

Christ's Church Is Essential To Salvation

by Doyle Crawford

These words of Jesus, "I will build my church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18), reveal his determination to establish his church. Such determination shows he deemed the church important.

The word "Hades ("Hell" in the King James Version) in the Bible means, according to Webster, "The state or resting place of the dead." 1 Jesus died on the cross of Calvary (Luke 23:46) and entered the state of the dead. However, Peter affirmed in Acts 2:27ff that his soul was not left in that state. He was raised (Acts 2:32). Not even death itself could keep Jesus' soul nor prevent his building his church.

THE WORD "CHURCH"

A noted scholar of the language of the New Testament has remarked that the word "Church" (Greek - "ekklesia") meant: "(a) An assembly of Christians gathered for worship. . . (b) A company of Christians. . ." 2 in its Christian usage.

It is apparent that Christ built a company of Christians. Such would convey the idea of building of which Jesus spoke. It would be more natural to speak of building together people in a company than an assembly. Anywhere people follow the teaching of Jesus' New Covenant faithfully, they are recognized as the church of Christ.

PURCHASED BY BLOOD OF CHRIST

Paul, the apostle, conversed with the elders of the church from Ephesus and encouraged them in their responsibility to the church (Acts 20:17-28). He reminded them of the importance of this group and their duty. He declared the church to be that which Christ "purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). To neglect their work in the Lord's church would have been to neglect that for which Christ died.

Jesus has not lessened the importance of this company for which his blood was shed. To neglect our duty to the church today is to abandon responsibility to the body for which Christ's blood was shed. I appeal to reason. Can one forsake such important duty and remain pleasing to God? Can one declare the church nonessential and refuse to be a part of it and yet obtain divine approval?

CHRIST, THE SAVIOR OF THE CHURCH

Ephesians 5:22-33 contains a beautiful analogy between the husband-wife relationship and the Christ-church relationship. Verse 23 states, "For the

husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, being himself the savior of the body." The apostle reasons that husbands and wives should imitate the relationship of Christ and the church.

Note that Christ is, "the savior of the body." The point was clear to first century Christians. They knew the church was the object of our Lord's continued grace. The apostle does not labor to prove the point. He uses what Christians already knew to be true to teach vital lessons on marriage.

Paul, the writer of Ephesians, knew of no other company or persons who had this special relationship with Jesus. Salvation was the blessing of the faithful in the church body. Can one leave the church and still enjoy salvation? How could that be when the church is that group of people being redeemed by Christ?

THE CHURCH IS GOD'S FAMILY

Paul wrote to Timothy that he might know, "How men ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God. . ." (1 Timothy 3:15). The word house is often used in the Scriptures to denote a household or family (cf. Acts 11:14; 2 Tim. 1:16). God's family is therefore also known as the church.

CHILDREN BY FAITH

Galatians 3:26 tells us that we become members of God's family by becoming his children through faith. The next verse tells us how that faith operates to make us family members. It says, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27). When one by faith in Jesus is baptized into a proper relationship with him, one becomes a member of God's family, the church.

A TEST CASE

"And the Lord added to them day by day those who were saved" (Acts 2:47b). This was the account of many Christian converts after the Lord's ascension back into heaven. What was this group called that had converts being added to it day by day? Acts 4:23 refers to these people as a "company." These same people are called, "the church" (Acts 5:11; 8:2). How were these people added to the church? They received the word gladly and were baptized (Acts 2:41). Having obtained forgiveness, they were now sons of God, members of the family or church of God.

WHAT MEN SAY OR WHAT CHRIST SAYS

Man's response to the concept of the church varies. Some say it has no significance and no right to exist. Others say it is good but, other organizations are just as good. Some believe it is imperative to have a church yet, believe one is as good as another.

Jesus once came to his disciples and asked them, "Who do men say the Son of man is" (Matt. 16:13). After they had related the opinions that many held he asked, "But who say ye that I am" (verse 15). Peter replied that he was the Christ, the Son of the living God (verse 16). Jesus then commended him for believing the testimony of God rather than the opinions of men.

The facts about the church are much like the idea as to the person of Jesus. Men have many opinions. But, God has a revealed will about the church in the Scripture. What will you believe concerning the church? Will you believe men or God?

1 Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, College Edition, (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1960) p. 650.

2 Joseph Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), p. 196.