

BASIC FACTS ABOUT THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

By Mark Lindley

The term “church” is a term that has many different meanings today. Some may use the word “church” to refer to a building. For example, “I’ll meet you at the church,” which means I will meet you at the church “building.” Another may use the term to refer to a specific denomination. A person might say, “In my church we believe in having women preachers.” The word church, in this sense, would obviously refer to one of the denominations which have women preachers. (cf. 1 Timothy 2:8-13.)

It would be helpful for all of us to go to the Bible and consider how the word “church” is used in the Scriptures.

1. “Church” refers to the universal body of believers who have obeyed the Gospel: “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Mathew 16:18.) Jesus

was not referring to brick, mortar, or wood. Rather, He was referring to the universal body of believers. Paul used “church” in this same sense when he penned: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it.” (Ephesians 5:25.) Christ loved the universal church, all believers everywhere.

2. “Church” refers to local congregations: “Then had the church rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.” (Acts 9:31.) Notice that the “churches” had rest. The reason was that Saul of Tarsus was no longer persecuting those congregations. The term “churches” here refers to the different congregations of the Lord’s one universal church. Paul also used the term in this way: “Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God,

and Sosthenes our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth. (1 Corinthians 1:1-2.) Notice that the “church” to which Paul referred was the local congregation of believers which met in the city of Corinth.

However, the term “church,” in the Bible, never refers to a Protestant denomination. Look at the pages in newspapers where the names of churches are listed. See if you can find in your Bible the list of denominational church names that you see in the newspaper. You will not find them.

The reason denominations are not mentioned in the Bible is that they were started by men long after Jesus built His church in the first century. (see Acts 2:1-47.) Any church which started after Acts, chapter 2, is too late to be the church of Christ. “Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you.” (Romans 16:16.)

— Ripley, MS

“LOVE ONE ANOTHER”

By Luke Bower

The other day, I overheard someone talking about how they love to buy things online. They even observed that as soon as the drone delivery system is perfected, they won’t have to interact with the UPS person.

It seems more and more stores are moving in this direction. Have you noticed that our society is becoming increasingly isolated from each other? You no longer have to go to department stores; you just order what you want online. You don’t have to talk to anyone when you go to the grocery store - with the self-checkout lanes you don’t even have to talk to the cashier. From drive-through windows to internet shopping, it’s all designed to make our lives easier; but it’s also taking away our interaction with each other.

Unfortunately, many of us take this same attitude and apply it to the church. We slip in, talking to as few people as possible, find a pew that will allow a quick get-away, and as soon as the prayer is over we make our dash to the car.

I heard a quote which seems to capture the attitude of many: “To live above with those we know - now that will be grace and glory. To live below with those we know - now, that’s a different story!”

Although this lifestyle might sound appealing to many of us, it is not how we are called to live as Christians. One of the greatest commands we are given is to love one another. How can we do that if we refuse to interact with one another? How can our good works be a light to the world if we refuse to

let the world see them? One of our purposes for gathering together in worship is to encourage each other, but how can we do that without talking to, or interacting with, one another?

Even though it is not always convenient and may mean stepping out of our comfort zones, we need to slow down and share our lives with others. Talk to the cashier at the grocery store. Don’t work on slipping out of church services so quickly.

Let’s make every effort to love one another and let our lives be a light to those we meet.

— Abilene, TX

“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35.)

Old Paths

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“ask for the old paths” (Jer. 6:16)

“PRECIOUS IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD”

By Cecil Burch

“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.” (Psalm 116:15.) “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” (Hebrews 9:27.)

Death is a subject that most of us try to avoid, but with the passing of time we must recognize its reality. Recently a group of nine year olds was giving their opinions of death. In their sweet innocence they discussed this unpleasant subject. One said, “Maybe I’ll die someday, but I hope I don’t die on my birthday because it’s no fun to celebrate your birthday if you are dead.” Another said, “When you die you don’t have to do your homework in heaven, unless your teacher is there too.” One little boy said, “When you die, they bury you in the ground and your soul goes to heaven; but your body can’t go to heaven because it’s too crowded up there already.” A little girl said, “Only good people go to heaven. The other people go to a place where it is hot all the time, like in Florida.” We all know that death is no laughing matter, but is is refreshing to listen to our little ones as they develop their minds and begin to explore the world around them.

It makes no difference how much you try to get ready for death, the ugly shock is always there. The funeral homes and cemeteries are places of sorrow and tears. There is a feeling of hopelessness that pervades the living. Even the apostle Paul referred to death as having a “sting.” “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 15:56,57.) It is no wonder then that the Psalmist said long ago that, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.”

When the apostle Paul was in prison in Rome and realizing that death could be near, he wrote to the Christians at Philippi saying, “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” (Philippians 1:21.) Death no longer held a horrible chain around his neck; he was free from sin which brings death and he knew that “in Christ” he was the recipient of eternal life by the grace of God. It is God’s free gift to those in Christ. (Romans 6:23.) When a child of God nears death the words of Ecclesiastes 7:1 become real in his life: “The day of man’s death is better than the day of his birth; it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting.” Why? Because the Christian does not go to a funeral but to a victory service.

— Amarillo, TX

SIMPLE BUT UNPOPULAR

By Dalton Key

How do we go about the business of uniting our divided, fragmented religious world? We know that Jesus prayed to the Father asking for such unity (John 17: 20,21), but just how do we bring it about?

Should we ignore our faith-based differences, disregard our conflicting doctrines, and simply agree to disagree? As appealing as this approach might seem, it simply will not work. While it could result in some semblance of disjointed union, true unity would be impossible. Genuine unity depends upon fundamental agreement, as Amos suggested in his inspired question, “Can two walk together except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3.)

Perhaps we could all unite upon some common creed or manual. But who has the influence or the authority to devise such a document? And doesn’t the Bible teach, “There is a way that seems right unto a man, but the ends thereof are the ways of death?” (Proverbs 14:12.) Even if it were possible for all of us to agree upon one common, human creed, we would find it full of mistakes and in constant need of revision.

Garbage in, garbage out comes to mind.

This leaves us with but one possible alternative. We determine to throw off all party names, discard all party platforms, reject all humanly devised doctrines and unite upon the Word of God alone.

As the very body of Christ, as His church, we make and bind no laws; we leave that to the Lord and His inspired message of truth. From the earliest days of the church, Christians “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine.” (Acts 2:42.)

As disciples of Christ, we strive simply to do Bible things in Bible ways and call Bible things by Bible names. Our platform is simple and based upon God-breathed Scripture: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.” (Ephesians 4:4-6.)

Simple? Yes. But then, that may well be why the scriptural plan has always and continues to be so very unpopular.

REMEMBERING HIS WONDERFUL WORKS

By Bobby Key

"He has made His wonderful works to be remembered." (Psalms 111:4.)

Why did God create such an immense and complex universe? So far as science now knows, no other planet is populated. I know that thousands of spheres sail serenely through space and we use them as fixed points for navigation. These same spheres exert influence on our reckoning of time, establishing the cycle of seasons. But I wonder if an all-powerful God could have done this by simpler devices.

Our mind falters in seeking to estimate the great enormity of space. The heat of the sun warms us; the size of the sun stuns us. Its diameter is 109 times that of the earth, but it is only one of billions upon billions of other similar stars. Astronomers affirm that many of the stars would outshine the sun if they were as close to earth as it is (the sun is a mere 93 million miles from earth).

Why is God's creation so vast? Reason and science surmise the answer, but the answer is clearly revealed in our text: "He has made His wonderful works to be remembered."

We often are made to suffer because of a failure to remember. Parents sometimes fail to remember their children. Spouses too often fail to remember their obligations to one another. But forgetting the God of heaven is especially dangerous.

May we gaze into the heavens and ever be constrained to remember the God who created them - and us. - Miami, OK

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them He has set a tabernacle for the sun, which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoices like a strong man to run its race. Its rising is from one end of heaven; and there is nothing hidden from its heat." (Psalm 19:1-6.)

Editorial . . .

NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

By Dalton Key

When Jesus promised, "you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free," He provided the much-needed answer to so many questions of biblical interpretation troubling His people today. (John 8:32.) These few words from the lips of our Lord make it clear that truth - absolute spiritual truth - exists and can be known or understood.

It may seem odd, at least in light of more modern theology, that Christ did not speak of this hermeneutic or that hermeneutic. He spoke openly, unabashedly, of truth; and of truth which is available to be understood.

The inspired writers of the New Testament continued this same attitude toward truth. To the Ephesian brethren Paul wrote, "Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is." (Ephesians 5:17.) He commended the early spiritual training of Timothy, his own son in the faith, by urging, "But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." (2 Timothy 3:14,15.)

Take note of Peter's words as well. He allowed little sympathy for those "untaught and unstable people" who were twisting the inspired Scriptures "to their own destruction." (2 Peter 3:16.) Though Peter recognized there were in God's Word "some things hard to be understood," he nonetheless expected his readers to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 3:16,18.)

Inspired New Testament writers did not pen their letters as discussions of this interpretation compared with that interpretation. They wrote, and wrote of scriptural truth which could be learned, understood and agreed upon.

Paul never suggested that we all have the right to handle spiritual truth as we choose; he never spoke of truth as absolute but our understanding as relative; he never sacrificed truth at the altar of the latest poll-tested, pseudo-intellectual hermeneutic. No, the peerless apostle expected workmen in the "word of truth" to rightly divide it, to handle it aright. (2 Timothy 2:15, NKJV, ASV.)

Divine truth could be learned and understood, known and handled aright in the first century. Are we to believe the same is not possible for those of us living in the twenty-first century?

One last thought: perhaps we would make better use of our time, in the pulpit, in the classroom, and in our own personal study, by centering more upon the truth, and less upon what others have said about the truth.

(MEN, MAKE PLANS NOW: Our annual Men's Retreat is slated for September 15-17!! We hope to see you at Flint Hills this fall! For more information, check with us for details.)



"BLESSED ARE THE MEEK"

By Milton Smith

Among the beloved beatitudes, Jesus placed a special blessing upon those souls whom He characterized as "meek." (Matthew 5:5.) Our Lord even described Himself this way in Matthew 11:29 when He declared that He was "meek and lowly in heart." In Matthew 21:5, Jesus again applied this word to Himself when he spoke of the King "meekly" coming and "sitting upon a donkey." Peter teaches that God's children should possess "a meek and quiet spirit." (1 Peter 3:4.)

I have long felt that this word is one of the most misunderstood words found in the Bible. I'm sure the reason for this misunderstanding is directly related to the way and manner most people view the English word "meek." This word is often used in our culture as a

synonym for a cowardly person. Back in the early part of the 20th century, a cartoonist by the name of H. T. Webster created a comic strip character that he called Casper Milquetoast. This mild-mannered little weakling became so well-known that his name ultimately passed into the English language for any cowardly person. Amazingly, people often use the word "meek" to mean the same thing. Thus, if you are described as being meek, you are viewed as the polar opposite of a courageous hero.

But the Greek word that is translated "meek" in the New Testament carries a much different meaning. This Greek word was generally used to describe a kind, gentle person as opposed to an arrogant, haughty one.

What is perhaps even more interesting is the fact that this word was often used to express a form of bravery! It was not uncommon for this word to be used to describe a person who was willing to quietly accept whatever might come his way. Such a person was willing to humbly accept his lot in life with no resistance or complaining.

How perfectly this word thus describes Jesus as He humbly made His way to Calvary, bearing His cross. If we possess such characteristics, Jesus has placed a special blessing upon us.

As strange as it might sound, Jesus wants us to demonstrate our "meekness" by "courageously" standing with Him!

— Tulsa, OK

SOMETHING GOD WILL NOT DO

By Danny Tunnell

In our modern society, few want to accept any responsibility for their sinful actions. They want to blame someone or something else, but never themselves.

The Bible teaches that God hates all sin. He hates evil, pride, arrogance, and a perverted mouth. (Proverbs 8:13.) He loves righteousness and hates wickedness. (Psalm 45:7.)

We cannot love what God loves without hating what God hates. We cannot love righteousness without hating sin. In order to accept the good things of God, we must reject the evil things of this world. (1 John 2:15.)

In the "things God cannot do category," there is this one: God cannot do our repenting for us. God can help us to repent, but He will not repent for us. (2 Timothy 2:25.)

God has commanded all men to repent. (Luke 13:3,5; Acts 17:30; 26:20.) But it is something which only the individual can do. It is

impossible of one person to repent for another. Even Christ could not do that. He could die for us, but He cannot repent for us.

It is true that God, through His mercy, will help motivate us toward repentance. Certainly that is a work of the Holy Spirit and His teaching. The Spirit thus convicts the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment. (John 16:8.) But we still must, of our own free will, repent.

Repentance always involves reformation. We must stop the sinful practice and we are the only ones who can do that. Whether it's lying, or stealing, or fornication, adultery, viewing pornography, gambling, gossiping, drunkenness, drug addiction, bitterness, wrath, strife, envy, murder, deceit, pride, or covetousness, etc., we must stop the sin and accept full responsibility. We must stay away from the areas where we are tempted to sin: the bar, casino, or the computer, etc. If we

truly repent of a sin, we will quit that sin.

God commands everyone to repent, but, it is up to us to accomplish it.

The angels in heaven rejoice over one sinner who repents. (Luke 15:10.) Ask God to help you repent, and then you take the initiative to get it done.

— Miami, OK

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