studied regularly and seriously. A knowledge of the word of God is an absolute necessity if we are to grow (2 Pet. 3:18).

We could go on and on suggesting things that we can do to promote spiritual growth. We must pray and be involved in the work of the Lord. We must seek the fellowship and assistance of those who can help us grow and not those who will hinder our growth. We must become doers of the word and not hearers only (James 1:21-25).

When personal, spiritual growth stops, death comes. So, this is a matter of life and death. May we dedicate ourselves to living for Christ before the world and thereby save ourselves and others. Let us never become so complacent or self-satisfied that we fail to grow spiritually.

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*If you must use a hammer, build something.*

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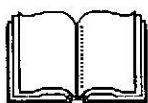
## BOOK BLURBS

### Recommended Reading

**Creation Compromises**, by Dr. Bert Thompson, Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press, Inc., 1995, 303 pp. The topics of creation and evolution continue to capture our attention. Science claims that organic evolution is an established fact and many so-called believers in the Bible wilt and yield before such pronouncements. In this book Bert Thompson, a scientist with a PH.D. in microbiology and a diligent student of the Scriptures, tells us to wait just a minute before we compromise the Biblical account of creation. If you stretch that minute long enough to read this book, you will be thoroughly convinced that there is no need for such compromises!

Brother Thompson begins this excellent volume with a discussion of our origins (where we came from), discussing the importance of the topic and how it relates to atheistic evolution and the concept of creation. After documenting some "voices of compromise," he considers whether Genesis 1-11 is mythical or historical and the question of the Bible and the age of the earth. Following rather full treatments of the "Day-Age" and "Gap" theories is a discussion of the Bible genealogies and the age of the earth. A serious look at the many compromises which some make of Genesis precedes a chapter which answers what is wrong with creation compromises. The final chapter cautions that compromises regarding creation are a warning sign of potential apostasy in other areas. This book will equip you to deal with many issues related to the creation/evolution controversy, while informing you of many dangerous compromises being made (some by our own brethren). We highly recommend it for your serious study in this field. You can purchase the book for \$10.95, plus postage, from Apologetics Press, Inc. 230 Landmark Dr., Montgomery, AL 36117.

[Editor's Note: Bert Thompson will be speaking on the topic of **Creation Versus Evolution**, August 4-6, 1995, at the following churches of Christ. Aug. 4 at 7:30 p.m. and Aug. 6 at 10:00 & 10:45 a.m. at the Third & Bethel congregation in Mammoth Spring, AR. Aug. 5 from 1:00-3:00 & 3:30-5:00 p.m. at the Thayer, MO church at Jcts. 63 & 142, next to McDonald's The public is invited!]



*You can tell that a child is growing up when he quits asking where he came from and starts refusing to tell where he is going.*

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-Editor

## GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

## THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2,3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

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