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The Glorified Church Christ Established

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THE GLORIFIED CHURCH CHRIST ESTABLISHED

By Clarence A. Westapher

It is fitting that we should study the Bible and especially the Acts of the Apostles for instruction concerning the glory and dignity of the church in Apostolic times. The Apostles were inspired by the Holy Spirit to perfect a platform upon which the churches should stand until the end of this gospel dispensation. In giving the Apostles the commission, Jesus promised to be with them "always, even unto the end of the world." (Matt. 28:18-20.) Many times the churches were admonished to adhere to the teachings of the Apostles, to add nothing, and to take nothing therefrom. This solemn warning was given to the churches for all time to come. "If any one adds to these words, God will add to him the plagues spoken of in this book; and if any one takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city." (Rev. 22:18, 19.)

The church, Christ's spiritual realm, is the greatest institution extant, and membership in the church is the greatest privilege accorded to man. By divine authority, there is only one church, and there can be no substitute. The greatness of the church is seen in its task. The wisdom of God is to be made known through it (Eph. 3:10), and the gospel is to be preached by the church to the whole creation. (Mark 16:16.) Its work is the evangelization of the world and to redeem men and women.

This work is to continue, without change, until Christ comes again.

HOW TO ENTER THE CHURCH

The New Testament teaches us very clearly how to enter the church as it is revealed for our instruction in the New Testament, but it does not teach us how to enter any other church.

Since Christ is the head of the body, the church (Col. 1:18), no one can enter without complying with the terms of entrance, which have been given by its head. The Lord adds people to his church, and He adds only those who comply with His terms.

The phrase: "joining the church," is unknown to the Bible. Since the Apostle Peter with the divine keys opened the door of the church (Acts 2:38, 39), the matter of opening the door of the church today is even more foreign in the Scriptures. Man cannot open the door because it is already open. Neither can any man shut it. "I have set before thee a door opened, which none can shut." (Rev. 3:8.)

Born into the family: The church is the "Family of God." By birth, we enter the physical family, and by rebirth we enter the spiritual family, God's kingdom, the church. To be born again, one must be born of the water, and the Spirit. (John 3:3-5.) Let "Spirit" mean Spirit, and "water" mean water. We are begotten by the Spirit, the word of God. (Jas. 1:18.) We come up from the watery grave a new born creature. (Rom. 6:3-6.) Thus we are born both of water and the Spirit.

In New Testament times, inspired men preached faith, repentance, confession, and baptism, as terms of pardon, to the alien sinner.

FAITH

The first condition which God has placed upon salvation is FAITH. Faith means we are confident of what we hope for, convinced of what we do not see. Faith comes by hearing the word of God. (Rom. 10:17.)

It is imperative that we have an abiding faith in God, if we would offer acceptable obedience in becoming a child of God, and to live a Christian life that would be well pleasing unto Him. "Without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto Him; for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that seek after Him." (Heb. 11:6.) Paul said: "We walk by faith, not by sight." (2 Cor. 5:7.) "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." (Rom. 14:23.) The importance of faith in the divine plan of salvation is emphasized throughout the entire Bible.

The terms **faith** and **obedience** always work together. They cannot be separated in the act of salvation. Note that the turning unto the Lord was after they believed. The word of God does not teach that men are saved by faith without further acts of obedience. The faith that saves leads one to obey the commandments of God. "To obey is better than sacrifice." The faith our Lord requires must be well pleasing to Him, and must be expressed in obedience. Paul speaks of this obedience. (Rom. 16:26.)

Faith, working through love on the part of God's children, accomplishes that for which it was designed. "Be faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life." (Rev. 2:10.)

REPENTANCE

After faith naturally comes another condition of salvation which is repentance. To repent means "to change the mind." If one repents of sin, he simply changes his mind about sin; whereas he once loved sin, he now hates it. Those who have learned to hate sin will certainly not practice it. No one can love sin and be pleasing to God. Therefore, a change of mind about sin is a condition of salvation. See Acts 2:38; 17:30; Luke 24:47.

Repentance is commanded by Jehovah, God. It is His way of turning mankind back to Him. "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men to repent." (Acts 17:30.)

God's commands are emphatically imperative.

We know that remission of sins and eternal salvation are impossible without faith and repentance. We should make no mistake about this positive command from God to repent which means a change of man's will power, which is brought about by the goodness of God (Rom. 2:4), producing godly sorrow in the heart, the result of which is a reformation of life (II Cor. 7:10).

Repentance causes man to lose sight of self and know his humility as a poor lost sinner, not able to justify himself by his own goodness.

Repentance is the decision to accept God's way, do His will, refrain as much as possible from doing wrong; and in the future, do right to the best of our ability. Ours must be such a repentance as will make us realize the terrible consequence of sin, so terrible indeed that it was necessary for God to give his Son to die for its destruction.

CONFESSION

Confession of our faith in Christ is the third step necessary to our salvation, and naturally follows repentance; and precedes baptism, the final step into Christ's kingdom, the church.

The man who confesses his faith in Christ also declares his repentance. Therefore, after faith and repentance should come confession which is an acknowledgment of faith. There is no salvation without the confession of a belief in Jesus. This confession must be witnessed by men. "Every one therefore who shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father who is in heaven." (Luke 12:8.) But this confession with the mouth only is not sufficient. Ours must be such a confession of faith that our daily life, while here on earth, will reflect the beauties of His glorious life, that men may know we have a personal Saviour.

The wisdom of placing the confession of faith in the Christian dispensation is apparent. It strengthens the disciple to give public expression to what he believes.

On one occasion, Jesus asked His disciples: "But who say ye that I am?" And Simon Peter answered and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matt. 16:16.) This confession identifies Jesus and is the creed of the New Testament church today. This creed is divine and needs no revision. The universal practice of this creed will promote Christian unity, because it identifies the church.

All the combined forces of infidelity, atheism, criticism, modernism, and all the forces of the devil are not powerful enough to overthrow the glorious and dignified creed of the Church of Christ.

BAPTISM

When the believer repents and confesses Christ, then comes the positive command to be baptized. (Acts 10:48.) Faith changes the mind, repentance changes the conduct, and baptism changes the state. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ." (Gal. 3:27.)

Jesus said: "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he that disbelieves will be condemned." (Mark 16:16.) Here we see that the conjunction "and" joins faith and baptism, indicating that the Holy Spirit has joined these two terms together. One is undoubtedly as important as the other, and certainly they should not be separated.

It has been said, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin." This is true because the Bible affirms it. (I John 1:7.) The blood must be contacted or it will be of no avail. The place of contact is the place where He shed it—His death. The alien sinner goes down into His death in the watery grave of baptism and takes refuge in His blood. (Rom. 6:3, 4.)

When inspired men baptized, they used much water. (John 3:23.) They came to it and went down into it. (Acts 8:38.) After baptizing, they came up out of the water. (Acts 8:39.) The bodies of the baptized were washed in pure water. (Heb. 10:22.) The persons baptized were buried and raised. (Col. 2:12.) Were you baptized in this way? If not, have you obeyed Christ's positive command? "Blessed are they that do his commandments." (Rev. 22:14.) "If you know these things, happy are you if you do them."—Jesus.

HOW TO LIVE IN THE CHURCH

After becoming a child of God, study His word to know how to behave in God's house (1 Tim. 3:15).

The work of Christians consists in preaching the Gospel (1 Thess. 1:8; 2 Tim. 4:1, 2). Teaching the Gospel (1 Tim. 3:1, 2). Visit the sick (Matt. 25:34-40). Feed the hungry (Acts 6:1-5). Caring for the fatherless and widows (Jas. 1:27). Jesus said: "Herein is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit; and so shall you be my disciples" (John 15:8). We glorify God by a life of faithful service, and by our works our faith is made perfect.

The church is the greatest institution in the world. Its greatness is seen in its task. The wisdom of God is to be made known through it (Eph. 3:10), and the Gospel is to be preached by the church to the whole creation (Mark 16:16). The evangelization of the world and the redemption of man is its task.

The church is a spiritual institution. "God is a Spirit and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24).

Be ye filled with the Spirit; speaking one to another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord (Eph. 5:19).

The Lord's people should deny "ungodliness and worldly lusts, and should live soberly and righteously and godly in this world; looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Tit. 2:12, 13).

"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10).