

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

"...Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body." - Ephesians 5:23

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A PLEA FOR NON-DENOMINATIONAL CHRISTIANITY

Part Two - Seven "Ones" of the Church

Number 1 - "One Body"

by Ted J. Clarke

INTRODUCTION

Last month's article asked the question whether it is possible for a church to be simply and only what the church in the New Testament was. We demonstrated that the Bible states that: [1] there is only one true church, which the Lord promised to build (Matthew 16:18); [2] there is only one standard of authority for the church, the Scriptures (John 12:48-50; 16:12; 2 Timothy 3:16-17); and all local congregations of the New Testament church were commanded to practice the same teachings. (1 Corinthians 1:10; 4:17).

As promised last month, this article begins a look at the seven "ones" of the church which the apostle Paul commanded in Ephesians 4:1-6. After saying that we must be "endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," (verse 3), Paul said, "*There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all*" (verses 4-6). It is these essential elements of the true church we now examine in some detail. [All Scripture references are from Ephesians unless otherwise noted.]

Please take note of this consideration. **Where there is only "one" of anything, you have no choice of what you will choose!** You may decide not to choose anything, but if you choose to accept what the Scriptures teach about the Lord's church, you have no choice. You can only accept the "ones" Christ has commanded through Paul in this passage. If someone were to offer you a certified check for \$100,000, would you refuse to take it because there was only one check from which to choose? If a doctor offered you a pill that would cure you from a fatal disease, don't tell me that you would fuss with him because there was only one pill to choose, or because you did not like the

color, shape, or size of the pill. No, you would recognize the **value** of the check and the pill and you would accept them even though there was only one to choose. In like manner, friends and brethren, we do not have a choice in any essential matters regarding the church. It is Christ's church and He has decided these matters for us. If you do not accept Christ's choice, **there are no alternatives** through which you can receive the spiritual blessings which come through Him (1:3, 7). Once people recognize the **value** of being in Christ's church, they will accept the church as Christ intended it to be.

ONE BODY

Our previous article showed emphatically that there is only **"one body"** and that the one body is **the church**, over which Christ is the Head (1:22-23). Furthermore, it is **in** this "one body" that we find salvation. Redemption and forgiveness of sins are **in Christ** (1:7). But to be "in Christ" is to be in His body, the church, of which He is the Head. Paul stated in 5:23 that "*Christ is the head of the church and he is the saviour of the body.*" If Christ saves His body, the church, how can one expect to be saved outside that "one body"? In Acts 2, when the first gospel message of salvation in Christ was preached, we are told that "*the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved*" (verse 47, KJV). The same process by which God saves a person also adds that person to the Lord's church, the "one body" of Ephesians 4:4. How can a person be "in Christ," (where redemption and forgiveness of sins are located) and not be in His body, the church? Obviously, it is not possible.

Too many people in religion miss the essential nature of the "one body," the church. People in denominational religions often say, "You should be a member of a church, but it isn't necessary to be saved." Please see the error in that

statement. It is not true to passages like Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47 and others.

In God's scheme for saving mankind, He planned the church to play an essential role (Ephesians 3:9-11). The church is God's kingdom on earth and we are "*translated into the kingdom of his dear Son*" when we obey the gospel (Colossians 1:13-14). Two other passages proclaim the absolutely essential nature of the church. In Acts 20:28, the apostle Paul told the Ephesian elders to "*feed the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood.*" The American Standard Version says, "*feed the church of the Lord...*" but the meaning is the same since Christ is God in the flesh (cf. John 1:1, 14; 20:28). Ephesians 5:25 also says, "*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.*" Now, friends and brethren, think about this matter. It cost Christ His blood and life to purchase the church as the **saved**. Was Christ's death unnecessary? Of course not! Well, then, how could that which was "purchased" by His death (the church) be unnecessary! Remember, Christ "is the Saviour of the body," which is His church.

Accordingly, the church of the Lord is composed of all the saved and there are no saved outside the "one body." You have no choice as to the church of which you will be a member. You cannot join Christ's church like you do the denominational churches. Christ **adds** you to His body when you obey the gospel (Acts 2:36-47; Ephesians 1:7; 21-23; 5:23, 25). Jesus died for the church, His body, whom He saves. How can anyone think that the church is not absolutely necessary as a part of God's plan for redeeming mankind?

A final point on the necessity of Christ's church. As noted above, some will contend, "Well, the church is important, but not essential in being saved. A person can be saved in Christ and not be in the church." To the contrary, the Scriptures show that one cannot be saved in Christ and not be in the church! Try this illustration to help you see the truth of this matter. Take a clear drinking glass or

(Continued on page 2)

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(Continued from page 1)

other container and fill it half full of water. Suppose that the glass represents Christ and that the water in the glass represents the church. Now, the denominational view is that one can be in Christ and not be in the church. If this were the proper illustration for us to use, that would be true, for Christ (the glass) is only half full of water (the church). The other half of the glass without the water allows space for people to still be in Christ (inside the glass), but not in the church (the water).

However, the above is **not** the proper illustration to use to speak of being "in Christ." Now take the same glass (representing Christ) and **fill it** with water (representing the church). Fill it to the very top, till there is no room left. There you have the proper illustration regarding Christ and His church. The apostle Paul clearly states that this is the truth about Christ and His church, writing that Christ is "*Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And [God] hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all*" (Ephesians 1:21-23). There you have it friends, the inspired apostle

Paul tells us that the "*church, which is his body, [is] the fulness of him that filleth all in all.*" As you look at the illustration of the glass filled to the top with water, you can understand that the body of Christ, His church, is the fulness of Him. You cannot be saved in Christ and not be in the church. Christ did not leave room for that to be so, in spite of what people want to believe about it. If you are not in Christ's body, the church, you are not purchased with His blood and you are not saved (Ephesians 1:7, 22-23). Christ's blood is our hope of salvation (Romans 3:23-26; 5:6-9), but we must submit to God's plan of salvation, not our own. God's eternal plan includes being in the "one body," the church which belongs to Christ.

CONCLUSION

As the apostle Paul pleaded with the church in Ephesus to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," he followed that admonition with the seven "ones" we are studying. Will you not strive with us to be the church as Jesus wanted it to be? We can be united in Christ only as we believe and practice these "ones" which were given to us.

The "one body," the church, is an essential feature in God's plan for redeeming us and in our service to Him. This will be illustrated in greater detail as we develop the remaining "ones" in this text. If you have questions regarding these matters or comments to make, we will try to provide you with Biblical answers and promise to study what you send for our consideration.

[To be continued]

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE!

by Neal Pollard

Ask George Dawson! This Texas grandson of a slave, born in 1898, worked from the age of twelve on a ranch and tended livestock. He married at the age of twenty-eight, becoming a father the next year. What is so noteworthy about this man? Well, for 98 years he did not know how to read. In 1996, ten years after the death of his spouse, a young man working for an organization designed to teach adults how to read knocked Dawson's door. He now reads on a fourth-grade level and even reads the Bible aloud at church services. He sums this remarkable story up by saying, "I just figured if everybody else can learn to read, I could too" (Bingham, Reader's Digest, June 1998, p. 156).

Ask Medzhid Agayev, interviewed some twenty years ago, but possibly still alive. He decided to retire—after 120 years as a shepherd! The Russian press agency in Novosti said, "He is in good health. He is thin, active, and has excellent eyesight." Perhaps he quit his job to enjoy as many of his 151 children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, and great great grandchildren (who knows great great great-grandchildren today?! Here is a tribute to not only longevity, but also to changing one's life even after such a period of time as Agayev had lived (Tan 936)!

Many Bible characters, Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18:11-15), Barzillai (2 Samuel 17:27ff), Jacob (Hebrews 11:21), Anna (Luke 2:36), and others, teach by their lives that it is **never** too late to be a servant of God. While only the foolish set aside the counsel of the "gray heads" for the inexperience of youth (cf. 1 Kings 12:6ff), the Lord's church today will deliberate carefully upon the wisdom of her senior citizens! Though age brings some physical and mental limitations, the aged are among the most precious resources available for the spiritual strength and progress of the entire congregation. It is **never** too late for an elderly Christian to be a valuable contributor to live and work for the church where he or she attends. In fact, the inspired Paul places the aged upon a high and responsible pedestal (Titus 2:1-10).

In another regard, it is **never** too late to decide to become a Christian! This is true, whether one is eighteen, eighty, or any time before, between, or after. **Almost** is awful (Acts 26:28)! **Later** is a lie (Acts 24:25)! **Waiting** is a wager few win (Proverbs 27:1)!

In youth, one anticipates the stability of adult life as a time where becoming a Christian will be an easier choice. With adulthood comes marriage, children, and job concerns, and retirement becomes a more appealing point in life to obey the gospel.

But, three potential tragedies loom before one who banks on the elusive capital of tomorrow. First, old age may find one too distracted with golden year goals to make the commitment to Christ. Second, death may stand between one and the time he or she hoped to be a baptized believer. Third, Christ may come before one submits to the Lord's plan. When eternity disrupts the flow of time (set in motion by God only to rule existence on this

earth), then it will be too late!

However, **now**—being the accepted time (2 Corinthians 6:2)—is **not** too late! Are you still breathing in and out? Are you yet able to process thoughts and make choices? Is there still within you a heart soft enough to be touched by the power of the gospel? If so, it is not too late. As long as there is life and opportunity, it is **never** too late to do all the will of God!

Your eyes may be cloudy,
 a halt may slow your gait,
 But as long as your soul is within you,
 it is never, no never too late.
 The years you may have wasted,
 and in shame you might hesitate.
 But though it be the "eleventh hour,"
 it is never, no never too late.

-NP

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*If you want to be near to God in prayer,
 don't get far away in between times.*

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GOD IS

Bible Lesson Number One

by Richard England

INTRODUCTION

The world's philosophers have spent hours, as it were, in the shade of an apple tree thinking about "things"; their origin, purpose and destiny. Some have concluded: "God is." Others say, "There is no God." The sweet singer of Israel properly stated the case when he said: *"The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God"* (Psalms 14:1). A fool differs from an idiot. An idiot is not capable of knowing and understanding. A fool is one who possesses the ability to comprehend, yet, willingly abandons common sense and sound reasoning in favor of that which he personally desires in his heart.

The enormity of the implications of the subject of God, man, and the possibility of life after death demands that it be approached with as much dedication as one can muster to discover the truth. Only a desire to know the absolute truth, whatever it is, gives hope of obtaining understanding. One who holds any prejudicial views that he is unwilling to abandon will be strongly influenced toward those views regardless of evidence to the contrary. The human mind is very much inclined to believe what it wants to believe and reject ideas contrary to its personal desires. Objectivity is very elusive. Nevertheless, as much as possible, our consideration of questions related to the existence of God and the nature of man ought to be a genuine, open-minded search for truth.

I. GOD EXISTS

To exist is to have the quality of "being." Things, ideas, purposes, motives, energy, time and space exist. Man's lack of awareness or understanding of the existence of anything does not negate its existence. The millions of stars beyond the view of the unaided human eye were out there just the same before Hans Lippershey invented the telescope in 1608 and Galileo made his first one in 1609. Because the Russian astronaut went into space and later reported that he didn't see God, is not proof that God does not exist. Sometimes, as is the case concerning God, we must depend on logical accumulation and assimilation of observable facts to understand some unobservable facts. This is what the apostle Paul had in mind in **Romans 1:20**. *"For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the*

things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse."

Truth is the accurate statement of that which exists. A statement of that which actually exists, that which has truly occurred, or of that which will surely come to pass, is truth. If it is said that something exists when it does not, that something occurred when in fact it did not, or such and such will happen when indeed it will not, the statement is false, not true.

The value placed on truth by the wise man is implied in the statement: *"Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding"* (Proverbs 23:23). Notice he did not say: "Buy the truth if you can afford it and don't sell it unless the price is great enough." We must "buy" it, whatever the cost, and not surrender it, whatever the offer.

God is. There are many approaches to the proof of this proposition, but none as simple and conclusive as that used by Dr. Thomas B. Warren in a 1976 debate with atheist Dr. Anthony G. N. Flew. Here is a summary of the argument:

- 1. Human beings exist. No one, not even an atheist, contends that humans existed throughout all eternity. Therefore, there had to be a first human being.
- 2. The first human in existence was either created or he evolved from lower forms of life. There are no other possibilities.
- 3. If he was created, there had to be a creator. Thus, God is.
- 4. If he evolved from lower forms of life, the first human had to either be born of a non-human or had to be a non-human turned into a human. There is no other possibility. No evolutionist, atheist or otherwise, contends that one single non-human turned into a human or that a non-human gave birth to a human. Neither of these being possible, the only alternative (that being: man was created) must of necessity be true.
- 5. Therefore, God is!

QUESTIONS

1. Can something exist and we not know it? Can someone exist and no one else be aware of his being?
2. What is truth?
3. How important is it that we know the truth?

(Continued on page 4)

REMEMBER!!!

Beginning in August you must send us your change of address before you move or before your area switches to 911 addressing. Otherwise, we will remove your name from the mailing list for FCGN. We want you to receive FCGN if you want it, but you have an obligation to keep us informed as to your correct address. If your name is dropped, you can be restored to the mailing list by sending us your correct address, including your nine digit zip code. If you have any questions, please call your Post Office for your current correct mailing address. It costs us 50¢ for each address change the Post Office sends to us and we frequently receive over 100 per month. Since FCGN is free to you, please be considerate enough to send us a postcard with your correct address when you are planning a move or changing addresses for 911 emergency service in your area.

Thank you. - Editor

(Continued from page 3)

- 4. Does man exist?
- 5. How many possibilities are there of his origin? What are they?
- 6. If man evolved from lower forms of life, what must be true?
- 7. If man was created, what must be true?

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Editor's Note: This is the first in a series of Bible lessons written by Richard England, former minister at Mammoth Spring Church of Christ and former editor of FCGN. He has graciously given us permission to use these lessons for the benefit of our readers and we gladly do so. Over the coming months we will likely use all thirteen lessons he has printed in a book. These lessons are suitable for classroom use at a nominal cost. You may write to brother England for information at the address given above. Please do not write to FCGN to order these study booklets.

A preacher who cannot preach better than he can practice is not worth listening to, and a preacher who will not try to practice what he preaches is not fit to listen to.

No, beloved: I'll not get on your toes if you keep them where they belong - I am preaching to your head and heart.

JUST A MATTER OF WANTING TO!

A man can get out of bed at three o'clock on Saturday morning to go fishing, but when you talk to him about Sunday morning Bible class, he can't get up that early on Sunday!

WHY THE DIFFERENCE???

A man can go a hundred miles on Friday night to a ball game, but is too tired to get out for the worship on Sunday and Wednesday nights!

WHY THE DIFFERENCE???

A man can take his family to a circus and spend considerable money, but can't afford to give more than a dollar to the Lord!

WHY THE DIFFERENCE???

A man can be on the membership committee at the civic club but cannot make the right approach when asked to do personal work for the Lord!

WHY THE DIFFERENCE???

A man can take an aspirin and go to work despite an annoying headache, but a similar headache is considered a good reason for missing the worship!

WHY THE DIFFERENCE???

OUR AIM

Christians are devoted to the restoration of New Testament Christianity. It is not our mission to be another denomination, but rather to urge all religious people to return to the simple plan of God. It is our plea that this is a solution to the problems that confront a divided Christendom. We desire that ultimately the church for which Christ died may supersede all movements of men, and that his people may be one in every sense of the word. May His church shine in all its beauty and pristine glory.

- No book but the Bible.
- No creed but the Christ.
- No name but the divine.
- No plea but the gospel.
- No aim but to save.
- In Christ-unity.
- In opinions-liberty.
- In all things-love.

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GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

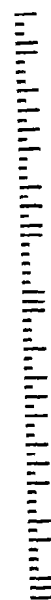
1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2,3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

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