

My Church

By

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“Upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).

The “Rock” upon which the church is built is the fact that Jesus is the Christ. When Peter said, “Thou art the Christ” (Matt. 16:16) he was referring to the fact that Jesus was the One anointed to be the sin-offering; to die in man’s place and thus remove from him the curse of sin and death.

With the sin-guilt removed a person’s circumstance is changed in three ways; (1) He is no longer condemned to die in judgment, but has passed out of judgment and death into life (John 5:24). He is therefore destined to live forever in the eternal Kingdom of God; (2) He is no longer an enemy of God but is reconciled to Him (Romans 5:10); (3) He is therefore set apart from the dying and, doomed world of sinners to have fellowship with all others who are redeemed (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Moreover, this matter of removing one’s sin-guilt is absolutely personal. It depends upon faith: the belief that Christ Himself took the believer’s sins and underwent sin’s punishment of death on the cross. It involves a personal repentance and submission to baptism where the believer is baptized into the death of Christ (Rom. 6:3). The entire transformation is strictly between the individual sinner and Christ. Therefore as the person takes his stand upon the “Rock” which is Christ, and all that He represents, Christ changes the circumstances that make the person a part of His church.

It is easy to see, then, that only Christ can build the church. Men may organize and erect great structures which they call churches. They may fill these buildings with the unbelieving, the unrepentant, the people of the world who look to the church for a cloak of respectability, for prestige and an aid to their reputation. They may do many great works in the name of the Lord. But such “church building” is not necessarily what Jesus is doing. A young minister recently told me that he had left a certain church because he was convinced that “He could never build a church in that location.” He was right. But, then, he was not sent to build churches! The minister of Christ is sent to preach the gospel. It is the truth of the gospel that brings men to the “Rock” and into the fellowship with Christ, and hence a part of the church He builds.

The “church” which is built upon any other basis than redemption through Christ is a counterfeit church. Whatever name it wears and whatever ordinances it observes, it is not the Lord’s church and will be condemned at His coming along with all false systems of religion. The attendance figures, the wealth of members and number of people of social and political influence on the rolls may impress the unbelieving world, but they do not indicate a redeemed people. What Christ wants is people who are totally converted from

allegiance to this world to allegiance to His kingdom which “is not of this world.” His purpose is not merely to flavor the things of the world with a little bit of Christian good will, and a bit of Christian principle and a dash of good morals all mixed in with some good business ethics. It is true that all these things will be evidenced in the life of the Christian, but they do not make a person a part of His church.

It is a gross mistake for Christian people to think that the church indicates its success by its size or by the grandeur of its buildings or the fame of its members. While the world may judge a thing by its size and by the fame and wealth of the people in it, we ought to remember that Jesus said, “That which is exalted, among men is an abomination in the sight of God.” The current effort to “impress” the world through worldly attainments can hardly result in repentance from the things of the world to God.

In fact, the more we find we are approved by the world, the more uneasy we should be as to whether or not God approves. After all, the world, in which we live, is not committed to the purpose of God, but rather to the purpose of Satan. “The whole world lies in the evil one” (John 5:19). Jesus said, concerning His disciples, “The world hated them because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (John 17:14). The Bible reveals that the rebellious and condemned world will grow more and more hostile to God’s purpose, seeking to discourage and destroy His people, while at the same time Satan will counterfeit His kingdom with a false church.

Some interpret the statement, “The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it,” to mean that once a church is begun, nothing can defeat it; or that in spite of unbelief and atheistic attacks, the church will go right on increasing and, prospering. Of course, we can see that neither interpretation is correct from the many churches that have been organized, only to disband later on, and the fact that in many lands the whole church has been swept aside by atheistic communism.

“Hades” refers to death. (King James Bible erroneously translates it “hell,” but the correct translation is Hades). The door of death cannot be shut upon the Christian. He has been rescued, from the penalty of sin by Christ. Although he will meet death as a mortal being (unless Christ comes before he dies) death will not prevail. At the coming of Christ the second time the graves shall be opened, and “death and Hades (shall give) up the dead” (Rev. 20:13) and the Christian shall be raised up to live forever as an immortal person. The resurrection of Jesus is a demonstration of this fact that death and Hades cannot prevail over one who is sinless! Since it is only the person who comes to Christ and is made sinless by His death that belongs to the church which Christ builds, then when Christ comes all the members of His church shall be released from the grave and from death.

Thus we see from Jesus’ own lips that the purpose of building the church is in order to have a people who can pass from death to life and live forever in His new creation. It is made up of people who come to Christ, and are established by a personal faith in Him, thus built upon the “Rock” which is Christ the sin-bearer. Its object is not to persuade the sinner by the sheer force of size and appeal to worldly appetites, but to present the truth

of Christ and His gospel. Its object is not to pass legislation and thus force man to conform to certain social changes. Its objects are not to save the nation by political pressure upon congress or the president. Such changes take place when men refuse to be “fashioned according to this world” and are “transformed by the renewing of (their) minds” (Romans 12:2), and this, in turn, is a result of being built upon the “rock” of Christ.

One more thing; the Lord’s church is united. It is united in faith, a harmony of the thinking of the people. It is not a unity brought about by giving up the truth, but a unity that comes by believing the same thing. The mere bringing of men together under the same roof, or the idea of uniting churches under one name would be unity in appearance and name only. When a person is united with Christ in His death, he is built or established on the Rock of Christ and is therefore united with all others who are so established. In the prayer of Jesus in John 17 He prayed “that they may be one even as we are one.” This oneness is obviously **oneness of minds**, a harmony of faith, and a mind to mind relationship with one another and with God which is produced by accepting the truth of God.

A great many things are being built and honored, today in the name of the church. Christian, be sure that you are a part of that which Christ, and not man, is building.

JUST FOR YOU–TH

In case you hadn’t noticed, the YOUTH section has been absent for two months, and about all I heard was a big silence. Do any high-school and college kids ever read this section? Alt the comment I ever get is from the older folks.

For several years I have watched Christian young people grow up. At first one is encouraged to see fine young boys and girls in Sunday school and other church-related meetings. You just can’t help loving these kids as you think of them giving their lives to God. But most of the time it is a disappointment to follow these lives on into college and then into adulthood. A few are staunch and true, but the rest drift, and the witness for Christ they promised to bear when young turns out to be nothing more than an occasional nod to God.

Why this drifting? It isn’t too hard to find the reason. These youth failed to make God the actual focal point of life. They never did really make up their minds to seek God’s will first of all, no matter what happened. They went along with Him when the going was easy, but when some other attraction captured their attention, God took second place.

Jesus summed it up by saying that one must “live the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength and with all thy mind” (Luke 10:27). And this is just what every young person needs, A TARGET FOR LOVE.

Until a person does find a TARGET for his LOVE, he will never be able to fulfill his life, and unless that TARGET is GOD, he will never know life eternal.

The trouble today is that love is being aimed at the wrong targets. First it's the opposite sex. Then it's football. Then it's the opposite sex again, and then movies, and then the opposite sex, and then clothes and style, and then the opposite sex, and then music and then the opposite. . . .

Now you can do one of two things. You can find a target that is really worthy of all your love and then you can fling your whole life at it! Or you can continue to go off in all directions, at all these little targets, each time returning to home base a little regretful, a little less sure of yourself, and a little less able to put you all into the next effort.

What Jesus is saying is that "God is the one TARGET that's worthy of all your love, and when you aim at Him, you get everything else thrown in."

What do I mean by God as a Target? Well, look at what God started out to do - to make man in His own image. This is the bull's eye! What greater goal can anyone have than to be what the Creator intended for him to be - a person made in the very image of God? If you are aiming for God then your target is to be a person in God's image, and when you seek to be this kind of person you have included all the good qualities for which any person can strive. Besides that you do away with drifting from one idol to another. One cannot follow the "idols" - whether movie-idols, TV-idols or record-idols - and set his heart on God at the same time.

But there's more. When God is the TARGET OF YOUR LOVE, consider all the other rings of the "bull's eye": the cleansing from sin afforded by Christ's death, the hope of the resurrection from the dead when Christ comes, the redemption of our bodies that we may be changed" into immortal beings like Him, and finally the new creation which God will create for our eternal dwelling place! How one could aim at any other target, and dare miss all that God has to offer.

Make God the TARGET OF YOUR LOVE, and never aim at anything else.

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