

Newsletter March 2016

In previous newsletters we have been highly critical of the decadent churchianity (cf. Newsletter October 2014) that has overwhelmed today's temporal churches. Unlike the Visible Church, which is the present living earthly component of the one eternal Church that transcends space and time, the temporal church is a human institution that is both earth-bound and time-bound (cf. *CRC Book II*, page 147). The sole purpose of the temporal church is to provide an organization through which the Visible Church can function on earth. Although a temporal church can never hope to perfectly fill this important role because of its human establishment and leadership, it should consistently strive to reach upward toward that goal.

Today, the temporal church is threatened to be overwhelmed and absorbed by a sin-stained world though the infiltration of secular humanism carried in by false professors of the faith. Rest assured, however, that not all local churches have fallen into doctrinal, moral, and procedural decay to the extent that we have previously discussed. These rare local churches are often hidden within a barrage of liberalism and pseudo-orthodoxy issuing forth out of today's churchianity. In this newsletter, we shall turn our attention toward identifying these rare churches by sharing some thoughts concerning the properties of an ideal temporal church (hereafter referred to as the church for sake of brevity). These thoughts are based upon our *Doctrinal Statement* as well as all of our books and newsletters, which are available on this website.

First and foremost, the church must be fully God-centered. It must never bend to the will of man, but must submissively conform to the will of God. Not only must the church be God-centered it must also be joyously Christ-centered. When we worship Jesus Christ, we also worship God the Father who sent his Son to earth to be a propitiation for our sins. The Visible Church is the living body of Christ on earth, and a local church must fully exemplify that identity or cease to be a legitimate church.

The church must maintain a close relationship with God through corporate worship as it regularly assembles together to represent the redeemed in Christ. Although we have many opportunities to worship God individually, corporate worship allows us to express unity with others of like faith. God greatly desires our collective worship expressed through earnest meaningful prayers of praise. Spoken prayers must be addressed directly to God extolling his worth, not put forth for congregational approval or admonition. Having said that, corporate prayers must combine with the spiritual needs of the congregation to express their own praise through and around the words of the spoken prayer. God-centered worship is also manifested through the spirited recitation of various Old-Testament Psalms of praise and through vibrant congregational singing, which must be both reverent and worshipful. Because contemporary music often fails the reverence test due to its indulgent musical style and often contain lyrics that revere the believer more than God, many biblical churches have chosen to revive the older praise hymns of the church (cf. Newsletter, November 2015). Only congregational singing provides a complete corporate unity of praise, which is notably absent when praise music is performed by choirs and soloists. Moreover, applause for praise music is never appropriate, since this would be paramount to snatching worship back from God and placing it onto those who had offered it. This not only dishonors God, it completely discredits the humble offering of a sincere giver as well.

As praise through prayer and worshipful singing is our way of addressing God, his Word is the means by which He directly speaks to us. Therefore, the church must place their complete trust in the divine authorship of Holy Scripture. God is not appeased by clever, flowery and anecdotal addresses to the congregation intermingled here and there with his Word, but only with the meticulous expository teaching from the pulpit of his very Word as it is written. God is highly honored when his Word is clearly and accurately spoken and received with joy by the congregation. In addition to the Scripture text itself, expository teaching must contain a careful explanation of context and background, as well as explicating any translational problems concerning the text, in order to fully establish its precise meaning. Scripture must never be bent to soften its message or to overstate it, nor should it ever be twisted to conform to some lofty individual or church application that does not fully comply with its original intent. Scriptural applications are supernaturally transmitted and received when God's Word is clearly spoken and the indwelling Holy Spirit applies its message directly to the heart and mind of the believer.

The church Must act as a vast storehouse of biblical Truth, which is firmly held to be inviolate and apart from all sinful human opinion. For Scripture to be truly the Word of God, it must be obtained from a sound translation derived from many manuscripts trailing back to the original autographs (cf. Newsletter April 2015). Because of an

overwhelming choice of translations of varying quality today, it is absolutely necessary that the church be able to differentiate between sound translations and poor translations that can adversely affect sound doctrine. To do that, the church must maintain a scholarly forum of church elders for ascertaining, re-validating, and maintaining Scriptural doctrine without error and without compromise. A church should also produce a printed statement of belief that clearly describes all of its major doctrinal positions both as a testament to the world and as an aid to prospective members. At a minimum, that statement must acknowledge the sovereignty of God in all matters – including the redemption of men. It must acknowledge the triune quality of the Divine Being, subsisting as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It must acknowledge the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, and thereby proclaim Jesus as being fully God yet fully man through his incarnation. The church must declare the death of Christ as the only atonement for human sin and acknowledge Jesus' bodily resurrection from the dead as a verification of mankind's justification to God. It must further acknowledge the Holy Spirit whose extensive work is to first convict men of sin, and then by revealing the redemptive works of Christ facilitate a spiritual re-birth. In doing so, the church must not fall into the snares of the modern charismatic movement (cf. Newsletter, January 2015).

The church must not only diligently seek to hold to biblical Truth, it must provide sound doctrinal instruction to aid new believers in reaching a maturity in the faith. Beginning with the simple milk of the Truth contained in the Gospel for young children and the novice, it must also be willing to explore the depth and breadth of God's Word to satisfy the mature believer's continual thirst for greater knowledge of God and Christ. This extended teaching must encompass every book of the Bible, such that we gain the whole council of God's Word. The church also should promote spiritual growth in its members by encouraging home Bible studies and personal prayer times outside the corporate meeting of the body. The ultimate goal in doing this should be to cultivate faithful disciples of men who will in turn seek out and bring forth additional disciples. In this manner, the true Christian faith is perpetuated through the work of godly men and protected from alteration by the ungodly.

An ideal church should have a biblically complete church government in place consisting of Elders, Deacons, and a presiding pastor. In keeping with the divine natural order of creation, the Bible clearly excludes women from assuming any of these roles, and a sound church must accept that limitation without question, argument, or exception (cf. 1Ti. 2:12-14; Newsletter March 2015).

The role of Elders is paramount to the health of the church inasmuch as they act as vigilant overseers of church worship, guardians of church doctrine, and protect the purity of the church through the proper exercise of church discipline. Elders must be carefully selected by god-fearing men in accordance with the strict Scriptural standards set forth in First Timothy 3:1 and Titus 1:6. They must be devout and capable teachers of God's Word, from the pulpit as necessity dictates, but be especially able and willing to teach in less formal settings, such as Sunday School classes and other Bible studies, wherein serious questions can be put forth and faithfully answered. Men of this quality are indeed rare in today's world, but a biblically sound local church will draw such men into its midst through the Holy Spirit's guidance. Scripture does not stipulate a particular number of Elders, but as a practical rule there must be at least two to avoid any possibility of autocratic rule, with a maximum limited to that which allows them to regularly meet together and function efficiently.

In addition, an ideal church must select deacons to oversee the physical welfare of its members. Deacons should be selected by the congregation at large under the guidance of elders in accordance with 1Ti. 3:8-13. Deacons may temporarily provide material aid and funds as needed by members of the congregation who have suffered loss of employment or have encountered other financial difficulties. They also must provide for the visitation of shut-ins and those confined in nursing homes and hospitals. In addition, they must manage all church physical properties and real estate, as well as account for church offerings and financial expenditures. In regard to this last duty, they should regularly prepare printed reports for church members – listing total offerings and expenditures as well as a report on the overall financial state of the church. A church ordinarily requires a greater number of Deacons than Elders to fulfill this wide range of service.

The primary role of the church pastor is to diligently study, prepare, and present biblical expository dissertations from the pulpit. He must meet the same qualifications required for selecting elders, with whom he must closely work. As a practical matter, he may act as chairman and mediator when the board of Elders meet to ensure order. He must be an exemplary Christian having the personal integrity to present himself and his family as a role model for true Christian living. He must lovingly shepherd and council the congregation in all significant matters of daily life and preside over marriages and conduct funeral services. Because his extensive

full-time duties prevent him from earning a living, the church must support both him and his family with living quarters and properly provide church funds for his day-to-day needs. Although lay members may be utilized in an initial search committee to locate potential candidates for the office of pastor, ordained Elders must closely oversee that committee and must be held fully responsible for ultimately selecting a fully qualified man to fulfill that position. The entire board of Elders must carefully examine the candidates and come to a unanimous decision; failing that, the search must continue. The congregation's role in this process is commonly limited to affirming the final choice of their Elders with a resounding vote of confidence.

The duty of individual members of the church is to faithfully attend regular services of the church whenever possible, and to personally serve in whatever capacity one is able as opportunities present themselves and as need dictates. Prayers should be continually offered up by members for the sound leadership of their church officers that they may not fall into a snare surreptitiously set for them by the evil one, and that they exercise their authority justly and in accordance with the will of God. Members must likewise offer up prayers for civil magistrates, and leaders of the nation in which the church resides that they should rule justly and provide an atmosphere of peace in which the church can thrive.

Members must also furnish all necessary finances for operations of the church. Old-Testament tithing is not directly applicable to the church wherein its members are expected to give graciously, generously and cheerfully as they are able out of an abundance of joy. Some individuals may set a personal goal to give one-tenth of their income, while others determine to give as much as they are able without any strict accounting. There are also many worth-while charities and Christian ministries outside the institutionalized church that faithfully perpetuate the Gospel and teach God's Word; these ministries often provide the local church with new members. For that reason, a church must not institute so-called "store-house tithing" wherein every charitable donation must be funneled directly into the church coffers lest these important ministries flounder.

The church must promote brotherly love and assist others within the body with their personal walk with Christ. This is especially important for new believers, but at times even mature saints need help in sorting out priorities and maintaining a faithful walk with Christ. The Christian walk is far from an easy one; believers often become troubled with many issues that unbelievers cannot begin to understand. It is at this time that a fellow believer in Christ can provide great comfort and useful council. The church must provide mutual encouragement in times of trials and adversity such that no member should ever believe that they must suffer in isolation. It must also offer up collective prayers for the infirm among them not only for their encouragement, but also to unleash the healing power of God in their behalf according to his will. Having done so, church members must realize that they are quite often the hands and feet that God may choose to utilize in providing an answer to those prayers.

The church must firmly hold to a biblical understanding of the Lord's Supper as the church's primary means of expressing true spiritual unity and fellowship with each other and with Christ. All social gatherings of the church must remain subordinate to that reality. Love feasts and fellowship dinners, although socially beneficial, must not ever be allowed to displace or encroach upon the importance of the Lord's Supper. The Lord's supper is not a means to salvation, nor is it a means of maintaining salvation, but a solemn act of remembrance of the Lord's death by his faithful Church until He returns (cf. Lu.22:19; 1Co. 11:24,25). The bread and juice remain unchanged throughout the procedure; they are not miraculous elements, nor are they in any way efficacious; they are but simple symbols of Christ's body and blood that aids in focusing the human mind on Christ's sacrificial death. Therefore, Christ is not physically or spiritually present within the elements themselves; His presence is to be found only within the hearts and minds of true believers who partake of them. Because we cannot always rightly discern those who are in Christ, the church must make the Lord's Table available to all who profess Christ, but always precede it with the Scriptural warning concerning the self-damning consequences for those who would partake of it without discerning the body and blood of Christ. There is no biblical mandate for the frequency of the Lord's Supper, leading some churches to conduct it weekly, others monthly, some quarterly, and unfortunately some not at all. What is important is that the Lord's Table not be neglected or conversely rendered so commonplace that it loses all its profound meaning.

Because Christians remain an imperfect people living in a fallen world, the earth-bound time-bound temporal church experiences much of this world's decadence. Therefore, the church must provide a means to assure continuous personal accountability to Christ and to each other such that they may be aided in living a godly life in

accord with biblical principles. At times this peaceful fellowship is disturbed by one or more believers who have fallen into sinful practices. When a wayward brother or sister is found to have fallen into sin, every effort must be made to restore him or her whole again to the fold through loving rebuke along with the assurance that Christ has forgiven all our sins, past and present, if we but confess our sins and turn away from them (cf. 1Jn. 1:9). Only if the member stubbornly refuses to repent should he or she be cast out into the world in order to maintain the purity of the church. Upon demonstrated repentance many of these prior members may later be reinstated. Unfortunately, not all professing members of churches are members of the Visible Church; worldliness and sin is so deeply rooted in their lives that repentance is impossible; thus, they must remain permanently banned from all future church gatherings of the faithful (cf. Newsletter December 2015).

The church must fully comprehend the radical nature of the new birth, without which no man can see the Kingdom of Heaven (cf. Jn.3:3). Through the new birth, a new man is created in Christ as the old man in Adam dies (cf. 1Co.15:22). The church must humbly acknowledge God's sovereign role in this spiritual transformation; spiritual rebirth is an act of God, not of man. Man's sole role in attaining the atonement is a subordinate response to the Gospel to which their minds have been divinely opened by the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, the church must fully reject evangelicalism's "easy believism" – the presumptive notion that one can accept Christ as savior to attain the future joys of Heaven, yet reject Christ's lordship over their lives by continuing to live in moral depravity with the rest of the fallen world. Christ died to save us from the ravages of sin, not to indulge in sin without consequence. Although a born-again believer can occasionally stumble into sin, he greatly desires in his new nature to obey Christ and to walk in a way that is pleasing to Him.

In connection with spiritual conversion, the church must hold to a biblical understanding of ritual baptism. Baptism cannot bring forth a new birth or wash away sins; it only provides a means of personal witness and testimony for a believer who has already been born anew in Christ. Therefore, the church must reject the unbiblical doctrine of baptismal regeneration (cf. *CRC*, Book II, page 423). The only method of ritual baptism described in Scripture is immersion, which was undertaken by professing Christians as a personal witness of their faith. Inasmuch as infants do not have the mental capacity to make any profession of faith, pedal baptism must be rejected. The baptism of infants has also led to the unbiblical methods of sprinkling and pouring inasmuch as immersing babies is not considered safe or reasonable (cf. Newsletter August 2012).

Even as the local church must be firmly established in the Truth, it must carry that Truth to the lost peoples of the entire world in keeping with the great commission (Mt.28:19,20). Every believer must realize that they are a personal evangelist of the Gospel to all of those in their locality as occasion provides the opportunity to bear witness of it both in word and deed. To that end, they must learn to engage a lost world without compromising their own integrity in doing so (cf. Jude 23). Because it is impossible for one believer to personally reach everyone in the world, it is important that the church provide for a true Gospel outreach beyond its immediate jurisdiction by sending forth emissaries of the Gospel into remote regions of the world. The Gospel is universal and is intended for all on earth to hear without exception. Although it will be rejected by the masses as foolishness, it brings forth eternal salvation to those who receive it through the power of God (cf. 1Co. 1:23,24). Again, the church must refuse evangelicalism as the central doctrine of the Christian faith – fully rejecting the notion that salvation comes about as a consequence of man's persuasive efforts through pragmatic evangelistic means and fully rejecting the delusive unbiblical notion of universal salvation.

Finally, the church must hold to a biblical eschatology, by acknowledging the book of Revelation as a prophetic book containing prophecies yet to be fulfilled when the world enters into the end times (cf. *CRC* Book III, *Doctrines of the Last Days*, Section 20). In brief, the church must anticipate a call from Christ to transport the Visible Church off the earth to be with Him (cf. 1Th. 4:16,17); this is commonly referred to as the rapture of the Church. The rapture will be followed by a series of catastrophic judgments hurled down by God from Heaven upon the unsaved masses remaining behind on the earth. Following this time of divine wrath, Jesus will physically return to the earth to judge the nations for their sin and rejection of Him. Satan will be incarcerated, and Jesus will renovate the earth as He establishes and reigns over a thousand-year long Kingdom on earth. At the end of that thousand years Satan will be released, and because of his rebellion he will be fully judged by being thrown into the lake of fire. Then will come the universal resurrection and judgment of the reprobate masses. This event will be followed by the creation of a new heavens and a new earth and a consummation of all things within an eternal heavenly state. © Arthur J. Smith March 2016