

Is The Church Dying Or Am I?

By Kent Heaton

It is hard to believe the church of the Lord has been in existence for more than two thousand years. Pentecost was where the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:47) and where the gospel first sounded forth across the world. Twelve disciples stood before an immense crowd of devout men declaring a new message of salvation. Three thousand would respond in obedience to God's message of grace and the early church began. As the years unfolded the infant church faced many problems. Misunderstanding, neglect, jealousy, persecution and the growing pains of establishing the pattern laid out by the Holy Spirit.

Paul would warn of a coming apostasy that would change the world's view of the body of Christ. "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth" (1Tim. 4:1-3). In fulfillment of the Spirit's words the apostasy came full force through the instruments of men corrupting the purity of the gospel. The Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches divided the east and west up in the apostate doctrines that thrive to this day. What is lost (sometimes) in this study of how the church went into apostasy is the one true church never went out of existence. It is clear the dominance of the true church was minimized from the view of history but the church has never ceased to be in the world.

The church can never die. "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:28-29). Since Pentecost, the world has never been without the church built by Jesus and bought with His blood. God is a consuming fire and will never allow His church to perish on the earth no matter what Satan brings against it. The influence of the true church has changed over the centuries but not its existence. Through the power of God the church of the New Testament will never cease to exist until the coming of the Lord – but then it will be as one before the Heavenly Father.

Skepticism can creep into the hearts of saints today who look upon the church with disparity and gloom. Studies may suggest the church is dying but is it really the church that is dying or is it the individual? The view of what the church means often clouds the real meaning of church. The church of Jesus Christ is the people. Collectively we gather as congregations to worship the Lord. When Paul wrote to the church at Philippi he addressed the letter to the "saints in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:1). If the church is dying then we are dying. It is easy to beg off why the church is not growing because the church is dying; but the truth of why the church is not growing is because we are not growing. We have to take accountability for the spread of the gospel or lack thereof. The church of modern day America has become a satisfied, complacent un-growing institution serving the conscience whims of Sunday only Christians. In the face of great persecution the "churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied" (Acts 9:31).

The reason the gospel spread to "every creature under heaven" (Col. 1:23) in the first forty years of the church was because of those devoted saints who lived everyday sharing the message of a risen Savior to a lost and dying world. Church to the modern day saint has become a building, an edifice. Jesus did not die for stone and mortar. He shed His blood for the hearts of men. Seeking the lost is not leaving the front door of the church building open hoping some passing sinner will wander in. Letting our light shine forth in a dark world is something more than keeping the front light on of the church building. Lost souls are longing for something better in life and the saints of God have the cure. The body of the elect in a community should be the force of change in the lives of these lost souls who need Jesus Christ. Two feet under a kitchen table in the home of unbeliever is where the gospel finds its power. All the devices of men and technology will never replace the need of one heart speaking to another heart.

Let us change the course of history. Instead of despairing on whether the church may be dying let us be united to proclaim the church is growing in my community because we are growing. Saints of Christ arise and share the good news of Jesus Christ with others. Bring someone to Christ this year. Be a force to make the church grow in your area. Make your life to be an instrument of change in teaching the good news of salvation. The world can be turned upside down again like it was in the New Testament (Acts 17:6). The church will never die as long as the world stands and we need to stand to make sure we do

not die. "Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest" (John 4:35)!

"No Labels!"

I am underwhelmed by the contemporary hue and cry against "labeling." Putting labels on things is how people find the exit door during a fire, or put vanilla in a cake instead of arsenic. Labels facilitate communication and clarify speech. Unless, of course, the label is intended to cause harm or is pejorative. Then, it has the opposite effect of inhibiting communication. It must be understood that offense is not unidirectional; that is, sometimes the speaker intends offense, and sometimes the hearer is looking to be offended. (prb)

A Love Cake for Mother

1 Can of obedience

3 Pounds of affection

1 Pint of neatness

Assorted holiday, birthday, and everyday surprises

1 Box of running errands

1 Bag of get up when I should

1 Bottle of keep sunny all day long

1 Container of pure thanksgiving

Mix well, bake in a hearty warm oven, and serve to Mother every day in large slices.

A Moments Wisdom

--A house without a roof would scarcely be different than that of a family unsheltered by fellowship with God.

--Always listen to others express their opinions; it probably won't do you any good, but it will make them feel better.

--Yesterday is experience; tomorrow is hope. Today is getting from one to the other as best we can.

--Beware of too much explaining, lest you end up by too much excusing.

--People who don't mind their own business, either have no business or no mind.

--There may be times when you cannot find help, but there is no time when you cannot give help.

--If you want a rainbow, you first need to be patient while it rains.

--God loves each one of us as if there was only one of us to love.

--There is no better way to thank God for your sight than to give a helping hand to someone in the dark.

--No matter what your lot in life may be, build something on it.

--A truly wise father will find switching opportunities when he discovers his children on the wrong track.

--When angry, count to ten; when very angry, count to one hundred.

--Nothing is easier than fault-finding; it takes no talent, no intelligence, no self-respect, and no character to set up in the grumbling business.

--Don't knock the weather; without it, nine out of ten people would be unable to start a conversation.

--No man can think clearly when his teeth are clenched.

--Do not allow idleness to deceive you; when you give him today, he also steals tomorrow from you.

--If a care is too small to be made into a prayer, it is too small to be made into a burden.

--You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people, than you can make in two years by trying to get other people interested in you.

--The few who do are often the envy of the many who do not.

--Hate is always tragic. It is as injurious to the hater as it is to the hated. It distorts the personality and scars the mind.

--Many people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.

--Humility is a virtue; timidity is a disease.

--If a gentle answer turns away wrath, then not using gentle words may turn wrath in your direction.

--Children cannot be made good by making them happy, but they can be made happy by making them good.