



**Front Cover**

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# CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

Nearly everyone will agree that Christ is essential to our salvation. This is a universal belief. But when we ask the question: "Is the church essential to our salvation" we get this answer: "Of course not!" I feel confident that most of you believe that Christ is necessary to your salvation, but that the church plays no vital part in your soul's destiny. In other words, to your thinking, membership in the church is not of any external value. In this brief lesson, I wish to affirm that both Christ and the church are essential to our salvation. Please study your Bible closely as you follow the lesson.

If we but realize the close relationship between Christ and the church we would never be guilty of saying: "I can be saved without ever being a member of the church."

Notice the wording of the following passage of Scripture. Paul, inspired by God, wrote to the church in Ephesus in Ephesians 5:22-33: "Wives submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

"So, husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."

From this beautiful passage we notice that the church is referred to as the bride of Christ. This teaching certainly depicts the

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close affinity between the Lord and the church. To belong to Christ is to belong to the church! Paul stated that Christ would sanctify, cleanse, and present the church to Himself! The record also states that Christ gave Himself for the Church. I ask this pertinent question: Did our Lord suffer the agony of death to bring into existence a non-essential institution? Did the Son of God offer Himself on a Roman cross—the most shameful death known to man—in order to present something that we could either take or leave; accept or reject? In Acts 20:28, we hear the apostle Paul as he speaks fervently to the elders of the church in Ephesus: “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”.

Did Jesus shed His blood in vain? This scripture teaches that the church was bought with Christ's blood. By the standards of fair trade exchange, we learn that anything purchased should be worth the value of the price paid. The price paid for the church was the blood of Christ. Therefore, if the purchase price equals the value of the purchased possession, the church is just as important to our salvation as Christ's precious blood. Who then will deny that the church is essential? Is Christ's blood essential? Only the atheist, skeptic, and modernist will say no!

In Matthew 26:28, we read that Jesus shed His blood for the remission of sins. So, we learn that Christ shed His blood for two reasons: (1) To purchase the church (Acts 20:28) and (2) for the remission of sins (Matthew 26:28). There is, therefore, an unmistakable relationship between salvation from sin and the church. In Acts 2:38, we read of those who received remission of sins by repenting and being baptized into Christ and then the divine record states: “And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47).

These Jews on the Day of Pentecost benefited by the blood; by being in what the blood bought, that is, the church. Perhaps this illustration will help. Let us suppose that it is the coldest day of the year. You pass by a street corner and see a young boy standing there in thin, scanty clothing. His teeth are chattering and he is turning purple because of the freezing weather. You have compassion on him and hand him fifty dollars, saying, “Son, go over there to that clothing store and buy

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yourself some clothes, before you freeze to death.” He gratefully accepts the money for the clothing and heads for the store as you depart. Two hours later you pass the same corner. Much to your surprise, the boy still stands there—still in his inadequate clothing—icicles in his hair—and piled up high by his side you see fifty dollars worth of warm clothing. He is none the better in spite of your generosity for he failed to realize that he would only profit by being in the clothing your money had purchased. You had given him that money to provide warmth and clothing. The boy's only hope for getting warm was to get in the clothing.

Let us apply the principle to our lesson. Christ shed his blood for the remission of sins (Matthew 26:28; Ephesians 1:7) and to purchase the church. We benefit from His blood by being in the church or the purchased possession.

The book of Acts furnishes us with another example of the close tie between the church and Christ. In Acts, chapter 8, we read that Saul of Tarsus, a leader of the Pharisees, “made havoc of the church.” Yes, he led the persecution against the church (Acts 8:1). But in Acts 9:4, Jesus asked him: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” Can't you see, my friends, from this example, that to persecute the church is to persecute Christ? Why? Because Christ and the church are one, just as husband and wife (Ephesians 5:32).

From Colossians 1:18, we learn another lesson concerning the intimate connection between Christ and the church. Listen to these words of inspiration: “And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.”

Paul further stated: “I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church” (Colossians 1:24). We learn from these words to the church at Colosse that the church is the spiritual body of Christ over which He rules as head. Therefore, to try to be saved by Christ but apart from the church is to separate the head from the body—and this, of course, would destroy both. The very fact that the Bible teaches us that Christ is the head of the church, which is His body, proves conclusively that the church is

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essential. Can you visualize the perfect Son of God as the head of a non-essential organism? The New Testament teaches no such thing. Also, in this regard, in writing to the church at Ephesus, the apostle stated that we are reconciled in the one body, the church (Ephesians 2:14–16). To reconcile means to bring us back in harmony with God. The idea is this: Man has estranged himself from God, but he can be reconciled or brought back on friendly terms with God, only in the body, the church. Now, ask yourself the question: "Is the church essential?"

Another striking point concerning Christ and His church or His body (Ephesians 1:20–23) is found in Ephesians 5:23: "For the husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body." Friends, if you think the church is non-essential, you have to get another Savior—for Christ is the Savior of the body over which He rules as head, that is; the church. The New Testament teaches that Christ gave Himself for the church, shed His blood to purchase it, that He rules over it as its head, and He will save the church one day.

Are you a member of the church that Jesus built? Friend of mine, I am not speaking of the man-made churches but of the body of Christ. In this lesson, as I have shown you the various scriptures that prove the church to be essential, I did not mean that membership in a denomination is essential. In fact, to be a member of a denomination is to endanger one's eternal destiny. You and I must be Christians, members of the Lord's body, in order to be saved.

### **THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS DISTINCTIVE!**

As one travels over the busy roadways in America and throughout the world, he is made aware of the diversity of religious beliefs, the division within the realm of spiritual matters. A few years ago I heard a noted international evangelist say that there were 800 different churches on earth today! Twenty years ago a leading publisher in the United States issued a book listing 254 denominations in North America. Is this the epitome of what Jesus died for? No, it is directly opposed to His prayer for oneness in Christianity (John 17:20–21). The apostle Paul condemned such schism as carnal (I Corinthians 1:10).

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In Ephesians 4:1–6, we have a divine platform for unity as the Holy Spirit desires it to be. It is significant that our Lord promised to build one spiritual body or organism (Matthew 16:18). In the first century, Paul, Peter, James, John, Philip, and Stephen were all members of the same church—the one Christ purchased with His precious blood (Acts 20:28). It was distinct and unique then; the Lord's church is even so today!

There is no merit in being unusual just for the purpose of being odd. But, the church of Christ is distinctive because it follows the Bible only as its guide. This makes the organization, doctrine, worship, and life of the church unique in the maze of religious confusion.

Since the church is referred to over 500 times in the New Testament, heaven must be concerned and vitally interested in the religion of Christ. We read in Ephesians, chapter five, that the church is subject to Christ—not to the Pope, a synod or a creed book—but only to the Lord. His very truth contributes greatly to the distinctiveness of Christ's church. In Ephesians 3:21, we learn that God is glorified “in the church” both now and eternally. Thus, our present study is certainly incomparable in its worth.

Whenever men today explicitly obey the Scriptures, the Lord's church exists. If we do what men did in the first century, under the instructions of the Scriptures, we will be exactly what they were. They were Christians (I Peter 4:16); they were members of the church of Christ (Romans 16:16)!

Another rebuttal is often stated in these words: “Too many years have elapsed since the establishment of pure Christianity. The Dark Ages resulted in the loss of divine truth. We can no longer be just Christians. We will have to be a member of some denomination today.”

Multiplied thousands adhere to such reasoning. But, is it true? Jehovah promised that His word would not return void (Isaiah 55:11) and that the inspired Scriptures would make men spiritually complete (II Timothy 3:16–17). It therefore becomes a strange idea to believe that God would allow the devil to triumph over divine truth so as to pervert the plan of redemption for man. Among those who profess to follow the

Bible, this position is, in fact, untenable. We *can be today* what servants of Jesus *were* over 1900 years ago. The intervening years have not hidden the power of the gospel. It is still the same message of salvation (Romans 1:16).

Let us illustrate the plausible nature of what we are saying. Suppose that the game of baseball would cease to be played for several centuries. If, in the year 2550, a man were to follow minutely the baseball rule book of 1968, he could present to the people of his day the exact game we play now. The elapse of time could not change the matter. And, friends, the same principle applies to Christianity. If we obey and teach and practice that religion portrayed on the pages of the New Testament, we shall be members of the church.

The church which Jesus purchased with His own blood does not consist of all the denominations. New Testament Christianity is undenominational. The body of Christ is not composed of the 300 differing religious bodies on earth today.

But someone says, "Preacher, have you ever read the passages in John, chapter 15, concerning the vine and the branches? Don't you know that Jesus was referring to the various denominations when he said: "I am the vine, you are the branches?"

No, I *do not believe* Christ was referring to the various denominations when He said: "You are the branches." Here are four conclusive reasons why we say so emphatically:

First of all, Jesus made it plain that He was referring to an individual and not a denomination when He spoke of the branches of the vine. Notice John 15:1-7, "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is

withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide

## 6

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in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, so you will be My disciples.”

The very context itself disproves the theory put forth by the denominations. Jesus was saying: *I am the vine, you (My disciples) are the branches*. He said: “If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch. ...” John 15 does not prove that Christ was sanctioning the present division in the religious world when He stated, “I am the vine, you are the branches” because none of the denominations today existed then. He could not have referred to the Protestant bodies for not one of them was in existence until 1519.

I am also sure Jesus was not upholding sectarianism by His use of “vine and the branches” because *a vine bears only one type of fruit*. If Christ had wanted to uphold denominationalism He would have needed another comparison for a vine cannot bear but one type of fruit. The fruit of the denominations has produced many, many varying religious orders. It would be just as logical to see a vine with grapes, bananas, apples, plums, and peaches on each of its branches as to believe Christ was referring to the denominations when He said, “I am the vine and you are the branches.” Last of all, we are confident Jesus was not herein endorsing religious divisions because just two chapters later He prayed for oneness and not diversity (John 17:20–21). Surely, Jesus did not contradict His teaching in His prayer life.

I beg of you to seriously consider the importance of being a member of the body of Christ. In Galatians 3:27 and I Corinthians 12:13, we read that to become a part of Christ's church we must be baptized for the remission of sins. When we do this, God will add us to the church (Acts 2:47) where we can serve the Lord faithfully until death and then go home in heaven in the after-awhile.

### **WHAT THE CHURCH IS NOT!**

Many people have an unscriptural idea concerning the church. For instance, most people speak of a material building as the church. You



ask 10 people on the street "What is the church" and most of them will point to a building with stained glass

## 7

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windows and a steeple projected in the sky. To a lot of people this is the church. No such idea prevailed in the New Testament days. Jesus did not shed His blood to purchase a building composed of brick, mortar, and stone. Unless we have a fuller concept of the Lord's church than to liken it to a literal meeting house then we have missed the true meaning of the church that Jesus built.

The church is spoken of as the house of God (I Timothy 3:15). But Peter tells us in I Peter 2:5, that Christians are living stones which make up the house of God or the church of the Lord. To Christians at Corinth, Paul stated: "Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually" (I Corinthians 12:27). Thus far we have established that the church is not a building. Such expressions, then, as "go to church," "what a beautiful church," "they are building a new church," and many others express a lack of Bible teaching on the nature of the church that Jesus built.

In discussing what the church is not I would like to further state that it is not a social club. Thousands of people think of the church as a glorified social center. It is true that many of the denominations started by men use the social element to thrive on—but remember, our lesson deals with the church Jesus built and not some man-made religious order. Such things as bridge parties, pie suppers, bingo games, white elephant sales, and rummage sales sponsored by the church would be as foreign to the New Testament Christians as for us today to see an eskimo wearing a panama hat! In some religious groups the most successful preachers are not noted for their gospel preaching but for their ability to plan and supervise social affairs.

The church of the Lord never has been in the business of providing entertainment or developing the appetite. The gospel story is designed for men's souls and not their stomachs. Today some build huge cathedrals and use them once or twice a week for spiritual matters and then will use the same building purchased with what is called "the Lord's money" for such things as card parties, pie suppers, and even dances in some places. I challenge every preacher on earth to show me one scripture that even remotely gives us the right to use the

Lord's money for such things. If we'd leave the kitchens, banquet, rooms, and dance halls out of the church buildings and use that

## 8

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money to preach the pure gospel of Christ, the Lord would be pleased instead of humiliated by our actions.

The church Christ established is not a denomination. Were the early Christians, such as Paul, Stephen, Philip, and John, in the world today no denomination could claim them, for they labored for the Lord as faithful members of His church long before any of the so-called "Christian" denominations came into existence. They were simply members of the body of Christ—humble Christians—and had absolutely no affiliations with denominationalism. The church Jesus purchased was not a denomination.

In discussing what the church is not we need to mention that Jesus never did intend for His church to be a political power. The Lord didn't intend for the principles of Christianity to be a mixture of "church and state." His kingdom is a spiritual reign in the hearts and lives of men and not a political regime. In John 18:36, we have these words of Christ recorded: "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight. ..."

To the brethren at Corinth, Paul was inspired to write: "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal" (II Corinthians 10:3-4). The only weapon we are to use as members of the Lord's army—His church—is the sword of the spirit, the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17). Christians are taught not to use *force* but *love* in overcoming the enemies of righteousness. But you can read in any reputable history of an apostate religion, which claims to be the original church, which sent its members on a series of murdering escapades—known by us today as the *Crusades* and the *Inquisition*. As we study the nature of the church that Jesus established, we see plainly that He never intended for it to be a political system. Preaching brethren, let's keep politics out of the pulpit and tell sinners of the King of Kings.

## **A CHRIST-CENTERED CHURCH**

What makes a church great? There are those in the world who appraise spiritual greatness in the light of material accomplishment. Even some brethren are prone to equate importance with

## 9

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numbers, money, and propaganda. But the Bible is careful to tell us the traits of a truly great church. A church cannot be great unless:

1. The Lord Built It: Psalm 127:1; Matthew 16:18.
2. Christ Is The Head: Colossians 1:18.
3. And The Foundation: I Corinthians 3:11.
4. He Must Be The Cornerstone: Ephesians 2:20.
5. Christ Purchased it: Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:23.
6. It Follows The Divine Pattern: Hebrews 8:1-5.

But, it is apparent, today, that among those congregations belonging to Christ, some are not accomplishing what they ought. Why? One reason is we have almost over stressed individual responsibility and have overlooked Biblical injunctions that demand congregational oneness and action. For instance the Scriptures refer to the church as the:

1. Army of the Lord: Ephesians 6:10-17.
2. Body of Christ: I Corinthians 12.
3. Bride of Christ: Ephesians 5.
4. Family of God: Hebrews 3; Ephesians 3; I Timothy 3:15.
5. Kingdom of the Lord; Hebrews 12:28.

### **A CHRIST-CENTERED CHURCH**

All of these comparisons speak of the concord we have if the Lord's church glorifies the Savior. For the church will never be fully great until every member works together. We need the sentiment expressed in Acts 4:32 to prevail in our midst today: "Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul." We must be "striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Philippians 1:27). Paul exhorted the Corinthians to "be of one mind, live in peace" (II Corinthians 13:11).

A church that has "fervent love for one another" (I Peter 4:8) can accomplish much for Jesus. Yes, a congregation of the Lord's people

working together as these passages urge would be indeed unusual, different, and great! Wouldn't it be marvelous if every member were 100% loyal instead of 30%? If each one attended each assembly of study and worship? If each Christian gave so liberally that the tremendous work of

## 10

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evangelism and benevolence could be put into action? Yes, if every member of the body of Christ loved the Lord and one another thoroughly, we would soon see a world redeemed.

But, alas the following words truly depict the problem (II Timothy 2:20): "But in a great house there are not only vessels of silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor." The honorable vessels form churches that are Christ-centered. Let us notice five necessary ingredients in a Christ-centered church. Such a congregation must first of all be:

1. **Converted:** The word means "change in character, spiritual change, transformed, to have a different purpose." Yes, conversion applies after becoming a Christian, too! The church of Ephesus was told by the Lord to be transformed (Revelation 2:4). So also was the congregation in Sardis (Revelation 3:5). In II Corinthians 5:17, we learn of the converted life each member of the church is to live. A Christ-centered church must also be:

2. **Convicted:** Webster tells us that this word means "a state of being convinced, a fixed or firm belief, a deep persuasion." The opposite idea would be doubt or uncertainty. In Revelation 11, we learn that no compromise among God's people is tolerated. Christians today need to have the backbone manifested long ago by Daniel and his friends. We desperately need churches that stand up for the right thing—if **needs** be, against all odds. We just cannot please men and yet be the servants of Christ (Galatians 1:10). We need some rock-ribbed conviction in the church today. The language of II Corinthians 4 is very appropriate: "We also believe and therefore speak." When the love of Christ constrains us we shall persuade men (II Corinthians 5:11–14). How this attitude is needed today in God's family! A Christ-centered church is:

3. **Compassionate:** A root word here is "compass"—to see all around our neighbor's needs. An old Indian proverb said: "I'll not criticize my brother till I have walked in his moccasins for two weeks." To be compassionate means "to have pity, to be merciful, to be interested in the needs of others." Certainly, a church that is Christ-centered has **concern** for the lost of the world everywhere. The churches in Jerusalem, Antioch,

## 11

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Thessalonica and Philippi were all great in their concern for others. Our spirit needs to stir within us (Acts 17:16) as we realize millions yet remain untaught. A great church of the Lord must be:

4. **Constant:** This involves firmness, fortitude, faithfulness, regularity, steadfastness, and loyalty. The church in Philippi was told "to stand fast in one spirit" (Philippians 1:27). The one in Corinth was admonished to be "always abounding in the work of the Lord" (I Corinthians 15:58). The church in Ephesus was exhorted to "be strong in the Lord and the power of His might" (Ephesians 6:10). We should be constant, as God's people, in praising Him continually (Hebrews 13:15), in beseeching Him fervently (Colossians 4:2) and in bearing the Spirit's fruit (John 15:8-9; Galatians 5:22-23). Last of all, a Christ-centered church is:

5. **Conversant:** This word means "familiar by use or study, having frequent conversation, intimately associated, well acquainted and informed." The reason is obvious! A church cannot be great in the sight of heaven if heaven is out of sight! A church centered on Christ meditates day and night in Jehovah's law. Its members pray without ceasing. They are made glad to assemble for worship. Christ lives within the membership of such a church. And as one man such a congregation sings:

"O the pure delight of a single hour  
That before thy throne I spend.  
When I kneel in prayer  
And with Thee my God  
We commune as friend with friend."

**YOUR CONSENT**

All that is needed for each congregation to truly be patterned after the Lord's decrees is for each of us to give our consent to the divine pattern. Let us do this so the world may see the sterling character of the church—after the pristine order and beauty of the first century brethren.

## **What Must The Church Do To Be Saved?**

For years we have correctly taught in harmony with the Bible that sinners must do certain things, commanded by God, in

### **12**

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order to be saved. We have also stressed man's free moral agency and his personal response to heaven's decrees. Very few religious groups emphasize anything except "Christ's finished work at Calvary."

Satan enjoys that kind of preaching because it will keep sinners who are lost thinking they are saved! Actually, only one verse, I John 2:4, rebukes the doctrine of grace alone—faith alone: "He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

Even when denominational preachers speak to their members they follow the same pattern of Nicolaitan Heresy. They affirm: "After one becomes a Christian he cannot fall from grace; he is eternally secure." There is only one way that such a position could be true—men would have to *lose the power of choice* upon becoming Christians! For as long as we can choose we might decide to do wrong. Demas did (II Timothy 4:10; I John 2:15). The Corinthians certainly did (II Corinthians 12:21; 13:5). Christ tells us emphatically that some in Ephesus, Sardis, and Laodicea did (Revelation 2:1–5; 3:1–21). This is not a matter of conjecture—the Bible settled the issue long ago.

Due to the clarity of the New Testament on how to become a Christian and then on how to remain one, it is very strange to me that some brethren become terribly upset when we urge in preaching and writing that the church of the Lord must be on constant guard against apostasy from within and error from without.

At least 100 verses from the eight writers of the New Testament center around the theme of departing from sound doctrine. In Paul's

admonitions to Timothy and Titus alone it is safe to say that one-third of the context deals with what the church must do to be saved!

Is the devil lulling us into spiritual apathy with the old idea: "You are eternally secure; God will take care of you. Don't be concerned about doctrinal error, innovations in worship, men's devices in church government, and liberalism in morals. After all, Christ purchased the church with His blood; therefore, it can never fail!"

## 13

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It is true that the divine part of the church shall never fail and the message of truth that sustains the church is impregnable (I Timothy 3:15; I Peter 1:25; Daniel 2:44). However, from the human standpoint, only eternal vigilance and unfaltering loyalty can prevent a major falling away from the Rock of Ages. May I suggest seven points for deep consideration on the solemn theme: **What must the church do to be saved?**

1. **Develop elders who can convict the gainsayer:** This, of course, is required of spiritual overseers (Titus 1:10). We must honor the qualification, "able to teach" (I Timothy 3:2) if shepherds of the flock are ever capable of fending off wolves (Acts 20:28-30). Therefore, we must put the premium on spiritual growth and not in popularity when we elect elders.

2. **Train brilliant young men to boldly preach the Gospel:** We must give the best we have to the Lord's service. Too much manpower is being sacrificed on the altar of secular pride and materialistic enterprise. The congregation is failing in its responsibility to perpetuate the gospel through succeeding generations. Elders, preachers, parents, and Bible teachers must begin now to inspire, instruct, and instill within alert young men the urgency of preaching the Word.

3. **Practice church discipline constantly and consistently:** In order to preserve truth and strengthen the children of God there must be, as the Bible directs, *discipline* within the body of Christ. When bishops of the local church allow the name of the Lord to be degraded and scoffed at by worldly, insincere members it sets the church back for years. Required reading on this subject is Hebrews 12.

4. **Demand a much higher moral tone:** Corinth of the first century and America today would make almost identical twins in a satanic couplet. The appalling decline of moral fiber in our nation—and around the world—plays right into the devil's hands. Sadly, we are not *teaching* and *preaching* and *practicing* the high standards we once did. Immodesty and adultery can be found in our midst as well as in the world. Let us stop compromising and start living for Jesus.

5. **Do more teaching on church identify:** A generation ago gospel meetings were conducted to introduce our neighbors

## 14

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to New Testament principles of worship, doctrine, and organization. Exceedingly clear denunciation of false doctrine could be heard from most every pulpit. Today, in so many places, *it is different*. Some of our own children seldom, if ever, hear lessons on instrumental music, the Lord's Supper, church membership, and organizational structure. Just a few more years of failure to be *distinctive* and we will preach ourselves right out of the picture! It takes sound doctrine to be the church of the Lord (Titus 2:1).

6. **Preach the Bible and not emotionalism:** The one commodity we have to offer the world is the pure message of the Lord. Nearly any actor in Hollywood can jerk more tears than we can and most lawyers are sharper in swaying audiences. But the one precious ingredient that we have, by God's trust in us, is the gospel of His grace (Acts 20:24). When we resort to playing on people's emotions and becoming "response crazy" we walk the ancient road of insincerity and sectarianism.

7. **Above all, be Christ-centered:** This is the apex of all that we could ever say regarding keeping the church safe and secure in the Lord's bosom. A step away from Christ is a step into darkness (John 8:12). Walking with Him, in love and integrity, sheds constant light on the pathway of life (Colossians 1:10). When the church is centered upon the Lord there is no room for "preacheritis" or indifference or worldliness. When Christ is the point of focus we will proclaim His *message*, follow His *example*, and obey His *commands*. Nothing short of that can save the church.

## FINAL APPEAL



Friend of mine, I appeal to you to search the New Testament, read all that you can find therein concerning the bride of Christ—the church—and then begin immediately to search for a group of people who have restored the worship, the life and the teachings of the blood-bought church of Jesus Christ. Determine that you'll become a member of that body by believing in Christ as the Son of God, turning from sin in your life, and, after confessing the sweet name of your Lord, be immersed in water for the remission of sins. The Lord will then add you to His church and you will be able to assist His cause as you go

## **15**

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through life ever looking forward in the beautiful home of the soul! You will be a part of that immovable kingdom. Your name will be enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23–28) and blessing will surround you throughout eternal bliss. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus promised to build His church. Let us hasten to be members of that divine and glorious organism.

## **16**

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