

THE GLORIOUS CHURCH

4 - THE WORK OF THE GLORIOUS CHURCH

Universally Christ is over the church as its head. "And he put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all" (Ephesians 1:22,23). Thus Paul glorified and exalted the church in a manner that staggers the imagination. It is the body of Christ! How could anyone think of it as unnecessary? Christ as Head of the church is the total source of direction for all the members of the body. Certainly unity is demanded, and will prevail when all follow Christ.

The head of any body is as important as its existence. In the case of an organization, headship may be vested in several men. How healthy the organization is depends largely on the decisions of the head. How careful we must be as members of Christ's body that we truly have Christ as our Head. Who is giving you instructions?

The head is inseparably linked with progress. The directions of the head may be short-circuited somewhere before they are carried out, but essentially, the progress surely depends on the head. Suppose we have a false head. Will not the directions be false? Will not the progress be in error and not in truth? It doesn't matter how diligent one is if he is following a false head. The proper head is essential for the permanence of any institution. Human institutions must make allowances for succession or else chaos prevails. Since Christ is eternal, there is no worry about finding a new Head.

If Christ is Head of the church, then man or men can never be. Some claim that Peter was head, and subsequent bishops of Rome are the earthly head. When a pope dies, there is no head until men select another. A headless body! Many churches have Bishops, Councils, or other groups that make decisions for the churches under their jurisdiction. Thus they interpose themselves between the people and Christ. If we admit that Christ is Head, but ignore His instructions, are we not leaving the church headless in a very real sense?

Christ alone has authority. "And Jesus came to them and spake unto them, saying, All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). Christ, as He speaks to us through His word, is the true and only source of authority. He has spoken once and for all (Jude 3). He has all legislative authority. That simply means He passes the laws. This He did. Christ, through the Holy Spirit and the New Testament writers,

revealed His complete will. "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work" (II Timothy 3:16,17).

Do we really believe and base our practice on the belief that God has given us all we need to know? Must we go outside of Christ to know our moral responsibilities? Do we need a human interpreter? Our way may be a modified, adulterated form of Christ's way. God's word provides us with all we need (II Peter 1:3). This is how Christ exercises His Headship over every local church. Christ alone will judge us and our response to His law (John 12:48). Let us study the law of our Head, believe it, and obey it.

The church in the universal sense has no earthly organizational structure. Locally, churches are independent and self-governing. Local churches are to be guided by men known as "elders" or "bishops" (Acts 14:23; 20:17,28). Specific qualifications are given for men who are to fulfill this task (I Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Another term applied to them is "pastor" (Eph. 4:11). They are assisted in their work by men known as deacons (Phil. 1:1; I Tim. 3:8-13). The elders have only a local field of labor. They are set apart for the work of overseeing and teaching the Christians in a particular church (I Peter. 5:2).

The Bible is the only source of information we have on our purpose as a church (II Tim. 3:16,17). Since Christ built the church (Mt. 16:18), and is Head of the church (Col. 1: 18), He alone can tell us what He expects us to do. We cannot decide what we want the church to do. We cannot take the world's desires for the church, and seek to fulfill them. Our national government is now doing many things that were never in the minds of the original founders of the nation. In order to give a sense of legitimacy to its activities, the constitution has been amended or stretched to cover what people want. Some approach the church in the same way. They want to modify, alter, and stretch the Bible until it permits them to make the church do what they want it to do. We see this now as churches have their own secular educational system, recreation, entertainment, money raising schemes, political influence, and collectives for doing the work of God.

God wants His church to be evangelistic. This means to preach the gospel to the lost. This is done by sending men and messages (Acts 13:1-3; I Thess. 1:8). Churches supported men in distant places (Phil. 4:16; II Cor. 11:8). There is also personal, individual evangelism (Acts 8:1-4). When a church or a Christian ceases to be evangelistic, it ceases to be "of Christ" (Luke 19:10).

The church is to edify its members (Matthew 28:20). Edifying means building up (I Cor. 14:12). The means of edification is the word (Acts 20:32). It is our responsibility as a church to help each Christian develop all his talents to the fullest use by the Master (Eph. 4:16,29). Where could we do better?

The church has a responsibility to take care of its needy. This was recognized in the earliest history of the church (Acts 4:32-35; 6:1). When the needs were too great, brethren sent funds to brethren in other places (Acts 11:27-30; I Corinthians 16:1,2). There is no evidence that the church ever undertook to supply physical assistance to the needy of the world. The church is primarily a spiritual body with a spiritual goal.

The church will only be the glorious church Christ wants when it confines itself to being and doing what Christ teaches in the New Testament.

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