

*We are never the same after any temptation. If we yield we are changed and become weaker. If we resist we are changed and become stronger.*

C. S. Lewis

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Prayer Study #280

**GOD'S CHURCH IN THIS HOUR**

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(The following are writings from High Point Church in Macon, Georgia, I have taken the liberty to summarize some of the information.)

The only place to go for truth concerning spiritual matters is the Word of the living God. We are told to *study to show ourselves approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth* (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 2:15). Since Paul wrote that we were to rightly divide the Word of God, we also know that we can wrongly divide it too. Peter in 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 1:20 tells us that **NO SCRIPTURE IS OF PRIVATE INTERPRETATION**. Thus, we do not take isolated texts and build a doctrine, as some have, but we read all the verses that have to do with a certain truth. But this is still not enough. We must also have revelation from the Holy Spirit to make spiritual truth effective in our own lives. No one can receive divine revelation from God if he refuses to receive Biblical truth that does not line up with his previous doctrinal positions. We see so many active and good church people, for example, who refuse to receive the truth of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, in spite of the overwhelming Biblical evidence, because their church's doctrinal position teaches against this experience. These people must approach the Scripture as it is in truth, the very Word of God and must bow in humility of spirit willing to accept that which the Holy Spirit will teach. It goes without saying that the Spirit of God will NOT teach anyone whose heart is hard, critical, and unforgiving, and also one who deals lightly with truth, who cuts down another's reputation, who denies the deity of Christ Jesus, who denies the Word of God as absolute truth, and who would hinder the working of God's Spirit among His people.

The Christian Church is a New Testament *institution* which came into functioning order at Pentecost. The very word for church-assembly or *ecclesia* in the Greek-gives an important clue to understanding what the church is. It is a **GROUP** of people that exists in the world but is called out from this "world system." The people of God are said to be the "called-out" ones (Romans 8:30, 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1:2).

It is important to note that the Church is part of what we may call Christendom, but that Christendom is not part of GOD'S CHURCH. We know this from reading Matthew 13. Notice here the parable of the wheat and the tares. Satan (the enemy) sows the tares amongst the wheat. The tares look very much like the wheat, but they are not wheat. This is Christendom, but the wheat, not the tares, is GOD'S CHURCH. Then there is the parable of the mustard seed which grows into a huge tree where in the birds of the air come to lodge in its branches. A mustard seed becoming a tree is a picture of Christendom. Such a tree is a monstrosity. Here is Christendom with its millions of church members. Yet its religious organizations deny the Lord Jesus Christ, deny His Word, receive only that part of truth which will not isolate them from the world system and which have a FORM OF GODLINESS BUT DENY THE POWER THEREOF and from which God says to turn away. Also here is the parable which says the kingdom of heaven is like leaven which leaveneth the whole lump. This does not mean the whole world will be converted (the word *church*, assembly, or called-out group, would then be meaningless), but leaven in Scriptures is a type of evil in its subtle influence. Now this religious form we look at is Christendom but NOT THE CHURCH.

The Church was foretold by Christ in Matthew 16:16-18 "...On this rock I will build my church." This is the first mention of the Church in the New Testament and is a prophecy and a promise. We see also that the founder of the Church is our Lord Himself.

The foundation of the Church is Peter's confession of Jesus Christ as the Son of the Living God. Historically we can say that the Church was founded by the apostles. In Acts 1:2-47 we find the account of the first Christian Church. When men were regenerated, they became a part of the Church (*the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved.*)

The Church had

**STATED PLACES OF MEETING:**

The upper room (Acts 1:13), the temple (Acts 5:12), the homes of members (Acts 2:46, 12:120, and the synagogue.

**STATED TIMES OF MEETING:**

Daily (Acts 2:46), the first day of the week (Acts 20:7).

**REGULAR HOURS OF PRAYER:**

(Acts 3:1, 10:9).

**REGULAR CHURCH ROLL:**

120 (Acts 1:15); 3000 (Acts 2:41), 5000 (Acts 4:4).

**DAILY ADDITIONS:**

(Acts 2:47).

**REQUIREMENTS AND CONDITIONS** to become a part of the Church: (Acts 15).

**REPENTANCE AND BAPTISM WERE REQUIRED OF ALL ITS MEMBERS:**

*Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:38-39).*

These early Christians had certain characteristics, which marked their lives. They were known as:

**BELIEVERS: (ACTS 4:32)**-They were guided by principle; they were marked by believing something so much they were willing to take their stand upon it even unto death.

**BRETHREN: (Acts 11:29, 12:17; Romans 1:13)**-There was an equality of all believers although they differed in office. There was a spiritual life which they shared and which bound them together.

**CHRISTIANS: (Acts 11:26, 26:28)**-Others called them Christians because they were like Christ.

**SAINTS: (Acts 9:13; 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1:2; Revelation 13:7)**-They were not saints because they were made so by edict of the church organization, but the word means to be set apart, and they were set apart ones-set apart FROM the WORLD SYSTEM and To the LORD.

**ELECT: (Mark 13:27; Romans 8:33; Ephesians 1:4)**-I most definitely am not a 5 point Calvinist, but we do know from scripture that *He chose us*

*in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.* Thus, we are the *elect*. I do believe, however, that we have a free will to choose Him who has chosen us, and, if we do not choose Him, we will suffer eternal punishment because of our sin.

It is evident from this much of our study that many members of a local church are a part of Christendom and are not a part of God's Church because they have not genuinely been born again. Those in God's Church are those who have been baptized into the body by the Spirit (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12:13). They are marked because they're not bound by traditional religion but are-as far as they have light-WORD CHRISTIANS, marked by a personal devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ. They will not be as the Pharisees who erred because they KNEW NEITHER THE SCRIPTURES NOR THE POWER OF GOD; they will covet the best gifts of the Spirit (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12:31) and desire to walk in the way of love with its attendant fruit. Now will they castigate others who disagree with them, realizing that they know truth only because God Himself opened their hearts.

God's Church is set forth in Scriptures by several descriptive figures. These are plain for all to see and yet neither organizational religionists nor sectarian independents seem to place much emphasis upon the salient features in the figures. Each of these figures implies that those in God's Church are there NOT AS SPECTATORS but as PARTICIPANTS. Modern man makes his choice of a church because he likes its program of music, education, the preacher, or because it supports or doesn't support a denominational program. But the Word teaches that God adds to the Church such as should be saved and that we are to contend for the faith of the apostles, which included the baptism in the Spirit, the gifts and fruit of the Spirit, and the whole body of truth. Many want to be counted as being active members of God's Church by aligning themselves with a conservative church, paying tithes and warming a pew. This is a far cry from New Testament Christianity.

Let us first consider the figure of the Church as a body. Pentecost marked the beginning of this Body as a functioning organism. Jesus was God "enfleshed," walking on this earth amidst man's need. If we want to know how God feels about sin, sickness, forgiveness, and the problems of human life, we look at the LIFE OF JESUS. But since Pentecost, our Lord still has a Body on this earth and that Body is God's Church, and this Church should still be doing the same works that Jesus did. Jesus said, "*Greater things*

*than these shall you do because I go to my Father” (John 14:12), AND “...As You have sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world” (John 17:18). The ministry of Jesus and consequently of His Body on the earth is spelled out in Luke 4:18, “The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed...”*

We will pursue this a little at length since the average spectator church member will resist this concept of “participatory Christianity.” Unfortunately, many pastors also resist this because they want to in control and lord over the people of God. This is the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes mentioned in Revelation 2:6, 15 as that which God hates. The work *Nicolaitane* comes from *nikao*, “to conquer,” and *laos*, “the people.” It is much easier to let things roll on as they are than to try to see God’s order established in the church. Would any Christian familiar with the New Testament say that the modern church, especially the church in America, is like the Church set forth in the New Testament? How many are willing to go back to God’s way?

How can God’s Church do greater works than Jesus did? We know from the Word that all He did, He did by the same Spirit that we have. Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to His Church (Acts 2:38-39, as previously quoted). Our need is not so much revival or reformation but restoration to what the apostles taught, especially as pertains to walking in the same *dunamis* power of the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus, who had the Spirit without measure, did when on this earth.

The Church’s head is Jesus, and He is in heaven where He intercedes for His own on earth. He left His Body, the Church, on earth to do God’s will in bringing the good news of salvation. Salvation includes deliverance, safety, preservation, healing and soundness, and all of the promises of God-@2nd Corinthians 1:20: *For all the promises of God in Him are yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.*”

**Stir Thy Church, O God, Our Father**  
**Milburn Price**  
**1970**

Stir thy church, O God, our Father, move throughout its life  
today;

Cultivate a sense of mission in our hearts and minds, we pray.

Help us renew commitment to a way of life in thee  
Which interprets for our culture how thy truth can make men free.

Make thy church a living witness to the power of her Lord;  
Send us to the world around us with thy spirit and thy Word;  
To the inner city turmoil, to the suburbs where men flee,  
To all men who need thy message, help us, Lord, to live for thee.

Give to us a social conscience, which enables us to see  
That all men are thy creation and that helping them serves thee.  
Let us free with real compassion, needs of body, mind and soul;  
For these needs may we provide men ministry, which makes them  
whole.

Challenge us, O God, our Father, to the tasks, which must be done  
For thy church to find fulfillment, in the way taught by the Son.  
With awareness of our purpose, with commitment to thy call,  
May we help prepare the time when Christ will reign as Lord of  
all.