

THE CHURCH: THE PILLAR AND GROUND OF THE TRUTH

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Devotion 1 of 17 **INTRODUCTION** The consideration of the church is integral to the contemplation of the Son of God, the kingdom of God, and the works of God. It is associated with the reign of Christ, the fruit of the Spirit, and the gifts of God. We must not allow the fact that the modern church is flawed, and often even obnoxious to sensitive souls, to cause us to have demeaning views of the real church. We must not allow the world, either secular or religious, to define this word. Some people are averse to the word “church” itself – and it is largely owing to the misrepresentation of the people of God that exists. From the standpoint of language, there is no English word that exactly parallels the meaning of the Greek word from which it is translated. There are several ideas wrapped up in this word. They include the idea of an assembly – people gathered together. There is also the idea of being called out in order to be assembled. Additionally, there is the concept of an objective to being called together. In apostolic doctrine, God is the One who has called the assembly, and Jesus Christ is the One in whom they gather. The purposes for the gathering include to learn from Jesus, be oriented for glory, and edify one another. There is grand assembly that includes all of the called ones, and local assemblies that meet together in Jesus’ name because of Divine drawings. The church is not a mere human institution, and certainly not a physical structure. It is a “spiritual house” (1 Pet 2:5), the “household of God” (Eph 2:19), the “whole family in heaven and earth” (Eph 3:15), “the body of Christ” (1 Cor 12:27; Col 1:18), and Christ’s bride” (Rev 21:9; 22:17). This is the body of people to whom new converts are added (Acts 2:47). God has placed certain people in the church in capacities He has ordained (1 Cor 12:28). He is presently making His manifold wisdom known to

principalities and powers in heavenly places “by the church” (Eph 3:10). “The church” is where God receives special glory (Eph 3:21). It is our business to bring our thinking into accord with these revealed facts. Men may haggle about the term “church,” and prefer another term. However, from the standpoint of thought and perception, when they think of this body of people, they must think of them within the confines of what God has said about them. God has given Jesus to the church in the capacity of “Head over all things” (Eph. 1:22-23). Christ loved and gave Himself for the church (Eph. 5:25), and the Holy Spirit enlivens it (Rom. 14:17; 15:13). The prophets foretold it (Psa 22:22; Heb 2:12), and the apostles proclaimed its foundation (Eph. 2:20). The church is at the heart of the work of God (Eph. 3:21), the custodian of the gospel (Eph. 6:15), and the habitation of God through the Spirit (Eph. 2:22). It is never mentioned casually. Its advantages are proclaimed, and its faults and failings are rebuked with unwavering consistency. This series of devotions pertains to “the church” I have just described. Any body of religious people that cannot be so identified cannot be the church of reference. Further, the church is defined doctrinally, not lexically. The Greek word “ekklesia” does not contain the intended meanings declared in Scripture, and we should not treat lexical meanings as though it did. I shall use the word “church” as applied to the total body of believers in general, and local bodies of bodies of believers in particular. Everything that is said of the whole church is to be expected in the individual congregations of believers. No body of people can correctly call themselves “the church” who cannot in some way be identified with the revealed objectives for “the church.” In particular, I will deal with “the church” as the Divinely appointed custodian of the truth of God, and the implications of that responsibility.

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IDENTIFYING THE CHURCH

Of itself, the term “church” has little eternal significance. It comes from the root word *ekklesia* which has the general meaning of “an assembly” – a body of people separated from the masses and devoted to a specific purpose. The word also bears the connotation of “called out,” indicating that the objective for which they were gathered together was determined outside of themselves – they but embraced the purpose.

The word *ekklesia* is used in variety of ways in the scriptures. Luke used it to identify a riotous gathering that opposed the preaching of Paul (Acts 19:32,41). He also employed it to describe a body of people lawfully assembled for consideration of the affairs of state (Acts 19:39). Stephen used it to describe the Israelites in their wilderness wanderings (Acts 7:38). Its preeminent use, however, pertains to those who, by faith and obedience, have embraced the atonement of Christ (Eph. 5:24,25,27,29).

In the latter usage, “the church” is the body of people separated from the world in order to fellowship with God through Christ. Their separation is the result of their response to a heavenly summons, referred to as the “heavenly calling” (Heb. 3:1). This “calling” is accomplished through the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14a). It comes from heaven, and has an upward thrust, and is therefore called a “high calling” (Phil. 3:14). Those who have “obeyed the gospel” (Rom. 10:16) comprise “the church.” While “in the world,” they are being oriented for glory by their submission to God’s will.

The church is the extension of Christ upon the earth – His “body” (Eph. 1:23; Col. 1:24). It was His central consideration when He died. As it is written, He “loved the church and gave Himself for it” (Eph. 5:25). It is His personal “house” – those to whom He ministers Divine benefits (Heb. 3:6). God contemplates His Son in eternal association with the church, and therefore she is called “the bride, the Lamb’s wife” (Rev. 21:9). Because Jesus Himself is constructing the church, a “spiritual house” in which God resides (I Pet. 2:5; I Tim. 3:15a), groups of

believers are also called “churches of Christ” (Rom. 16:16). Rather than being a mere appellation, this portrays them as being identified with Jesus. That identification began when they obeyed the gospel; it continues by their devotion to the truth, and shall consummate by them being joined to Him forever (1 Thess 4:17).

From an even higher point of view, the church is a body of people God has given to Jesus (John 6:37,39; 17:7,9,11,24; Heb 2:13). They are described as a people “chosen . . . to salvation” (2 Thess 2:13), and are referred to as “the elect” (Mk 13:22; Col 3:12), “God’s elect” (Rom 8:33; Tit 1:1), and those who are “elect according to the foreknowledge of God” (1 Pet 1:2). They are described as being “chosen” in Christ “before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4), and a “chosen generation” (1 Pet 2:9). God Himself has put them into Christ (1 Cor 1:30), and even given them “ministers by whom” they “believed” (1 Cor 3:5). These are the people who, from a practical point of view, know the voice of Christ and follow Him (John 10:4-5,27). They belong to Christ, and have “crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Gal 5:24). Collectively, they are Christ’s “bride” (John 3:29) that is being prepared “for her husband” (Rev 21:2,9; 22:17). In the day of the Lord it shall be said of this bride, “His wife hath made herself ready” (Rev 19:7). The aim of Jesus is to present these people “to Himself, a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:27). The objective of godly ministers is to present those among whom, they have labored “as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Cor 11:2).

“The church” to which I refer has been “washed,” “sanctified,” and “justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11). They have been “joined unto the Lord,” and are “one spirit” with Him (1 Cor 6:17). They have been “made accepted in the Beloved” (Eph 1:6), and they acknowledge that God Himself has “raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6). They have been “added to the Lord” (Acts 5:14), “made partakers of Christ” (Heb 3:14), and are “not of the world” (John 15:19;

17:14,16).

Time and space forbids a further elaboration of these people at this time. However, when I use the word “church,” these are the people to whom I am referring. Their names are “written in heaven” (Lk 10:20; Heb 12:23), and their primary citizenship is there (Phil 3:20-21). Because they are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into their hearts crying “Abba Father” (Gal 4:6). This is the body of people the Spirit affirms is “the pillar and ground of the truth.”

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THE RELEVANCE OF THE CHURCH

The relevance of the church is found in God’s salvational purpose in Christ. It really has no other significance. Its members are a “holy priesthood,” appointed “to offer up spiritual sacrifices” to God (I Pet. 2:5). The work of God is perceived as being accomplished through the church, thereby bringing glory to Him: “Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Eph. 3:21). The church exists for participation, not merely to be blessed. Divine blessings are intended to equip the church for involvement in divine work. As it is written, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph 1:3). Herein is found its relevance.

“The church” – the grand assembly of which I speak – is being prepared as a habitation of God. It is written, “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of GOD; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles

and prophets, JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in THE LORD: In whom ye also are builded together for an HABITATION OF GOD through THE SPIRIT" (Eph 2:19-22). Notice the involvement of the entire Godhead in "the church" (Eph 1:22; 3:10,21, 5:23,24,25,29,32). It is God's "household." Christ Jesus is its "Chief Cornerstone," determining the spiritual measurements of the house. It is being built for a habitation of the God of heaven. God inhabits the church "through the Spirit." The Foundation for this gathering of people has been laid by the apostles and prophets, whose chief announcements and expositions had to do with the Son of God, the Savior of the world. In fact, in summation, the Gospel they preached is "the record God has given of His Son" (1 John 5:10). Christ Himself is declared to be the Foundation:

1. "Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste" (Isa 28:16).
2. "And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (Eph 2:20).
3. "Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed" (1 Pet 2:6-8).
4. "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 3:11).

As "the church of God," the redeemed participate in the "work of God." As the "body of Christ," they become the means by which He

accomplishes His will. The church is, therefore, as relevant as the work of God; as pertinent as the ministry of Jesus.

Technically speaking, “the Foundation of the church” –what it is built upon – is not the commandments and directives delivered by the Apostles. This by no means suggests that such words are irrelevant, but they are not the Foundation. The Foundation is the Person of Christ, not a certain manner of life or worship. The church is built upon the Rock of Christ. It is upheld by what Jesus accomplished when He put away sin (Heb 9:26), destroyed the devil (Heb 2:14), made peace with God for man (Col 1:20), reconciled the world to God (2 Cor 5:18-20; Col 1:21), ended the Law as a means to righteousness (Rom 10:4), and plundered principalities and powers (Col 2:15). Realities such as those, together with the implications, have to do with the formation and development of the church. They are what give it true relevance.

In a day when men tend to speak more of human duty than Divine accomplishment, it is necessary to draw attention to foundational matters, and the reason for the church. This is the church that Jesus Himself is building (Matt 16:18).

The “kingdom of God” and “the church,” though related, are not synonymous terms. God’s kingdom is an enterprise, the church is an assembly of personalities. The kingdom is a divine reign involving the implementation of an “eternal purpose,” the church is a revelation of that purpose. God, through Christ, is achieving His purpose “by the church” (Eph. 3:10). There is no reason for the church apart from that objective. This is what gives it relevance.

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AN UNILLUMINATED CHURCH IS A CONTRADICTION

An uninformed church – one that is fundamentally ignorant of eternal realities – cannot glorify God. Contrary to some contemporary notions, God is not glorified by His own obscurement. Glory, by its very nature, is the result of revelation or manifestation.

The chief stewardship of the church, the “word of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:19), is called the “glorious gospel” because of its revelatory attributes (2 Cor. 4:4; I Tim. 1:1). Through it, the mind and purpose of God has been made known to men. Indeed, the new covenant – “the ministration of the Spirit” – is “rather glorious.” It excels the first covenant – the law – in its disclosure of God’s will to men.

That purpose is summarized by the apostle; “Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end” (Eph. 3:21). The nature of this glory is perceived in the statement of divine intention: “To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by [means of] the church the manifold wisdom of God” (Eph. 3:10). Those that are “partakers of the heavenly calling” bring glory to God in their manifestation of the wisdom of God. This is achieved by means of their participation in the primary demonstration of His wisdom – His “great salvation” (Heb. 2:3).

A church that is ignorant of the reconciliation, therefore, contradicts the purpose of God. It obscures God’s glory rather than revealing it, and draws a veil over the greatest manifestation God has ever given of Himself – the new covenant. God has ordained the church as custodian of the covenant. If it is not made known by her, God has no other means of making it known, and, consequently, no other means to glorify Himself “by Jesus Christ.”

Another word for illumination is enlightenment. This is elsewhere called “spiritual understanding” (Col. 1:9), and means the perception of the significance and implications of God’s provision in Christ. The concept postulates one passing from a state of spiritual ignorance into one of understanding and discernment.

Paul elaborates upon this concept to the Ephesian church, showing that it is an incongruity for the people of God to be ignorant of Him. The apostle's prayer for them was "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge [or understanding] of Him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened. . . ."

This enlightenment results in a comprehension of what had been previously undiscerned. The purpose and nature of God becomes clearer to the heart in fulfillment of divine purpose: ". . . that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what [is] the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power" (Eph. 1:17-19). Paul prayed for the enlightenment of the Ephesians because it was in keeping with divine objective.

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5 of 17 **CALLED BY MEANS OF ILLUMINATION** There comes a time when it is profitable for one to recall his entrance into the kingdom of God's "dear Son" (Col. 1:13). It was the time when he became "a new creature" in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), and the "answer of a good conscience" was experienced (1 Pet. 3:18). This is the time every one who has been "added to the church" (Acts 2:47) was "delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the Kingdom of" God's "dear Son" (Col 1:13). Then is when the saved "passed from death to life" (John 5:24; 1 John 3:14). The time of one's conversion (Acts 3:19; 15:3) is also a time of illumination. Thus did the apostle stir the remembrance of lethargic Jewish believers: "But call to remembrance the former days, in which, AFTER THAT YOU WERE ILLUMINATED . . ." (Heb. 10:32). At that time they perceived their own state as sinners, God's great love in Christ, and the availability of that love through the belief of the gospel. It was a time of enlightenment, when the veil of obscurity was taken away from their hearts (2 Cor 3:14). The apostolic description of newness of life included being "once enlightened" (Heb 6:4). The process through which this initial illumination is experienced is thus described: "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give THE LIGHT of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). In this God enabled the individual to realize the nature of God and one's own natural incompatibility with Him. Jesus Christ was perceived as the means of obtaining the reconciliation, and sin no longer made any sense. It was a time of

enlightenment, when the individual became aware of very real conditions that existed – conditions of alienation, enmity, and guilt. The God-ordained path out of this situation was also perceived, and obedience was gladly rendered. The ignorance that formerly dominated the person was replaced with the knowledge of God, through which the pollutions of the world were “clean escaped” (2 Pet 2:18). A salvation begun by illumination, only to be later characterized by obtuseness, is a contradiction. God has joined salvation and illumination together, and they cannot be separated without one becoming alienated from God. In fact, eternal life is defined by the Lord Himself as knowing God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent (John 17:3). An unilluminated church is one that has denied its calling, and repudiated the means by which it was once called into the fellowship of God’s Son (I Cor. 1:9). Man’s initial participation in salvation is accomplished by means of spiritual enlightenment. The Divine fellowship for which salvation is wrought (1 Cor 1:9) is also maintained by the same means. The lack of maturity in Christ evidences a failure to comprehend the realities of the kingdom. The apostle said, “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . that He would grant you . . . to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man . . . that ye . . . may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph. 3:14-19). The phrase, “that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God,” is accomplished in the experience of Divine fellowship. The Lord’s spiritual intimacy with His people results in their conformity to Himself – “filled with all the fulness of God.” Divine communion will consistently yield an improvement in man’s character – growth in Christ Jesus, and a more thorough conformity to His image.

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5:19), is called the “glorious gospel” because of its revelatory attributes (2 Cor. 4:4; I Tim. 1:1). Through it, the mind and purpose of God has been made known to men. The condition of humanity is unveiled. The forwardness of God go bless is set before men. Indeed, the new covenant – “the ministration of the Spirit” – is “rather glorious.” It excels the first covenant – the law – in its disclosure of God’s will to men, testifying of the working out of that marvelous purpose in the Lord Jesus Christ, His “only begotten Son.”

That purpose is summarized by the apostle; “Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end” (Eph. 3:21). The nature of this glory is perceived in the statement of Divine intention: “To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by [means of] the church the manifold wisdom of God” (Eph. 3:10). Those who are “partakers of the heavenly calling” bring glory to God in their manifestation of the wisdom of God. This is achieved by means of their participation in the primary demonstration of His wisdom – His “great salvation” (Heb. 2:3).

A church that is ignorant of the reconciliation, therefore, contradicts the purpose of God. It obscures God’s glory rather than revealing it, and draws a veil over the greatest manifestation God has ever given of Himself – the new covenant, expressed in the Gospel, and mediated by His Son. God has ordained the church as custodian of this covenant. If it is not made known by her, God has no other means of making it known, and, consequently, no other means to glorify Himself “by Jesus Christ.”

Another word for illumination is enlightenment. This is elsewhere called “spiritual understanding” (Col. 1:9), and means the perception of the significance and implications of God’s provision in Christ. The concept postulates one passing from a state of spiritual ignorance into one of understanding and discernment – comprehending “with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:18-19).

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This enlightenment results in a comprehension of what had been previously undiscerned. The purpose and nature of God becomes clearer to the heart in fulfillment of divine purpose: ". . . that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what [is] the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power" (Eph. 1:17-19). Paul prayed for the enlightenment of the Ephesians because it was in keeping with divine objective.

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CALLED BY MEANS OF ILLUMINATION

There comes a time when it is profitable for one to recall his entrance into the kingdom of God's "dear Son" (Col. 1:13). It was the time when he became "a new creature" in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), and the "answer of a good conscience" was experienced (I Pet. 3:18). The prelude to that conversion included a call from heaven – a "heavenly calling" of which we became "partakers." As it is written, "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the HEAVENLY CALLING, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus" (Heb 3:1).

It is written that this was also a "holy calling" – "Who hath saved us, and called us with an HOLY CALLING, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ

Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim 1:9). Those in Christ are challenged, "... see YOUR CALLING" (1 Cor 7:26). Paul prayed that God would give those in Christ "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of HIS CALLING . . . " (Eph 1:17-18). Further, this is common to all saints, for they are called in "one hope" of their "calling" (Eph 4:4). The calling of reference is also a "HIGH CALLING" (Phil 3:14), and we are to give diligence to make our "CALLING and election sure" (1 Pet 1:10). Have you considered your own "calling?" It is certainly worthy of your attention.

The time of one's conversion (Acts 3:19; 15:3) is also a time of illumination. Thus did the apostle stir the remembrance of lethargic Jewish believers: "But call to remembrance the former days, in which, AFTER THAT YE WERE ILLUMINATED . . ." (Heb. 10:32). At that time they perceived their own state as sinners, God's great love in Christ, and the availability of that love through the belief of the gospel. It was a time of enlightenment, when the veil of obscurity was taken away from their hearts (2 Cor. 3:14). Until that time, as with Israel, a veil remains over the heart so the truth of Christ cannot be seen. However, in Christ Jesus, that very veil is "done away" (2 Cor 3:14).

A salvation begun by illumination only to be later characterized by obtuseness is a contradiction. God has joined salvation and illumination together, and they cannot be separated without one becoming alienated from God. An unilluminated church is one that has denied its calling, and repudiated the means by which it was once called into the fellowship of God's Son (I Cor. 1:9). I realize that is strong language, but an unenlightened "church" is a most serious circumstance. The salvation of God cannot be maintained while swimming in the pool of ignorance.

Man's initial participation in salvation is accomplished by means of spiritual enlightenment. The Divine fellowship for which salvation is wrought is also maintained by the same means. The lack of maturity in

Christ evidences a failure to comprehend the realities of the kingdom. The apostle said, “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . that He would grant you . . . to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man . . . that ye . . . may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph. 3:14-19). Christ does not dwell within the hearts of those who have not been strengthened by the Holy Spirit, and the objective of that indwelling is that the saints may be “able to comprehend.” That is what the Spirit has said to the churches.

The phrase, “that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God,” speaks of Divine fellowship, where the God who Himself is “Light” (1 John 1:5) dwells within (1 John 4:12,15,16), bringing enlightenment, wisdom, and spiritual understanding. The Lord’s spiritual intimacy with His people results in their conformity to Himself – “filled with all the fulness of God.” All of that takes place under the canopy of illumination.

Divine communion will consistently yield an improvement in man’s character. As the redeemed behold “the glory of the Lord,” they are changed “into the same image,” advancing in their conformity to the image of the Son (Rom 8:29). An unchanged people are an unilluminated people. A failure to make the appointed change is the result of failing to walk in the light, or look to Jesus.

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THE MEANS OF GROWTH

Divine fellowship is the objective view of the effect of spiritual

enlightenment. The fellowship, or comradeship, that we have in salvation is referred to a number of times in Scripture.

1. First, we are called into it: “God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto THE FELLOWSHIP of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor 1:9).

2. Second, the apostle John affirmed they had fellowship with the Father and the Son, and were writing that we might have the same: “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our FELLOWSHIP is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” (1 John 1:3).

3. Third, there is a communion that is had with the Holy Spirit: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the COMMUNION of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen” (2 Cor 13:14). Other versions read, “fellowship” (NASB) “the communion and sharing together, and participation” (AMPLIFIED).

4. Fourth, in the table of the Lord, there is a communion, or fellowship, with the body and blood of the Lord: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the COMMUNION of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the COMMUNION of the body of Christ?” (1 Cor 10:16). Other versions read “sharing” (NASB), “participation in” (NIV), and “participate in *and* share a fellowship” (AMPLIFIED).

The words “fellowship” and “communion,” as used in the above texts, are all translated from the same Greek word – “koinonia.” The lexical meaning of this word is, “participation, or [social] intercourse (STRONG’S); “the share which one has in anything, participation . . . contact, fellowship, intimacy” (THAYER). In the environment where I once walked, this word was exclusively applied to fellowship with believers – fellow-believers. That is certainly a valid use of the word. However, it is by no means its only use, nor is it the superior use of it. There is a marvelous accord and participation with Deity that is realized in the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, and more needs to be made of it in preaching and teaching.

For those with a propensity to Law, these texts are rarely, if ever, mentioned. As I was growing up, I vividly recall my own father being the only man on earth that I heard speak of these things. They just were not mentioned in the church circles in which I found myself. When I went to Bible College, I found the same circumstance. It was as though these texts had been conveniently removed from the Bible. So far as practicality and the public exposure to the Word of God is concerned, they did not exist.

Spiritual growth is the subjective view of this marvelous fellowship. Men “grow up” into Christ by means of faith – exercised through “the eyes of” their “understanding” (Eph. 1:18). The fundamental means of advancement in redemption is that of comprehension, not morality. Moral improvement is recognized by God when it is the result of discernment. Those who have achieved this type of growth are said to have their senses exercised to “discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:14). Morality that is accomplished by rote, or mere fleshly discipline, has no eternal value. This kind of illumination comes exclusively from walking “in the light.” Jesus said, “If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. "But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him" (John 11:9-10). John wrote, “"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). This kind of walk is involved in fellowship with the Lord.

The spiritual progress of believers is identified with the truth – the objective statement of heavenly reality. As the truth is articulated, it is brought within reach of the mind. Apart from that articulation, saving truth cannot be comprehended. The apostle alluded to this process when he said, “but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things . . .” (Eph. 4:15). The use of “love” refers primarily to a love of the truth itself (2 Thess. 2:10). It is out of that attitude that truth may be considerately spoken to others. Reality thus proclaimed will provoke

advancement toward the “mark for the prize of the high calling,” by clarifying the hope of that calling. It all takes place within the perimeter of Divine fellowship.

THE CHURCH: THE PILLAR AND GROUND OF THE TRUTH

"But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Tim 3:15)

Devotion 7 of 17

THE CONTEXT OF STEWARDSHIP

Collectively, the church is God’s steward, or custodian, of His truth – this is at the congregational level as well as that of the individual, as confirmed in Jesus’ message to the seven churches of Asia (Rev 2:1-3:22). It is also made quite clear in the declaration of the objective for “apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers” (Eph 4:11-16). Stewardship is an expression of the dominion for which man was made. It speaks of responsibility and management. In scripture, a steward was one who had charge of a household or estate. In a poignant statement to His disciples, Jesus said, “Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his Lord shall make ruler over His household? . . . Of a truth I say unto you, that He will make him ruler over all that He has” (Luke 12:42-44).

Prior to this utterance, Jesus had alerted His disciples to the necessity of readiness. “Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord, when He will return from the wedding; that when He comes and knocks, they may open unto Him immediately.” He pronounced a blessing on servants that were found “watching” at the return of their lord. “Verily I say unto you, that He shall gird himself, and make them sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. And if He come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants” (Luke 12:35-39). Jesus associated service with stewardship – with spiritual rule

or responsibility. Under the new covenant, a servant was not to be a mere slave, but one that has been given responsibility in a key kingdom area (Luke 12:43-44).

Stewardship is also identified with accountability. A steward has been given the goods of another, and is responsible for handling them in a manner pleasing to their owner. In a parable that revealed the nature of God's kingdom, Jesus revealed this truth. "For the kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called His own servants, and delivered unto them His goods . . ." (Matt. 25:14-30). This was the well known parable of the "talents." Following its proclamation, a divine commentary was provided. "When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: and before Him shall be gathered all nations." The accountability which followed was awesome, resulting in the salvation of some, and the damnation of others (Matt. 25:31-46). This was a commentary on kingdom stewardship – the allocation of Divine resources to men, together with the responsibility to handle them acceptably in prospect of the day of accounting.

The primary area of responsibility for the church is that of the truth of God. The "church of the living God" is the "pillar and ground of the truth" (I Tim. 3:15). It is to make manifest the revelation and purpose of God to the minds of men – what God has made known of Himself and what He is doing in Christ Jesus. It is to introduce men to heavenly substance and its conflict with the world. The primary role of the church is not that of problem resolution as ordinarily defined. Its fundamental role is not to diagnose the needs of men and make life on earth more tolerable. It is rather to so engage the hearts and minds of men with the truth of God that they will be constrained to labor together with God in what He is doing. In so doing, they are preparing men to give a good account to God, and to dwell forever with the Lord.

The members of Christ's church are "kings and priests" as regards their stewardship (Rev. 1:5; 5:10). In Jesus the church, or body of Christ, is

able to declare the gospel with all of the authority of heaven – collectively, its members have been made under-rulers over Christ’s house, each one playing a specific role in the matter of building up the saints of God (1 Cor 12:1-28). Admittedly, the modern church is not generally set up for this kind of process, which means that it has been set up wrongly. I know of no church-planting program that targets the bodying edifying itself in love (Eph 4:16). Many of them start with a youth program – something that is foreign to both the revealed activity and purpose of the church.

There is a sense in which truth’s effectiveness is now dependent upon the faithfulness of its steward, the church. It can be spoken or concealed, plentiful or scarce, flourishing or failing – it is up to the steward. This condition does not exist because God is weak, or because the truth, of itself, is impotent. This is the manner of God’s kingdom. In Christ, He has brought men into His purpose as participants. If the truth is not generally known among men, whether they have received it or not, the church has not been faithful to its stewardship. If truth is “fallen in the street,” and “fails” (Isa 59:14-15), it is not owing to any deficiency in the truth itself. Rather, the stewards of truth have been recalcitrant in carrying out their responsibility.

Admittedly, the situation has introduced an element of restriction – but that element has been imposed by God, not man. The work of restoring men to God, AND culturing them for glory, includes a period of temporary handicap – life in this present evil world. That period, however, can be addressed successfully by a faithful and willing church. God has provided resources that will support diligent effort (Eph 1:3; 2 Pet 1:3) – but the steward must appropriate them by faith.

THE CHURCH: THE PILLAR AND GROUND OF THE TRUTH

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THE REQUIREMENT OF A STEWARD

The proper emphasis of the church is not its organization, but its stewardship. It is the “pillar and ground of the truth.” Believers are to maintain their relationships as “good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (I Pet. 4:10-11). To receive grace is marvelous – to be a steward of it in its diversity is sobering! Faithfulness is to be the watchword of the church! The divine requirement for stewards is clearly stated in scripture. “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (I Cor. 4:2). God will hold all stewards – both individuals and congregations – responsible for their stewardship.

Of particular interest is the accountability of congregations to the Head of the church. This is too often overlooked in our time. Jesus held the seven churches of Asia accountable, apprising them of His personal assessment of them: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. If they did well, He told them so. If He had something against them, He told them so. If they had faults, He told them how to rectify them, and what He would do if they ignored His word. He also gave promises to those who would overcome. Then there were churches especially noted for having to be corrected: the church in Corinth, and the churches in Galatia. There were churches being pulled in the wrong direction, like Colossae. There were churches that were doing well, like Philippi. There were churches that were noted for their faith and love – like Rome, Ephesus, Colossae, and Thessalonica. All of this was owing to the fact that they were stewards.

THE EMPHASIS IS ON STEWARD

Conceptually, God’s truth cannot be separated from its stewards. It is as apparent as its stewards are faithful. Jesus has actually dispensed His goods to His church, and it is responsible for handling them correctly – both at the individual and congregational levels. Such an arrangement requires that an emphasis be placed upon the steward – upon the custodian of the truth. That is the appointed means of establishing the

truth. The church is the “pillar and ground of the truth.”

When Christ “went about doing good,” He was the heavenly Steward among men. He was sent to “bear witness unto the truth” (John 18:37). God placed the emphasis upon His Steward: “This is My Beloved Son . . . hear ye Him” (Matt. 17:5). Truth could not be obtained independently of Him.

When the Son returned to heaven, He charged His apostles with the responsibility of ministering the truth – they received the divine stewardship. “Preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15); “Go therefore and teach all nations . . . teaching them to observe all things, whosoever I have commanded you . . .” (Matt. 28:19-20). He determined to build His church “upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets” – His stewards (Eph. 2:20). Men would be judged according to their response to these men – the emphasis was upon His stewards. The truth “in Jesus” (Eph. 4:21), because of this stewardship, was called “the apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42).

Paul’s stewardship of and identification with the gospel constrained him to call it his gospel; “In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men according to MY gospel” (Rom. 2:16). That is because He was a custodian of the Gospel. Speaking in behalf of those that brought the message of the gospel, he wrote to the Thessalonians, “Whereunto He called you by OUR gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 2:14).

In God’s kingdom – an economy of truth – the rejection of His stewards constitutes a rejection of their stewardship. Thus, a rejection of Jesus is a rejection of the “grace and truth” which came by Him (John 1:17). A refusal to accept the apostles is a refusal to embrace the gospel of salvation which they proclaimed. To despise the members of the body of Christ is to despise their ministration of “nourishment,” which is designed to “knit together” and produce “the increase of God” (Col. 2:19). In this sense, the emphasis is on the steward.

THE CHURCH: THE PILLAR AND GROUND OF THE TRUTH

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Devotion 9 of 17

WHEN TRUTH FAILS

It is possible for truth to fail – to cease functioning, as far as effects are concerned, and lose its strength. This condition is not caused by any deficiency in the truth itself – God forbid! Rather, God has ordained that the truth be communicated by the intelligent expression of men. Angels do not proclaim it to the world, as they themselves do not fully comprehend it – particularly the Gospel. As it is written, “Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into” (I Pet. 1:12). Jesus will not return to the world to minister the truth among men. That is a job He has assigned to His church, and it is required to disseminate the truth. Jesus Himself shall remain in heaven until the fulfillment of all prophecies. That is expressly stated by Peter: “And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:20-21). The NIV version reads, “He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything.”

The dead will not be raised to proclaim the truth, as their word would carry no more weight than that of those remaining in the earth. Thus when the rich man who was tormented in hell asked Abraham to send Lazarus back to earth to warn his brothers, Abraham said, “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead” (Luke 16:31).

Those who have been joined to the Lord, who remain in the world, must declare the truth, or it will not be made known. The proclamation of “the truth of the Gospel” (Col 1:5) is a stewardship that has been given to men who are in the world, but are not of the world (John 15:19), and they are responsible for carrying out their commission.

In the time of Isaiah there was a lack of the proper awareness of the truth. God denounced His people for permitting such a condition to arise. “Yea, truth fails: and he that departs from evil makes himself a prey: and the Lord saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no judgment” (Isa. 59:15). It was not that truth was beyond them, but that men were not availing themselves of it – thus its power was lost. When there is no proclamation of, or regard for, the truth, its fruits will not be experienced.

Our times must be seen with this responsibility in mind. There has rarely been historical periods when such a prevailing ignorance of the Word of God existed, the Dark Ages being one of the only exceptions. Today, particularly in our country, there is not a corner where Bibles are not readily available. A lot of leisure time has been created by automation that allows for an extended study of the Word of God. And yet, exceedingly few people have a working knowledge of the Word, or anything near an adequate knowledge of what is proclaimed therein. Even among professed Christian preachers and teachers, there is an alarming level of ignorance concerning the content and meaning of the Word of God.

How can these conditions exist? It is because the Word of God is NOT being proclaimed. It is quite true that words are being spoken and books written about institutional matters and sectarian bias. But the Word is not being declared, and thus the awareness of it has waned, and people are wallowing in the pool of ignorance and despair. I realize there are exceptions to this, but it remains lamentable they are, in fact, exceptions to the rule.

Truth is essentially associated with expression; “Thy WORD is truth”

(John 17:19); “. . . speaking the truth . . .” (Eph. 4:15); “. . . the word of truth . . .” (Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:15; James 1:18). It is not possible to form a valid idea about heavenly things apart from the word of God! Thus, when the truth of them is not declared by the church, sound concepts of spiritual realities become impossible. This condition results in the failing of the truth to do its work.

Whether it is a failure to “preach the word” (2 Tim. 4:2), or the turning “away their ears from the truth” (2 Tim. 4:4), the result is the same; truth is rendered ineffectual – it fails. Truth never fails because it is intrinsically powerless or is in any way lacking. The “sword of the Spirit,” which is the Word of God, must be picked up and wielded by those who are fighting the good fight of faith.

This situation places a solemn obligation upon the church, God’s custodian of the truth. It is the responsibility of “the church” to proclaim the truth with godly consistency. It has not been sent to rectify the problems of humanity. Its chief role is not to feed the poor of the world. Its primary responsibility is not to see to it that marriages are stable, or that young people are off the streets, or that Christians are elected to government positions. There is nothing inherently wrong with those things, but that is not what the church has been placed in the world to do. If, in the doing of its main work, some of those things are accomplished, no one of understanding will quarrel with the workers. But when the truth is not declared, men, as in days of old, begin to call good evil and evil good (Isa 5:20). Thus, the church itself becomes a boiling cauldron of ignorance, for the truth has failed.

If what the truth is intended to accomplish is not being carried out, then truth has failed. If the person who departs from iniquity makes himself a prey within the precincts of the church itself, then truth is failing, and is “fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter” (Isa 59:14).

THE CHURCH: THE PILLAR AND GROUND OF THE TRUTH

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Devotion 10 of 17

PERILOUS TIMES SHALL COME

The scarcity of truth produces perilous times – periods of intense spiritual danger. Satan’s access to, and subversion of, men is directly proportionate to their knowledge of the truth of God – more precisely to their knowledge of God Himself, which is immediately related to His Word. If men are fundamentally unacquainted with God and His ways, they are lacking in the knowledge of God. If they are reliant on religious tradition, sectarian positions, and sayings and affirmations that define their religious sect, they are lacking in the knowledge of the truth. We are speaking of the truth that sanctifies (John 17:17).

This is “the truth” that must be loved if a person is to be “saved” (2 Thess 2:10-13). It is said of truth, “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and BELIEF OF THE TRUTH” (2 Thess 2:13). When men are saved, they “come to a KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH” (1 Tim 2:4). It can be said of all who have been reconciled to God: they “know the truth” (1 Tim 4:3). All of this presumes that the stewards of truth have been faithful in dispensing it. If truth is not being faithfully spoken by the custodian of the truth, perilous times will inevitably surface.

The apostles spoke of such times – perilous times – and their words carried a note of alarm. “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come” (2 Tim. 3:1-6). The danger did not consist of imminent physical harm, but of spiritual jeopardy. Protection from those perilous times could not be achieved by fleeing to physical safety, as in the destruction of Jerusalem (Matt. 25:16-19). Rather, it was to be found in the truth; “But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of . . .” (2 Tim. 3:14).

The peril of reference is not merely a time when nations are jostling for power, or worldly standards dip to an all time low. Rather, it is when the world gets into the church, and worldly traits pervade the people who were once delivered from it. Paul cites some of those traits his letter to Timothy.

Elaborating upon those days of peril, or danger, Paul identified them with a lack of devotion to the truth. “Preach the word . . . for the time will come when men will not endure sound doctrine . . . and they shall turn away their ears from the truth and be turned unto fables” (2 Tim. 4:1-4). These uncomely traits are all summarized in the phrase, “men shall be lovers of themselves.” This is a breakdown of those traits as stated in Second Timothy 3:1-5.

1. Covetous: driven by an insatiable desire for the things of this world.
2. Boasters: bragging of self and personal attainments.
3. Proud: thinking of oneself as better than others.
4. Blasphemers: speaking against both man and God.
5. Disobedient to parents: children that are rebellious.
6. Unthankful: ungrateful, not associating benefits with the God who gives them.
7. Unholy: fundamentally unlike God.
8. Without natural affection: desiring unlawful marital unions, lacking care for children, etc.
9. Trucebreakers: will make no truce where one can be made, but insists on warring when it is not necessary.
10. False accusers: slanderers.
11. Incontinent: lacking in self-control.
12. Fierce: savage, not to be approached without trouble breaking out.
13. Despisers of those that are good: does not have a preference for those who are good.
13. Traitors: betraying those who trust in them.
13. Heady: headstrong, froward, and contrary.
14. Highminded: self conceited, lifted up with pride.
15. Lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God: preferring worldly

pleasure to identity with God Himself.

These are not intended to be a commentary of the status of the world. They rather speak of the assimilation of worldly traits by professing Christians. It speaks of those who claim they are of Christ, yet their lives do not differ from those who are alienated from God. You will note that none of these traits emphasis murder, or physical violence. They are all character-traits, and they are all unacceptable to God. When these characteristics are found in the professing church, we are in the midst of perilous times! The text says of such people, "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof" (2 Tim 3:5a) – that is, they reject the power than enables a person to be godly. And what is our attitude to be toward such people? The answer is straightforward: “from such, turn away” (2 Tim 3:5b). Other versions read, “avoid such men as these” (NASB), “Have nothing to do with them” (NIV), “Avoid them” (NRSV). And “Avoid [all] such people [turn away from them” (AMPLIFIED).

The proclamation of the truth is a critical factor in holding it up and causing it to produce spiritual results. Further, the setting forth of truth is decidedly neutralized when those who profess to have it are no different than those who openly reject it.

If Satan can deceive the church into closing its mouth, the truth will be “fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter” (Isa. 59:14). The time of the “dark ages” in history abundantly demonstrates this principle. With Bibles chained to the monasteries of papal Rome, the “lip of truth” dried up (Prov. 12:19). The result was a prevailing ignorance of the living God that was reflected in all of society. Literature, art, and social advancement had the stamp of spiritual death upon them. Truth failed and fell in the streets, and perilous times were introduced. The church, by its devotion to its stewardship of truth, can help avert the occurrence of such tragedy.

THE CHURCH: THE PILLAR AND GROUND OF THE TRUTH

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Devotion 11 of 17

THE ADVANCEMENT OF TRUTH AND THE DEFEAT OF THE DEVIL

The time of the first covenant was marked by military exploits, bloodshed, and war (Joshua 10:5-24; 11:17). The Israelites were commissioned to drive the inhabitants out of the land of Canaan, and to possess it by carnal warfare (Deut. 7:1-5).

The new covenant, however, is not according to this manner. The weapons provided the church are "not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." These "strongholds" are citadels of thought that interfere with the apprehension of the knowledge of God. "Our weaponry consists of weapons that are effective in casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:4-5). Among other things, the church, as the "pillar and ground of the truth," is to make inroads into the kingdom of darkness by its faithful and discerning proclamation of the truth. This is the appointed means of advancing the truth and defeating evil.

Nothing is automatic, or accomplished without effort, in the kingdom of God. The foundation of man's acceptance by God was accomplished by the zealous accomplishments of Jesus Christ. Effective declaration of those accomplishments is by the zealous efforts of redeemed men. Zeal is required because "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." (Eph 6:12) These forces are zealous and relentless. If the church dares to approach them casually, it will be soundly defeated – just as surely as the Philistines, in a certain battle with Israel, put themselves in array and soundly defeated Israel, killing about four thousand men in the open field (1 Sam 4:2).

Israel inquired among themselves why they had been defeated by the Philistines. They concluded they should have the ark of the Lord among them when they fought. They obtained the ark and again went into battle with the Philistines. This time the Philistines sensed they were at a decided disadvantage. Therefore they shouted to one another, "Be strong, and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants unto the Hebrews, as they have been to you: quit yourselves like men, and fight." It is written that the Philistines "fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen. And the ark of God was taken" (1 Sam 4:3-11). Israel was not in a right relation with God, and hasty decisions about procedures would not change their situation. Therefore, they were defeated.

The professed church has been defeated too many times in this generation because of its failure to hold up the truth of God. Many of its battles have been fought too casually, and with too little declaration of the truth of God. It is time for the church to get to the business of holding up the truth of God, and cease from its inveterate attempts to solve the problems of the people and give them satisfaction for their worldly lusts.

The prophet declared that God's purpose would be achieved by Divine zeal; "The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this" (Psa. 9:7). That zeal, however, consumed the heavenly steward. It was prophesied of Jesus that He would be "clad with zeal as a cloak" (Isa. 59:17). When He "dwelt among us" (John 1:14), His disciples observed His energetic ministry and "remembered that it was written, "the zeal of Thine house hath eaten Me up" (John 2:17). God's kingdom is revealed when His Divine resourcefulness and devotion are exhibited in men.

A realization of this principle burned in the heart of the apostle. He knew that God did not, in His salvation, work through casual and indifferent efforts. If the reconciliation of men to God was to be realized experientially, God's stewards must have God's zeal – it must consume

them! Thus did Paul earnestly request of the church, “Praying always . . . for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth and speak boldly . . . that therefore I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak” (Eph. 6:19-20).

The table of salvation has been “prepared” in the presence of the church’s enemies – enemies among men and among the spirit-world. If there is not a bold proclamation, the forces of evil will prevail. The intense energy of Satan cannot be successfully thwarted by a half-hearted effort by the church.

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Devotion 12 of 17

THE WORD HAVING FREE COURSE

God’s redemptive purpose and the “word of reconciliation” were closely united in the mind of the apostle. He could not conceive of God’s undertaking being achieved without proclamation of the gospel. How fervently he besought the Thessalonians; “Finally, brethren, pray for us, **THAT THE WORD OF GOD MAY HAVE FREE COURSE**, and be glorified, even as it is with you: and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men . . .” (2 Thess. 3:1-2). Other versions read, “that the Word, of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified” (NKJV), “and be honored” (NIV), “may spread rapidly and be glorified” (NASB), “may speed on and triumph” (NRSV) and “may speed on (spread rapidly and run its course) and be glorified (extolled) and triumph” (AMPLIFIED).

What a marvelous exhortation to prayer! Some people live in such a sloven manner that their only prayers are for themselves. They always seem to be in a backward stance, creeping along spiritual ground instead

of mounting up with wings like an eagle (Isa 40:31). Here, however, is a matter that requires the prayers of the saints – of those who are actually living in the fellowship of Christ, into which they have been called (1 Cor 1:9).

God's servants, as depicted in this text, are invading enemy territory. They are declaring the Word of God in environments where hostility exists. They need to be delivered from "unreasonable and wicked men," because "all men have not faith." Our text is not speaking of a fledgling youth who is venturing into the battle for the first time. This is Paul the apostle, who "labored more abundantly than they all" (1 Cor 15:10). His spiritual strength and insight were unparalleled among men. He had survived beatings, countless perils, shipwrecks, and oppositions from outright sinners and false brethren as well (2 Cor 12:23-28). HE is the one who asks for the prayers of the saints.

THAT THE WORD MIGHT HAVE FREE COURSE. The "free course," or running, of God's word is connected with its proclamation. It cannot run to fulfill God's pleasure where it has not been declared. Paul is speaking of the influence that follows the proclamation of the Word of God. He is desiring that the Word of God not be ignored, or unduly opposed. That involves the Lord opening the hearts of listeners, as He did in the case of Lydia (Acts 16:14). It involves the opening of the door of faith, as He did among the Gentiles (Acts 14:27). There is also the granting of repentance upon the hearing of the Word (Acts 11:18). Additionally, there is the phenomenon of the hearers "gladly receiving the Word" (Acts 2:41). All of that is evidence of the Word of God having free course, not being hindered, and being glorified. The church is to be involved in prayers for those who preach the Word.

THAT THE WORD MIGHT BE GLORIFIED. The Word of God is "glorified" when men embrace it and realized the benefits that it announces. That is when it is "honored" (NIV), and "triumphs" (AMPLIFIED). God has called the church into the good work of the spread and success of the Word of God. Through its prayers, the saints

fellowship in the work. It is not that God requires this involvement because of some inability within Himself, or weakness in the Word. This is rather the way God has chosen to work. After all, the church is being oriented for an eternal reign with Jesus (2 Tim 2:12). Therefore, they become involved in what the Lord is doing now.

THAT HE MIGHT BE DELIVERED FROM UNREASONABLE AND WICKED MEN. Paul's desire to be delivered from inhibiting men was not one for mere personal well-being. He saw wicked men as capable of hindering the spread of the truth, and thus solicited the prayers of discerning hearts. He was united with the Lord in the desire for the salvation of "all men" (2 Tim. 2:4). Too often this aspect of Kingdom work is not given due attention. God can quell the hostility of men, and even remove them if He so pleases. There are especially wicked men who raise up against the proclaimers of the Word of God, and some of them are even within the professing church, as at Corinth and Galatia. Let the church pray that faithful proclaimers of the Word of God will be delivered from such opponents – men who have no faith.

The church, in my judgment, is ill-advised to become engrossed in the social issues of our day at the expense of the truth. If truth fails, it is the church's fault, for she is its custodian and steward. If the word of truth is to move freely among men, the church must speak it, and be delivered from wicked and unreasonable men in order that she might do so. It is time for the modern church to give attention to the preaching of the Word – both among the saints, and within the world at large. That preaching is to be accompanied by the prayers of the saints, that the Word of God may have free course, and not be hindered, and that its proclaimers may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men. Such a church will be aptly seen as the pillar and ground of the truth.

THE CHURCH: THE PILLAR AND GROUND OF THE TRUTH

"But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave

thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Tim 3:15)

Devotion 13 of 17

WHOSE MOUTHS MUST BE STOPPED

Not only must truth be proclaimed with zealous effort, it is also imperative that religious error be subdued. Just as Israel had to subdue the land of Canaan (Deut. 20:20), so must the church subdue the proclamation of dogmas that separate men from God. This task is more necessary than pleasant, and thus men must be exhorted to engage in it.

It is an unfortunate reality that spiritual “gainsayers” exist – men who speak reproachfully of the truth. Such are called “unruly and vain talkers,” who “subvert whole houses, teaching what they ought not, for filthy lucre’s sake.” Jude referred to them in most arresting words. “For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ . . . But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves. Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core. These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.” (Jude 1:4,10-13). He said that they were jeopardizing the salvation of men, pulling them backward instead of enabling them to progress in the faith (Jude 1:4-9).

Peter spoke similarly of these intruders. “These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever. For when they speak great swelling words of vanity,

they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage" (2 Pet 2:17-19). He also associated their teaching with a backward stance that put people in danger: "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning" (2 Pet 2:20).

Paul also spoke of these pretenders, and in no uncertain words. "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself" (1 Tim 6:3-5).

The existence of these intruders presents a challenge to Christ's church. They are not to simply be ignored in hope that they will go away. Nor, indeed, are the redeemed to be so naive as to think that the positive declaration of the gospel will automatically put false prophets to flight.

We have an apostolic word on this – it was part of their "doctrine." "For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped" (Titus 1:10-11). In his instruction concerning the appointment of elders, Paul told Titus that "a bishop" was required to hold "fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and convince the gainsayers" (Titus 1:7-10). This activity would result in the silencing of the subverters.

The church must come to grips with its responsibility to confront contrary doctrines that shut up the kingdom of God, and restrain men from entering it (Matt. 23:13; Luke 11:52). Thus will it follow the

example set by the apostles, who did not hesitate to expose error by shining the light of truth upon it (2 Tim. 2:14-18; I John 4:1-5; 2 John 7-11; 3 John 9-10; Jude 4-11).

This is certainly not a pleasant work, but it must be done. Those who cannot do it must not be put into places of leadership. Such imposters “beguile unstable souls” (2 Pet 2:14), and cause them to be “tossed to and fro” (Eph 4:14).

THE CHURCH: THE PILLAR AND GROUND OF THE TRUTH

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Devotion 14 of 17

CONTROVERSY

The offensiveness of controversy is not reason to avoid it. The kingdom of God is essentially involved therewith. Even the law made provision for “matters of controversy” (Deut. 18:8; 19:17), teaching men that it was not to be avoided. Scripture records that Michael, an angel of great authority, “when contending with the devil, disputed about the body of Moses” (Jude 9). Controversy, or disputation, is thus not unknown in the heavenly places (cf. Dan. 10:11-14). God Himself is a God of controversy. He had a “controversy” with Israel (Isa. 34:8; Hosea 4:1; 12:2; Micah 6:2), as well as with “the nations” (Jer. 25:31). The kingdom of God, therefore, is no stranger to dispute and controversy.

WHAT IS CONTROVERSY?

Controversy does not involve merely different views, but conflicting ones – not varying perspectives, but antithetical ones. Not all differences are conflicting in nature, as the apostle taught; “for one believes that he may eat all things: another, who is weak eats herbs . . . One man esteems one day above another: another esteems every day alike. Let every man

be fully persuaded in his own mind” (Rom. 14:2-6). It is out of order to make these kinds of differences matters of controversy. Valid controversy involves differences of eternal consequence; varying views that have a direct bearing upon the salvation and damnation of men.

Like Christ, truth has a discriminating effect. It was said of our Lord, that “there was a division among the people because of Him” (John 7:43) . . . “There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings” (John 10:19). Thus was His truth often proclaimed in the arena of disputation (Acts 9:29; 15:2; 17:17).

While Paul was in Ephesus, “he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 19:8). Having met with considerable opposition in the synagogue, he did not abandon the practice of disputation, but rather “separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus” (Acts 19:10).

Contrary to carnal analysis, controversy does not cause division; division produces controversy. Disputation does not bring about separation, but is rather evidence of its existence.

A proper involvement in controversy requires discernment of the truth. Reality must be blended with man’s spirit before it can be successfully defended. Jesus put it in these words; “If any man will do [wills to do] His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of Myself” (John 7:17). Without that experiential knowledge, disputation is confined to the realm of flesh, and is thus unlawful.

Let the church press the battle by boldly confronting religious error with the truth. Righteous disputation will show the illogical nature of error – it simply cannot blend with truth. Truth cannot be supported without toppling dogmas that do not permit it to be embraced.

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Devotion 15 of 17

THE SIN OF SILENCE

All productive manifestations of the kingdom of God are by articulation. Truth has never been embraced where it was not uttered. If a person had a dream or a vision, either someone spoke in that manifestation, or it had to be interpreted in words. Those who had such experiences, like the butler (Gen 40:9-15), the baker (Gen 40:16-19), Pharaoh (Gen 41:15-32), and Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2:26-45; 4:5-27), had to ask someone to interpret the dream in words, else they had no idea what it meant.

God "spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets," and in these "last days" He has spoken unto us by His Son" (Heb. 1:1-2). Jesus came speaking – teaching and proclaiming the purpose of God. "I speak to the world those things which I have heard of Him," He declared (John 8:26). It is true that He "went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed of the devil" (Acts 10:36), but it is what He SAID that was the basis for God's acceptance or rejection of the people (Mk 8:38; Lk 9:26; John 5:47; 12:47-48; 14:24; 15:7). When the people divided over Jesus, it is because of what he said (John 7:42-43; 9:15-18; 10:19). When the Jewish leaders tried Jesus on the night of His betrayal, it is what He "said" that was the basis of their charges (Matt 27:43).

During His ministry Jesus affirmed the centrality of His word: "'Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth MY WORD, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). And again, "If ye continue in MY WORD, then are ye My disciples indeed" (John 8:31). He identified His enemies by their failure to hear His word: "I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because MY WORD hath no place in you" (John 8:37). And again, "Why do ye not understand My speech? even because ye cannot hear

MY WORD" (John 8:43).

The preeminent role of the Holy Spirit is found in what He says. "He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit SAYS unto the churches" (Rev. 2:7, 11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). Man's withdrawal from God (Heb. 10:39) is arrested by hearing what "the Holy Spirit SAYS" (Heb. 3:7, 15; 4:7). Sound preaching and teaching is encapsulated "not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words" (1 Cor 2:13, NIV). The "sword of the Spirit" is identified as "the WORD of God" (Eph 6:17).

When it comes to TRUTH, it is invariably stated in words. Paul told Festus that he spoke before him "WORDS of truth" (Acts 26:25). Jesus said to the Father, "Thy WORD is truth" (John 17:17). Paul said he preached "the WORD of truth" (2 Cor 6:7). The saved have been begotten "with the WORD of truth" (James 1:18). It is also stated, "the WORD of God . . . effectively works in you that believe" (1 Thess 2:13).

When, therefore, we speak of "the pillar and ground of the truth," it is assumed that this involves making people aware of what God has SAID. If the world has not been apprised of the truth of God, the church has neglected what it has been placed here to do. All other works, regardless of their appearance and seeming benefit, have been in vain.

A silent church – one that is not holding forth the WORD of life (Phil 2:16) – cannot be in harmony with a speaking God, a teaching Jesus, and an exhorting Spirit. The gospel must be proclaimed, and the word is to be preached with reproof, rebuke, and exhortation (2 Tim. 4:2). The conversion of sinners and the edification of saints is accomplished by speech – "words of faith and doctrine" (1 Tim. 4:6). The words God spoke through the psalmist are still true; ". . . open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it (Psa. 81:10). Let no individual that has named the name of Christ be content to be silent, to hold his peace, or to have his tongue cleaving to the roof of his mouth (Ezek. 3:26). In view of the great salvation that has been provided in Christ, and of the activities of God

toward men such an attitude is sinful!

The level of ignorance concerning the Word of God that exists in our time is a commentary on an unfaithful professing church. To a very large extent it has hawked plans and procedures that have been created by men. These range from tips on having a successful marriage, to how to plant a church or win souls. Some even major on speaking of finances, affirming that Jesus talked more about money than anything else. Such an affirmation reveals an unparalleled ignorance of the teaching of Jesus.

Nothing can remove the solemn reality that the church is “the pillar and ground of the truth.” It has NOT been placed in the world to make it a better place to live, to resolve the problems of humanity, or to build a successful institution with a fine building and diverse involvements in the community. So far as activity in this world is concerned, the church is first obliged to hold up the truth of God – to set it forth with plainness of speech. If that is not being done, there is really no need for a “church,” and the doors to structures in which it meets ought to be closed.

THE PILLAR AND GROUND OF THE TRUTH

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Devotion 16 of 17

A BETRAYAL OF THE STEWARDSHIP

The gospel has been placed in the hands of the church – she is the pillar and ground of its truth. Its power is unleashed when it is preached, for it has “pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (I Cor 1:21). Undeclared, the gospel has no power. It is the “power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes,” but “How shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear

without a preacher?” (Rom 10:14-17).

A silent church – one that is not making known the record God has given of His Son (1 John 5:10) – has betrayed its stewardship. It has buried its talent in the ground, so to speak, and shall be judged for doing so (Matt 25:18-19,24-30). The true expertise of the church is to be found in its discernment and proclamation of the word of God in general, and the Gospel of Christ in particular. She is primarily the “pillar and ground of the truth” – God’s means of getting his saving truth to men.

The requirement of faithfulness in stewards (I Cor 4:2) is introduced by the prophets. In strict conformity with His character, God revealed how He views an unfaithful steward. For example, His revelation to Ezekiel is startling to a lethargic church, and thus needs to be proclaimed.

“When I say unto the wicked, Thou shall surely die; and you give him not warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thy hand” (Ezek 3:18).

The same point is made concerning watchmen, charged with the responsibility of alerting the city to possible attack. “But if the watchmen see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman’s hand” (Ezek 33:6). God then declared that He had appointed Ezekiel to be a “watchman unto the house of Israel.” Failure to warn the people of impending judgment would result in the judgment of the prophet (Ezek 33:7-8).

Paul alluded to this principle of responsibility in his letter to the Corinthians. "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me" (1 Cor 9:16-17). The Amplified Bible reads, “For if I [merely] preach the Gospel, that gives me no reason to boast, for I feel compelled of necessity to do

it. Woe is me if I do not preach the glad tidings (the Gospel)! For if I do this work of my own free will, then I have my pay (my reward); but if it is not of my own will, but is done reluctantly *and* under compulsion, I am [still] entrusted with a [sacred] trusteeship *and* commission.” This is the expression of a faithful steward. The proper handling of a stewardship cannot be accomplished out of a mere sense of obligation. That is not enough incentive to induce true faithfulness. Little wonder Paul exclaimed, “. . . for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel” (I Cor 9:26). His was a gospel stewardship.

Notice the statement of Paul concerning how he handles his stewardship. If he carries out his commission willingly, entering into it heartily and without reservation, he has a “reward.” However, if he engages in discharging his duty against his will – i.e., if it is not his preference, and his mind is not set on pleasing the One who has given him the responsibility, he is simply doing what he is told to do. Jesus said of such an attitude: “So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do” (Luke 17:10). That is not the kind of mind-set a person wants to have when he stands before “the Judge of all the earth” (Gen 18:25). Such an attitude betrays an unthankful spirit and a lack of love for the Lord.

It is not enough to simply do what we are told to do! Our hearts must be in the matter. The interest of the Master must be zealously sought. The aim must be to be to return to the Lord more than He has given us – to invest His goods, seeking to make a gain for the Master. The parables of the talents (Matt 25:14-30) and the pounds (Lk 19:11-27) confirm this necessity.

This kingdom principle is also applied to “the church of the living God, which is the pillar and ground of the truth.” Woe unto her if she does not execute her responsibility – if she does not hold up the truth! She is to hold it up under the fierce attacks of men and demons! With unrelenting zeal, her efforts are to be poured into the “manifestation of the truth” (2

Cor 4:2). If she proves unfaithful in this awesome stewardship, the souls of the condemned will be required at her hand!

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CONCLUSION

God's kingdom is one of truth. It involves the effectual dissemination of that truth by those who have embraced it. The theme of truth is not man, but God Himself, and His Son, Jesus Christ the Lord. The objective is that men might have eternal life. As it is written, "And this is the promise that He hath promised us, even eternal life" (1 John 2:25). Further, eternal life is precisely defined by the Son of God Himself in His prayer to God on the night of His betrayal: "Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him. And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent" (John 17:1-3).

These words were not spoken to the masses, but were in the interest of the masses. Because Jesus was speaking to the Father, His words were most precise. Here, He did not speak in parabolic language or use similes. Notice His concise and insightful statements.

1. "The hour is come" – that is, the hour for which He came into the world. Elsewhere He defined His mission in these words: "Therefore doth my Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father." (John 10:17-18).

2. “Glorify Thy Son that Thy Son may glorify Thee.” The objective was for the Son to bring glory and honor to the Father by doing what He was commissioned to do. His aim was not to make the world a better place to live, or to address and resolve all of the problems of humanity. Sin had caused men to become ignorant of God, and God wanted to be known – yea, His glory and majesty demand that He be known by those whom He has made. In order for Jesus to bring due glory to God, He asks God to glorify Him – to lift the veil of obscurity from Him in order that He might be properly seen in His relationship to God.

3. “Thou hast given Him power over all flesh.” God gave Jesus authority over the entirety of humanity. There is no person who is not subject to Christ, whether they are aware of it or not. Jesus Christ will eventually pronounce the eternal destiny of every person who has ever lived, from Adam until the end of the world. He has the power and authority to do so (Acts 17:31).

4. “That He should give eternal life . . .” During this day of salvation (2 Cor 6:2), Jesus has been given all authority in order that He might give eternal life to all the that the Father has given to Him. That might not be the way that men prefer the mission of Jesus to be stated, but that is how He said it, and that is how we are to receive it. Jesus did not make this statement weighing how it would fit into men’s theology, and men are not to pass it along with that ignoble objective.

5. “And this is life eternal . . .” Eternal life is not merely existing for ever. It is knowing “the only true God, and Jesus Christ” whom He “has sent.” That is not knowing about God, or merely having a lot of information about God. It is holy involvement with God that yields a very real familiarity with His Person, attributes, and purpose. It is to be acquainted with God and His Son (Job 22:21), so that one can speak intelligently to God and about God and His Son. This is the kind of knowledge that enables a person to escape the pollutions of the world (2 Pet 2:20). It is shameful NOT to possess this kind of knowledge (1 Cor 15:34). All kinds of thoughts originated by the devil and hurled as

temptations against men, attempt to throw down this sacred knowledge (2 Cor 10:5). The saved have been supplied with weaponry that can throw down these deviate thoughts (2 Cor 10:3-5). The saved are to “increase” in their “knowledge of God” (Col 1:10). Grace and peace are multiplied unto us “through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord” (2 Pet 1:2).

In His wisdom and prudence, the Lord has deposited the truth with His church – the truth which leads to the knowledge of God and Christ, which is eternal life. That truth will run only as far as the church carries it; it will grow only to the extent that His people proclaim it. The “elect angels” (I Tim. 5:21) cannot proclaim it. The Holy Spirit will not pierce the heavens with a thunderous audible announcement. If the church does not preach it, it will not be preached; it is in her care.

It requires an extremely naive and uninformed soul to be ignorant of the fact that what Jesus was sent to do is not widely known, even though the church has been charged with making it known. The lack of this knowledge is alarmingly prevalent in the professing church itself, which accounts for the preponderance of sin within it – even though Jesus came to “make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness” (Dan 9:24).

If men are not growing “in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18), a spiritual abnormality exists – a circumstance that is at odds with God’s revealed objective. The cause for this situation can ultimately be traced to the professing church not being “the pillar and ground of the truth.” If that is an accurate assessment, then such a church is really an imposter, a harlot, and an entity in which God is not dwelling. Like it or not, unless that situation is corrected in a manner that pleases God, such a church will prove to be nothing more than a dead branch that the Father will cut off.

Our main text does NOT say the church OUGHT to be the pillar and ground of the truth, but that it IS. It will take more than a fanciful argument to prove it is proper to call a church something that it is not.