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"Where is the Church?"

By Mike Pace

God's holy and divine Word records the conversation that Jesus Christ had with His disciples, particularly the Apostle Peter, in Matthew the 16th chapter. It was on this occasion that Jesus promised to "build my church", verse 18. Considering the context of this conversation, it readily becomes apparent to the reader that our Lord uses the word "church" and "kingdom" interchangeably to refer to the same institution. Other passages of scripture which indicate this to be true include Hebrews 12:28 and Colossians 1:13.

In what we often refer to as the scene of "transfiguration", Jesus further enlightened His followers concerning this promised kingdom. Mark 9:1 records the Master's words, "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." Jesus revealed to His listeners that some of them hearing His words would still be alive when the "kingdom (church) would come with power." In other words, Jesus informed them that there would be a sign, an indication to them when the kingdom (church) had come, and that identifying mark would be "power".

By turning to Acts the first chapter, and a careful consideration of the events recorded there, we can easily determine that Jesus is about to ascend back into heaven with His Father. Before doing so, Jesus shared some parting revelations to those with Him. His last words, recorded in Acts 1:8 before His departure were, "BUT YOU SHALL RECEIVE POWER, AFTER THAT THE HOLY GHOST IS COME UPON YOU: AND YOU SHALL BE WITNESSES UNTO ME BOTH IN JERUSALEM, AND IN ALL JUDEA, AND IN SAMARIA, AND UNTO THE UTMOST PART OF THE EARTH." Notice carefully that the identifying sign that would signal the coming of the kingdom (church) was "power" as Jesus had told His disciples in Mark 9:1. Now Jesus informs His disciples that they would receive such "power" when the

Holy Ghost comes upon them. So now Jesus tells His disciples that they can more precisely know when the promise of a kingdom is fulfilled, when the Holy Ghost comes upon them.

Now we turn our attention to Acts, Chapter 2. The occasion for the circumstances about to take place in this section of scripture is the day of Pentecost. Many of the Jews had gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate this religious feast. But our attention is especially drawn to Acts 2:1-4, for it is recorded in these verses that "they (the apostles) were all filled with the Holy Ghost". We've now arrived at the fruition of the promise that Jesus made in Matthew 16:18.

Follow the progression with me. Jesus promises to build His church (kingdom); the promise is made by Jesus that this church (kingdom) would come with power; this power would come with the Holy Ghost; and the Holy Ghost came upon them on the day of Pentecost, (Acts 2:1-4). Therefore, the church (kingdom) that Jesus promised was built, established on the day of Pentecost, Acts 2.

Do we still have that same church in existence today? First of all, to answer that question let's again notice another part of Jesus's promise to build the church. Matthew 16:18 goes ahead and records Jesus as saying "THAT THE GATES OF HADES SHALL NOT PREVAIL AGAINST IT." In other words, there will be nothing, nor no man, not even the power of Satan that will be able to destroy His church. So with a hearty "YES" we affirm that the Lord's church is still continuing today.

If that be true, that the Lord's church, the one that He promised to build in Matthew 16, the one that He referred to frequently in the Gospels, and the one that was established on the day of Pentecost, Acts 2, can we identify it today? Just as there were identifying characteristics which our Lord gave to reveal the beginning of the church, we today should use His words to identify that same church today.

The church of the New Testament can be identified today as it will have only

Jesus as its head. Jesus died for His church, Acts 20:28 and Ephesians 2:23 as well as Colossians 1:18 state that Jesus is the head of the church. God's Word makes no allowances for anyone else to assume the headship of the church, not even as a figurehead or an intermediary. Christ alone is the head of the church and any church or religious group today that has someone else assuming this role is not the New Testament church.

Another distinguishing mark of the church which Jesus built is that His church uses only the Bible, God's Holy Word, as its creed. II Timothy 3:16, 17 informs us that all the scriptures are inspired by God Himself. God in the beginning spoke to man by means of prophets, (Hebrews 1:1, 2). But now He speaks to us through His Word and He has provided all that we need to know in scripture, (Jude 3). We're also told that He has given us all knowledge that will save us in His Word, (II Peter 1:3). We need no additional revelations or any other information whereby we can be saved, as God has done all for us already. It is not the Bible that is responsible for all the division in the religious world today, it is the interference of men's creeds and philosophies. When men return back to the

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TAKE HEED

Five reasons are given by the historian Edward Gibbon for the collapse and fall of the Roman Empire:

1. The rapid increase of divorce; the undermining of the dignity and sanctity of the home, which is the basis of human society.
2. Higher and higher taxes and spending of public money for free bread.
3. The mad craze for pleasure, with sports becoming more exciting and more brutal every year.
4. The building of gigantic armaments when the real enemy was within - the decadence of the people.
5. The decay of religion, faith fading into mere form, losing touch with life and becoming impotent to warn and guide.

FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS

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EDITOR Mike Pace

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Paper Continues To Grow . . .

With this issue, the Fulton County Gospel News begins its thirtieth year of publication. Intended at first for local distribution, the paper now reaches into most of the fifty states. The paper is now mailed into well over four thousand homes. The majority of those receiving the paper live in other states. Many live in the northern part of the nation where the church is not as established as in the south.

Each year the elders of the Mammoth Spring church meet and evaluate the work of the paper. Because the paper furnishes unsaved, as well as many members of the church who do not receive any gospel papers, the decision has been each year to carry on. It furnishes one more way of preaching the gospel that is so badly needed by so many in our time. It is difficult to drop a good work when it has the chance of saving just one soul.

With the increase in circulation, the cost of mailing and printing continues to rise. The amount of clerical work has increased until it has become necessary to pay a secretary to have this work done. The editing, business managing, machine upkeep, etc., is donated by the Mammoth Spring church.

There is a constant need for finance. We want to thank the many who have contributed in the past and urge the continuation of your support. Without your continued support the work could not go on.

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MISPLACED VALUES

By Ordell Heavin

It is so easy for humanity to emphasize the wrong things. Often we put a premium on matters that are second best instead of "things which are excellent" (Phil. 1:10). In Psalms 20:7 we read these very pertinent words. "Some trust in chariots and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God". Later in Psalms 65:4 we learn that wise men should always "be satisfied with the goodness of thy house", for God alone can crown the year with glory and guide our pathways (verse 11). And in Psalms 37:39 we read this beautiful thought, "But the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord; he is their strength in time of trouble." How much truth, joy and fellowship of a Christian between the creator and the creation.

In an old but ever true spiritual song we read words of encouragement like:

*"Jesus is all the world to me,
and true to Him I'll be;
How could I this friend deny,
when He's so true to me;
Following Him I know I'm right,
He watches o'er me day and night;
Following Him, by day and night;
He's my friend."*

How then could we ever put anything or anyone ahead of Him? Christ is the "friend that sticketh closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24) to "Seek first the kingdom of God" as stated in Matt. 6:33, ought to be easy for us if we truly appreciate such a price as our Savior paid for our salvation. Yet many abide in sin and others teach a perverted gospel. He expects our loyal, spiritual service to Him if we expect to live eternally in heaven, (Romans 12:1).

Many times people who ought to know better leave the Lord out of their time, money and interest. Like the nine lepers of Luke 17 who don't even have the courtesy to say, "Thank you", to the dearest friend to ever grace this their life on this earth. What a tragedy it is when we fail to get our priorities straight.

A memorial hymn expresses powerfully why we should respond to the love of God and always put Him first. Listen to the words:

*"Thy mercies how tender,
how firm to the end,
Our Maker, Defender,
Redeemer and Friend."*

Sometimes we claim to be strongly devoted to the Lord, yet our emphasis is wrongly placed. One of the devil's most subtle tactics is to lull us into spiritual

idleness while we think we are doing the best we can, (Rev. 12) (II Cor. 11:3). Let's use seven points to explain this fully:

(1) It's not enough to read the Bible - we must study it properly, (II Tim. 2:15; Neh. 8:8).

(2) It's not enough just to attend the assembly we must worship scripturally while present (John 4:24).

(3) It's not enough to go to church - we must also take the Gospel to the world, (Mark 16:16; Acts 8:4).

(4) It's not enough to abstain from evil - we must also grow in grace (2 Peter 3:18; Rom. 6:11). Look also at II Peter 1:5-9 for an example of the way we grow.

(5) It's not enough just to pray about the sinful world - we must rebuke error, (Titus 1:9; Eph. 5:11).

(6) It's not enough to love the brethren and pray for our rulers - we must also love our enemies and pray for the rulers of the whole world, (I Tim. 2:2; Matt. 5:44).

(7) It's not enough to talk and sing about heaven - we must make preparation to go there, (Rev. 14:13).

When we place our trust solely in an inherited, convenient, no work, church house only attitude our values are all mixed up, and we will be sadly surprised in the Day of Judgement. Go work in the vineyard of the Lord, both in the assemblies of the church and into it's fields of harvest.

"WHERE IS THE CHURCH?"

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Scriptures for their sole authority in doctrine and life, the human creeds are abandoned, all men can be one in Christ as God designed.

Yet another mark whereby we can identify the New Testament church must be the name it uses. There is no other name but the name of Jesus in which men must be saved, (Acts 4:12). Individuals who made up the early church were called Christians, (Acts 11:26). The Lord's church was not named for its organization, worship, rites, or outstanding preachers. It was called "THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST", (Romans 16:16), because it was Jesus' church. He died for it according to Acts 20:28, therefore it must wear His name.

Next, let's observe that the church of the New Testament, if found today, must worship according to scriptural pattern. Those who pleased the Father must worship Him in spirit and in truth, (John

THE WORLD'S UNBELIEF

By Charles A. White

"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.

These are the words of Jesus from his beautiful intercessory prayer in John 17. Having prayed for the Apostles, he then prayed for those who would believe in Himself through their word. It was the classic prayer of unity among his followers. The Lord knew of the great power that genuine unity would have upon the world at large. He says, in essence, that unity among those who have committed themselves to him will inspire the world to believe that He was sent of God. Sadly, nearly two-thousand years have passed since Jesus prayed this touching prayer and most of the world still does not believe that He is the Son of God. The aggregate total of those who profess Christianity constitute but a small minority of the world today. Unbelief is undeniably one of the prime cause of the turbulence and fear that now plagues the earth.

We who believe the Bible to be the inspired word of God (II Tim. 3:16, 17), are therefore convinced that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (John 6:69). We want people everywhere to share this belief. And further, not only to believe that He is the divine Son of God but to OBEY

Him and be SAVED (Heb. 5:8, 9; I Pet. 1:22-25). We want to see Christ glorified in the world, therefore we want to see as many people as possible walking by faith (II Cor. 5:7), living lives of holiness (I Peter 1:15, 16), and serving Him as their King and Lord (Col. 1:13; Eph. 4:5). Naturally then, we long for the ideal of all humanity giving submission to Jesus. Realistically, we know that a great many will not believe and be saved (Matt. 7:13, 14), but nevertheless, our love and concern for the souls of all people makes us want to see as many converted to Him as can be so persuaded (II Cor. 5:10, 11).

STUMBLING BLOCKS EXIST

You may not be ready for this, but here goes! You and I (that's US) are hindrances to what we say we want for the cause of Christ! Stumbling blocks to the world about us! How, you say? It is through our disunity. You see, the confusing and often contradicting claims and doctrines, and the divisions among us; though we profess to love and obey Jesus have gone contrary to the overall plan and have turned people off. They have long since become confused and know not whom nor what to believe. They reject Jesus BECAUSE OF US! So, the fact is, our loyalty to our denominations and sectarian creeds not only divides us, but renders us powerless to have any real impact on a lost and confused world.

It has been a first-hand experience of

this writer on "missionary journeys" in far places to see the negative effects of American religious division. We are exporters of it. Each denomination sends out missionaries to the same areas where other denominations are sending missionaries and they, in effect, proceed to compete with one another. The natives are soon filled, almost as much as we here at home, with the same contradictions and traditions that we have seen for generations. Many of these newly-exposed people soon begin to shake their heads and walk away, being amazed that anyone could be expected to buy such a confusing hodge-podge.

There has never been a time when the cry, "back to the Bible", was more relevant. This theme expresses our great need and is the solution to the problems of disunity and unbelief. It is time for us to become serious about studying the Bible and letting it be the source book for what we believe, teach, and practice. The old denominational creeds and traditions will only keep us divided. They are a batch of confusion. They bind upon us things peculiar only to a particular religious group, and in so doing they often subject us to requirements that are not set forth in the word of God. Really, the truth is that our concept of Christianity is almost totally erroneous. Denominationalism is not Christianity. It is religion as man has conceived and perpetuated it, but it is not the religion of Jesus Christ as revealed to all in the New Testament.

4:24). The church of the New Testament practiced these acts of worship: Singing, (Ephesians 5:19); Giving (I Corinthians 16:1, 2); Praying (I Timothy 2:8); Bible Teaching (Acts 2:42); Fellowship (Acts 2:42); and partaking the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7). We are further instructed in Revelation 22:18, 19 that we are not to add to or subtract from God's Word. This applies in the matter of worship, also. We are not privileged to change the manner in which we worship God. For example, God instructed how our worship in song is to be conducted, (Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16), and to add instrumental music or any other changes to that item of worship violates Revelation 22:18, 19.

Let's consider just one more characteristic of the New Testament church. The church we read about in the New Testament must have Scriptural organization

appointed by each congregation to govern its affairs, (Acts 14:23). Deacons were selected to serve the congregation in special areas of work, (Acts 6:1-6). And all the members worked together to build up the church, (Ephesians 4:16). There was no ecclesiastical machinery outside the local church, no clergy and laity. Christ was the only head over the church, with no earthly headquarters and citizenship in heaven, (Phillipians 3:21).

I believe if you'll carefully investigate the churches today, including the Church of Christ, you'll find that the body of believers who call themselves only Christians; refer to themselves as the Church of Christ; and can be identified by identifying marks we've discussed in this article, you'll readily be able to locate the church of the New Testament. We sincerely invite you to visit with us, worship with us, and study with us soon!

The prayer Jesus prayed was not that we believe what we want and then go our separate ways, but that we believe the teaching of the word of God . . . and it alone . . . and be united. The reader will be interested in additional scriptures that relate to this subject, stressing that denominationalism is NOT the will of God: I Cor. 1:10-13; Eph. 4:1-6. These should be carefully studied. The Lord's will is that we all be "one" in Christ. May He bless and help us to have the desire and courage to turn to His word in a spirit of submission and obedience to His revealed will. If we truly believe in the authority of the Bible, and that this authority is truly supreme, we can come together in common submission to it. We must be completely open to what it reveals, commands and allows. This is the effort we must make both for ourselves and for the world for which Jesus, its Savior died.

Happiness Requires the Right Self-Image

By Harold Turner

How do you see yourself? It might be a startling experience for us to see ourselves as others see us. And it would probably be even more shocking if we could see ourselves as God sees us. It seems evident that most of us do not choose to really look at ourselves. We are either afraid of what we might see, or we know that what we will see is not a commendable picture. No doubt, one of the reasons why we magnify and pick at the faults of others, is to, in some way, help to improve our self-image. If we can see the faults in others it in some way helps us misconstrue our own faults and weaknesses.

Jesus taught that happiness depends on developing the right self-image. In Luke 14:11 he said, *"For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."* Jesus spoke this to some who were seeking an unachieved position of honor. The fact that Jesus taught this lesson indicates that this is evidently a problem typical to human nature. Man likes for others to see him in a more honorable light than he is worthy of. Few like for others to see them for what they really are. Paul said of this problem, *"For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself."* (Gal. 6:3.) One who fails to see himself for what he really is, lives in a state of self-deception. In Rom. 12:3 he warned, *"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think."*

Man's self-image can only be improved by being honest about self, about others, and being mindful of our relationship with God. In Phil. 2:3, 4, Paul taught a challenging lesson about self-image improvement. He said, *"Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."* Can you compliment another without desiring a return compliment? Can you hold up the hands of another without wanting to have some recognition yourself? Can you sincerely give another credit and recognition and step into the background without any envy at all? Do you have a problem of esteeming others, but only not quite as highly as you feel you should be esteemed? If our feelings and expressions toward others is done with some selfish motive, then we need some help in improving our

self-image. How can we be happy if we esteem others resentfully? We can't.

Every person wants happiness more than any other thing in life. And it seems evident that most of the ways that he has sought happiness has only been futile. The statement of Jeremiah 10:23 applies to this pursuit as well as to other things. He said, *"O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."* We need help and direction to find the happiness we long for. There are evidences all about us to prove that happiness is not found in the many misconstrued ways through which men have sought for it. Where is happiness to be found, and how can we find true happiness?

Jesus taught several things that are required for us in order to be happy. The Beattitudes are things essential for happiness. The first of these, *"Blessed are the poor in spirit . . ."* (Matt. 5:3), involves the need for man to see himself as he really is in the eyes of God. Until man sees himself, actually in a state of spiritual poverty and destitution, he will never be approved in the eyes of God, and he will never be an effective servant of either God or others. If in the bank of our mind we feel that we are something that God should be proud of, or that we are really doing God a favor by obeying Him, we have never really seen ourselves in the right way.

In Isaiah 6:5, Isaiah evidently got a glimpse of a self-image that he had never seen before. He said, *"Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips: and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."* Even prior to this, Isaiah is one of God's great prophets, but Isaiah had a very poor self-image. He was not humble. But this new view of himself was a great motivating power to serve God in a better way.

The apostle Paul is another good example of a man with a bad self-image. Before his conversion he was striving to excel above others (Gal. 1:14). Isn't this typical of most people. For some vain reason we want to be exalted above others. But look at the change in Paul's life at his conversion. For the first time, no doubt, Paul saw himself for what he really was. In 1 Timothy 1:15 Paul said, *"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came*

into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." Paul now has a new self-image. He was not saved because of his excellence or goodness. But, as he stated in 1 Cor. 15:10, *"by the grace of God I am what I am."* Paul can now become a great servant of the Lord and others. But what kind of servant would Paul have made had he gone through life in the church desiring to excel above others for a self-esteemed reason? Paul's service now would not depend on how many compliments and pats on the back he got for his service. He would now serve in the face of criticism and rejection by others. Listen to his words in 1 Cor. 4:12-13, *"And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day."* Did someone say that they were not appreciated for their work in the church? Did someone say that they were just taken for granted? How frequently we cry out in self-pity, desiring recognition and compliments. Such cries come from a proud self-image. The only time such a self-image can be happy is when others are pouring on the compliments. May God help us to see ourselves in the right perspective, and by doing so awaken within us the appreciation that we should feel for God and others. Such will cause us to give others recognition and encouragement, and it will help us serve with right attitude. None of us are special and important to God within ourselves. We are important because the grace of God through Christ has made us such. We have nothing to glory in as far as self is concerned, we must glory only in the Cross of Jesus.