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Truth and Right

Vol. 07 No. 14

April 1, 2012

Christians Without Churches?

Over the past few years a trend has increased among people, especially Americans: the idea that people can be good Christians without being part of a church. Many people will recognize that Jesus is the Messiah and Lord, but yet want nothing to do with any church. This attitude fits with the independent streak that marks most Americans. Many also feel that churches are just trying to get money out of people, and they do not see the value or relevance in being part of a church.

It is too often true that churches are not living up to the call of Jesus Christ. Some churches do not teach the Bible at all, and other churches favor their traditions over what the

Bible teaches. Too many other churches teach the truths of the Bible and yet do not show the love and community that God desires. Do these difficulties, however, mean that we can or should be Christians without being part of a church?

We must first understand that there can be no such thing as a "churchless Christian." In Ephesians 4:4-5, we read that there is "one body", as assuredly as there is "one faith" and "one Lord." In Ephesians 5:29-30 (and Colossians 1:18), Paul identifies that "one body" as the church; this is the body for which He gave His life (Ephesians 5:25-27). Anyone who is not a part of this "universal church" is separated from Christ, and will not be saved! A

Christian, then, that is entirely "churchless" is no Christian, and has no part in the resurrection of life!

Is it possible for a Christian to be part of the "universal" church without being identified with a local church? The Scriptures give us no reason to believe that such is possible except temporarily, such as being converted while traveling.

God desires for His people to act in certain ways, and many of these actions require a person to be part of a local church of fellow believers. God desires that His people die to self and live for others (Galatians 2:20, Philippians 2:1-4). Christians are to think more highly of others and the needs of others than of themselves and their own needs. God intended for Christians to be first concerned with the needs of their fellow Christians (Galatians 6:10, Matthew 25:31-46). How can this be done if one

is not part of a local church?

God also desires that His people work together, both to strengthen each other and to further His purposes (Hebrews 10:24-25, Galatians 6:2, Acts 2:42-47). Encouragement and accountability are important aspects of the Christian faith. Christians are commanded to consider how to provoke other Christians to love and do good works and to bear each other's burdens. They are to be open and honest with one another so that they can be the best servants of God they can be. This can only happen when Christians come together and get to know each other, and the local church has been designed for this purpose.

The witness of the Scriptures is clear: God expects Christians to work together in a local church. Love for one another, encouragement to continue in the faith, and accountability are

all learned in the environment of the local church. We cannot grow to be the type of Christians that please God if we attempt to do so on our own!

Yes, it is unfortunately true that too often local churches are not representing God's intentions very well. Too many churches encourage too much passive behavior and do not challenge their members to represent the community that God expects the local church to be. Just because many churches fail to live up to God's desires, however, does not mean that we are "off the hook" of the local church. God established local churches in His wisdom for our benefit. If God desired to have "maverick Christians," He could easily have done so. He recognizes, however, that we are too weak to defeat Satan by ourselves. Christians need opportunities to assemble with one another, to show love to

one another, building one another up, and encouraging and exhorting each other to continue to serve God according to His will.

If you believe in God and Jesus Christ, do not deprive yourself of the love and encouragement you need and that others need from you: join us!

Ethan R. Longhenry

Our gospel meeting starts today! Support the effort by being here each and every night, and invite as many people as you can, so the seed may be planted and watered! To God be the glory!

Occam's Razor and Creation (Gen. 1-2)

Have you ever heard or read something that became a life-guiding principle? When I was little, my mother said about a preacher who became an agnostic – “He studied himself out of the Bible.” Simple faith got replaced by educated “*explain-aways*.” Maybe that is one reason I accept Occam's Razor in interpreting the Bible – “*the simplest explanation will be the most plausible until evidence is presented to prove it false.*” When the explanation is “God,” man keeps trying to present new evidence. Usually the new evidence is not as simple as “God.”

In defending the Biblical account of creation, I am content to be called “uninformed,” refusing to put on the uniform of the elite masses. I believe, “In the beginning God.” I believe “then God formed Adam.” I believe what believers accepted for 1000's of years before sophisticated man felt the dangerous need to explain what God calls us to accept. Since the beginning

of time believers accepted that God created. Now we are called to believe God is not the Omnipotent Creator, but rather is the Great Evolver. I believe that science actually confirms this simple faith, but not because I believe science. It is because I believe in the first four words of the bible – “In the beginning God.” When it comes to the “hard sciences” most believe in God. And if you can believe the first four words, then you can believe all the words that follow.

That is why the resurrection is believable. It recreates creation. And for the last couple of 1000 years, Satan does not want us to believe in that. There are “*explain-aways*” for a literal resurrection too. That is why I believe in salvation from sin by faith. It too is a recreation of the beginning (Romans 4). So I am content to keep studying the Bible, and to not study myself out of it. If in eternity I am proved to be wrong, at least it is because I had more faith in God, than in my ability to explain away God.

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