

GRACE GAZETTE

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Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Hebrews 12:12-13

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. I Timothy 3:15

The vast majority of folks (even many professing faith in CHRIST) if asked to describe the church, would define it as a building in which folks meet on a certain day of the week (usually Sunday, but some on Saturday.) Beyond that we would hear a wide variety of opinions as to what the church might consist of. The scriptures are, however, quite clear as to what the “church” is and also the centrality of its existence in and by CHRIST JESUS, who is the HEAD of it. Nowhere in the scriptures is any building made with hands ever described as the (or even a) “church” nor I might add as an organization which has perpetuity because of its bylaws, decorums, and officers.

There are basically two concepts of the church taught in the scriptures. Both concepts are united in CHRIST, who is the very FOUNDATION STONE upon which this spiritual edifice rests and is built upon. The overriding consideration of the “church”, in the scriptures, is as the term describes the people of GOD who are chosen in CHRIST from before the foundation of the world. This is the Bride of CHRIST, or those for whom HE has shed HIS blood for their redemption. Their number does not increase nor shall it ever diminish. *“But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.” (Heb 12:22-24)*

There is only one Greek word which is translated as “church” in the New Testament. It appears eighty times in its singular form and thirty-two times in its plural form. That Greek word is “ekklesia” and literally means a “called out assembly or community”. This leads us to point out the second concept of the “church” as we see it in the New Testament, which is the local manifestation or gathering together of the “church” in one particular place. This could be called a “local church”. A local church is made up of members of the same body which CHRIST has purchased with HIS own blood, but does not include everyone of them, but only those who are in that particular location at the same time. Each local assembly is as much the “body of CHRIST” as is the whole and is no less the domain of CHRIST where HE is the Sovereign ruling monarch, the sole POTENTATE.

The local assembly does not freely determine its doctrine or practice, but does most willingly submit herself to the Headship of CHRIST and HIS doctrine which *“shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass.” (Deu 32:2)* *“So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.” (Isa 55:11)* Just as there are multitudes who preach false doctrine, which does not exalt CHRIST and HIM crucified to the exclusion of all else, so too are there many false “churches” which are manifested in their disregard of HIS WORD. CHRIST alone is able to establish HIS church where HE sees fit and HE alone can sustain it according to HIS purpose. Vain is the help of men.

Paul writes to Timothy with loving instruction and stern exhortation to recognize the glory and necessity of walking in obedience to the precepts of CHRIST in the local assembly where he presently abides. *“That thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of*

God". He does so by reminding him of the "*mystery of Godliness*" (see v.16), which he is called to declare in the midst of the gathering of GOD's people. Declaring the "TRUTH as it is in JESUS" is not an option for those who are sent with HIS message. To preach any other message is to prove oneself to be a reprobate and a false prophet, and to embrace any message other than that which centers in the all sufficiency of CHRIST as PRIEST and KING is to deny the very FOUNDATION upon which the "church" of the LORD JESUS CHRIST firmly rests.

Let no man mistake the fact that CHRIST will build HIS church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Many have made the mistake of thinking that the ROCK upon which CHRIST would build HIS church was Peter. Yet Peter (i.e.; petros, a piece of stone) is not the ROCK (i.e.; PETRA, a mass of stone or a ROCK), but merely a "stone" or "pebble" in the construction of the LORD's church. "*Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. 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.*" (1Pet 2:5-6)

The local church does not exist for the purpose of preaching and teaching the WORD. But a local assembly cannot be rightly called "the church" where there is an absence of that exercise. Sound doctrine which exalts only CHRIST is the very basis upon which it must stand. No member of that body is more important than another and there is only ONE HEAD. The love of the brethren for CHRIST and one another is the tie that binds a true assembly of JESUS CHRIST together. "*Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another.*" (Rom 12:10) "*But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.*" (Eph 4:15-16) A gathered assembly with the absence of that love cannot be a manifestation of the "church" of CHRIST regardless of what else it may practice, its past history, or its dusty "Confessions of Faith". "*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*" (John 13:35)

Paul describes the "local church" as the "*house of GOD*". Stephen plainly declared, "*the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands.*" We can be certain that Paul had no reference to any structure constructed by mortal men nor even in some organization which they have put together in the vain attempt at perpetuating the same. Rather this "house" is merely a reference to the "assembly" itself. It is that place where the LORD is. "*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*" (Mat 18:20)

Then he describes this "edifice" as "*the pillar and ground of the truth.*" Since this is true we must recognize the folly of those who profess to follow CHRIST who have a complete disregard of the gathering together of the saints in a particular location. There are many who make a profession of following CHRIST (i.e.; calling themselves Christians) who see this assembly as an inconvenience in their busy lives and are not compelled to seek out this fellowship. That is quite an odd combination since John said, "*We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.*" (1John 3:14)

A man cannot be walking in the TRUTH if he has no regard for the assembly of the saints. Such a man cannot manifest a great esteem for the brethren of CHRIST if he has no desire to minister to them by his presence, fellowship, and encouragement. Some are indeed providentially hindered from such gatherings. Yet any man (professing faith in CHRIST) who is capable of assembling with the LORD's people and chooses not to, is completely disobedient to the heavenly vision. "*If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.*" (1John 1:6) "How sweet, how heavenly is the sight, When those that love the Lord, In one another's peace delight, And so fulfil his word! When each can feel his brother's sigh, And with him bear a part; When sorrow flows from eye to eye, And joy from heart to heart. When free from envy, scorn, and pride, Our wishes all above, Each can his brother's failings hide, And show a brother's love. When love in one delightful stream Through every bosom flows; When union sweet and dear esteem, In every action glows! Love is the golden chain that binds The happy souls above; And he's an heir of heaven that finds His bosom glow with love." (by Joseph Swain, #1082 Gadsby's) mam