

## INTRODUCTION: THE IMPORTANCE OF SUCH A STUDY

There are a number of reasons why I believe it is important to study the doctrine of the Church, and why we need to spend some time and give serious thought to it. Not the least of these is that in many areas the Christian Church seems to be acquiescing with the mediocrity of modern society. In a world where mindless activity and entertainment are promoted and where every vein of thought is accommodated the church finds it hard to maintain the level of excellence, definition and precision that the Scriptures demand. The Christian's appreciation of the Church and an all-out activity in and for it seems to be missing. Change is the preferred method because the demands of the public are continually pressing and the Church is being squeezed into the mold of the world; a world calling for an undefined, nondescript and inoffensive institution that accommodates all and everyone. Many "searching for a church" do so, not for what the Church by definition is, but for what it can do for them as a family in their schedule and according to the needs of their all too often shallow life style. In many cases a social club with "something for all the kids and the teens" would accomplish the same end.

What is the answer to the difficult situation in which the Church finds itself; in a hostile world many within her ranks capitulating with the enemy? It is not to become so disinterested in the world and so inward looking and purist in our theological definition that we become somewhat eccentric and cultic. We must avoid this extreme. Nor is the answer to become worldly by accommodating every whim and fancy that arises. Both these extremes are guilty of the same sin; seeking to save the work of God by human effort (I Chronicles 13:9-10). The answer is in a balanced biblical perspective that can only be found by a return to Scripture (John 5:39; Acts 17:11). The only way forward is to understand what the will of the Lord is concerning his church and how the Scriptures speak of the Church. There is a continual need for definition to offset the process of change and degeneration that is inherent in any human institution.

So just how important is the Church and what is the need for studying it. Why do we put so much stress on apparent insignificant issues which are deemed in some circles to be personal preferences? Why do we call for proper definition respect and precision in the work of the Church? There are four main areas I believe that will give perspective to this study, focus and galvanize our minds on the glory of God in the work of the Church.

### **THE CHURCH'S RELATIONSHIP TO CHRIST**

There is a unique relationship between the Church and Christ. So close a relationship that it is described as that of the Head and body, the bridegroom and the bride etc, etc (see further study "The Descriptions of the Church"). This relationship was purchased at a very high price; it was the life-blood of Christ (Ephesians 5:25; Acts 20:28). This is no cheap or insignificant institution that the God of heaven in the person of Jesus Christ would give his life for and which is his continued and primary purpose and pursuit (Matthew 16:18; Luke 19:10). The Church of Jesus Christ is the apple of God's eye (Zechariah 2:8).

### **THE CHURCH'S OBLIGATION TO THE CHURCH**

The Church is obligated to its own wellbeing as a corporate body and also to individuals in the Church. It was the sacrifice of Christ that Paul had in mind when he thought with grief about his pre-conversion persecution of the Church. So important did he see the Church to Christ that to persecute it constituted the greatest of sins. (Galatians 1:13, I Corinthians 15:9 *cf.* Romans 14:15). It was for Christ's sake after his conversion that he suffered for the Church (Colossians 1:24), for the church laboured incessantly (I Timothy 4:10), and prayed for the Church (I Thessalonians 1:2) etc.

### **THE CHURCH'S MISSION TO THE WORLD**

In I Timothy 3:15 Paul refer to the Church as the "*pillar and ground of the truth.*" The first obligation of the Church to the world is to guard the truth, and then disseminate the truth. Before Matthew 28:19-20 can be carried out in missions I Timothy 3:15 must be upheld.

### **THE CHURCH'S MINISTRY TO ANGELS**

Ephesians 3:10 (*cf.* I Corinthians 11:10) is a pivotal verse which relates the Church to the angelic host. In this verse Paul identifies the Church as a means of teaching the angels the "diversity of wisdom" in the work of God through the Church. By the instrumentality of the Church, her redemption, her grace, her obedience to Christ, and her love for Christ's redeemed ones God instructs those intelligent being around the throne, that they may worship Him and minister to the Church (Ephesians 1:19-23).