

THE PIONEER BAPTIST

INDEPENDENT • MISSIONARY • ESTABLISHED 1786

VOLUME 22, NO. 12

SEPTEMBER, 1991

WHAT IS THE CHURCH FOR?

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INTRODUCTION: When the Son of God left this earth, after a brief sojourn upon it, He left behind to await His return in glory an institution which He called "My Church." This institution is unique--it is different from all other institutions in origin, mission, and destiny. This institution in its visible and concrete expression has a heavenly program requiring heavenly resources. But, alas, it has too often been the victim of a wisdom that is not from above, which is earthly, sensual, and devilish. It has been espoused as a chaste virgin to Christ, but has actually flirted with many lovers, and her robes have become spotted with the moral filth of this world. What is this mission of this institution? What is the church for?

There is a human and a Divine answer to this question. The human answer varies according to human fancies and whims and distorted ideas; the Divine answer is consistent and harmonious throughout. Here are some human answers taken from actual facts of human conduct:

I. According to a large number of people, the church is an institution to be despised. They get their names on its pages and then treat it with a cold indifference. There are people in the churches who actually seem shocked at the thought that they should give any support to the church.

II. There are others who think of it as a sort of fire escape from hell.

III. Still others think of it as having the task of making the world a good place to live in, a sort of world-betterment society. The world needs reforming and the church is here to reform it. What a mistaken idea! Christ and the apostles were not reformers in the mod-

ern sense of the term. With this idea, various institutions have sprung up seeking the support of the church. Some would reform it by feeding it. They would minister to the world through its stomach. Others by educating it. The real trouble is ignorance. Others by entertaining it. Make it laugh. Others by healing it. Build hospitals and heal humanity's hurt. They tell us that Christ and the apostles healed and that the church ought to heal. But Christ and the apostles healed by miraculous power. This work was under a temporary commission.

The first thing to be considered in the study of this question is:

OUR SOURCES OF INFORMATION.

I. The commissions of Christ. Christ told his people what they were to do while He was here. He did not leave His church without a commission. These commissions are of two kinds. One is of a temporary nature; the other is of perpetual obligation.

A. The temporary commissions:

1. To the twelve: Matthew 9:36-38, "*But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then said he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest.*" Matthew 10:5, "*These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles,*

and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not."

2. To the seventy: See Luke 10:1-24.

B. The great and perpetual commission to the apostles in church capacity. Matthew 28:16-20, "*...All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*" This is the commission under which the church is to work to the end of the age. It provides for a perpetual church; for a perpetual gospel; for perpetual ordinances; for a perpetual task; and for His perpetual presence.

II. The practice of the early churches under apostolic instruction. We are not to do everything the early church did, but only those things which were done under the leadership of the apostles. The church at Ephesus left its first love; Pergamos tolerated false doctrine; Thyatira suffered the woman Jezebel to teach and seduce; Sardis was a quitter; and Laodicea was proud and boastful.

THE CHURCH HAS A FIVE POINT PROGRAM.

I. The missionary program. The church is to perpetuate itself by making disciples. No church perpetuity apart from missionary activity. Disciples can only be made by preaching the gospel. Without missionary endeavor, churches

are limited to a single generation. Disciples are to be made to the end of the age, and making of disciples guarantees church perpetuity.

II. The teaching program. The church is to edify itself. This is done by teaching the Word of God. *"Teaching them to observe all things commanded by Christ."* There is no secular education in the great commission, or in the practice of the early church. The church is not responsible for the education of the world, but for the education of the saints in the Word of God. We are not decrying education, but we do deny that it is the mission of the church to furnish it to the world. Education is an individual and state responsibility. The church has expended her energy in secular education, while the saints have remained in ignorance of the Word of God, that which edifies and builds up in the holy faith.

III. The ceremonial program. The church is to guard the ordinances. The preservation of the ordinances in their original purity and simplicity will go far in preserving the pure gospel. The perversion of the gospel had its beginning in the perversion of the ordinances. When men began to call the ordinances sacraments and ascribed to them saving efficacy, the true gospel was lost.

IV. The benevolent program. The church is to care for its poor. The church at Jerusalem took steps to take care of its poor widows. Paul took up offerings for the poor saints at Jerusalem. It is not the mission of the church as such, to feed the poor of this world. As individual Christians, we should relieve suffering and distress wherever we come in contact with it.

V. The disciplinary program. The church is to regulate itself. It is to keep itself pure and chaste by disciplinary measures.

The church has a distinctive mission, and must not exhaust its strength doing what other agencies can do. She must be divinely empowered for this service.

THE SCOPE OF GOD'S FORGIVENESS.

In response to our confession of sin, God is faithful and just "to cleanse us from ALL unrighteousness." I don't care what you may have done, or how awful it may seem to you. It may be of such a nature that you'd rather die than ever have anyone know about it. If you're sorry about it (and you are, or you wouldn't be so worried), if you've confessed it to the Lord, and if you've resolved that with His help you'll never do it again, He has already forgiven you. Yes, He is faithful and just to cleanse you "from all unrighteousness." So accept His forgiveness. Then take comfort in the assurance that when God forgives, He forgets. The all-knowing, sovereign God has elected to banish from His remembrance those sins you confess. The psalmist declared: **"As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us,"** Psalm 103:12. And the Lord, speaking in reference to Israel, said: **"I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more,"** Hebrews 8:12.

There are times when we would like to erase some distasteful memories from our minds. But try as we might, we just can't seem to forget them. Because of that, it's difficult for us to realize that God can do just that. He completely forgets those sins we have sincerely and honestly confessed.

A story is told about a man who, although genuinely converted, was having quite a struggle with a long-standing habit. He had resolved to give it up and was trying his best to overcome it. But time and again, in weak moments, he stumbled and fell. On each occasion he would confess his failure to the Lord. He succumbed to temptation so often, however, that he began to wonder how long the Lord would keep on granting him forgiveness. After losing another spiritual battle, he cried out to God with a heart that was broken and filled with remorse, "Oh, Lord, I've done it again. I've done it again!" Expecting a stern rebuke, the fearful soul was somewhat stunned, but also comforted, by the

Lord's reply. The Heavenly Father said, "You did what again?" Now, that's a fictional story. It's merely a parable. It does emphasize, however, that when God forgives us, He remembers our transgressions no more.

Have you been struggling with something that's displeasing to the Lord? If so, don't let it get you down. Confess your sin. Determine with God's help to give it up. He will forgive you. He will cleanse you from all unrighteousness. Taking Him at His Word, accept His forgiveness. Believe that you have been cleansed--even if you don't feel like it. Let your confidence rest upon what God says rather than upon how you feel. Yes, BELIEVE: GOD IS FAITHFUL.

--Copied

CHRIST, OUR SUBSTITUTE

II Corinthians 5:21

BY: C. D. COLE

"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him," II Corinthians 5:21.

INTRODUCTION: This is one of the greatest texts of the Bible. It contains the heart of the gospel. It announces the blessed exchange between the sinner and the Savior--the Savior took our sins and we get his righteousness.

"For," the initial word of this text, indicates that the apostle is here assigning a reason for something in the preceding context. In the preceding verse is an exhortation, *"Be ye reconciled to God."* This means accept the reconciliation that God has made for sinners, *"for he hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."*

The analysis of the text is easy. Its precious truths fall into three parts:

I. Christ knew no sin. Let us see what this means.

A. It does not mean that Christ was ignorant of sin's existence. His knowledge of sin brought him to earth--he came to save sinners. He knew sin on earth--he could look through a man and see the sin of his life. He still sees sinners from heaven.

B. Christ knew no sin in the sense of committing sin. He had no sin of his own. There were many witnesses to His sinless life. The Father from heaven said He was well pleased with him. His own followers worship him as God. After rigid and repeated examination, Pilate, could find no fault in Him. If ever there was a man who would like to have blackened the life of Jesus, it was Judas. It would have helped him immensely if he could have shown that

Jesus was a sinner. But instead of charging the victim of his treachery with sin, he confessed that he had betrayed innocent blood. It is true that there were people who charged him with sin--he was called by the blackest of names. He was even called a devil. But this was by people who knew better--they did not believe their own charges. They spoke out of prejudice. It is hard to judge righteous judgment in our estimation of men. A man's friends will too often put him on a pedestal and look up to him; his enemies will put him beneath their feet to crush him as they would an ant.

II. Christ was made to be sin for us. Let us see:

A. It cannot mean that He became an actual sinner. The word for sin frequently denotes a sin offering. He became a sin offering or a sacrifice for sin. The sinless one was made a sacrifice for the sinful.

B. This sacrifice was made by the shedding of His blood. Away back in the remote past, Moses wrote the life of the flesh is in the blood. This is scientifically as well as morally true. If we poison the blood, we poison the animal. If we shed the blood, the life goes out with it. Now our life had been forfeited by sin, and He who saves us must forfeit his life, and this is done by shedding his blood.

III. The purpose of Christ's substitution. *"That we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."*

A. We are lost by our own record because we are unrighteous. Unrighteousness is the result of disobedience, and all have disobeyed or sinned.

B. To be saved we must have righteousness, that which is equivalent to a

life of obedience. We cannot establish our own righteousness for we have disobeyed.

C. Gospel righteousness is based upon the obedience of another--even Christ. Romans 5:19, *"For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous."* We have the righteousness based upon His obedience. Our righteousness is a foreign and imported righteousness. It is called the righteousness of God to distinguish it from human righteousness, and because it was provided by God. Our righteousness is the righteousness of Christ credited to our account--imputed righteousness.

IV. The exhortation, *"Be ye reconciled to God."* This means that we are to accept and trust the sacrifice made by Christ in order to be saved--in order to be found righteous in the sight of God. We are to renounce all claims to self righteousness and depend on Him for our righteousness.

I heard this story of a farmer who was trying to show his neighbor, who was a carpenter, how to be saved. The carpenter insisted that there was something he must do to be saved. One day the farmer hired the carpenter to make him a gate. The gate was made and the farmer took it away in his wagon. The next day the carpenter came out to see the new gate hanging on the farmer's fence. When he arrived, he found the farmer standing by the gate with a sharp axe. He asked the farmer what he was going to do and the farmer replied that he was going to add a few strokes to his work on the gate and then he began to chop and strike the gate until it was ruined and useless. The carpenter cried out, "Look what you have done! You have ruined my work;

that gate was alright, I made it just like it should have been, and now you have ruined it." Then the farmer began to tell him how he had tried to show him that Christ had worked out for us sinners a perfect righteousness before the law of God, and that he had ruined it by trying to add something to it.

CONCLUSION: Christ's righteousness is the gateway to heaven. I do not want to tamper with it-I do not want to add to it-I am satisfied with it. My own hands cannot perfect that which He has made. But with my heart I can appreciate His work and with my hands I will try to please Him and do what He commands.