

June 29, 2010

...Praise Him with the timbrel and dance. (Psalm 105:4)

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Shepherds of Sinai

Legal leaders lords would be,
They turn the gospel upside down;
Binding up - not setting free,
Adorning grace with thorny crowns.

Shepherds of the pseudo-grace
Proclaiming legal logic wise,
Give righteous zeal a fleshly taste,
And cripple sheep and blind their eyes.

The Savior said to all His own
That tears and trials shall surely come;
But sad it is, when for the sheep,
They suffer 'neath a shepherd's thumb.

●ejr

Quote of the Week. from the *Rev. W. Fry* of the London Eclectic Society, April 17, 1809 on *Grace vs Self-Righteousness*

“It is a dangerous thing when religion begins in the head rather than in the heart. It is better to find our need of doctrines to meet the wants of the soul, rather than first to take up notions to which we have not corresponding feelings. Such [individuals] often take up two or three leading notions, and square everything to them. The doctrines not growing out of experience are crudely applied.

1. HUMILITY is a principal distinction between a consciousness of grace, and a spirit of self-righteousness.
2. TENDERNESS AND MEEKNESS of spirit is another distinction, as opposed to a harsh spirit and a heady mind.
3. SPIRITUALITY is a characteristic of grace; vehemence and activity, that of self-righteousness.
- 4, Ascribing everything to GRACE is another.

from *The Thought of the Evangelical Leaders-Notes of the Discussions of the Eclectic Society - London, 1798 - 1814, edited by John Pratt, Banner of Truth reprint, 1978.*

Feature Article:

Who Needs a Church?

So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believe. Acts 14:23

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. Heb 10:24-25

I heard a popular personality say this week that belonging to a local church is not necessary, and even detrimental for a true Christian. The New Testament clearly teaches otherwise. The word *church* in the Greek is *ekklesia*, and had the common meaning of *assembly*. The very first New Testament believers were joined together in a very close-knit fellowship (*Acts 2:38-47*) called “the church.” As the gospel of Christ went forth, local assemblies of believers were established in each city, and official leadership was appointed to oversee each church. (*Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5*). In over 95% of the times the word *church* is used in the New Testament (98 of 103, depending the manuscript) it refers to *a local organized assembly of believers, with established leadership- pastors (elders) and deacons*. While *ekklesia* is used in a few places to refer collectively to all believers of all places and times, (a precious truth in itself) it is clearly the corporeal local assemblies that are Christ’s appointed way of nurturing and equipping his saints to carrying out His will on earth today. These churches may associate together for missions, education, or other purposes, but the integrity and primacy of the local church should be respected, and not obscured.

●What are the primary objectives of the church’s ministry?

There are many activities and programs in which a church may be involved, but, biblically, there are only five primary ministry functions of the church through the *working of the Holy Spirit*, and upon *the foundation of biblical truth*:

- (1) **Worship.** Worship is the expression of adoration and praise toward God, done in *spirit and in truth* (*John 4:24*). That is, it must be genuine, from a heart indwelt by the Holy Spirit; and it must be in response to the truths of God revealed in scripture. Worship, then, must be the fruit of a personal relationship with God through Christ.
- (2) **Fellowship & Care.** The church is to be a nurturing and edifying fellowship where Christian believers are encouraged and cared for *by one another*.
- (3) **Training & Equipping for Ministry.** Every member of a church is to be a *minister*, serving God with the unique gifts and resources given to each. Christ gives pastors and teachers of various sorts to the churches to *equip the saints (believers) for their work of ministry through preaching and teaching* (*Eph 4:11-12*).
- (4) **Mission.** The church does not exist for itself, but for the

glorifying of God, as it collectively and individually becomes *salt and light* to the world. The overarching mission is to proclaim the saving grace of Jesus Christ to the nations (*Matt 28:19-20*). This certainly includes sending called and prepared servants into the world to preach and teach (missionaries). However, *just as important*, are individuals living for God's glory as they exercise their gifts and callings in their daily lives.

(5) **Report & Testimony.** The ministry cycle of the church isn't complete until there is a sharing with the body of believers as to what God is doing in and through the members and works of the church. Throughout scripture the *testimony* of God's working is a key motivator and enhancer of powerful worship and greater service.

●How is the ministry of the church to be financially supported?

In every time and culture, the fulfilling of the church's mission requires monetary/material support. The Lord has ordained that those who are called as pastors (elders) are to be supported by the churches to the best of their ability. What is to be the source of these funds? Throughout the Bible, God has established that His work is to be carried on *primarily* through the free-will tithes and offerings of his people. Giving cheerfully and without compulsion is to be an act of worship in itself for every child of God. Whatever portion we give is to be a loving acknowledgment that *all* we have and are, belongs to God, and our desire is for His glory and the salvation of others.

●With so many denominations and different local churches, what identifies a true church of Jesus Christ?

There are many reasons for the diversity of churches today, some for good reason, and some, not so good. However, **all** true churches of Jesus Christ share some absolute beliefs in common, regardless of their name:

The inspiration and authority of the Bible as the Word of God. (*Matthew 4:4; Acts 17:11; 2 Timothy 3:15-17, 4:1-4; 2 Peter 1:19-21*); **The Trinity**: there is one true and living God who is the creator and sustainer of all things, and who exists eternally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (*Deut.4:39; Isaiah 44:6; Genesis 1, Exodus 20:11; Psalm 33:6,9; Colos.1:15; Mathew 28:19; John1:1-3; 14:6-9; Colossians 1:13-18, 2:9*); **The Deity and Humanity of Christ** (*Matthew 16:27; 25:31-32; Luke 9:26; Acts 1:11; Hebrews 10:37; Titus 2:13; Rev. 1:7*); **A literal eternal Heaven and eternal Hell.** (*Matthew 10:28; 23:33; 25:41 Mark 9:43-48; Luke 12:4-5; 16:23; 2 Peter 2:4; revelation 20:10,15*); **Salvation and eternal life** are only through **personal faith in Jesus Christ** and his atoning work. (*John 3:16; Acts 4:12; 16:31; Romans 3:20,28*); **There is a literal resurrection and personal judgment** of all people before God. (*1 Corinthians 15; Romans 14:11-12; Rev. 20:11-15*)

There are *some* true churches which hold to these beliefs under the majority of Christian denominational labels, today, but there are **many** which do not. It is very important to investigate the true beliefs of an individual church before uniting to it.

●In summary, then, why is church membership so important?

(1) The local church is clearly established in God's Word as His ordained format for **worship** and **service**.

(2) Every Christian is spiritually "born" and gifted to be a living part of a body of believers. (*1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 2:20-22; 1 Peter 2:5*)

(3) God has given pastors and teachers in the church to equip believers for maturity and service through the preaching and teaching of His Word. (*Ephesians 4:11-12*)

(4) All believers need the nurturing and encouragement of other believers. (*1 Corinthians 12:14-21, 25-26; Colossians 3:16;*)

(5) Practically speaking, official membership is necessary to help establish leadership and conduct business.

If you are a believer, please consider carefully your need to be an involved member of a Christ-centered, biblically sound fellowship of believers; if you are not yet a believer, consider seeking God in a local Bible based Church. ●ejr3

Walking with Jesus... a devotional minute.

In His Hands.

And they say unto him, We have here only five loaves, and two fishes. He said, Bring them here to me. Matt.14:17-18

And the LORD said unto [Moses], What is that in your hand? And he said, A rod. And the Lord said, Cast it on the ground. Exodus 4:2

The situation seemed impossible. Five thousand hungry men (plus women and children), and one lad with a some fish and bread. But skip forward a bit, and we see five thousand men full to their hearts' content, and twelve baskets extra. What lies between these scenes is very instructive. We see a boy giving up his lunch and placing it in the hands of Jesus. Thus were his meager resources about to become the overabundant blessing of thousands. Friend, do you see your "meager" resources as too insignificant for the Lord to use. Are your gifts and abilities, money, education, intellect, position, or health, too little or too frail to do much for the Lord? Remember Moses' "stick", the widow's *handful of meal* (1 Kings 17:8-16), another with her *empty borrowed pots* (2 Kings 4:1-7), and our Lord's own *earthly poverty*. God's power and blessing is in what you **have**, not in what you think you need. Place it in Jesus' hands to bless, than receive it back and begin to serve God and others. You will find an overabundance of sufficiency.

●ejr3

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