

CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

By Johnny Ramsey

Nearly everyone will agree that Christ is essential to our salvation. This is a universal belief. But when we ask the question: "Is the church essential to our salvation" we get this answer: "Of course not"! I feel confident that most of you believe that Christ is necessary to your salvation but that the church plays no vital part in your soul's destiny. In other words, to your thinking, membership in the church is not of any eternal value. In this brief lesson, I wish to affirm that both Christ and the church are essential to our salvation. Please follow the lesson closely with your Bible open.

If we but realize the close relationship between Christ and the church we would never be guilty of saying: "I can be saved without ever being a member of the church". Notice the wording of the following passage of Scripture. Paul, inspired by God, wrote to the church in Ephesians 5: 22-33.

"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church; For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless, let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband."

From this beautiful passage we notice that the church is referred to as the bride of Christ. This teaching certainly depicts the close affinity between the Lord and the church. To belong to Christ is to belong to the church! Paul stated that Christ would sanctify, cleanse, and present the church to Himself. The record also states that Christ gave Himself for the church. I ask this pertinent question: "Did our Lord suffer the agony of death to bring into existence a nonessential institution. Did the Son of God offer Himself on the Roman Cross-the most shameful death known to man-in order to present something that we could take or leave, accept or reject?" In the book of Acts, chapter 20, verse 28, we hear the Apostle Paul as he speaks fervently to the elders of the church in Ephesus: "Take heed unto yourselves and all the flock, over which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of the Lord which he hath purchased with his own blood." Did Jesus shed His blood in vain? This scripture teaches that the church was bought with Christ's blood. By the standards of fair trade exchange, we learn that anything purchased should be worth the value of the price paid. The price paid for the church was the blood of Christ. Therefore, if the purchase price equals the value of the purchased possession, the church is just as important to our salvation as Christ's precious blood. Who then will deny that the church is essential? Is Christ's blood essential? Only the atheist, skeptic and modernist will say no!

In Matthew 26:28 we read that Jesus shed His blood for the remission of sins. So, we learn that Christ shed His blood for two reasons—(1) To purchase the church (Acts 20:28) and (2) For the remission of sins (Matthew 26:28). There is, therefore, an unmistakable relationship between salvation from sin and the church. In Acts, the second chapter, we read of those who received remission of sins by repenting and being baptized into Christ (Acts 2:38) and then the divine record states: "And the Lord added to the church daily such as were being saved" (Acts 2:47). These Jews on the Day of Pentecost benefited by the blood, by being in what the blood bought, that is, the church. Perhaps this illustration will help. Let us suppose that it is the coldest day of the year. You pass by a street corner and see a young boy standing there in thin, scanty clothing. His teeth are chattering and he is turning purple because of the freezing weather. You have compassion on him and hand him 50 dollars, saying, "Son, go over there to that clothing store and buy yourself some clothes, before you freeze to death." He gratefully accepts the money for the clothing and heads for the store as you depart. Two hours later you pass the same corner. Much to your surprise, the boy still stands there—still in his inadequate clothing— icicles in his hair—and piled up high by his side you see 50 dollars worth of warm clothing. He is none the better in spite of your generosity for he failed to realize that he would only profit by being in the clothing your money had purchased. You had given him that money to provide warmth and clothing. The boy's only hope for getting warm was to get in the clothier.

Let us apply the principle to our lesson. Christ shed his blood for the remission of sins (Matthew 26:28; Ephesians 1:7) and to purchase the church; we benefit from His blood by being in the church or the purchased possession.

The book of Acts furnishes us with another example of the close tie between the church and Christ. In Acts, chapter 8, we read that Saul of Tarsus, a leader of the Pharisees, "made havoc of the church". Yes, he led the persecution against the church (Acts 8:1). But, in Acts, chapter 9, verse 4, Jesus asked him: "Saul, Saul, why persecutes" thou me?" Can't you see, my friends, from this example, that to persecute the church is to persecute Christ? Why? Because, Christ and the church are one, just as the husband and wife (Ephesians 5:32).

From Colossians 1:18 and 24 we learn another lesson concerning the intimate connection between Christ and the church. Listen to these words of inspiration: "And he (Christ) is the head of the body the church: who is the beginning, the first- born from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence." Paul further stated: "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh—for his body's sake, which is the church." We learn from these words to the church at Colosse that the church is the spiritual body of Christ over which He rules as head. Therefore, to try to be saved by Christ but apart from the church is to separate the head from the body—and this of course would destroy both. The very fact that the Bible teaches us that Christ is the head of the church, which is His body, proves conclusively that the church is essential. Can you visualize the perfect Son of God as the head of a nonessential organism? The New Testament teaches no such thing. Also, in this regard, in writing to the church at Ephesus the Apostle stated that we are reconciled in the one body, the church (Ephesians 2:14-16). To reconcile means to bring us back in harmony with God. The idea is this: Man has estranged himself from God, but he can be reconciled or brought back on friendly terms with God, only in the body, the church. Now, ask yourself the question: "Is the church essential?"

Another striking point concerning Christ and His church or His body (Ephesians 1:20; 23) is found in Ephesians 5:23: "For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church and he is the savior of the body." Friends, if you think the church is non-essential, you will have to get another Savior-for, Christ is the Savior of the body over which He rules as head, that is; the church. The New Testament teaches that Christ gave Himself for the church, shed His blood to purchase it, that He rules over it as its head and He will save the church one-day.

Are you a member of the church that Jesus built? Friend of mine, I am not speaking of the man-made churches but of the body of Christ. In this lesson, as I have shown you the various scriptures that prove the church to be essential, I did not mean that membership in a denomination is essential. In fact, to be a member of any denomination is to endanger one's eternal destiny. But, you and I must be Christians, members of the Lord's body, in order to be saved.

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS DISTINCTIVE!

As one travels over the busy roadways in America and throughout the world, he is made aware of the diversity of religious beliefs, the division within the realm of spiritual matters. A few years ago I heard a noted international evangelist say that there were 800 different churches in the earth today! Twenty years ago a leading publisher in the United States issued a book listing 254 denominations in North America. Is this the epitome of what Jesus died for? No, it is directly opposed to His prayer for oneness in Christianity (John 17:20-21). The apostle -Paul condemned such schism as carnal (I Corinthians 1:10). In Ephesians 4:1-6 we have a divine platform for unity, as the Holy Spirit desires it to be. It is significant that our Lord promised to build but one spiritual body or organism. (Matthew 16:18). In the first century Paul, Peter, James, John, Philip and Stephen were all members of the same church-the one Christ purchased with His precious blood (Acts 20:28). It was distinct and unique then; the Lord's church is even so today!

There is no merit in being unusual just for the purpose of being odd. But, the church of Christ is distinctive because it follows the Bible only as its guide. This makes the organization, doctrine, worship and life of the church unique in the maze of religious confusion.

Since the church is referred to over 500 times in the New Testament, heaven must be concerned and vitally interested in the religion of Christ. We read in Ephesians, chapter five that the church is subject to Christ-not to the Pope, a synod or a creed book-but only to the Lord. His very truth contributes greatly to the distinctiveness of Christ's church. In Ephesians 3:21 we learn that God is glorified "in the church" both now and eternally. Thus our present study is certainly incomparable in its worth.

Wherever men today obey the Scriptures explicitly, the Lord's church exists. If we do what men did in the first century, under the instructions of the Scriptures, we will be exactly what they were. They were Christians (I Peter 4:16); they were members of the church of Christ! (Romans 16:16).

Another rebuttal is often stated in these words: "Too many years have elapsed since the establishment of pure Christianity. The Dark Ages resulted in the loss of divine truth. We can no longer be just Christians. We will have to be a member of some denomination today."

Multiplied thousands adhere to such reasoning. But, is it true? Jehovah promised that His word would not return void (Isaiah 55:11) and that the inspired Scriptures would make men spiritually complete (II Timothy 3:16-17). It therefore becomes a strange idea to believe that God would allow the devil to triumph over divine truth so as to pervert the plan of redemption for man. Among those who profess to follow the Bible this position is, in fact, untenable. We can be today what servants of Jesus were over 1900 years ago. The intervening years have not hidden the power of the gospel. It is still the same message of salvation (Romans 1:16).

Let us illustrate the plausible nature of what we are saying. Suppose that the game of baseball would cease to be played for several centuries. If, in the year 2550, a man were to follow minutely the baseball rulebook of 1968, he could present to the people of his day the exact game we play now. The elapse of time could not change the matter. And friends, the same principle applies to Christianity. If we obey and teach and practice that religion portrayed on the pages of the New Testament we shall be members of the church.

The church, which Jesus purchased with His own blood, does not consist of all the denominations. New Testament Christianity is undenominational. The body of Christ is not composed of the 300 differing religious bodies on earth today.

But, someone says: "Preacher, have you never read the passage in John, chapter 15, concerning the vine and the branches? Don't you know that Jesus was referring to the various denominations when he said: "I am the vine and ye are the branches?"

No, I do not believe Christ was referring to the various denominations when He said: "Ye are the branches." Here are four conclusive reasons why we say this so emphatically:

First of all, Jesus made it plain that He was referring to an individual and not a denomination when He spoke of the branches of the vine. Notice verses 1 through 7 of John, chapter 15: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word, which I have spoken unto you Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot hear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit so shall ye be my disciples."

The very context itself disproves the theory put forth by the denominations. Jesus was saying: I am the vine, ye (my disciples) are the branches. He said: "If a man abide not as a branch." John 15 does not prove that Christ was sanctioning the present division in the religious world when He stated "I am the vine and ye are the branches" because: None of the denominations of today existed then. He could not have referred to the Protestant bodies for not one of them was in existence until 1519.

I am also sure Jesus was not upholding sectarianism by His use of "the vine and the branches" because: A vine bears only one type of fruit. If Christ had wanted to uphold denominationalism He would have needed another comparison for a vine cannot bear but one type of fruit. The fruit of the denominations has produced many, many varying religious orders. It would be just as logical to see a vine with grapes, bananas, apples, plums and peaches on each of the branches as to believe that Christ was referring to the denominations when He said: "I am the vine and ye are the branches." Last of all, we are confident Jesus was not herein endorsing religious divisions because just two chapters later He prayed for oneness and not diversity (John 17:20-21). Surely, Jesus did not contradict His teaching in His prayer life.

I beg of you to seriously consider the importance of being a member of the body of Christ. In Galatians 3:27 and I Corinthians 12:13 we read that to become a part of Christ's church we must be baptized for the remission of sins. When we do this, God will add us to the church (Acts 2:47) where we can serve the Lord faithfully until death and then go home to Heaven in the after-awhile.

WHAT THE CHURCH IS NOT!

Many people have an unscriptural idea concerning the church. For instance, most people speak of a material building as the church. You ask 10 people on the street "What is the church" and most of them will point to a building with stained glass windows and a steeple projected in the sky. To a lot of people this is the church. No such idea prevailed in New Testament Days. Jesus did not shed His blood to purchase a building composed of brick, mortar and stone. Unless we have a fuller concept of the Lord's church than to liken it to a literal meeting house then we have missed the true meaning of the church that Jesus built.

The church is spoken of as the house of God (I Timothy 3:15). But Peter tells us in I Peter 2:5 that Christians are living stones which makes up the house of God or the church of the Lord. To Christians at Corinth Paul stated: "Now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular." (I Corinthians 12:27). Thus far we have established that the church is not a building. Such expressions, then, as "go to church", "What a beautiful church", "They are building a new church", and many others express a lack of Bible teaching on the nature of the church that Jesus built.

In discussing what the church is not I would like to further state that it is not a social club. Thousands of people think of the church as a glorified social center. It is true that many of the denominations started by men use the social element to thrive on— but remember, our lesson deals with the church Jesus built and not some man-made religious order. Such things as bridge parties, pie suppers, bingo games, white elephant sales and rummage sales sponsored by the church would be as foreign to the New Testament Christians as for us today to see an Eskimo wearing a Panama hat! In some religious groups the most successful preachers are not noted for their gospel preaching but for their ability to plan and supervise social affairs.

The church of the Lord never has been in the business of providing entertainment or developing the appetite. The gospel story is designed for men's souls and not their stomachs. Today some build huge cathedrals and use them once or twice a week for

spiritual matters and then will use this same building purchased with what is called "the Lord's money" for such things as card parties, pie suppers and even dances in some places. I challenge every preacher on earth to show me one scripture than even remotely gives us the right to use the Lord's money for such things. If we'd leave the kitchens, banquet rooms and dance halls out of the church buildings and use that money to preach the pure gospel of Christ the Lord would be pleased, instead of humiliated by our actions. The church Christ established is not a denomination. Were the early Christians (such as Paul, Stephen, Philip and John) in the world today no denomination could claim them, for they labored for the Lord as faithful members of His church long before any of the so-called "Christian" denominations came into existence. They were simply members of the body of Christ-humble Christians-and had absolutely no affiliation with denominationalism.

The church Jesus purchased was not a denomination. In discussing what the church is not we need to mention that Jesus never did intend for His church to be political power. The Lord didn't intend for the principles of Christianity to be a mixture of "church and state." His kingdom is a spiritual reign in the hearts and lives of men and not a political regime. In John 18:36 we have these words of Christ recorded: "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight."

To the brethren at Corinth, Paul was inspired to write: "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal" (II Corinthians 10:3-4). The only weapon we are to use as members of the Lord's army-His church—is the sword of the spirit, the Word of God. (Ephesians 6:17). Christians are taught not to use force but love in overcoming the enemies of righteousness. But you can read in any reputable history of an apostate religion, which claims to be the original church, which sent its members on a series of murdering escapades-known by us today as the Crusades and the Inquisition. As we study the nature of the church that Jesus established we see plainly that He never intended for it to be a political system. Preaching brethren, let's keep politics out of the pulpit and tell sinners of the King of Kings!

A CHRIST-CENTERED CHURCH

What makes a church great? There are those in the world who appraise spiritual greatness in the light of material accomplishment. Even some brethren are prone to equate importance with numbers, money and propaganda. But, the Bible is careful to tell us the traits of a truly great church. A church cannot be great unless:

1. The Lord Built It: Psalms 127:1; Matthew 16:18
2. Christ Is The Head: Colossians 1:18
3. And The Foundation: I Corinthians 3:11
4. He Must Be The Cornerstone: Ephesians 2:20
5. Christ Purchases It: Acts 20:28 & Ephesians 5:23
6. It Follows The Divine Pattern: Hebrews 8:1-5.

But, it is apparent, today, that among those congregations belonging to Christ, some are not accomplishing what they ought. Why? One reason is we have almost overstressed individual responsibility and have overlooked Biblical injunctions that demand congregational oneness and action. For instance the Scriptures refer to the church as the:

1. Army of the Lord: Ephesians 6:10-17
2. Body of Christ: I Corinthians 12
3. Bride of Christ: Ephesians 5
4. Family of God: Hebrews 3; Ephesians 3; I Timothy 3:15
5. Kingdom of the Lord: Hebrews 12:28.

A CHRIST-CENTERED CHURCH

All of these comparisons speak of the concord we must have if the Lord's church glorifies the Savior. For, the church will never be truly great until every member works together. We need the sentiment expressed in Acts 4:32 to prevail in our midst today: "and the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul." We must "strive together for the faith of the gospel" (Philippians 1:27). Paul exhorted the Corinthians to "be of the same mind and live in peace" (II Corinthians 13:11).

A church that has "fervent love among themselves" (I Peter 4:8) can accomplish much for Jesus. Yes, a congregation of the Lord's people working together as these passages urge would be indeed unusual, different and great! Wouldn't it be marvelous if every member were 100% loyal instead of 30%? What if each one attended each assembly of study and worship? If each Christian gave so liberally that the tremendous work of evangelism and benevolence could be put into action? Yes, if every member of the body of Christ loved the Lord and one another thoroughly, we would soon see a world redeemed.

But, alas the following words truly depict the problem (II Timothy 2:20). "But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth: and some unto honor, and some unto dishonor." The honorable vessels form churches that are Christ centered. Let us notice five necessary ingredients in a Christ-centered church. Such a congregation must first of all be:

A. CONVERTED

The word means "change in character, spiritual change, transformed, to have a different purpose." Yes, conversion applies after becoming a Christian, too! The church of Ephesus was told by the Lord to be transformed (Revelation 2:4). So was the congregation in Sardis (Revelation 3:5). In II Corinthians 5:17 we learn of the converted life each member of the church is to live. A Christ-centered church must also be:

B. CONVICTED

Webster tells us that this word means "a state of being convinced, a fixed or firm belief; a deep persuasion." The opposite idea would be doubt or uncertainty. In Revelation 11 we learn that no compromise among God's people is tolerated. Christians today need to have the backbone manifested long ago by Daniel and his friends. We desperately need churches that stand for the right thing— if needs be against all odds. We just cannot please men and yet be the servants of Christ (Galatians 1:10). We need some rock-ribbed conviction in the church today. The language of II Corinthians 4 is very appropriate: "We also believe and therefore we speak." When the love of Christ constrains us we shall persuade men (II Corinthians 5:11-14). How this attribute is needed today in God's family! A Christ-centered church is:

C. COMPASSIONATE

A root word here is "compass"—to see all around our neighbor's needs. An old Indian proverb said: "I'll not criticize my brother till I've walked in his moccasins for two weeks." To be compassionate means "to have pity, to be merciful, to be interested in the needs of others." Certainly, a church that is Christ centered has CONCERN for the lost of the world everywhere. The churches in Jerusalem, Antioch, Thessalonica and Philippi were all great in their concern for others. Our spirit needs to stir within us (Acts 17:16) as we realize millions yet remain untaught. A great church of the Lord must also be:

D. CONSTANT

This involves "firmness, fortitude, faithfulness, regularity, steadfastness and loyalty." The church in Philippi was told "to stand fast in the Lord." The one in Corinth was admonished to "always abound in the work of the Lord." The church in Ephesus was exhorted to "be strong in the Lord and the power of His might." We should be constant, as God's people, in praising Him continually (Hebrews 13:15) in beseeching Him fervently (Colossians 4:2) and in bearing the Spirit's fruit (John 15:8-9, Galatians 5:22-23). Last of all, a Christ-centered church is:

E. CONVERSANT

This word means "familiar by use or study, having frequent conversation, intimately associated, well acquainted and informed." The lesson is obvious! A church cannot be great in the sight of Heaven if Heaven is out of sight! A church centered on Christ meditates day and night in Jehovah's law. Its members pray without ceasing. They are made glad to assemble for worship. Christ lives within the membership of such a church. And as one man such a congregation sings:

"O the pure delight of a single hour
That before thy throne I spend,
When I kneel in prayer
And with Thee my God
We commune as friend with friend."

YOUR CONSENT

All that is needed for each congregation to truly be patterned after the Lord's decrees is for each of us to give our consent to the divine pattern. Let us do this so the world may see the sterling character of the church-after the pristine order and beauty of the first century brethren.

WHAT MUST THE CHURCH DO TO BE SAVED?

For years we have correctly taught, in harmony with the Bible, that sinners must do certain things, commanded by God, in order to be saved. We have also stressed man's free moral agency and his personal response to heaven's decrees. Very few religious groups emphasize anything except "Christ's finished work at Calvary."

Satan enjoys that kind of preaching because it will keep sinners lost thinking they are saved! Actually, only one verse, I John 2:4 rebukes the doctrine of grace alone-faith alone: He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar and the truth is not in him."

Even when denominational preachers speak to their members they follow the same pattern of Nicolaitan heresy. They affirm: "After one becomes a Christian he cannot fall from grace; he is eternally secure." There is only one way that such a position could possibly be true-men would have to lose the power of choice upon becoming Christians! For as long as we can choose we might decide to do wrong. Demas did (II Timothy 4:10, I John 2:15). The Corinthians certainly did (II Corinthians 12:21, 13:5). Christ tells us emphatically that some in Ephesus, Sardis, and Laodicea did (Revelation 2:1-5, 3:1-21). This is not a matter of conjecture-the Bible settled the issue long ago.

Due to the evident clarity of the New Testament on how to become a Christian and then on how to remain one, it is very strange to me that some brethren become terribly upset when we urge in preaching and writing that the church of the Lord must be on constant guard against apostasy from within and error from without.

At least 100 verses from the eight writers of the New Testament center around the theme of departing from sound doctrine. In Paul's admonitions to Timothy and Titus alone it is safe to say that one- third of the context deals with what the church must do to be saved!

Is the devil lulling us into spiritual apathy with the old idea: "You are eternally secure; God will take care of you. Don't be concerned about doctrinal error, innovations in worship, men's devices in church government and liberalism in morals. After all, Christ purchased the church with His blood; therefore, it can never fail!"

It is true that the divine part of the church shall never fail and the message of truth that sustains the church is impregnable (I Timothy 3:15, I Peter 1:25, Daniel 2:44). However, from the human standpoint only eternal vigilance and unfaltering loyalty can prevent a major falling away from the Rock of Ages. May I suggest seven points for deep consideration on the solemn theme: **What Must the Church Do To Be Saved?**

1. Develop Elders Who Can Convict the Gainsayer:

This, of course, is required of spiritual overseers (Titus 1:10). We must honor the qualification: Apt to teach (I Timothy 3:2), if shepherds of the flock are ever capable in fending off wolves (Acts 20:28-30). Therefore, we must put the premium on spiritual growth and not in popularity when we select elders.

2. Train Brilliant Young Men to Boldly Preach the Gospel:

We must give the best we have to the Lord's service. Too much manpower is being sacrificed on the altar of secular pride and materialistic enterprise. The congregation is failing in its responsibility to perpetuate the gospel through succeeding generations. Elders, preachers, parents, and Bible teachers must begin now to inspire, instruct and instill within alert young men the urgency of preaching the Word.

3. Practice Church Discipline Constantly and Consistently:

In order to preserve truth and strengthen the children of God there must be, as the Bible directs, *discipline* within the body of Christ. When bishops of the local church allow the name of the Lord to be degraded and scoffed at by worldly, insincere members it sets the church back for years. Required reading on this subject is Hebrews 12.

4. Demand a Much Higher Moral Tone:

Corinth of the first century and America today would make almost identical twins in a satanic couplet. The appalling decline of moral fiber in our nation-and around the world-plays right into the devil's hands. Sadly, we are not *teaching* and *preaching* and *practicing* the high standards we once did. Immodesty and adultery can be found in our midst as well as in the world. Let us stop compromising and start living for Jesus.

5. Do More Teaching on Church Identity:

A generation ago gospel meetings were conducted to introduce our neighbors to New Testament principles of worship, doctrine and organization. Exceedingly clear denunciation of false doctrine could be heard from most every pulpit. Today, in so many places, *it is different*. Some of our own children seldom, if ever, hear lessons on instrumental music, the Lord's Supper, church membership and organizational structure. Just a few more years of our failure to be *distinctive* and we will preach ourselves right out of the picture! It takes sound doctrine to be the church of the Lord (Titus 2:1).

6. Preach the Bible and not Emotionalism:

The one commodity we have to offer the world is the pure message of the Lord. Nearly any actor in Hollywood can jerk more tears than we can and most lawyers are sharper in swaying audiences. But the one precious ingredient that we have, by God's trust in us, is the gospel of His grace (Acts 20:24). When we resort to playing on people's emotions and becoming "response crazy" we walk the ancient road of insincerity and sectarianism.

7. Above All, Be Christ-Centered:

This is the apex of all that we could ever say regarding keeping the church safe and secure in the Lord's bosom. A step away from Christ is a step into darkness (John 8:12). Walking with Him, in love and integrity, sheds constant light upon the pathway of life (Colossians 1:10). When the church is centered upon the Lord there is no room for "preacheritis" or indifference or worldliness. When Christ is the point of focus we will proclaim His *message*, follow His *example* and obey His *commands*. Nothing short of that can save the church.

FINAL APPEAL

Friend of mine, I appeal to you to search the New Testament, read all that you can find therein concerning the bride of Christ— the church—and then begin immediately to search for a group of people who have restored the worship, the life and the teachings of the blood-bought church of Jesus Christ. Determine that you'll become a member of that body by believing in Christ as the Son of God— turning from sin in your life and after confessing the sweet name of your Lord be immersed in water for the remission of sins. The Lord will then add you to His church and you will be able to assist His cause as you go through life ever looking forward to the beautiful home of the soul! You will be a part of that immovable kingdom. Your name will be enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23-28) and blessings will surround you throughout eternal bliss. In Matthew 16:18 Jesus promised to build His church. Let us hasten to be members of that divine and glorious organism.

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