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Churches of Christ Salute You with a Herald of Truth

James Willeford

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The Churches of Christ
Salute You
with a
Herald of Truth

CAN GOOD PEOPLE BE SAVED
OUT OF THE CHURCH?

September 14, 1952

by James D. Willeford

SERMON NO. 32

Station WC4E

3:00 P.M.

CAN GOOD PEOPLE BE SAVED OUT OF THE CHURCH?

When one says good people can be saved out of the church, that brings to mind this question: Just how good must people be for God to save them out of the church? In thinking about this question let us suppose that at the judgement the best woman who ever lived but who was not a member of the church steps before Christ. The Lord considers her moral life and says, "Since you were so good I am opening the gates of heaven that you may enter." And just after this woman steps from before the bar of Christ the best man who ever lived but who was not a member of the church steps forward. Christ says, "Since you were upright and honest I am saving you." Just after this incident another woman steps forward who is almost as good as the first one, and the Lord saves her even though she never became a member of the church. Friends, just where is the Lord going to stop? According to this theory, there is no impartial stopping place. It must go on and on and terminate only when Satan and his angels have been saved also. A theory that can be reduced to such an absurdity as this should be deliberately avoided.

There are two extreme views regarding the church. One view suggests that the church is everything; that its voice is authority in religion. The other view is that the church is almost nothing. To those who embrace the latter view the church is but little more than a glorified social order. They contend that it is not necessary to salvation. But the Bible supports neither of these extreme positions. It teaches that the church is important, but that it is not everything. It is essential but it is not the only essential. Let us study the New Testament and see what it does teach about the connection between salvation and the church.

In Matt. 16:18 Jesus said to Peter, "I will build my church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." Who would go on record as saying Christ built something that is non-essential? The very fact that the Lord built the church, and insured it against the gates of Hades is proof of its necessity.

Another factor that indicates the great importance of the church is its cost. Paul said to the elders in the church at Ephesus, "feed

the church of the Lord, which he hath purchased with His own blood", Acts 20:28. Would the Lord have shed His blood for something that is non-essential? The church was worth Christ's blood, for that is the price He paid for it. This great cost of the church indicates its essentiality. All truly good people will want to be in the church, knowing that the Lord shed His blood for it.

The vital union between Christ and the church is further seen in the fact that the church is the body of Christ. Paul said Christ "is the head of the body, the church", Col. 1:18. In the twelfth chapter of first Corinthians, Paul compared the church to a human body. He said, "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ". The church is a body in that Christ is the head, and all Christians are the members. We have no difficulty in understanding the apostle when he speaks of the eye, the ear, and the hands as being members of our body. These members are a part of the body and as such they are connected with the head. They could have no association with the head if they were not in the body. What is true of the body in a physical sense is true of the church in a spiritual sense. Paul said to Christians, "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular", 1 Cor. 12:27. As the members of the human body must be attached to the body to have any connection with the head, so we must be attached to or in Christ's body to have any connection with Him. The Lord's spirit is in His body, and if we would be washed in His blood and filled with His spirit we must be in His body. To be in His body is to be in His church, for the Lord says the church "is His body", Eph. 1:23. Surely all good people will want to be connected with Christ by being in His spiritual body.

The Lord used another figure of speech to impress upon us His close connection with the church. He said the church is His family. He guided Paul to say to Timothy, "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God", 1 Tim. 3:15. The word "house", in this instance, means family. Paul said the church is God's family. If good people can be saved out of the church of God they can be saved out of the family of God. But who believes this? Modernists may, but surely no person who accepts the Bible would contend that we can be saved out of God's

family. We must be in His family to be His children, and we must be saved to be His children. Paul said, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ", Rom. 8:16,17. Oh friends, we should yearn to be in God's family that we may be heirs of eternal life. Whatever the Lord asks of us we should do gladly that we may be in His family. And when we read in the New Testament that God's family is the church, we should hasten to come into it. We should honor and respect it, for it is the family of God.

Can good people be saved out of the church? If so, they can be saved without becoming subjects in the kingdom over which their Savior reigns. After having promised to build His church, Jesus promised to Peter the keys to the kingdom. When Peter used these spiritual keys on the day of Pentecost, men were entering the kingdom. Also, by being saved, they were added to the church, Acts 2:47. So then, we can see that in becoming a Christian one enters the kingdom and the Lord adds him to His church. Further proof of this is shown in that Paul wrote to the Christians at Colossae and reminded them that they had been translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, Col. 1:13. To be saved, then, one must become a willing subject in this great kingdom by obeying the commands of Christ, its King.

Another Bible statement about the church is where reconciliation to God takes place. In speaking of Jews and Gentiles the Lord says He reconciles "Both unto God in one body by the cross", Eph. 2:16. Reconciliation to our Lord takes place in Christ's body, the church. The writer adds that it is all by the cross. It was through death on the cross that Christ purchased the church with His blood. That is why we are reconciled to God in the body by the cross. The cross is inseparably connected with the church, and there is no promise of reconciliation to God except in the body which is the church. Paul reminded the Ephesian Christians of their condition before they came into the one body by saying, "That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world", Eph. 2:12. After their reconciliation the apostle said, "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of

the household of God", Eph. 2:19. Friends, to say that good people can be saved out of the church is to say that people can be saved without being reconciled to God.

We will all acknowledge the inseparable union between Christ and the church when we learn that it is the bride of Christ. The inspired writer of Ephesians said, "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore, as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it ... This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church." (Eph. 5:23-25,32). The church is here pictured as the bride of Christ. Paul said Christians are "married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God", Rom. 7:4. The Holy Spirit said the church is Christ's bride and that He is the savior of it. All good people wish to be closely united with Christ, and that union takes place when they become a part of His bride, the church.

As we know, Saul persecuted the early church, Acts 8:1. In the very next chapter Christ said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Acts 9:4. In persecuting the church Saul was persecuting Christ. This is easy to understand when we remember that the church is the bride of Christ. How can anyone be united with Christ and not be a part of His bride? How can we bear spiritual fruit and not be a part of this divine union?

When the Lord speaks of the church He has no reference to denominations, for they did not exist for hundreds of years after Christ. They were built by men, because Christ promised to build only one church. He said, "Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up", Matt. 15:13. Christ prayed for unity among Christians, but people have thought so long in denominational terms they have forgotten His prayer. If we were living in the first century, denominationalism would be a strange term indeed, for the Lord says, "The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul", Acts 4:32.

Members of the church sometime contribute to the mistaken belief that the church is not necessary to salvation. Their lives are unbecoming as disciples of Christ. But the Lord says, "every-

one of us shall give account of himself to God", Rom. 14:12. The Lord will not excuse sin in anyone, and He says the hope of the hypocrite shall perish.

Some good people feel they are broad-minded when they suggest that the church is not necessary to salvation. Friends, the all-important question is not whether you are narrow-minded or broad-minded, but are you right? When you believe what the Scriptures teach you will be scriptural-minded. Then you will have the mind of Christ, and that should be the overwhelming desire of our hearts.

Some good people say the church cannot save; that Christ must do that. Of course the church does not save, for it will be saved. Paul said Christ is the saviour of the body, the church. Eph. 5:23. The church does not save because it is the saved. Christ is the primary agent in our salvation, but may use whatever means He pleases in saving us. For instance, faith is not our saviour, but we cannot be saved without it. John said the word of God was "written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name", John 20:31. In like manner, the church is not our saviour, but we cannot be saved without being in it for the Lord promised to save it, Eph. 5:23.

Someone asks, "If I do the work of a Christian am I not one?" I could follow the moral principles of masonry all my life and never be a Mason. I could do many things the Lord requires of a Christian and never be one. If we can learn from the will of Christ how to become a Christian, we will know whether good people can be saved out of the church. One chapter in the New Testament will answer our question. According to the record given in Acts, chapter two, the apostles preached to thousands of men who had asked for the crucifixion of Christ. The burden of the sermon was the resurrection of the Lord. These people were convinced that they had killed the Son of God, and they cried with deep concern, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" By inspiration the apostles replied, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." Three thousand gladly received this message and were baptized. At that moment they were saved from past sins. They became Christians. Were they members of the church? Let the Lord answer. In verse 47 the

Lord said he "added to the church daily such as should be saved." The very moment they became Christians the Son of God added them to the church. The moment they were saved they were enrolled in the Lamb's book of life. This He desires to do for you. Jesus longs to become the shepherd of your soul. He offers to be your Great Physician, and you can trust His remedy for sin for He has never given a wrong prescription. He waits now for your faith to manifest itself in loving obedience. Hasten to Him who says so tenderly, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

I AM COMING TO THE CROSS.

I am coming to the cross;
I am poor and weak and blind;
I am counting all but dross;
I shall full salvation find.

Here I give my all to Thee,
Friends and time and earthly store;
Soul and body Thine to be,
Wholly Thine forevermore.

Gladly I accept Thy grace;
Gladly I obey Thy word;
All Thy promises embrace,
O my Savior and my Lord.

Chorus:

I am trusting, Lord, in Thee,
Blessed Lamb of Calvary;
Humbly at Thy cross I bow,
Seeking Thy salvation now.

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