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Talks From The Bible: Why The Church Means So Much?

Charles E. Cobb

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TALKS
FROM
THE

Bible



**WHY THE CHURCH
MEANS SO MUCH!**

A Prayer

Our Father,

Bless these words, we pray,

To the honor and glory of Thy Name,

And to the salvation of the souls of men.

In Jesus' Name,

Amen.

Why the Church Means So Much

It is our purpose in this discussion to bring your attention to focus upon the importance of the church by emphasizing why it means so much. There are some who, because of their lack of understanding, reject the church entirely. Others have stooped to the level of assault and ridicule. Some will contend that the church is unnecessary and is a "burden" imposed that is non-essential. Others claim to believe that the church has its place, but quite obviously think nothing of it. As we examine the subject now before us it is with a fervent hope and prayer that we shall be able to assist all who will give heed to a better understanding of the church of Christ, and why its meaning is so great.

To preface our study, we call your attention to the following words from the Bible. "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been

hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Eph. 3:8-11.) We can readily see that this scripture presents two cardinal points which must be clearly understood. *First*, the church was in God's eternal purpose. *Second*, God has a universal work for the church to accomplish, specifically the preaching of the eternal truth of Jesus Christ. Obviously, therefore, the church is of great and exceeding importance. It means much to God. It means much to Christ. It is to mean much to every sincere Christian as a member of the glorious body for which our Savior died.

The church is not some sort of an accident or step-child that can be lightly regarded or practically neglected. It means far too much. The founding of the church occupied the infinite mind of God across many centuries. Though some would deny this to protect their human concepts, our text presents with remarkable simplicity that God intended for the church to come to pass according to the plan and purpose which he had in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We pray you, therefore, to refrain from attending to the differing and colliding views of ambitious and prideful men. Take the time to hear clearly and well the teaching of the word of God.

Because of What It Is

May we begin by calling to your attention that *the church means much because of what it is*. In Colossians 1:18 the inspired apostle wrote, "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence." Here we are taught that *the church is the body of Christ*. God has told us plainly in his word what the church is—the body of Christ! How, then, under any circumstances, could we possibly conclude that the church of our Lord Jesus Christ is unnecessary, unimportant, and has little or no value? Again, we read, "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." (Eph. 1:22, 23.) The church is set before us again as the body of Christ. It is important, therefore, because it is the body of Christ. No other group or

institution can claim this marvelous distinction.

In the second place *the church is the family of God*. In Ephesians chapter 3, beginning in verse 14, the apostle writes, "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named." In 1 Timothy 3:15 the writer declares that the church is the "house of God, the pillar and ground of the truth." We know, then, that God considers the church made up of many members to be his family, his people, "A people for God's own possession" (Titus 2: 14 ASV). Surely, we believe that God's family must occupy a place of profound importance.

We also call your attention to the fact that *the church is the temple of God*. There is no temple standing in Jerusalem today patterned after the stipulations of Moses' law in which God's presence is known. *The church is now God's temple*. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." (1 Cor. 3:16, 17.)

God dwells within and among his people—in the church for which his Son died—in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because of What It Does

In the tenth chapter of the book of Romans the apostle asked, "How shall they hear without a preacher? How shall they preach except they be sent?" (Verses 14, 15.) A little later in the same chapter he said, "So then faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God." (Verse 17.) It is the responsibility of the church today to *preach Christ*. Men cannot hear the gospel without a preacher. The preacher cannot go unless he is sent. He should be selected, supported, assisted by the church to carry the gospel of Jesus Christ to those who know it not. One does not have true faith in God unless he is willing to abide in that which the word of God teaches. (2 John 9.) Thus the church is important and means so very much because *it is the only body charged with the solemn and awesome duty of preaching Christ*. We know that the church is the pillar and ground of the truth. (1 Tim. 3:15.) The church is that glorious institu-

tion to which God has committed the sacred privilege and holy obligation of preaching Christ and him crucified to lost men.

Further, as we read the New Testament, we are made aware of the persecution recorded in the book of Acts that centered about Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Following his death, the disciples were scattered abroad and "they went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). The next verse says, "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them." We, then, who are Christians, are to be busily engaged in preaching the gospel of the Son of God. This is the business of the church! This is the business in which we are to be constantly employed—preaching Christ. Preaching Christ to all who will listen. Preaching Christ to all who will believe. Preaching Christ to all who want to go to heaven.

The church means so much because it helps the unfortunate. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." (James 1:27.) A part of

pure religion as enjoined upon us by our heavenly Father is to "visit the fatherless and widows." It is clearly our duty as the church to do good unto those who are bowed down in sorrow, who are without the necessities of life. In fact, we are to do whatever good we can in the interest of anybody and everybody. This is taught in Galatians 6:10, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." This admonition was written to the churches of Christ in the region of Galatia.

The church means so much because it is the great body that worships God according to the teaching of the New Testament. Jesus said, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." (John 4:24.) The church of the Lord assembles together at various times and in these assemblies the people bow down in worship of the heavenly Father. God wants us to worship him. It is the duty, obligation, privilege of the church to worship God according to the truth and "in spirit."

In order that we shall be clearly understood, we wish to emphasize that we speak not of denominationalism when we speak of the church, but of that church set forth clearly and prominently upon the pages of the New Testament of Jesus Christ. This church had its origin in the mind of God. It was built according to God's eternal purpose. The Lord Jesus Christ had to come into the world to make it possible for the church to exist. Therefore, as we continue to consider this matter, we urge you to keep these facts clearly in mind.

Because of What It Stands For

In the first place the church stands for liberty and freedom under God. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." (Gal. 5:1.) Every Christian has been liberated. He has been liberated from the bondage of the old law as well as the bondage of sin which is the most terrible, tragic bondage of all. Even though one might spend a while in prison because of his faith; even though one may be barred from public association, yet he still

enjoys liberty and freedom in Christ Jesus our Lord. Observe the apostle Paul as an example of this truth that we have presented. Thus, the church today stands for liberty and freedom under God. We live under the direction and guidance of the *perfect law of liberty*. "But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." (James 1:25.)

The church means much because it stands for purity of individual life. In giving one of the secrets of happiness, Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." (Matt. 5:8.) Also we read, "Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure." (1 Tim. 5:22.) The church must uphold these verities. It cannot do otherwise if we would please God. We must contend for the blessing, virtue, and beauty of a life of holiness.

The church also stands for the truth in all right and reasonable areas of life. The church is not opposed to the truth in any

realm that is good for, and helpful to, society. It may interest you to know that there is no contradiction between the truth of the Bible and truth in the realm of science. There is no truth *known* to science today that contradicts the truth of the Bible. Whatever truth is for the good of mankind, the church willingly accepts that truth.

Because of What It Opposes

There are people in religious circles who are disposed to disagree with anything that is negative. They deplore "negativism," but in so doing "*negate the negative.*" Yet, the apostle Paul said to Timothy, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." (2 Tim. 4:2.) There are many things that the church must oppose by reason of what it is, what it stands for, and what it does.

The church is duty-bound to oppose religious error, division, or innovations of any kind. "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be

no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." (1 Cor. 1:10.) Again, "For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and division, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?" (1 Cor. 3:3.) Those people were condemned by the Spirit of God because they walked in the mind of the flesh instead of the mind of the Spirit. The mind of the flesh will lead to division. The mind of the Spirit will lead to unity.

We are impressed with the fact announced in Ephesians 4:4, "There is one body." As we have seen previously, the church is the family of God. Surely, the family of God ought not to be divided. And, if the family of God would not be divided, then the family of God must stand squarely for the truth—which is able to make us free when we know it, understand it, and practice it. (John 8:32.) This, therefore, means that we cannot and must not accept any error, condone any division, or accept any innovation. We must stand up for the truth and stand opposed to all religious errors.

The church must oppose immorality in any form. Our nation is being crushed, abused, and cursed today by a tremendous rise in immorality. This is obvious to anyone who will take the time to look about him. Immorality has become almost an epidemic across the U. S. A. The Bible warns us against this kind of conduct. "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Cor. 6:9, 10.) Immorality will destroy the soul. The church—if it is to stand—must stand opposed to any and all kinds of immorality.

This leads us to say that any kind of sin must be opposed by the Lord's church. Sin is of satan. Sin comes out of the "bottomless pit." Satan's influence brings about the practice of sin. The Bible teaches us that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).

The church is a glorious institution. It is a wonderful family. It is a glorious body—

not merely because of what it stands for—
but also because of what it opposes.

Because of Christ

Finally, the church means so much because of Christ. We are taught in the New Testament of the relationship that exists between Christ and his church. The church is set forth in a beautiful figure as the bride of the Son of God. "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God." (Rom. 7:4.) The church presented as the bride of Christ—and together with him—must bring forth fruit to the honor and praise of the eternal Father.

The writer of Ephesians says, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." (Eph. 5:25-27.) Some day, the

church will be presented to Christ "without spot, wrinkle, blemish, or any such thing." This is a glorious picture! Let us understand that the church means so much to us because of what it means to Christ.

We also ask you to consider that the New Testament church is "*in Christ*." Note this statement, "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." (Rom. 12:4, 5.) Those who are Christians are *in Christ*. They are in the body of Christ—the church. We are members one of another. The blood of Christ is that which has cleansed us, one and all.

It was Paul who declared, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Phil. 1:21.) This is the attitude that we also must assume if we would be well-pleasing unto God. We must walk in the footsteps of Jesus for it was he who left us an example that we should follow in his steps. "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps." (1 Peter 2:21.)

The church means so much to our Savior that he willingly went to the cross to give his life for our redemption and thus to purchase the church. "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." (Acts 20:28.)

Christ wants us to be with him. "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:1-3.) Our Savior declared, "That where I am, there ye may be also." This should be all the evidence that we shall ever need to prove to us the value and importance of the church.

If you want to be with Christ through all eternity, we urge you to obey his will, become truly his, and he will in the sweet bye and bye grant you the honor and clothe you with the glory of being where he is. While

mercy lingers, while heaven waits, while time is still on your side, won't you surrender to Christ, become a member of his church, *through obedience to the gospel*, and then live for him the rest of your days so that heaven may be your eternal home?

NOTE

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The speaker on the program is Charles E. Cobb, minister of the South Water Avenue Church of Christ, Gallatin, Tennessee.

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CHARLES E. COBB
P. O. Box 36
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