

Believing Truth About the Church



Dr. Harold Cooper

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Introduction

The Lord promised that His church would continue upon earth until He comes again (Matthew 16:18). He made that promise knowing full well that Satan would use every device at his command to destroy her. Jesus is omniscient. He knew that Satan would use direct, frontal attacks, deception, imitation, and internal disruption as weapons against the church. He made His promise, however, because He knew why she would continue. He was aware that His abiding presence would afford her protection, direction, provision, and illumination.

Jesus also knew that there would be those who would love her service and who would equip themselves for her defense. Surely that is needed today. The church continues to come under attack. Far too few people understand her history, nature, mission, means of support, and future sufficiency well enough to come to her defense. Thank God for the few, however! May their number greatly increase. To that end, this book has been written. If it accomplishes its purpose, however, it must not only be read; it must be given diligent study. The love of Christ for His church and for us should constrain us to do just that!

A slightly different format has been followed in this book from that which was followed in *True Science* and in *Discovering Christ in the Home*. The nature of the materials made it seem preferable to make the change. "Points of difference" have replaced the "common experience" which was in the former books. The "points of difference" are those areas of most obvious disagreement found in professed Christendom. They are presented in order that the student may see the error of those opinions which are contrary to the Scriptures and the truth of those which are in harmony with the Word of God. It is hoped

that the questions asked and the replies given are sufficiently detailed to differentiate clearly between those opinions which are in error and those which are in accord with truth.

All Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version since it is the translation predominantly used in the churches of the Baptist Missionary Association of America. The student has the lesson presented in the language and style of the translation with which he is probably most familiar.

The personal challenges are intended as supplements to the lesson or as stimuli to more detailed study. If the student takes those challenges seriously, he will profit from them. The Lord's church is a great institution. She should be known and loved by every believer.



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all ages constitute the church and (2) those who believe that the church had her beginning with Abraham. Neither of those concepts, however, finds positive support in the Scriptures. The church is unquestionably a New Testament institution.

Although Stephen's sermon (Acts 7) contains a reference to "*the church in the wilderness*," a church (*ekklesia*) in the New Testament sense is not intended. That body of people in the wilderness is more correctly designated by the term "*congregation*" (as in I Chronicles 13:2) or "*assembly*" (as in Ezekiel 13:9).

At the Rapture, the local, visible bodies of scripturally baptized believers (local churches) will come together into that one body (the church in the aggregate), which is destined to become the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:25-27). Since the church is to be given in marriage to the Lamb (Revelation 19:7-9), Israel cannot be the church. She is the estranged wife of the Father (Hosea 2; Isaiah 50:1). She will seek His favor again during the Tribulation (Revelation 7:4-8) and will experience lasting reconciliation to Him in the millennial and eternal ages (Hosea 2:19). As the wife of the Father, Israel has known the most intimate of relationships with Him. Through their union, she brought forth His Son to be the Savior of the world (Revelation 12:1-6). Surely she will not, in turn, be given to the Son in an incestuous and adulterous relationship. Consequently, we know that Old Testament saints, including Israel, are not in the church. The church had her beginning in New Testament days. The questions must still be answered, however, as to when and where in New Testament days she was founded.

Different biblical settings have been proposed as the place where the church began. Principal among those proposals are the following: Bethabara (a ford on the Jordan, sometimes called Bethany), where John was baptizing (John 1:28-51); the Sea of Galilee, where Peter, Andrew, James, and John were engaged in fishing (Matthew 4:18-22); the mountain where the apostles were chosen (Luke 6:13-16); and the house where the disciples were assembled on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). All of those places are significant in the history of the church. Obviously, however, only one of them can be the place where the church had her beginning. As an institution, the church is one or a unity. She did not have a multiplicity of beginnings. There was but one. Only one place can lay claim to that historic event.

In order to be thorough, however, there is another question that must be considered: Could the church have arisen in a non-biblical setting? There are those who feel sure that she did.

in their efforts to justify the existence of their local congregations: (1) They could have made a false claim to being the original church established by Jesus during His personal ministry, as the Roman Catholic Church has done. (2) They could have attached no significance to the time or place of origin of the church. (3) They could have argued that Jesus waited for many years following His ascension before beginning to "build" His church. (4) They could have invoked the "restoration" concept. The weight of historical evidence has made the first alternative infeasible for all except the Roman Catholic Church. Since the Bible so clearly ties the church to Jesus as her author and builder, the beginning of the church is highly significant. The second alternative offered no refuge. The existence of local congregations who were contending for the faith long before the establishment of those denominations made the third alternative a dangerous sanctuary for those who dared enter her portals. That alternative has been almost unanimously shunned. Consequently, the "restoration" claim has received wide usage among those groups.

One verse of Scripture is sufficient, however, to show the fallacy of the "restoration" claim. Jesus said in reference to His church that "*the gates of hell [i.e., the powers of darkness] shall not prevail against it*" (Matthew 16:18). If the church ever ceased to exist as an institution because of doctrinal corruptness, the "gates of hell" would prevail against her. Jesus said that would not happen. The "restoration" claim is false. The perpetuity of true churches from the days of Christ's personal ministry to the present can be historically documented.

Objectives

1. To introduce the membership of the first church
2. To identify the founder of the church
3. To investigate the time and place of the origin of the church

Laying the Foundation

The importance of a study of the relevant factors in the origin of the church may be found in the answers to the following questions: (1) What has Christ done for the church? (2) What is the church to do for Him? (3) To what group was the Great

Commission given? (4) What is to be the future relationship of the church to Christ?

If all that Christ has done for the church were listed and exhaustively discussed, "I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written." One thing which He has done, however, leaves no doubt about the importance that Jesus attaches to the church. He has purchased the church with His blood. While stressing to the elders at Ephesus the pastor's responsibility to the church over which the Holy Spirit had made him an overseer, Paul emphasized that great fact (Acts 20:28). He used the same argument to enforce his admonition to husbands to love their wives. "*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it*" (Ephesians 5:25). Since the church is so meaningful to Christ, she should be considered important by His people. Every believer should desire to learn as much as he can about the church.

Christ did the ultimate for the church when He died for her. What, then, is the church to do for Him? Paul answered that question in Ephesians 3:21. The church is the agency through which God is to receive glory "*throughout all ages, world without end.*" No other institution has been so honored. The Lord wants His people to identify His church, affiliate with His church, and work for Him in and through His church. Since Satan has sought to confuse God's people by setting up a number of imitations of the Lord's church through well-intentioned but deceived persons, it is imperative that the true church be correctly identified. That can be done only through a knowledge of the history and doctrines of the Lord's church.

To whom was the Great Commission given? To whom was the authority and responsibility given for evangelizing the world, for administering the ordinances, and for teaching new disciples "*to observe all things*" that Jesus commanded (Matthew 28:18-20)? Was the commission given to all believers as individuals, or was it given to an organized body of believers, His church? If the church had her beginning on the day of Pentecost, or thereafter, the Great Commission (which was given by Jesus before His ascension) was given to believers as individuals. That would mean that all believers have the authority to baptize and that persons so baptized have fellowship with other believers only as individuals and are not necessarily a part of any local congregation. If, on the other hand, the church had her beginning during the personal ministry of Jesus, the Great Commission was given to an organized body of believers — the Lord's church. If that

be true, the church alone has the authority to baptize, such baptism being administered through the church's authorized agent (who is usually the pastor). Such baptism would establish fellowship with the baptizing body, making the persons so baptized an integral part of that body. The "when" and the "where" of the church's origin is important to God's people.

The future relationship of the church to Christ provides another incentive for studying her history. That the relationship is to be intimate and beautiful is made quite clear by the Bible. The church at present enjoys a special relationship to Christ as the object of His special care, but the present relationship does not compare with that relationship which will be experienced when the church becomes the bride of Christ (II Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:27; Revelation 19:7-9). The discerning believer knows the value of that relationship and determines to share its joys by being a member of the Lord's church.

Let Us Reason Together

Question — What is meant by the term *church*?

Reply — A terse, working definition of the term *church* may be stated as follows: A church is a local, called-out congregation of baptized believers covenanted together to uphold the doctrines of the Bible and to forward the cause of Christ.

Question — Who were the charter members of the first church?

Reply — No attempt will be made to identify by name the first members of the church. Rather, it is affirmed simply that they were disciples of John the Baptist. They had become believers through the preaching of the Baptist and, subsequently, had been baptized by him. Granting that that is true (and it is true), how can they be said to have qualified to be charter members of the church?

That John's disciples were true believers is clearly set forth in the Bible. John came preaching repentance for sin (Matthew 3:1, 2) and insisting upon evidence of repentance before baptizing those who came to him (Matthew 3:8). The materials used in the formation of the first church met the qualification for true believers.

Since baptism had its beginning with John, the question naturally arises: By what authority did he baptize? The answer is that he baptized by divine authority. He was a special representative whom God sent forth to prepare the way for the Lord (Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 3:1; Luke 1:76-80). The apostle John said

of him: "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John" (John 1:6). Notice further the significance of his title, "The Baptist." *The Baptist* literally means "The Baptizer." John was "The Baptizer" who was sent forth by God (John 1:33). Did his disciples have valid baptism? The answer is surely obvious.

Although the disciples of John the Baptist were true believers and had valid baptism, they did not constitute a church until they were called out and formed into a company with the purpose of forwarding the cause of Christ. At what place were they called out and formed into such a company? The answer to that question will identify the place where the church began.

Question — Where did the church begin?

Reply — A step-by-step investigation of the proposed places will be made in the following discussion in an attempt to answer that question. The best approach for doing that seems to be to trace the church backward in time until her origin is found. "This we will do, if God permit."

That the day of Pentecost does not mark the beginning of the church is certain from the Scriptures. The Bible states that "God hath set some in the church, first apostles" (I Corinthians 12:28). The obvious reference is to the mountain scene (Luke 6:13-16) where Jesus chose the twelve disciples. Now to "set" the apostles in the church demanded that the church be in existence. It would have been an impossibility to have set them into something which did not exist. Jesus himself referred to His disciples a number of times during His personal ministry in such a way as to show clearly that they had already been formed into a functioning body, His church. He spoke of leaving a house with servants to whom He would give the authority of administration (Mark 13:34, 35). That house of God is declared to be the church (I Timothy 3:15). While comforting and warning His followers, Jesus called them a "little flock" and "the sheep of the flock" (Luke 12:32; Matthew 26:31). Paul used the term "flock" to designate "the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). Jesus declared that the "kingdom of heaven," the church organically instituted, has suffered violence from the baptism of John the Baptist (Matthew 11:11, 12). He asserted that some shut up the "kingdom of heaven" against men, neither entering themselves nor permitting those who would to enter (Matthew 23:13). That scripture evidently refers to the severe persecution and excommunication by the Jews of any who became a part of the Lord's "company," the church. The kingdom of God was declared to

have been in the midst of the Pharisees during the Lord's personal ministry (Luke 11:20; 17:20, 21). It is evident that a New Testament church was established and that she functioned as a local congregation before the day of Pentecost.

First Corinthians 12:28 shows that the church did not begin in the mountain where Jesus chose His twelve apostles. Again attention is drawn to the fact that to set apostles in the church required that there be a church. John the Baptist had declared much earlier that the bride was already in existence (John 3:29). In that Scripture, the present possessive ("*He that hath*") leaves no doubt that our search must go back beyond that scene.

Significantly, John 3:29 also rules out the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 4:18-22) as the place where the church began. Keep in mind that John 3:29 was spoken by John the Baptist *before* his imprisonment; whereas, the events of Matthew 4:18-22 happened *after* his imprisonment. (See Matthew 4:12.) The circumstances surrounding the imprisonment of John by Herod was one of the reasons for Jesus' withdrawal from Judea into Galilee, where Peter, Andrew, James, and John were subsequently called. Another reason for His withdrawal was the jealousies that had been aroused by His disciples' baptizing more converts than John's disciples were baptizing (John 4:1-4).

There appears to be only one other logical place where the church could have begun. That place was Bethabara, beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing (John 1:28-51). Much scriptural evidence, indeed, points to Bethabara as the place. Because he had "companied" with the disciples of Jesus "all the time that Jesus went in and out" among them, "beginning from the baptism of John," Matthias was nominated (and subsequently elected) to fill the vacancy in the apostolic office which had been created by the untimely death of Judas Iscariot. Undoubtedly, the "company" of which he was a part was the Lord's church. All the qualifications for a church were met at Bethabara.

John 1:37 relates that two of John the Baptist's disciples heard him identify Jesus as the Lamb of God. They followed Jesus; they became His disciples. One of the two who heard John speak was Andrew (verse 40). He found his brother, Simon (Peter), and told him about having found the Messiah (verse 41). He brought Simon to Jesus (verse 42). There were then three in the "company" of disciples. The following day Jesus found Philip and called him to discipleship (verse 43). Philip, in turn, found Nathanael and brought him to Jesus (verses 45, 46), completing the company of five — the first "called out" ones.

Recall that John the Baptist had affirmed that the bride was already in existence prior to Jesus' calling of the four at the Sea of Galilee (John 3:29). The church had experienced many things with Jesus before that time. Acting upon His determination to go up to Galilee, Jesus and His five disciples left Judea (John 1:43) and went to a wedding in Cana of Galilee (John 2:1, 2). There Jesus performed His first miracle, the turning of water into wine (John 2:1-11). Upon leaving Cana, Jesus made His first sojourn at Capernaum, accompanied by His kindred and His disciples (John 2:12).

As the time of the Passover drew near, however, He and His company returned to Jerusalem where He cleansed the temple for the first time (John 2:13-22). While at Jerusalem, He had the well-known interview with Nicodemus (John 3:1-21). Leaving Jerusalem, Jesus and His band of disciples withdrew into the regions of the Jordan where the dispute arose over Jesus' disciples baptizing more converts than John's followers (John 3:22-36). John's loyalty never faltered, however; he exalted Jesus to his disciples.

Subsequently, John the Baptist reprovved Herod for his adulterous relationship with his brother's wife. That resulted in John's imprisonment (Luke 3:19, 20). Upon hearing of the imprisonment, Jesus decided to return to Galilee (Mark 1:14; Matthew 4:12; Luke 4:14). As He and His disciples (the number of whom had increased considerably) passed through Samaria on their way to Galilee, He had the encounter with the woman at Jacob's well (John 4:5-42).

After arriving in Galilee, Jesus began to preach in the synagogues and was enthusiastically received because of the miracles which He performed (Mark 1:14, 15; Matthew 4:17; Luke 4:14, 15). On one of His preaching tours, He returned to Cana where He performed another miracle. It was there that He healed the nobleman's son (John 4:46-54). From Cana He went to Nazareth where He had been brought up (Luke 4:16).

As His custom was, He entered into the synagogue on the sabbath day. He stood up to read Isaiah 61:1, 2. When He laid claim to being the one in whom that scripture was fulfilled, the wrath of the Jews was aroused, and they sought to cast Him out of the city. He evaded them, however, and disappeared from their midst (Luke 4:17-31).

From Nazareth He went to Capernaum where He established a residence (Matthew 4:13-16). At Capernaum, His disciples (at least some of them) returned to their former occupations. It was in that setting that Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee where He

Personal Challenges

1. Study the materials in the chapter until they have become a part of you. Every believer should have a depth of understanding about the church because of her importance in this age and in the ages to come.
2. If your church has a library, determine if the books listed as references at the end of this chapter are a part of it. If they are not, consult your pastor about the possibility of obtaining them. Once they are in your library, make sure that you study them. A good book on the shelf is of little value. The contents of a good book in the head can be of great value.
3. Thank God each day for providing His church as an agency of strength and service.

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How to Build a Church

1. Never allow a day to pass without taking time to **PRAY** for your church and her special projects.
2. Never speak with anyone without saying a word of **PRAISE** for your church and pastor. The criticism will be spoken loud and often; see that the praise is louder.
3. Never fail to show **FRIENDLINESS** to everyone in all the church services, especially to the newcomer and the absentee. Nothing can substitute for old-fashioned friendliness.
4. Never push your church down into a position of lesser importance than social engagements, secular meetings, or anything else. There is no greater power for a church than members who quietly but emphatically **PUT THE CHURCH FIRST**.
5. Never refuse an opportunity to **SERVE**. Be willing to serve in any capacity. All service ranks the same with God.
6. **ATTEND** every service.

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The Form of the Church

SCRIPTURES TO MEMORIZE: "*The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house*" (I Corinthians 16:19). "*When they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed*" (Acts 14:23).

Points of Difference

This is an age of various types of opinion surveys. Society, in turn, is constantly being bombarded with the results of those surveys, often with the intent of molding public opinion. Such surveys results include opinions relating to the economic situation, to political figures, to military crises, and to numerous other topics. In all cases, differences of opinion are found, even among those who are purported to be knowledgeable in the given areas. The same would be true if one were to take an opinion survey relative to the nature or form of a body (of whatever magnitude) which could be designated by the term *church*.

Many would have only a vague idea, if indeed they had any concept, of the nature of such a body. Others would advance a variety of opinions. If the opinions were classified and separated into broad, generalized categories, three basic concepts would be found. Those concepts may be stated as follows: (1) A church is a local, visible assembly of baptized believers. (2) The church is a universal, visible body composed of all those who have met

certain requirements of the body. (3) The church is a universal, invisible body composed of all the saved of the church age. A sizeable portion of those surveyed would likely view the church as existing in two forms. Probably the majority of universal, invisible church adherents also recognize the church as existing in local, visible form. They view the local, visible churches as being manifestations of a universal, invisible body.

To proponents of the local, visible church concept, a church of the Lord Jesus Christ assumes only one form. Such persons declare a church to be a local, visible assembly of baptized believers covenanted together for the preaching of the gospel, maintenance of the ordinances, and manifestation of the glory of Christ. They recognize a larger body of believers (not necessarily scripturally baptized) who make up the family of God. The family of God, however, is not viewed as being synonymous with the church. By virtue of that concept, neither is the family of God thought to constitute the bride of Christ. Those persons contend that there are many in the family of God who do not have a church relationship. Water baptism is considered a prerequisite to church membership. Without baptism one cannot establish fellowship with a local body of believers. Baptism is important in the believer's experience. Although it is not believed to be essential to salvation, it is viewed as necessary to church relationship and to obedience to God.

Both the universal, visible and the invisible church theories appear to have been advanced by Augustine (353-430), the most outstanding of the early Catholic theologians. Augustine conceived of the universal, visible church as being made up of those who gave recognition to the bishops and who submitted to their teachings. The term *catholic* means "universal." It was chosen to convey the idea of a single, world-wide "church" to which one must belong in order to be saved. The term *visible* was chosen because those who submitted to the bishops could be known and identified by man. The Catholic Church, as such, rejected the universal, invisible theory, but the idea was revived and brought to prominence by Luther and other Protestant leaders. According to Luther, the universal, invisible church was composed of the genuinely devout in the visible church. The term *invisible* was chosen because only God could know the genuinely devout, since only He could know the heart.

The universal, visible church theory is held today by the Roman Catholic Church and by certain groups which branched off from Rome. Though not directly stated, that is also the basic view of the Church of Christ. The universal, visible theory

poses observable conditions, the meeting of which admits one into "the church" wherein salvation is said to be experienced. For admission into the Roman Catholic Church, the conditions to be met include the demonstration of a minimal proficiency in church dogma, with subsequent admission to the privileges of the sacraments. The sacraments are those church privileges which are claimed to have saving or sanctifying efficacy. Among the church privileges considered by Roman Catholics to be sacraments is baptism. Baptism, which must be administered by certain church officials only, is seen as prerequisite to salvation.

The same claim relative to baptism is made by the Church of Christ. That group contends that baptism is essential to salvation and that valid baptism can be administered only by the Church of Christ. Salvation is said to be restricted to the Church of Christ. That the Church of Christ holds to the universal, visible church theory may be seen in the fact that there is no such thing as transfer of church membership from one local congregation to another. It is contended that a person who has been baptized into church relationship is a member of "the Church of Christ," that usage having a universal connotation. Upon relocating, a person may simply state a desire to participate in the activities of a given local congregation and commence to do so.

Baptists, in general, do not subscribe to the universal, visible church theory. There is no such thing as "the Baptist Church." There are Baptist churches. Baptist may refer to the church as an institution in the generic sense but never to her being a large, universal, visible body. The universal, invisible church theory is held almost unanimously by Protestant groups. The theory resulted from their former ties with the Roman Catholic Church. Gradually the theory has made inroads also into Baptist thought. In the United States, its impact was first felt in northern Baptist churches. For a time the Southern Baptist Convention and other conservative Baptist groups strongly resisted the teaching. Various types of pressures to accept the theory, however, soon began to take their toll. The theory is now accepted by the majority of northern Baptists and is a matter of vigorous debate among Southern Baptists. Within the past few years the theory has become increasingly attractive to a small minority of persons in the Baptist Missionary Association of America.

Proponents of the universal, invisible theory conceive of the church as existing in two forms. Those persons insist that there is only one body of Christ which is made up of all the saved

(known only by God) and constituting the church in her universal, invisible form. The local congregations, thought of merely as manifestations of the mystical (invisible) body of Christ, are considered as the church in her other form — the local, visible form.

Objectives

1. To identify the form, or nature, of the church
2. To clarify some difficult scriptural passages
3. To rectify some errors resulting from the universal, invisible church theory

Laying the Foundation

Since Baptists almost unanimously disavow the universal, visible church theory on the basis of biblical teaching, no further consideration will be given it in this discussion. Rather attention will be focused upon the other two concepts of church form in an effort to establish the true nature of the Lord's church.

That the true nature of His church can be known is beyond doubt. Jesus said, "*Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*" (John 8:32). Paul stated the same principle when he said, "*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect [complete], thoroughly furnished unto all good works*" (II Timothy 3:16, 17). The man of God can be "complete," altogether equipped for all good works. It is possible for him to know the Lord, His institutions, and His will for mankind. To say that it is a simple matter to know the nature of the church, however, is to be less than candid. All students of the Bible must admit that there are passages which are difficult to interpret. Nevertheless, if the apostle Peter's statement that "*no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation*" (II Peter 1:20) is kept in mind, the local, visible nature of the church becomes clear. Paul W. Byers, in his book *Unto Him Be Glory*, has well said that "to depend entirely upon a few difficult passages to establish the universal, invisible church theory, or any theory, is to manifest a weakness in that position." The arguments advanced by advocates of the universal, invisible theory make it apparent that they have done just that.

It is sad, but a large segment of Baptist folks who know the "what" of Baptist belief do not know the "why" of that belief. They simply leave it up to church and denominational leaders to tell them what the Bible teaches. Those leaders are considered persons of character, ability, and spiritual discernment (in general they are). They are entrusted with the searching of the Scriptures and with the perpetuation of the historic, Bible-based Baptist faith. That is done for two basic reasons. First, being told what to believe requires far less effort than does an in-depth study of the Word. Second, many do not consider themselves to be equipped educationally for depth of understanding of the Scriptures. There are built-in dangers, however, in that philosophy. The Holy Spirit is not given His just due as the illuminator of the Scriptures. He will aid the prayerful, devoted Christian in his studies (I Corinthians 2:14, 15). Too, the leaders themselves are only human; therefore, they are subject to error. A child of God who depends upon others to do his studying and thinking finds himself ill-equipped to defend his beliefs when they come under attack. Consequently, he is unable to help others when false doctrines arise. Too often, he even finds himself being "carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Ephesians 4:14).

The attacks upon the Lord's church will greatly increase in the end time. Paul's admonition to "study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (II Timothy 2:15) becomes all the more imperative. If the Baptist faith is the faith of the Bible, every Christian ought to know both the "what" and the "why" of that faith. If Baptists have historically believed in the church as being local and visible in nature, every Baptist ought to know why he holds that belief. The only way that goal can be realized is through a personal, detailed study of those scriptures and scriptural concepts pertaining to the church.

Let Us Reason Together

Question — What is the meaning of the Greek word *ekklesia*, which is most often translated "church" in the English?

Reply — The usage of the Greek word *ekklesia* does not settle beyond doubt the nature of the New Testament church. Its usage does add much weight, however, to the total scriptural evidence that the church exists only in a local, visible form. It should be emphasized here that Christ did not establish two churches or the church in two forms. His speaking of "my church" shows

that generically she is singular, existing in only one form. She is identifiable from any other body.

Ekklesia is from *ek*, "out of," and *kaleo*, "to call." An *ekklesia* is a called-out assembly. The word occurs 114 times in the Greek New Testament. Three times it refers to an unlawful political assembly (Acts 19; translated "assembly" in the King James Version), once to Israel in the wilderness (Acts 7:38), and 90 times to the local Christian congregation. Those 90 references are to local Christian assemblies. Seventeen times the locality is given (cf. I Corinthians 1:2); 35 times the word is plural (cf. Galatians 1:2); 38 times the context makes the local sense clear (cf. I Corinthians 11:18).

That leaves only 20 possible instances, out of 114 usages, in which *ekklesia* could refer to anything other than a local assembly. Some of those instances could very well have a local, visible connotation. For example, the word "church" in Matthew 16:18 is used in the generic or institutional sense. That Jesus meant a local, visible assembly is clear from Matthew 18:15-20. There an aggrieved person was charged to tell his troubles to his church. Such an act is possible only if the church is local and visible. There is good reason to believe that the other usages are also in the generic, abstract, or institutional sense. Ephesians 5:23, for example, states, "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." Many people say that the church mentioned there is universal and invisible, but not the husband or wife. How can one determine that? Nowhere in the context is such a distinction made. Singular nouns, such as *church*, often refer to all of a given kind. To illustrate, in Ephesians Paul spoke about *flesh*, *mind*, *workmanship*, *understanding*, *heart*, and *faith*. In every such case the singular stands for the plural, that is, all of a kind. It NEVER stands for one big universal, invisible monstrosity. It thus seems logical to treat the word *church* with equally good sense.

Returning to the basic meaning of *ekklesia*, we find that it designates an assembly of people. There is a geographical content in the term. It refers to a gathering of people in a particular geographical location. The very meaning of the term excludes its usage in a universal, invisible sense. There is no such thing as all of the saved being assembled in one place upon earth. If they are never all assembled, they do not constitute an *ekklesia*. If all of the saved are not present in an assembly, the term *universal* is not appropriate. A gathered assembly cannot be invisible

because people gather in their bodies which are visible. It becomes nonsense to speak of a universal, invisible *ekklesia*.

Question — Are there other evidences of the local, visible nature of the church?

Reply — A number of other things indicate that the church exists only in that form. The many metaphors used for the church in the New Testament are among those things. Such metaphors as *building, body, bride, flock, temple, pillar, house,* and *candlestick* are used to characterize the church. Can a building be universal and invisible? Can a body be universal and invisible? Can a bride? Can a flock? Can any of those things? The answer is obvious and simple. They cannot! One might as well attempt to imagine a universal, invisible building, body, or bride, as to suppose a universal, invisible church. The one is meant to depict the other.

The various functions of the church also require that she be local and visible. Space will not permit an exhaustive review of her functions at this point (the next chapter is devoted to a study of the functions of the church), but an evaluation of some of those functions is sufficient to establish the truth that the church must be local and visible if she is to fulfill her mission upon earth. Preaching is surely one of those functions. The Great Commission logically begins with a command to the church to evangelize the world. Preaching is the means by which that question about that: "After that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." How can such preaching be done by a universal, invisible "church" which is never assembled? Where would be the organization necessary to the great task of preaching to every creature? Who would decide which ones would be sent to preach? Who would be responsible for the support of those who were sent? The charge to evangelize the world demands the type of organization possible only in local, visible churches and in their associations.

The same thing can be said of the second part of the Great Commission (baptizing) that was said of preaching. A local, visible congregation is necessary to the fulfilling of that function. That is equally true of the third part of the commission (teaching). From whence the teachers, if not from local, visible assemblies? Where lies the responsibility for doctrinal purity, if not in local, visible churches? Were it not for the restraint of the local churches, everyone would feel free to teach what was "right in his own eyes." Doctrinal chaos would be even greater

than it presently is. Thankfully, many churches do realize their responsibility for maintaining doctrinal purity in their teaching ministries. May their number be greatly increased!

God's plan for handling personal offenses likewise requires that the church be local and visible. The instructions for handling such offenses are recorded in Matthew 18:15-20. Jesus told His disciples that if a brother trespassed against one of them, the offended one should go personally to that brother in an effort to get him to correct his wrong. If the brother refused to hear him, the offended one should carry two or three witnesses with him. If the brother still refused to hear, the offended one should tell the matter to the church. If the offender refused to hear the church, the church should exclude him from her fellowship. How could it be possible to tell such a matter to a universal, invisible church? How could such a church exclude an errant brother from her fellowship without excluding him from the family of God (since all of the saved of the church age are supposed to compose the universal, invisible church)? Neither of those propositions makes good sense. A body must be local and visible in order to hear such matters. There is no way a church can exclude a person from the family of God; she can only exclude one from her fellowship as a local congregation of baptized believers.

Question — Is the church local and visible in time but universal in eternity?

Reply — The theory that the church exists presently only in local, visible form but will become universal in eternity has its proponents in Baptist ranks. Among the arguments advanced for that theory is the contention that all of the saved are baptized into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit, such baptism constituting the new birth. That body, it is purported, will be assembled when the Rapture takes place, thus constituting a true *ekklesia*. That "church," in turn, is proposed as the bride of Jesus Christ, and thus is supposed to experience eternal union with Him. It is further argued that that must be the case because all the saved will occupy the same status in heaven. That argument is based upon the fact that salvation is altogether by grace.

Are those valid arguments? The author thinks not! The New Testament refers to *each* local church as a body of Christ. For example, I Corinthians 12:27 (King James Version) says, "Now ye are *THE* body of Christ, and members in particular." The definite article, however, is missing in the Greek. When there is no definite article, the indefinite article should be used in translating. That passage, if correctly translated, would read,

"Now ye are a body of Christ." If the Corinthian church was a body of Christ, then every real church is a body of Christ. That makes sense when one takes note that a body is a unit of function. Each local church is just that. She is a unit of function in her locality. If the concept is still hard to accept, one should see I Corinthians 11:3: "*The head of every man is Christ.*" Since Christ is the head of every man, it should not be surprising that He is the head of every church.

Neither can we concede that the baptism of I Corinthians 12:13 is Holy Spirit baptism. If that were so, there would be two types of Holy Spirit baptism. The first type would be that by which the early church was immersed *in* the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). The second type would be the baptism of a repentant, believing person into Jesus Christ *by* the Holy Spirit. It seems rather clear from the Scriptures that the first type is the only true one. The church as an institution was baptized once for all *in* the Holy Spirit, just as a child of God is baptized once for all *in* water.

The Holy Spirit is never said to baptize anyone. The Greek text of I Corinthians 12:13 is "IN one Spirit [or spirit]" not "by" or "with." In the light of the context, it would appear that Dr. A. W. Pink had the correct interpretation. He said that the verse means that all the Corinthian believers were baptized (water baptism) into the Corinthian church "in one spirit"; that is, in one mind, purpose, and accord. There are no capital and lower-case letters in the Greek. The difference between *Spirit* (meaning the Holy Spirit) and *spirit* (meaning one mind) in any translation is dependent upon the translators' concept of the passage. Obviously the phrase "*in one spirit*" in Philippians 1:27 means "in one mind." The phrase "*by one Spirit* [or spirit]" in I Corinthians 12:13 is of exactly the same Greek construction. Keeping that and the fact that Paul was speaking about the distribution of spiritual gifts in the Corinthian church in mind, we conclude that 12:13 means that in one mind the Corinthian believers experienced water baptism, and that they, through their obedient spirit, were made to "*drink into one Spirit*"; that is, to become partakers of various spiritual gifts.

The question is raised then: What about such scriptural passages as Romans 6:3 and Galatians 3:27? The charge made in that question is that if one will not accept the teaching that the Holy Spirit baptizes one into Christ in the process of the new birth he must accept the teaching of baptismal regeneration. The writer denies that charge! The baptism "*into Christ*" in those passages has nothing to do with salvation. It has to do with



church membership. Is not "a body of Christ" a part of Him? My body is surely a part of me! Since each church is "a body of Christ," being baptized (water baptism) into a New Testament church is being "baptized into Christ."

Will the saved all occupy the same status in heaven? Does the fact of salvation's being by grace alone necessitate that? If so, what about rewards? Are rewards experienced only in time, not in eternity? Surely there are rewards in this age (Matthew 6:4, 6). Just as surely there will be rewards given at the Second Coming (Revelation 22:12). If salvation by grace prohibits rewards in the eternal age, why would it not in the church and millennial ages? The principle is the same. That there will be rewards in heaven cannot be successfully disputed, unless one wants to disagree with Jesus (Matthew 5:12).

Salvation by grace and rewards for service are entirely different things. The distinction in heaven will be based upon service, not upon the salvation experience. Salvation admits one to heaven. Service distinguishes one in heaven. The exalted status and close relationship to Christ which will be the lot of those constituting the bride of Christ is one aspect of that distinction for service. Those persons will have sought out the Lord's church from among the many false churches, will have shown an obedient spirit by submitting to spiritual baptism, and will have given Him glory in the church (Ephesians 3:21). The Lord will demonstrate His pleasure by the eternal distinction given them. The church (in the aggregate or institutional sense) is referred to as the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:26, 27). She has that distinction in time; she will retain it in eternity. Jesus is not fickle. The woman to whom He is now betrothed is one whom He will wed.

Question: — What is the difference between the church and the saved of the church age?

Reply — Those constituting the church make up a portion of the saved of the church age, but they are not all the saved of that age. There are some saved persons who do not have a church relationship. Scriptural baptism is a prerequisite to such a relationship (Acts 2:41; Matthew 28:19; Galatians 3:27). Many of the saved have *no* baptism; others have *unscriptural* baptism. Although the latter group may have gone through a form called "baptism," it is *unscriptural* because the correct mode, immersion (Romans 6:4; Matthew 3:16), was not used. It is *unscriptural* because it was not administered by a church which is doctrinally sound and which can trace her lineage back to the church that Jesus established while upon earth (Matthew 16:18).

Those unscripturally "baptized" persons are not a part of the Lord's church.

The Bible is rather clear in its teachings that there will be guests at the wedding feast (Revelation 19:7-9). "*They which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb*" cannot be any other than guests. A bride is never "called" (invited) to her wedding. She is an integral part of the wedding. There will be guests present. The question may be raised, however, as to the identity of those guests. It has been proposed by adherents of the universal, invisible church theory that they are Old Testament saints. No doubt, some will be Old Testament saints, but not all. The kingdom parables of Matthew 22:1-4 and 25:1-13 establish the fact that some will be church-age saints. Since the church is designated as the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:26, 27) and since some church-age saints will be guests at the marriage of the Lamb, the church and *all* the saved of the church age cannot be one and the same. The church is not universal in time, nor will she be in eternity.

Personal Challenges

1. Obtain a concordance; locate and study each verse in the Bible containing the word *church(es)*. Observe the usage of the word. How many times does it designate a group of believers meeting in a given locality? How many times does it refer to the church as an institution? Is there a single instance where it can be definitely shown to include all the saved of this age?
2. Ask your class and other interested persons to obtain a supply of the pamphlet, "Baptized Into One Body," by S. E. Anderson. Distribute those among your church membership and acquaintances. (The pamphlets may be ordered from: S. E. Anderson, 1300 Tyler Lane, Elgin, Illinois 60120.)

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3

The Functions of the Church

SCRIPTURES TO MEMORIZE: *“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen”* (Matthew 28:19, 20).

“Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Ephesians 3:21).

Points of Difference

That the believer has a personal responsibility to the Lord to live a godly life and to bear witness for Him is recognized without exception by professed Christendom. Opinions as to what constitutes a godly life and a positive witness, however, vary from group to group and from individual to individual. The same thing can be said of the mission of the church. There is general agreement that the church has a mission in the world. The nature of that mission and the functions involved in carrying it out, however, are matters of disagreement.

The points of difference regarding the functions of the church can be summarized under three headings — the areas in which the church is to function, the authority for carrying out those functions, and the amount of attention to be given each function.

Many of the questions surrounding the areas of church function depend upon one's concept of church purpose. What is the primary purpose, or mission, of the church? Is it social, or is it spiritual? Is the church simply to encourage people to live “the good life,” or is she to emphasize spiritual experience which, in turn, will lead to “the good life”? Is involvement in the great social and political issues of the day — giving direction and moral suasion, thereby bettering the lot of mankind — her principal task? Some modern groups and individuals seem to think that is the church's mission. Although they have never felt that social and political issues should be ignored, Baptists have traditionally contended that the primary mission of the church is spiritual. For that reason, they have placed emphasis upon the preaching of the gospel, the place and importance of the church and the ordinances in the believer's life, the need for teaching the believer the doctrines of God's Word, and the importance to the believer of active participation in the evangelization of the world. If the mission of the church is primarily social, the church loses her uniqueness. Many other organizations can also lay claim to that mission. If, on the other hand, the church has a spiritual mission, she is unique. No other organization can rightly lay claim to that distinction. The church alone among all organizations is dedicated to the promotion of spiritual experience and development upon earth.

To whom was the Great Commission given? If the Bible has the answer to that question, it should settle the differences in opinion relative to authority. Was the commission given to the eleven simply as individual believers? Was it given to them as apostles (that is, as officials of the church), or was it given to them as a church?

If the commission was given to the eleven as individuals, any believer has the authority to perform the functions of the commission — including baptism. It has been contended that such is the case. There has, consequently, arisen, at times, the “I'll baptize you — you baptize me” philosophy. John the Baptist's baptizing of converts before the church began has been cited as a scriptural precedent for such a practice. It should be noted, however, that John the Baptist was sent by God with a special commission to baptize (John 1:33). His was the responsibility of preparing material with which Jesus would begin His church. No other individual has had a similar commission and responsibility. John the Baptist cannot be used as an example to support the theory of individual authority. Neither is positive support for the theory found elsewhere in the Scriptures. One

must look further to find where the authority of the commission rests.

That the authority of the Great Commission was not given to the eleven as apostles can also be shown. Jesus spoke directly to them in the giving of the commission (Matthew 28:16), but God has always spoken to His people through consecrated men while authority rested elsewhere. When He spoke through the prophets, authority remained with the established government. When Christ spoke through John to the angels (pastors) of the seven churches of Asia, the counsel given was intended for the churches, not for the pastors alone. In each case, the message closed with the admonition, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). If the commission was given to the apostles as such, the authority ceased with the death of those men. To qualify for the apostolic office, one had to have "companied" with the early disciples "all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up" (Acts 1:21, 22). The only exception made to the rule was in the case of Paul who was "one born out of due time" (I Corinthians 15:8) and who received a special revelation (Galatians 1:12). Common reasoning insists that the gospel commission is still in effect. Jesus loved the world enough to die for it. He loved it enough to see to it that there is someone with the authority and responsibility for carrying to it the message of His death. There is a body of believers which has that authority and responsibility. That body is the Lord's church.

This discussion has not intended to convey the idea that the apostles had no authority. Certainly they did, but their authority dealt with the special needs of the churches prior to the completion of the Bible. Upon completion the Bible became a complete rule of faith and practice (II Timothy 3:16, 17). The authority which the apostles possessed was not the authority of the Great Commission. The churches exercised authority over the apostles (not the apostles over the churches) in matters pertaining to the discharge of the commission (Acts 13:2, 3; 15:22). It is obvious from those scriptural passages also that the Holy Spirit works in and through the churches to carry out the commission. We must conclude that the authority of the commission rests with the churches.

The amount of attention to be given each church function is another area in which one finds differences of opinion. Even among members of churches of the Baptist Missionary

Association of America such differences exist. To some, the winning of the lost assumes such importance that the other church functions are grossly neglected, if not overlooked entirely. No one questions that the preaching of the gospel, personal witnessing, and the winning of the lost are vital functions of the church. Other functions are important also. The first responsibility of the Great Commission is to "disciple all nations" (Matthew 28:19). Contained within that responsibility are the factors of preaching, personal witnessing, and soul-winning, but there is much more involved. One who has been disciplined has not only become a follower of Jesus but has also learned the discipline of his calling. That truth is restated and emphasized in the last part of the commission, "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20). To neglect that part of the commission is to fail to disciple completely those who are won.

Others place all of their emphasis upon the preaching and teaching functions of the church, neglecting to "go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in" (Luke 14:23). To do that is also to fail in fully discharging the responsibilities of the commission. There needs to be the proper balance in the emphasis placed upon the various functions by churches and by individuals. Each function is important in its place; it is possible to know that place. The Bible is a complete rule of faith and practice. It requires study, however, for one to acquire an understanding of the teachings of the Bible.

Objectives

1. To show that the church does have a commission
2. To determine the various functions of that commission
3. To urge diligence in discharging the responsibilities of the commission

Laying the Foundation

The task of doing God's work in the world is very challenging. Indeed, it must have seemed monumental to the small band of disciples to whom the Great Commission was given. There was a group, small in number, which was given the awesome responsibility of going "into all the world" to "preach the gospel to every creature." How could such a small group accomplish that,

much less fulfill their obligations of "baptizing them" and of "teaching them to observe all things" that the Lord had commanded? Had the Lord asked too much of them? Was its accomplishment beyond the bounds of possibility? There is no evidence that any of the group thought so. There seems rather to have been an eager acceptance of the challenge — so much so, that the gospel rapidly spread throughout Europe and Asia as the disciples "went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4).

The task is still great! There is still much to be done. Many have not heard. Many have not been taught. If the same undaunted spirit that characterized the early church can be ours, it can be done.

The magnitude of the task should not discourage us. It should encourage us to use the resources available to us. No doubt that was the case with the early church. The promise attending the Great Commission was a prime stimulus to the members accepting the challenge. Had not the Lord said, "Lo, I am with you *always, even unto the end of the world*"? Were not all things His? Would not He supply their needs? Would not witnessing power be theirs after the Holy Ghost had come upon them (Acts 1:8)? His being with them assured them of those things, so they went out with enthusiasm. They realized that some would go to one place, others to another place, and still others to another; yet His omnipresence would allow Him to be with everyone, fully equipping each for the task. They rejoiced in the knowledge that they could "do all things through Christ" (Philippians 4:13).

Is the promise of His presence any less real to us? Are His resources any less plentiful? The answer to both of those questions is a definite no. He *is* with us! His resources are *still* unlimited! The task may be great, but the resources are more than adequate. Let us have faith. The Lord's church *can* perform her mission.

When the church accepts the challenge of her commission, desirable results are sure. History confirms that fact. The growth of the early church in grace, knowledge, and numbers is a clear example. Her membership "continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. . . . The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:42, 47). God is faithful. He has promised results when His people accept His challenge. His Word will not return unto Him void (Isaiah 55:11). The weeping sower will return, bringing his sheaves with him (Psalm 126:5, 6). The church can launch out with the assurance of success. The task is

great; the resources are adequate; the results are sure. What more can we ask?

Let Us Reason Together

Question — Does the church have a commission?

Reply — Dr. Scofield (and others) insisted that the church is without a commission. He contended that the Great Commission was given to the apostles only, since it was given before Pentecost, the time which he advocates as the date of the beginning of the church. When one claims that the church came into existence on the day of Pentecost, he has to agree with Dr. Scofield that the church is without a commission. It was shown in chapter 1, however, that the church had her beginning during the personal ministry of Jesus Christ. The church's beginning was during the *early* part of His personal ministry. The Great Commission was given to the eleven as a church, not as apostles. The Bible refers to them as a church in reference to the Lord's singing with them at the institution of the Lord's Supper (Hebrews 2:12; Matthew 26:30). If the commission was given to the eleven as apostles, the authority ceased with the death of those men, and no one has commission authority today. We know that such is not the case. Dr. Scofield and those who support his position must be counted wrong on that issue. The church does have a commission. She received that commission directly from Jesus during His stay upon earth.

Question — What are the functions of the church relative to her commission?

Reply — The functions of the church are those things clearly set forth and those things inferred by the Great Commission. Many of those things which are only inferred by the Great Commission are clearly set forth elsewhere. For a discussion of the functions of the church to be comprehensive, it is necessary that the inferred things be considered also.

The chief and highest function of the church is to glorify God. The Scriptures repeatedly point that out as the primary purpose of the church (Romans 15:6, 9; Ephesians 3:21; II Thessalonians 1:12). So fundamental is that function that, if faithfully performed, the other duties of the church will be carried out. The church glorifies Him by worshiping Him (John 4:23, 24; Philipians 3:3; Revelation 22:9). The church glorifies Him through prayer and praise (Psalm 50:23). She glorifies Him by godly living (Titus 2:10; I Peter 2:9) and, more particularly, by fruitful service (John 15:8). The church glorifies God by fulfilling her

mission — by doing those things which she was instituted to do.

God has a right to expect His church to glorify Him. He gave His only begotten Son to purchase the church so that He might be glorified in and through her. While the Son was in the world, He glorified the Father. He expects His church to fill that role. It is sad to say that the churches do not always glorify God in their activities. Too often they engage in activities which the Lord did not authorize. Every activity should be examined in the light of God's Word *before* being initiated. Churches can glorify God only through those avenues which He has ordained.

The church also has the function of edifying herself. Paul stated in Ephesians 4:11, 12, 14 that God gave to the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers "*for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: . . . that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.*" We are to understand that the members of the church are to be indoctrinated so that they can stand against the heresies around them. Paul, no doubt, had the same thing in mind when he spoke about Christians being "*rooted and built up*" in Christ (Colossians 2:7). In this age of so many strange doctrines, the edifying of her membership is an important function of the church. Each member of the church should be aware of that. The public church services should serve that purpose (I Corinthians 14:26). As individuals, however, the members ought to help to build themselves up in the most holy faith by private devotions and Bible study (Jude 20). Relative to that function of the church, Thiessen has well said: "The church is to indoctrinate its members, develop the graces of the Christian life in them, and teach them to cooperate with one another in the service of Christ."

Another function of the church is that of purifying herself. She is to purge herself of those things which keep her from being "*holy and without blemish*" (Ephesians 5:27). The Father performs a certain type of purging. He uses chastening as a means of correcting His people when they go astray (Hebrews 12:6-11; I Corinthians 11:32). Each believer has a type of purging that he is to perform in his own life (II Corinthians 7:1; I John 3:3). In addition, each local church is responsible for the purging of her membership. That is to be accomplished through the exercise of church discipline. If the church has members who walk disorderly and refuse to discipline their own lives in accordance with the Scriptures, she is to exercise her biblical responsibility

of church discipline. The teaching ministry of the church is a vital aspect of her discipline program. However, if she has those among her membership who refuse to abide by the teachings of God's Word and who reject all other efforts of the church to correct their erring ways, then church fellowship should be withdrawn from them. The early church practiced church discipline. The church of today is not excused from that duty (Matthew 18:17; I Corinthians 5:6-8, 13; Romans 16:17; II Thessalonians 3:6, 14; Titus 3:10, 11). In those scriptural passages, such things as divisions, heresies, and immoralities are listed as causes for discipline. It is to the shame of many churches that those things are common in their memberships and no attempt is made to correct them. In this day of laxness and looseness in the churches, discipline needs to be emphasized anew. The task of purifying herself is still a function of the Lord's church.

A fourth function of the church is that of evangelizing the world. Nowhere in the Scriptures is the church commanded to "convert" the world, but she is commanded to "evangelize" it. The Great Commission directs the church to go into all the world to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8). Towering above all other means for the making of disciples stands the preaching of the gospel (Romans 1:16; I Corinthians 1:21; Romans 10:12-17). We can easily see from the Scriptures why the church is to "*preach the gospel to every creature.*" Are all to go beyond the confines of the local area to preach the gospel? Obviously, they are not; otherwise, where would be the local church and the local witness? The churches do, nevertheless, have the responsibility for world evangelism. God calls certain ones into the special service of missions. It is the responsibility of the churches (either singly or in associational capacity) to send them (Acts 13:1-4).

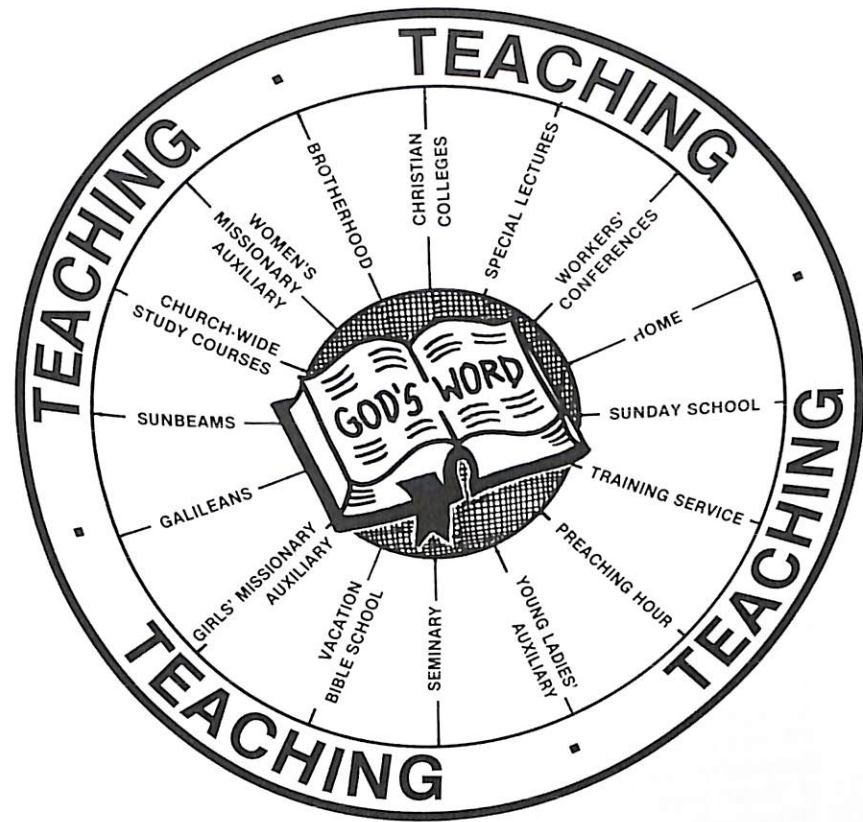
World evangelization calls for something from the churches. It requires that they study the needs of the world (John 4:28-38; Matthew 9:36-38), that is, that they study the need for missions. It urges upon the churches the responsibility for praying that more laborers will be sent (Matthew 9:38). It obligates *each* member to give financial support so that those laborers can be sent (Philippians 4:15-18; Romans 10:15). It necessitates the going forth of those who are called to the mission fields (Mark 16:15; Acts 13:1-4). The church member who is unwilling to give to missions or to go to the mission field (if called) stands in opposition to the will of God. The church is a debtor to the world. She is under obligation to give the whole world an opportunity to hear the gospel and to accept Christ. If the church fails,

the lost around the world will not hear and will not have an opportunity to be saved (Romans 10:13, 14). Dare she fail?

A function of the church which is closely related to her responsibility to evangelize the world is that of baptizing those who have been saved (Matthew 28:19). Baptism is not essential to salvation, but it is an obligation of those who have been saved. By it the believer identifies himself with the Lord Jesus Christ, declaring his faith in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:4). Baptism is a prerequisite to a believer's being admitted into the rights and privileges of a church of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Scriptures clearly teach that there is no church membership apart from baptism (Acts 2:41; Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3, 4). Since it is God's will that He receive glory through the church (Ephesians 3:21), the importance of baptism becomes obvious.

Every believer should be anxious to know what it takes to constitute scriptural baptism. Dr. J. E. Cobb listed the following elements in his book, *Brief Studies in Christian Doctrine*: (1) *a scriptural act* — the dipping, submerging, or immersing of one into water (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12), (2) *a scriptural subject* — a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, (3) *a scriptural authority* — a church of the Lord Jesus Christ (4) *a scriptural administrator* — one who has been scripturally authorized by one of the Lord's churches, (5) *a scriptural design* — the portrayal of the burial and resurrection of the Lord from the dead, and (6) *a scriptural element* — water. All of those elements have their proof in Scriptures. When a church baptizes a believer in Jesus Christ, she is fulfilling an important function for the Lord.

Closely related to the church's edifying herself is the next function. The church is to educate those who are won for the Lord — the young and others who come her way. She is to teach them "to *OBSERVE all things whatsoever*" He has commanded (Matthew 28:20). Therefore, there can be no doubt as to the value of Sunday Schools, Training Services, and study courses in the churches. They are effective teaching agencies of the churches; they should be supported by every member. Christian education, however, should not stop there. Paul directed the believers at Philippi to be interested in all types of worthy knowledge (Philippians 4:8); in that is included the duty to pursue higher education in all its phases. Bible schools, colleges, and seminaries have a vital place in the teaching ministry of the churches. Old Testament saints had their schools for the training of the prophets and their families (II Kings 6:1-7). Such schools are no less needful today. Since secular education is often of the



type which turns people away from God and spiritual truth, the church is under obligation to supply Christian education for her members and to extend its opportunities to all who desire it.

God has still other functions which the church is to perform. It is her responsibility to serve as a restraining force in the world. Some of the metaphors used by Jesus to characterize the church make that clear. The church is "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (Matthew 5:13-16). By her influence and testimony she preserves social order and holds back the development of lawlessness. Her presence is the reason that the judgment of God does not fall upon the world (Genesis 18:22, 23). Before God pours out His judgment, He will take the church out of the world (I Thessalonians 4:16, 17). The church is invaluable to the world, although her value is unappreciated by the world. Appreciated or not, the church is to continue to let her light shine, to hold forth the Word of life (Philippians 2:16), to serve as the custodian of the truth (I Timothy 3:15; II Corinthians 5:19), and to contend for the faith (Jude 3). What the world fails to see, God sees. He will reward the church for her role as a restraining force in the world.

The church is to promote all that is good (Galatians 6:10). Although they have never felt that other phases of life should be ignored, Baptists have traditionally contended that the primary mission of the church is spiritual. The church is to support all causes that seek to promote the social, economic, political, and educational welfare of the community. The church can accomplish much for Jesus through those means if she does not allow such things to become primary. She will do well to let Jesus be her example in that area as well as in all others. Jesus went about doing good, though He never lost sight of His principal mission (Acts 10:38-43). He always subordinated physical and material help to the spiritual.

In his book, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, H. C. Thiessen illustrated the role of such activities in the church's program. "We should devote ourselves to social service on the same principle on which a man picks up sharp nails that he finds in the street on the way to his work. It is one thing for him to devote his entire time to ridding the streets of nails, and another to remove such nails as he can without interfering with his main task. That is, the work of reformation must be definitely subordinated to the work of evangelization." The church will find herself in serious error if she devotes all her time to social helps. She will find herself also in error if she neglects those phases

of life. She has a responsibility there, but let her always remember that it is a secondary responsibility.

Question — Who has the responsibility of promoting the various functions of the church?

Reply — The pastor is God's man for the general oversight of a church (Acts 20:28). He is to "rule well" in every aspect of church life (I Timothy 5:17), yet he must not become so encumbered with secondary things that he neglects the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:1-4). Deacons were ordained to care for secondary matters (Acts 6:5-8). The deacons have an important place in the promotion of the church program. They should be men who are concerned about the church's fulfilling her *total* role in the world. The responsibility, however, does not belong to the pastor and deacons alone. It belongs to the entire membership. Since the church is composed of individual believers, it becomes the responsibility of each member to assure that his church carries out all of her functions. Each function of the church is important; none is to be slighted. How concerned are you about the efficiency with which your church is functioning? As a member of a church, you should be concerned. It is regretful, however, that attendance at church services, and especially at church business meetings, indicates that a majority of church members are lacking in concern. If that is true of you, become concerned. Help your church to do a better job.

Question — What if the church fails in her mission?

Reply — The church as an institution will not fail; neither will many of the local churches. Two of the seven churches of Asia received only praise from the Lord (Revelation 2, 3). When a church does fail, however, everyone involved suffers. The unsaved remain lost for lack of gospel preaching. The backslidden remain wayward for lack of correction. Individual members come under the chastening hand of God, and the church may even cease (Revelation 2:5; 3:16). God does not receive glory and honor which is so justly due Him. There is simply too much at stake for a church to fail. The church can (and will) succeed when each member knows her functions and accepts personal responsibility for helping her achieve success.

Personal Challenges

1. Review the list of church functions contained in this chapter. Think of others.
2. Join your class in evaluating the efficiency with which your church fulfills her functions. Do not approach that

- evaluation from a negative standpoint but from a positive one. Let the evaluation take the form of ways and means by which your church can become more effective.
3. Personally take an active interest in your church's business meeting. It is in her business meetings that a church is given direction. Do your part to assure that the direction which she takes will help her to faithfully fulfill her God-appointed function.
 4. Pray for your church daily. Prayer is an effective channel of church power.

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4

The Finances of the Church

SCRIPTURES TO MEMORIZE: *"All the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD'S: it is holy unto the LORD"* (Leviticus 27:30).

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Matthew 23:23).

"Here men that die receive tithes; but there he receiveth them, of whom it is witnessed that he liveth" (Hebrews 7:8).

Points of Difference

The mission of the church calls for the preaching of the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). That mission cannot be completed in any particular generation; it is a responsibility of the church in every generation until Jesus comes again (Isaiah 6:11, 12; Mark 13:32-37). The mission requires that the gospel be preached simultaneously in the local community, county, state, nation, and around the world (Acts 1:8). Such an undertaking necessitates finances of almost unbelievable proportions. Lost souls, however, need to be saved. They can be saved only through faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8, 9); faith comes only by means of the gospel (Romans 1:16; 10:14, 17). The necessary funds should be raised so that the gospel can be

preached. How are those funds to be raised? Does God have a plan, or is man left to his own ingenuity?

Various means have been used either singly or in combination to support the program of the church. Those means include state support, business ventures, solicitations, entertainment, tithing, and freewill offerings. The question repeatedly arises, however, as to which methods are approved by God and are in keeping with the nature and dignity of the church. Therein lies the basis for disagreement regarding the financing of the church.

Baptists have traditionally taught separation of church and state. Their teaching that doctrine is based upon Christ's charge to *"render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's"* (Matthew 22:21), along with other such scriptural injunctions. A number of other church groups, however, have not promoted the separation of church and state. Contrariwise, they have called for a union of the two. The Roman Catholic Church, for example, has been the state church in many countries. She still has that status in several countries, although an increasing number of church-state countries are dissolving their relationship. As the state church, however, she has received financial support from the taxes levied upon the general population. Despite the fact that the Constitution of the United States prohibits the establishment of a state church, the Catholic Church (as well as some other groups) enjoys the benefit of some of your tax dollars through indirect aid to parochial schools. Such aid is often given for the purchasing of physical structures and implements (e.g., school buses). State support requires persons of other faiths to aid financially the propagation of what they consider to be heresy. Such ought not to be!

Is competition in the business world at least a partial solution to the problems of financing the church? Some church groups, individual churches, and persons evidently think so. The fact that many local congregations of the Catholic Church engage in a variety of business enterprises is well known. Less well known, but just as real, however, are the controlling interests of the Mormon Church in several major corporations in America. Similarly, other church groups fill their coffers by ventures into the business world. Such can be said also for individual churches. Competition in the business world is not God's plan for supporting the church.

A modified form of the practice mentioned above is found in churches which seek to raise funds through rummage sales, church suppers, and cake-walks. Such is not God's plan for

financing the church. The writer is not a fanatic when it comes to such schemes. In the case where a special class project is involved, he personally sees no harm in a bakery sale, rummage sale, or church supper. The same thing cannot be said for a cake-walk. The gambling overtones should rule it out for church and individual Christians alike. They should *all* be ruled out as the primary source for church support. The Lord is not that haphazard in providing for the needs of His church.

Soliciting donations from those who are not members of the church is another area of disagreement among church folks. Some think that the practice is acceptable, basing their opinions upon the fact that everyone benefits, at least socially, from the work of the church. Others strongly disagree with the practice — the writer is one such person. That disagreement is for two simple reasons: (1) It is not the obligation of the world to support the work of the church. That obligation falls upon the membership of the church. (2) Such solicitations are poor advertisement for the church. Can the membership not support the church? Must the church resort to outside help for her support? Those and related questions may well arise in the minds of non-members who are solicited. The reputation of the church suffers with the very ones whom she seeks to help.

Some churches have found in church entertainments a fruitful source of church revenues. Singing groups, plays, and acrobatics are among the most frequent types of entertainment used. The church is not an entertainment center; she is an illumination channel. She is not to promote immorality; she is to increase spirituality. Are not those practices beneath the dignity of a church of Jesus Christ? Do not they take away from the spirituality of the churches rather than adding to it? Surely the Lord is not pleased with such.

Although they may employ other means of raising some funds, most churches depend upon the tithes of their membership as the primary source of church support. Historically that has been true. Presently it is true. It is a method for which there is positive support in the Scriptures. Not everyone, however, accepts the doctrine of tithing. It is contended by some that the giving of the tithe was God's plan for the nation of Israel *under the law*, but that it does not apply to Christians in the Church Age. Freewill offerings alone are championed by those persons as constituting God's plan for giving. Second Corinthians 9:7 is said to give support to that concept. *"Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver."* Does that verse

teach that each person is free to decide how little or how much he is to give? The writer thinks not! Paul prefaced that verse by saying, *"He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully"* (verse 6). Was not he teaching the giving of tithes *and* offerings? Was not he teaching sacrificial giving? The *"or of necessity"* phrase probably refers to the bare minimum a child of God is to give — the tithe or tenth. Biblical command, as will be shown shortly, requires the believer to give at least as much under grace as was required under the law. He is required to give the tithe. The believer is to go beyond law requirements, however, in that he is to give offerings above the tithe. He is not to give *"grudgingly,"* but he is to purpose in his heart to sow *"bountifully."* God, in turn, will assure his reaping bountifully. God's plan is tithes *and* offerings. If that plan were followed by each believer, the church would be adequately financed, and the earth could be covered with the gospel.

Objectives

1. To show that God has a plan for financing His church
2. To encourage compliance with His plan
3. To warn against rejection of that plan

Laying the Foundation

A steward is one who manages that which belongs to another. Since all things belong to God (Psalm 24:1), the Christian is a steward for God. He owns nothing himself. He simply manages what he has for God — whether it be time, talents, or treasures. For that reason he is responsible to God. He should be aware that much is expected of him. He is expected to be faithful (I Corinthians 4:2), knowing that he must give account of his stewardship to God (Romans 14:12). The faithful steward will receive a reward (I Corinthians 3:14). The unfaithful steward will suffer loss (I Corinthians 3:15). Even that which he has will be taken away (Matthew 25:29).

There is a high degree of correlation between faithfulness in one area of stewardship and faithfulness in the other areas. A person who is faithful in the stewardship of his treasures is likely to be faithful in the stewardship of his time and talents; whereas, one who is unfaithful in that area is likely to be unfaithful in

the others. Although this chapter is primarily concerned with the stewardship of money as the means of church finance, it is, at least indirectly, concerned with the stewardship of time and talents.

The carrying out of the spirit of New Testament tithing requires attendance at the worship services of the church. The Bible says that "*upon the first day of the week*" everyone is to "*lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him*" (I Corinthians 16:2). Two things are obvious in that statement. First, each one is to lay aside for the work of the church a portion of what God has given him. Second, he is personally to lay it by "*in store,*" that is, he is personally to bring it to God's storehouse, the church. At the same time God calls for our tithes and offerings. He calls for a portion of our time.

Since the giving of the law at Sinai, God has consistently called for the exclusive dedication of some of man's time to Him. Under the law, the seventh day of the week was designated as a day of worship, meditation, and rest — a day holy unto the Lord (Exodus 20:8-11). The seventh day was chosen because "*in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it*" (verse 11). In the church age, however, the first day of the week is to be dedicated to the Lord (I Corinthians 16:2). That day is set aside because on that day Jesus completed His work of redemption by coming forth from the grave. The day is to be given to worship, meditation, and rest. The Lord's house has first claim upon the Christian that day. He is not to forsake "*the assembling*" together at the worship services (Hebrews 10:25). If he does so, he robs God of time that rightfully belongs to Him. One day out of seven, however, is not the only claim which God makes upon the Christian's time. The remainder of his time is to be used in such a way as to glorify God (Ephesians 5:16; Colossians 4:5).

Similarly, the Christian is to be a good steward of his talents. The tithes and offerings brought to the church to finance her program are not sufficient within themselves. They do not have a voice of their own, so they alone do not tell the good news about Jesus. They can be used to *send* the gospel, but the talents of God's people are required for the *preaching* of the gospel. Consequently, the Christian is to "*stir up the gift of God*" which is in him (II Timothy 1:6). He is to use his every talent in building up the work of the Lord (Romans 12:1; Ephesians 5:19). Acceptable stewardship is total stewardship. A person cannot give his tithes alone and be pleasing to God. Neither

can he give time or talents alone and please Him. Biblical stewardship calls for faithfulness in all things.

Let Us Reason Together

Question — What is the Lord's plan for financing His church?

Reply — The answer to that question has already been given in this chapter. His church is to be supported by the tithes and offerings of His people. According to the Scriptures, the tithe is the bare minimum that a Christian should give. None should give less. The Bible makes it equally plain, furthermore, that God's people are to be faithful stewards of the remaining nine tenths. God not only takes note of what is given, but He also observes what is left. His people are responsible for wise usage of the remainder. For most, if not all, faithful stewardship of the nine tenths will permit them to give offerings above the tithe.

Question — Does the New Testament teach tithing?

Reply — Some object to tithing because they claim it is legalistic, belongs under the law, and was therefore abolished by the cross. Those persons deny that the New Testament teaches tithing. An overall view of the history of tithing, however, will show that it is not just a phase of the law, but that it antedated the law, was incorporated into the law, and remains after the law.

That tithing was practiced in the ancient world is well established. Not only did God's people practice it, but heathen peoples did also. Their tithes were used to support pagan temples and worship, that practice being borrowed, very probably, from the people of God. The practice of tithing by pagan peoples, however, has little relevance to this study. We are primarily interested in tithing as it relates to God's people.

None will deny that **Abraham started the practice of tithing** as far as the written record of God's Word is concerned (Genesis 14:18-20). God had given him a great victory. He expressed his gratitude by spontaneously and willingly giving a tenth of the spoils of war to Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of the most high God. That act of tithing antedates the giving of the law at Sinai by approximately 475 years.

Jacob continued the practice of tithing. That, too, was before the giving of the law. According to Genesis 28, Isaac sent Jacob to Padan-aram to take him a wife from among his mother's people. At the place which he later called Bethel, he lay down to sleep for the night. As he dreamed, he saw a ladder set up on the

earth, with the top reaching to heaven and the Lord God standing *above it*. God spoke to him, renewing the Abrahamic covenant. When Jacob awoke from sleep, he made a vow unto God that if God would be with him, keep him in his way, give him bread to eat and raiment to wear, and bring him again to his father's house, he would surely give a tenth of his income unto God (verse 22). Jacob tithed out of gratitude; we should not do less.

By divine inspiration, **Moses incorporated tithing into the law** (Leviticus 27:30). God laid claim to the tithe, declaring it to be "*holy unto the LORD.*" The Israelites, however, because of the hardness of their hearts and a lost sense of gratitude, often withheld God's portion, converting to their own use that which was His. It was in such a time as that that **Malachi**, God's spokesman for that day, **commanded that the tithes be given** (Malachi 3:10). He accused them of having robbed God (verses 8, 9). He stated God's promise to bless them if they would bring God's portion into His storehouse (verses 11, 12).

It has been shown that the practice of tithing began before the law and was later incorporated into the law. Now to the question of tithing in New Testament teaching. According to Matthew, **Jesus commended tithing**. In Matthew 23:23 are the words of Jesus: "*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.*" Jesus denounced the Pharisees for religious acts with no depth. He accused them of outward acts which had no inward truth. He said that they had done some lesser things but had left the weightier things undone. He made it clear that they should have done the weightier things — judgment, mercy, and faith — and *should not have left the tithing undone*. Although His emphasis was upon what they had omitted, He commended the practice of tithing. If Jesus commended it, who dares denounce it?

The New Testament has more to say about tithing. Paul's letter to the Corinthian church declares that **God ordained tithing** for the support of gospel preaching. In I Corinthians 9:13 the questions are asked, "*Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?*" Keep in mind in considering the answer to those questions that Paul spoke of the priests and Levites and of the fact that they were supported by the tithes and offerings of the people. Now notice the answer: "*Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which*

preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (verse 14). His "*even so*" means "exactly the same." If tithes and offerings were used to support temple worship (and they were), God has ordained tithes and offerings for the support of the church. The method to be used in financing the church is "exactly the same" as that for support of temple worship. The New Testament does teach tithing!

It is also of significance that **Paul explained giving as being proportionate**. He said, "*Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come*" (I Corinthians 16:2). Since Christ commended only two percentages in giving — 100 percent (the widow's mite) and 10 percent (Matthew 23:23) — the percentage to which Paul referred was obviously the tithe. God has never required 100 percent. There must be food, clothing, and shelter for His people. He *does* require at least 10 percent. His people must give it if they are to be well-pleasing to Him.

The writer of the book of Hebrews said that in heaven **Jesus receives tithes** (Hebrews 7:8). He is said to receive tithes "*of whom it is witnessed that he liveth.*" The church is the witness of His resurrection. He, therefore, receives tithes of the church. If He receives tithes of the church, the church must practice tithing. The New Testament teaches tithing!

Question — Did Jesus and His early disciples practice tithing?

Reply — There are at least two reasons for affirming that Jesus himself tithed. He was reared in a pious Jewish home where the principles of the Old Testament Scriptures were taught and observed. The compliance of His family with the requirements of the law (Luke 2:39), their going to Jerusalem to observe that Passover (verse 41), Jesus' astounding of the doctors in the temple by His superior knowledge at the age of twelve (verse 47), and His statement relative to His being about His Father's business (verse 49) bear witness to that fact. His enemies never charged Him with a failure to tithe. As diligently as they sought cause to accuse Him, they most surely would have had He not tithed.

That Jewish Christians gave tithes can be safely concluded from the fact that they too escaped condemnation from the scribes and Pharisees for not tithing. Had Jewish converts failed to tithe, they would have suffered severe and prompt censure. Though many Jewish converts went far beyond the tithe, even giving all they had, no consistent Jewish believer could have gone below the tithe.

Jewish Christians, in general, showed as much and even more love for Christ than they had for the law; that love was expressed in many ways, among which was their generosity in giving. They, in turn, instructed Gentile Christians to express obedience and love by way of tithes and offerings. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians that ministers had a right to be supported by the church just as old dispensation priests received their living from the people of Israel (I Corinthians 9:13, 14), he was referring to tithing, about which the Gentile Corinthians needed some instruction. The proportion to be given was easily understood as the minimal tenth in his later instructions (I Corinthians 16:2) where he enjoined each one to give proportionately, "as God hath prospered him." The Bible clearly teaches that both Jesus and His early disciples practiced tithing!

Question — Why should every Christian tithe?

Reply — The most obvious reason for tithing is the biblical command to do so. As has been pointed out previously, tithing is a New Testament doctrine. Obedience to God requires that we tithe. Jesus said, "If a man love me, he will keep my words" (John 14:23). In tithing a person keeps Jesus' words and, at the same time, expresses his love. He also shows that he recognizes God's total ownership of all things. The truth of God's ownership is expressed in many places but perhaps in no place more clearly than in Psalm 24:1, "The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein." As the owner of all things, it is only right that He have a fair return upon His investments. If He allows us to use some of that which belongs to Him, we should expect to give Him something in return. That is an accepted principle of business.

Of the unfaithful servant, the master asked, "Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury [interest]?" (Luke 19:23). The same principle is stated in Luke 12:48: "To whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required." Does that not place a grave responsibility upon every Christian? God's investments in us are great indeed. The possessions we have belong to Him. Regardless of how much or how little we possess, we remain His stewards, subject to His law which requires a fair return. We *manage* for Him. With Him we must divide the profits if we desire to share His blessings.

The grace of gratitude calls for the giving of tithes by every Christian. David's question, "What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me?" should be in every

Christian's heart. What better way is there to thank God for the nine tenths than by returning to Him the one tenth?

Tithing is a means of spiritual growth. Jesus said, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:19-21). If we put our money into the Lord's work, our interest in that work will increase, and we will grow spiritually. We learn to put emphasis upon spiritual rather than temporal things. That stimulus to spiritual growth is the primary reason that the giving of tithes and offerings is superior to other means of financing the church. None of the other means are real causes for our hearts to be in the Lord's work.

Every Christian should tithe because of the demands of God's work. If His program is to prosper, the Christian must give. Since it is the responsibility of the church to spread His Word, the tithe should be deposited in the local church treasury. The church is to dispense the tithes of the people according to the demands of her outreach program — not the people individually. Giving to the church gives stability to the church and extends her program upon a sound basis.

Every Christian should tithe because failure to do so consists of robbing God (Malachi 3:8). None are too poor to tithe. (The poor rob Him by failure to tithe.) None are too rich to tithe. (The rich rob Him by failure to tithe.) The excuse of being too poor to tithe has no real basis. God's blessings upon the nine tenths make it go further than the whole amount without His blessings (Malachi 3:11; Luke 6:38). God will not hold guiltless those who rob Him. He has many ways of collecting that which belongs to Him. Some of those ways are none too pleasant — illness, loss of job, business failure.

Question — How is the tithe to be figured?

Reply — Take the amount of your weekly or monthly salary, move the decimal point one place to the left, and you have the amount of the tithe — just one tenth of your income. If you do not have a fixed income such as a salary or pension, deduct for actual expenses before computing the tithe. Such a procedure is necessary for the business man, professional man, and farmer. A safe rule to follow in deducting expenses, however, is to be just as fair and honest with God as you would want a business partner to be with you.

WHICH SPIRIT OF GIVING?



Question — Why do some object to the doctrine of tithing?
Reply — Objectors to tithing fall into two categories with opposite motives — one set bad and the other good. Those with the wrong motive oppose tithing because they wish to escape the necessity of having to give as much as the tithe. They feel that if it is left up to them to “purpose in their hearts” the amount they are to give they can give as little as they wish. That is erroneous reasoning, for if the tithe were strictly a practice binding only under the law, the Christian under grace should not do less. The claim that tithing belongs to the law is often just a cover-up for a covetous heart.

Those who object to tithing from a good motive fear that the doctrine may fool people into believing that the giving of the tenth is all that is required, that the remaining nine tenths is theirs to squander as they please, thus drying up the springs of generous giving and undercutting the concept of total stewardship. Those who teach the biblical doctrine of tithing, however, do not stop there. They understand that God wants them to give more than the tithe. The Bible is filled with calls to generous giving *above* the tithe (II Corinthians 9:6). They teach that the tithe is simply the minimal amount at which to begin, with liberal offerings to follow. No Christian should be satisfied to give only the tithe. Tithes and offerings from *every* Christian will adequately finance the work of the church. God’s plans always work. If there is failure, it is because God’s people fail to work His plans.

Personal Challenges

1. If you are not already a tither, become one today. Do not be guilty of robbing God. Although you may have only an allowance, give a tithe of that. The person who is not faithful in small things will not be faithful in large things.
2. “Talk up” tithing among family members and friends. An enthusiastic witness to God’s blessings upon the faithful steward is worth more than many pages of written material.

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CHURCH COVENANT

Having been led, as we believe, by the Spirit of God, to receive the LORD Jesus Christ as our Savior, and on the profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we do now in the presence of God, angels and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another, as one body in Christ.

We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to walk together in Christian love;

To strive for the advancement of this church, in knowledge, holiness and comfort;

To promote its prosperity and spirituality;

To sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines;

To contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all nations.

We also engage to maintain family and secret devotion; to religiously educate our children;

To seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintances;

To walk circumspectly in the world;

To be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, exemplary in our deportment; to avoid all tattling, backbiting and excessive anger;

To abstain from the sale and use of intoxicating drink as a beverage, and to be zealous in our efforts to advance the kingdom of our Savior.

We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember each other in prayer;

To aid each other in sickness and distress;

To cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and courtesy in speech;

To be slow to take offense but always ready for reconciliation, and mindful of the rules of our Savior to secure it without delay.

We moreover engage that, when we remove from this place, we will as soon as possible unite with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word.

The Future of the Church

SCRIPTURES TO MEMORIZE: *"I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"* (Matthew 16:18).

"Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready" (Revelation 19:7).

"Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Ephesians 3:21).

Points of Difference

The ecumenical movement and other aspects of the falling away which will characterize the last days of the church age have given some people cause to ask whether or not the church has a future. Such doctrinal compromise and moral decay are envisioned as to make it inconceivable to those persons that God will allow the "candlestick" to remain in any of the churches of that day. Doctrinal compromise will increase (I Timothy 4:1-3). Moral decay will prevail. Evil was so prevalent in the days before the Flood *"that every imagination of the thoughts of his (man's) heart was only evil continually"* (Genesis 6:5). Conditions similar to those in the days of Noah will exist at the close of the church age (Matthew 24:36-39). There will be sound, separated, and serving churches, however, until Jesus comes again. The promise of Jesus that *"the gates of hell shall not prevail against"* the church guarantees that (Matthew 16:18). His

determination to *"present it to himself a glorious church"* (Ephesians 5:27) is additional assurance. Although there is cause for concern relative to the doctrinal and moral purity of professed Christendom, the fear that the church will cease is groundless.

The Tribulation will be a time of divine judgment upon the earth. It shall immediately follow the church age and consists, in its entirety, of seven years. The relation of the church to that age is another area where disagreement occurs concerning the future of the church. A series of questions will suffice to show the various theories relative to the relationship. Is the church to be taken out of the world at the beginning of the Tribulation (pre-tribulation rapture theory)? Is she to be raptured in the middle of the Tribulation (mid-tribulation rapture theory)? Are only the faithful of her number to be caught away at the beginning of the Tribulation and the unfaithful either sometime during the Tribulation or at its end (partial rapture theory)? Is she to be raptured at the close of the Tribulation (post-tribulation rapture theory)? All of those theories can be found in Baptist ranks. They are mutually exclusive, however; only one can be correct.

The holy city, new Jerusalem, has been described by John (Revelation 21:2, 9 — 22:5). Its beauty, splendor, and desirability will be beyond compare. That is rightly so, for it is there that the church, who will be the Lamb's wife by that time, will one day reside (Revelation 21:2). Of that there seems to be fairly general agreement. (Agreement as to the identity of the bride is another matter, as has been discussed previously.) The question is, "When is that day?" Will new Jerusalem descend "from God out of heaven" at the beginning of the millennial age? Will that city be the residence of the bride and bridegroom during both the millennial and the eternal ages? Will it descend only after the Millennium and the great white throne judgment have become history? Will it afford residence for the royal couple only after the consummation of time? Both of those positions have support in some churches.

The theory that the identity of the church changes when the Rapture occurs is another point of difference among Christian people. The theory is that the church exists in time only in "glory church," that is, that the church exists in eternity. That local, visible form but will become universal in eternity. That theory, as shown in chapter 2, is based upon two erroneous concepts — the idea that all of the saved are baptized into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit and that all of the saved will occupy the same status in heaven. Biblical evidence was presented to

show that the Holy Spirit is never the *agent* in baptism; He never baptizes anyone. He was the *medium* in which Jesus baptized the church on the day of Pentecost. It was shown also that *each* church is a body of Christ, a unit of function for Him, and that believers are added to such a body only after water baptism. Finally, it was pointed out that there will be differences in status among the saints of God, those differences being based upon rewards for service. The church in the aggregate (or as an institution) is to be the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:26, 27). Jesus is not fickle. The woman to whom He is now betrothed is the one to whom He will be wed.

Objectives

1. To show that the church does have a future
2. To show that her future is glorious in nature
3. To show that her future is guaranteed by the faithfulness of God

Laying the Foundation

When Jesus gave the Great Commission to His church, He simultaneously made a promise of inestimable value. He said, "Lo, I am with you *always*, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matthew 28:20). His promise in that verse was a re-statement of a promise that He had made earlier — "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). The keeping of that promise is the guarantee of the church's future. As long as Jesus is with her, she will prevail, because "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31). Will Jesus keep His promise? Is He faithful to His Word?

The Bible has much to say about the faithfulness of the Lord. In every case, His faithfulness is said to be sure. He is "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8). Paul insisted that "If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself" (II Timothy 2:13). The psalmist declared His faithfulness to the multitudes (Psalm 40:10), stating that His faithfulness "reacheth unto the clouds" (Psalm 36:5) and that it was "unto all generations" (Psalm 119:90). Those writers promised to declare His faithfulness "to all generations" (Psalm 89:1) because He would establish it

"in the very heavens" (Psalm 89:2). In the latter psalm, a doxology of praise takes the form of a question: "O LORD God of hosts, who is a strong LORD like unto thee? or to thy faithfulness round about thee?" (Psalm 89:8). Also in that psalm, God promised that He will not suffer His faithfulness to fail (verse 33). In Psalm 92:1, 2, it is affirmed that "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High: to shew forth thy lovingkindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night."

Isaiah also took up the faithfulness theme when he said, "O LORD, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name: for thou hast done wonderful things; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth" (Isaiah 25:1). Perhaps, however, nowhere is God's faithfulness more beautifully extolled than in Lamentations 3:22, 23: "It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness."

Past experience assures us of God's faithfulness. Prophecies concerning the coming of the Savior periodically occurred from Eden until Bethlehem. "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law" (Galatians 4:4, 5). Following His birth, Jesus faithfully fulfilled His ministry, revealing the Father, declaring the good news, and ministering to the needs of the people. When the time came for Calvary, with a firm resolve, "he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). On the eventful night before His crucifixion as His flesh rebelled at the thought of the cross, He prayed, "Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39). After hours upon the cross, He said, "It is finished." He then bowed His head and gave up the ghost (John 19:30). In continued faithfulness, He lay in the grave for three days, after which He arose again for our justification (Romans 4:25). For forty days thereafter He remained with His disciples to establish His resurrection and the fact that the cross had not embittered Him. After having proved that He remained the same loving, considerate, and powerful Master, He publicly ascended back to the Father, where He now receives all who come to Him (Matthew 11:28) and intercedes for His people (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 4:15). He faithfully provides for our temporal and spiritual needs. He has not suffered His faithfulness to fail. He will not suffer His faithfulness to fail. Being robed in the faithfulness of God, the church is assured of her future.



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Let Us Reason Together

Question — What is the church to do until Jesus comes for her?

Reply — The immediate future of the church is to be filled with a variety of activities. Those activities consist of (1) committing herself to glorifying God, (2) cultivating godly living among her membership, (3) contributing her means for the spread of the gospel, (4) carrying the gospel to every creature, (5) combing communities for those who are lost, (6) contending for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints, (7) confronting the forces of evil on every front, and (8) championing the cause of all that is good. Through engaging in those activities, the church will complete her mission and make herself ready for her wedding day. Some day soon the last soul to be saved during the church age will be won, the last good deed for that age will be done, and the last temptation of the church will be overcome. The finishing touches will thus be given in the making ready of the bride. The Bridegroom will then come forth to receive her. That truth ought to make the church anxious for service, with the thought ever in mind that each act of service may be the finishing touch that will call for the appearing of the Beloved One.

Question — When will the church be taken out of the world?

Reply — As mentioned previously, there are four positions held by different persons as to the time at which the church will be taken out of the world. Those positions are the pre-tribulation, partial, mid-tribulation, and post-tribulation rapture theories. The writer subscribes to the pre-tribulation theory as the scriptural one; but before attempting to set out biblical evidence for that position, it seems well to define some concepts.

The Rapture is the catching away and glorious uptaking of the saints of God to meet Jesus at the first phase of His second coming. At that time, those who have experienced the sleep of death with faith in Jesus Christ will rise from the dead (I Thessalonians 4:16; I Corinthians 15:52). Subsequently, the living saints will be changed or glorified (I Corinthians 15:52-54), and together they will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air (I Thessalonians 4:17). The Rapture is a bright spot in the Christian's future. It is a time when he will experience glory such as he has never before experienced.

The Tribulation Age, Tribulation Period, or Tribulation, as it is variously called, consists of a period of seven years which shall immediately precede the coming of Jesus to reign upon the earth

(Daniel 9:27; Zechariah 14:4). It will be a time of unprecedented tribulation which will overshadow and be distinct from all previous times of trouble. It shall be divided into two portions of equal duration, each portion lasting for three and one-half years — forty-two months, or one thousand two hundred sixty days (Revelation 11:2, 3; 13:5). During the first half of that age, the world ruler, the Antichrist, will come into power by means of subtlety and deception (Daniel 9:27; Revelation 6:2). At the beginning of the second half of that period, the true nature of the Antichrist will be revealed (II Thessalonians 2:3, 4); he will break his covenant with the Jews (Daniel 9:27) and take peace from the earth (Revelation 6:4). Following that, tribulation of almost indescribable proportions shall come upon the earth (Revelation 6:12-17; 9:6).

That future time of trouble, according to the Scriptures, will concern three classes of people: (1) the nation Israel, (2) the pagan Gentile world, and (3) the saints, or elect, who will live in that time of trouble. The purpose of the Tribulation is twofold: (1) to bring to conclusion "*the times of the Gentiles*" (Luke 21:24), and (2) to prepare for the restoration and regathering of Israel during the millennial reign of Christ, following His second coming.

There are many reasons for believing that the Rapture will be pre-tribulation. According to Walvoord and others, the pre-tribulation position is the historic position — the other three positions being of relatively recent origin. The weight of history, within itself, does not guarantee that that is the correct position, but it does add strength to the position when it is considered along with the other evidence.

Among the other evidences supporting pre-tribulationism is the total absence of any scripture which refers to the church's being in the Tribulation. Passages concerning the Tribulation refer to Israel, Gentiles, and the saved among either group, but never to a functioning body of Jews and Gentiles combined as they are in the church. Post-tribulationists, however, seize upon the word "*elect*," as found in Matthew 24:22, 31, as evidence that the church will be in the Tribulation. That term does not in the slightest prove that those mentioned in that way belong to the church. The "*elect*" were in Old Testament days. The "*elect*" are in the church age. There will be the "*elect*" in the Tribulation and millennial ages. All of the saved of all ages are the "*elect*" of God. The "*elect*" of the Old Testament days, however, will not be in the Tribulation. Neither will the "*elect*" of the church age. The "*elect*" of Matthew 24:22, 31 are those

persons, both Jews and Gentiles, who will be saved during the Tribulation (Revelation 7). Where the post-tribulationists make their mistake is in their failure to distinguish between Jews, Gentiles, and the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Partial rapturists divide the church in their theology. According to them, the faithful in the church will be translated at the beginning of the Tribulation, whereas the unfaithful will go through that judgment. Passages commonly used in an effort to substantiate their position include Matthew 24:40-51; 25:13; Mark 13:33-37; Luke 20:34-36; 21:36; Philippians 3:10-12; I Thessalonians 5:6; II Timothy 4:1; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 9:24-28; Revelation 3:3; 12:1-6. Three things are incorrect, however, in their application of those scriptures. First, many of those passages apply to Israel, not to the church. Second, in most instances, the reference is to the Lord's coming to reign, that is, to His advent, rather than to the Rapture. Third, words such as *watch* which are given strictly a works connotation often have a primary meaning of being prepared, that is, of being saved. Matthew 24:40-51 can be used to illustrate their misapplication of those scriptures. A careful reading of the chapter will leave no doubt that Israel, not the church, was in view in the writing. Verses 21, 29, and 30 show the time to be leading up to the Advent, not to the Rapture. The word "*taken*" (in verses 40 and 41) has reference to being taken to judgment, not to being taken in the Rapture. The word "*watch*" (in verse 42) means to be prepared in salvation. The church will be raptured as a unit; she will not be divided (John 14:1-3). Those who shall be resurrected or translated at the last trump (I Corinthians 15:52) are described as "*we all*" (I Corinthians 15:51). According to I Thessalonians 4:13-18, all of "*the dead in Christ*" will be resurrected (verse 16); all those who "*believe that Jesus died and rose again*" (verse 14) shall be caught up to meet Him. The Scriptures teach that the translation will include all living saints and the resurrection will include all dead saints. The church shall be a distinct company within those groups. Her members who have been claimed by death, therefore, will be resurrected. Her living members will be translated. Together with all other saints, they will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air (verse 17).

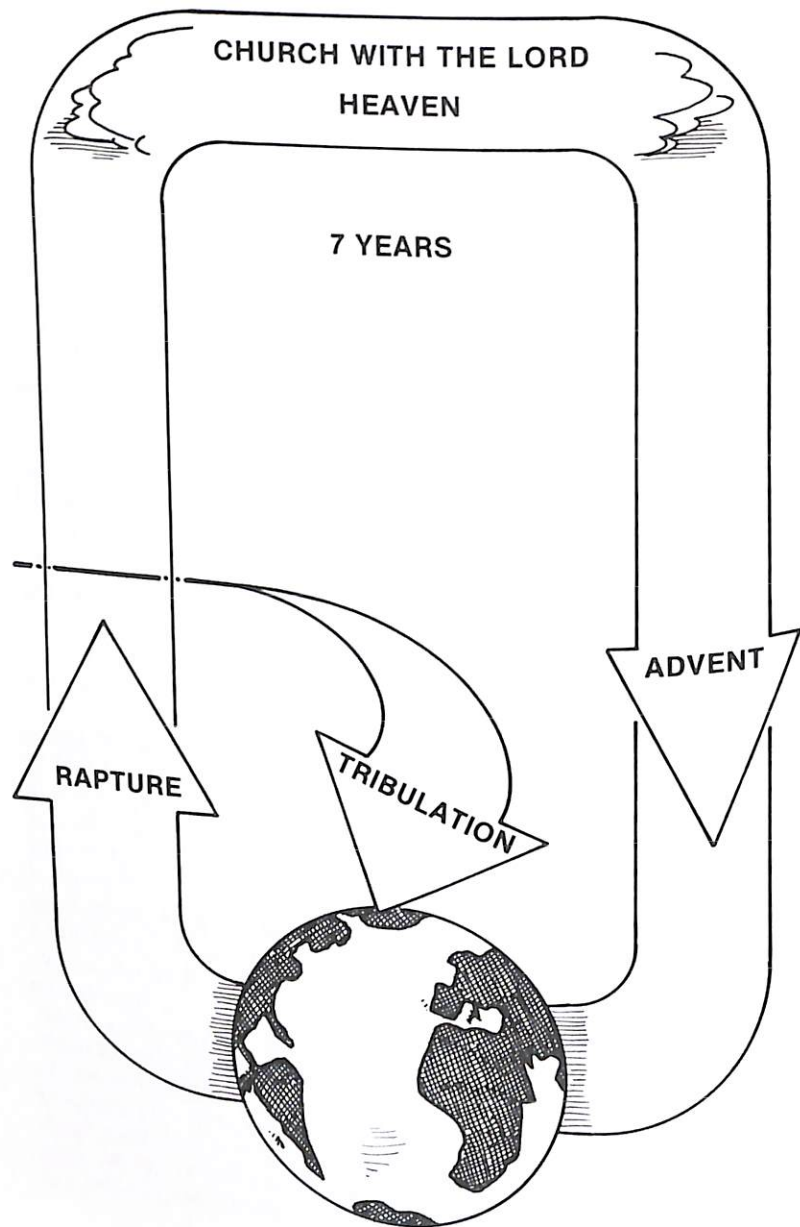
Mid-tribulationists conceive of Christ's coming as taking place in the middle of Daniel's seventieth week, just prior to the beginning of the Great Tribulation. According to that view, the time of the Rapture is recorded in Revelation 11, with the Great Tribulation beginning at the sounding of the seventh trumpet. It is rather difficult for the writer to believe, however, that the

bloodshed, famine, disruption of the sun, moon, and stars, and the other judgment phenomena attending the opening of the last six seals and the sounding of the first six trumpets are anything other than aspects of the Great Tribulation. The Rapture is depicted in Revelation 4:1, with the saved subsequently being gathered around the throne of God as represented by the four and twenty elders (Revelation 4:4, 10, 11). It is significant that the true church shall be nowhere upon earth during the events of Revelation 4 to 19 — the time of the Tribulation upon earth.

The wrath of God will be poured out upon the world during the Tribulation. It is thrilling to find assurance in the Scriptures that the church, along with the saved who have no church relationship, will be delivered from "*the wrath to come*" (I Thessalonians 1:10). The prospect of escaping the coming day of trial is stated in Luke 21:36: "*Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.*" In that same connection, the church at Philadelphia was promised that God would keep her "*from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth*" (Revelation 3:10). The purpose of God's judgment in the Tribulation will be to purge and judge Israel and to punish and destroy Gentile power. In neither case shall the church be the object of the events of the period. During that time, she will be in heaven with the Lord.

Question — What will the church experience during the Tribulation?

Reply — While the seven years of the Tribulation are being experienced upon the earth, the church will be with the Lord in heaven (I Thessalonians 4:17). Two outstanding events will be the occur during that time. The first of those events will be the judgment of the believers' works. That will occur soon after the Rapture. The Lord promised in Revelation 22:12, "*Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.*" Likewise, in II Corinthians 5:10, Paul told the church at Corinth that they "*must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.*" In his first epistle to that church, Paul stated and explained the judgment of the believers' works (I Corinthians 3:11-15). "*Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day*



shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." The day of rewarding is coming! The rewards shall be great for those who serve the Lord in His church (Matthew 5:12).

The second great event which shall take place while the church is with the Lord in heaven is the marriage of the church to Jesus Christ. Some teach that the church and Christ are already married, but that is erroneous. Whenever the marriage is mentioned in the Scriptures, it is referred to as being yet future. It will take place after Christ appears and catches away His saints from the earth. At that time, all of the local churches will be gathered into one. The church then, as an institution, will be given in marriage to Jesus. Revelation 19:7 places that time as just before His coming back to the earth to reign. "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready." Immediately thereafter, according to John's revelation, the heaven shall be opened and Christ will come forth on the white horse of victory to fight the final battle in the campaign of Armageddon (Revelation 19:11-21). Following Him also on white horses shall be glorified saints (verse 14), coming back with Him for His earthly reign.

Question — Where will the church reside during the millennial age?

Reply — Jesus gave diligence during His personal ministry to the preparing of His church for His death and subsequent departure back to the Father. It was during a time of teaching to that end that John 14:1-3 was spoken. He said, "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." When He comes again and catches away His church, He will carry her to that place which He has prepared for her. That place will be the holy city, new Jerusalem. As He shall come forth to reign, new Jerusalem will descend "from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:2). The holy city will descend until it becomes suspended over the earthly Jerusalem (Revelation 21:24-26). The church will reside in the new Jerusalem during the millennial age.

Some may question the statement that new Jerusalem shall descend at the *beginning* of the Millennium, not at the *end* of it. The weight of evidence, however, favors the beginning of the Millennium as the time of the descent. In that light, John was looking in retrospect to the beginning of Christ's reign when he saw the holy city "*coming down from God out of heaven*" (Revelation 21:2). Obviously, much of the Revelation is not given in chronological sequence.

The evidence for the premillennial descent of new Jerusalem comes from a number of sources. Unquestionably, the holy city appeared as the bridal chamber to John (Revelation 21:2). Jesus promised to move His bride into that chamber when He comes again (John 14:1-3); His promises are always sure. Is He going to move her *out* of that house and then move her *in* again after a thousand years? The writer thinks not! That is exactly what must happen, however, if the city does not descend until after the Millennium. Is not the housing of His bride the purpose of Jesus in preparing that mansion? That was what Jesus personally said (John 14:2). Surely His purpose will be fulfilled. His bride will not find herself homeless.

We find other evidence which supports the premillennial descent of the city. The nations are said to "*walk in the light of it*" (Revelation 21:24). "*Nations*" as used there shows that to be a phenomenon of time, not of eternity. Nations are composed of people in their *physical* bodies. There will be no such people in the eternal age. The leaves of the tree of life (Revelation 22:2) which is inside the city are "*for the healing of the nations.*" There, again, we find the word *nations*. More significantly, the people of those nations need "*healing.*" How can that be a need in eternity? Will not all saints have *glorified* bodies in eternity? Surely they will! What is the explanation? Isaiah 65:20 gives the answer. That verse is very definitely in a millennial setting. It shows life being extended in that day so that all who shall be born will reach an age of one hundred years. The person who is still in his sins when he reaches the age of one hundred will be "*accursed,*" that is, cut off. He will die. On the other hand, when the believer reaches a hundred years, he will cross over and receive his change. In the prolonging of life will be the "*healing of the nations.*" There will be a tree of life in both the old city and the new city (Ezekiel 47:12; Revelation 22:2). No sinner can enter into the new city (Revelation 21:27). Only the saved will have access to the tree of life in that city. The unsaved will obtain their "*healing*" from the leaves of the tree in the earthly city. In the light of the evidence, it seems clear that the new

Jerusalem shall descend at the beginning of Christ's reign upon earth.

Question — What will be the function of the church during the millennial age?

Reply — As the bride of Christ, the church is to reign with Him as His queen. The Bible clearly teaches that the church will have that position. To the church at Laodicea, the Lord said, "*To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne*" (Revelation 3:21). From I Corinthians 6:2, 3 we learn that the church will judge the world. The faithful members in the church at Thyatira were told, "*He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father*" (Revelation 2:26, 27).

Notice that those promises were made to the faithful churches and to the faithful in the churches. Simply holding membership in a church does not insure that one will be in the bride, with the subsequent privilege of the queenly reign with Christ. Many hold membership in a church where they are not faithful in upholding her doctrines, helping to do her work, walking worthy of her position in the world, and in supporting her services and outreach ministry. Those who are unfaithful to the church, although children of God, will suffer loss when they stand before the judgment seat of Christ. The Lord will remove the candlestick from an unfaithful church, causing her to cease (Revelation 2:5); He will also remove the unfaithful from the roster of the church. His message to the church at Thyatira proves that He will do so. The faithful, however, will reign with Him. It pays to be faithful!

Question — Will the church retain her identity in eternity?

Reply — The church has retained her identity during the church age despite the persecution and attacks of her enemies. She will retain that identity during the Tribulation and Millennium, as has been shown. There is no reason for her not to retain it in eternity. Neither is there any scriptural evidence that she will not do so. When she is given in marriage to Jesus Christ, it will be "*until death do us part.*" Since there will be no more death (Revelation 21:4; I Corinthians 15:26), that union will be eternal. The future of the church is a glorious one indeed!

"Come thou with us, and we will do thee good."

Personal Challenges

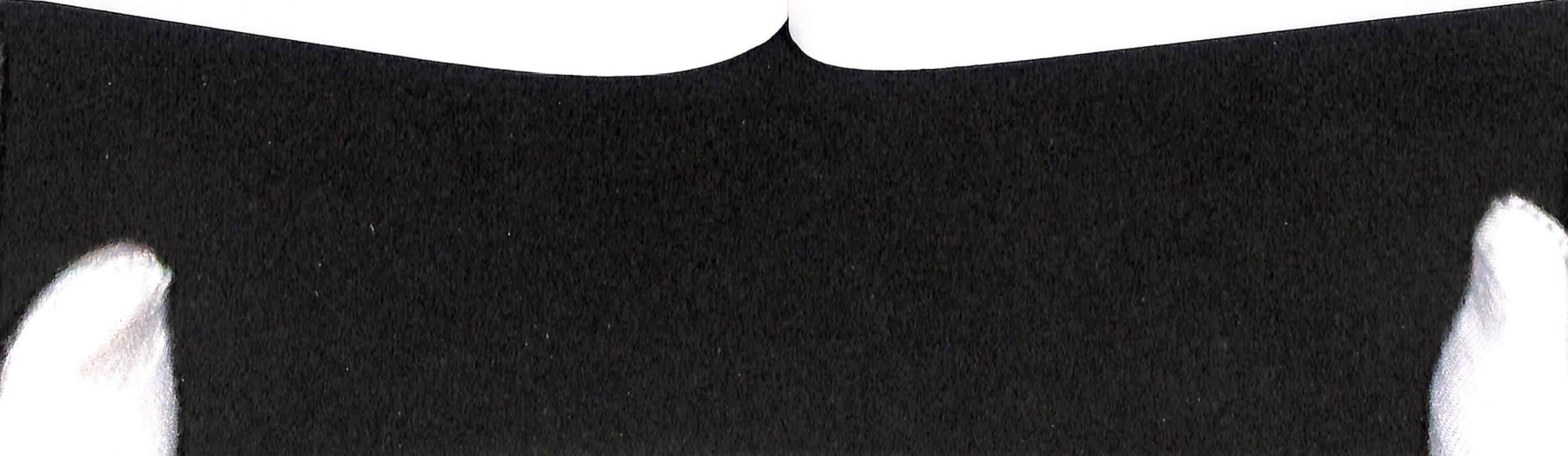
1. Pray for an understanding of the doctrines of the church.
2. Love the church and her work.
3. Become a part of the church and her future.

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