

## **ECCLESIOLOGY: THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH**

### **Introduction:**

Many people face a great deal of confusion about the church. Some have not had parental examples of church involvement. Others have recently been saved and are wondering how they should participate in the ministries of the church, or why the church is even necessary. Others have visited several churches and may still be looking for their "home church." Even those who have grown up in a particular local church have heard comments about church differences and divisions. We will be discussing why the church exists and what part each member is to contribute to please the Lord Jesus Christ in His Body--His *ecclesia*.

I Timothy 3:14,15 gives us some information concerning the church:

- it is the house of God
- it belongs to the living God
- it is the pillar and support of truth

### **A. Background**

1. Martin Luther in the 16th century reinstated the doctrine of salvation through faith alone.
2. J.N. Darby in the 19th century reinstated the doctrine of the church.
3. "Protestant theology has concerned itself largely with salvation truth to the neglect of the doctrine of the church." Chafer
4. The doctrine of the church was not even a subject of the O.T. prophecy. It was a mystery mentioned only twice in the Gospels (Matt 16:18; 18:17).

### **B. The word 'church' in the Scriptures**

1. Basic meaning = *ecclesia* from verb EK-KALEO "to call out." So it's a called out group--selected from a larger group by a call.
2. Biblical usage:
  - a. Secular group-- Acts 19:32,39 (political assembly)
  - b. Jewish group -- Acts 7:38 (assembly in wilderness at Mt. Sinai)
  - c. Church universal (Body of Christ) -- Matt 16:18; Eph 1:22-23; 5:25
  - d. Local church -- Acts 14:23; I Cor 1:2
  - e. Group of churches -- Acts 9:31

## **I. THE CHURCH AS AN ORGANISM (the UNIVERSAL CHURCH)**

### **A. Definition of the Church**

1. General definition (Central Passages: Eph 3:5-6 & I Cor 12:13)  
Two different views:

- a. Covenant theology: The church of Christ in its largest significance is the

whole company of regenerate persons of all time and ages in Heaven and on earth. This would include all the O.T. saints as well as the N.T. saints (believers).

b. Dispensational (Chafer, Scofield): The church is the whole company of the redeemed of all generations between Pentecost and the rapture.

Support:

- 1) Eph 3:5,6 -- This one body composed of Jew and Gentile is something not formerly revealed, but is now revealed. Verses 9,10 demonstrate that he is speaking of the church.
- 2) I Cor 10:32 -- There are distinctions between Jews, Gentiles, and the church -- these are three separate groups.
- 3) Matt 16:18 -- Christ's prediction of a future church "I will build."
- 4) Eph 5:25-27 -- The true church could not have existed prior to Christ's death since she must be redeemed by His blood.
- 5) I Cor 12:13-14 -- The true church could not exist until the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost because she can be formed only by the present ministry of the Spirit in baptizing all members into one Body and causing them to drink into one Spirit.

## 2. Specific definition

a. Its beginning -- at Pentecost (Acts 2; Matt 16:18; Jn 16:13; 14:16,17; Jn 15:26,27; Acts 1:8)

b. Its nature

1) A *parenthesis* between God's two dealings with the nation Israel -- Acts 15; Rom 11. Rom 11:13-17,25-29 -- reveal that the Jews were broken off and the Gentiles were grafted in. Later, however the Jews will be grafted at the Second Coming of Christ.

2) A *mystery* -- Eph 3:5-6; Col 1:26; Rom 16:25,26. The definition -- a fresh revelation or something now revealed that was not previously revealed and so previously unknown. The application to the church would be that the specific nature of the church is new. Jew and Gentile are now fellow members of the same body and the Gentiles are fellow heirs with the Jews and share in the promises of the Messiah. Therefore, this means the church - its nature or its program -- was not revealed in the O.T. (I Cor 15:51; Rom 11:25; Matt 13:11, 30,40-43).

3) A *distinct body* -- separate from Israel

Eph 2:14-15 = a new man or body

I Cor 12:13 = a new body composed of Jew and Gentile

I Cor 10:32 = three classes of men or groups Recognized: (Jew and Gentile). The church is not the replacement of Israel nor does it absorb the promises to Israel. The church has a separate program as distinct from Israel.

c) Its completion -- at the Rapture

1) Event described -- I Thess 4:13-18 & I Cor 15:51

This is not in the O.T. program for Israel. It is distinctly related to the mystery of the church.

2) Time defined -- Rom 11:25 -- At the end of God's dealing with the Gentiles. I Thess 4:16; I Cor 15:52 -- At Christ's return (at the last trump) for the church.

## B. Distinction of the Church from Israel

Many similarities do not prove identity; one dissimilarity disproves identity.

<i>Point of Difference</i>	<i>Israel</i>	<i>Church</i>
<b>Ministry</b>	Guardian of Truth	Disseminator of Truth
<b>Plan</b>	Worldwide kingdom	Worldwide witness
<b>Rule of life</b>	Mosaic law	Law of Christ
<b>Relation to Spirit</b>	Sovereign, selective indwelling	Universal, permanent indwelling
<b>Relation to Son</b>	King	Head
<b>Relation to the Kingdom</b>	Ruling servant nation	Ruling consort bride
<b>Expectation</b>	Second coming	Rapture

## C. The Divine Description of the Church

These descriptions say much about our subjective relationship with Christ. Christianity is a relationship with a person, Jesus Christ. It is not just a religion full of facts and principles.

### 1. The Shepherd and the Sheep (Central Passage John 10)

a. Shepherd = Christ  
 Comes by the door = true shepherd (v.1,2)  
 Is Himself the door = one entrance (change of figure)  
 Calls His sheep (v.3), leads them (v.3)  
 Dies for them (v.11,15)  
 Gives them eternal life & keeps them (v.28,29)

b. Sheep = believers  
 Know Christ (v.4,14)  
 Follow Christ (v.4,27)

Note trilogy:

Good Shepherd -- Jn 10:11, death Ps 22

Great Shepherd - Heb 13:20, resurrection and present ministry Ps 23

Chief Shepherd - I Pet 5:4, second coming Ps 24

## 2. The Vine and the Branches (Central Passage John 15)

### a. Setting

Upper room discourse

Directed to believers in view of His coming absence

Subject here (Jn 15) is disciples' fruit-bearing

These are some of His last important words before His death

Note Jn 14:20 - a new relationship between Christ and believers

"In Me" = *union* - vital union that results in life & salvation

"Abide in Me" = *communion* - vital fellowship that results in fruit & service

### b. Substance

1) Cause of fruitbearing -- the Father (15:1-3)

2) Condition of fruit bearing -- abide (15:4-6)

3) Consequence of abiding

prayer effectual (v.7)

joy celestial (v.11)

fruit perpetual (v.5,16)

### c. Significance

1) The same life is in the branches as is in the vine. The branches bear fruit because of their vital connection to the life-giving vine.

2) Fruit = any manifestation of the life of Christ in and through the Believer.

(a) Character -- Gal 5:22, 23

(b) Righteous living -- Lk 3:8-14; Eph 5:2,9; Heb 12:11

(c) Ministry among people -- Rom 1:13

(d) Good works -- Col 1:10; Eph 2:10

keep His words -- Jn 15:3, 7

keep His commands -- Jn 15:10

3) The major purpose (v.8) -- the glory of God

## 3. The Building (temple) (Central Passage -- Ephesians 2:19-22)

Israel had a temple (Exodus 25:8)

The church *is* a temple (Eph 2:21)

a. The figure of Christ as a stone is used in two ways in the Bible:

1) as the stumbling stone to Israel (Isa 8:14-15; I Cor 1:23; I Pet 2:8)

2) as the foundation stone and chief cornerstone to the church (I Pet 2:6; Eph 2:20)

b. The church is compared to a temple or building. It has certain characteristics:

1) The chief cornerstone, like its foundation, is Christ (Eph 2:20-22; I Pet

2:6)  
 cf Apostles are the foundation  
 -preaching of Christ by Apostles (I Cor 3:10)  
 -writing of N.T. Scripture

2) Each believer is a living stone (I Pet 2:5) and is a partaker of the divine nature (II Pet 1:4)

3) The whole temple is built for a habitation of God through His Spirit (Eph 2:22)

I will build my quality (Eph 4:11-12)  
 quantity (Acts 2:41)

#### 4. The High Priest and Royal Priesthood (Central Passage I Pet 2:5-9)

Christ pictured in O.T. sacrificial system as High Priest.  
 Christ's sacrifice pictured in O.T. sacrifices.

a. High Priest = Christ (Hebrews 7)  
 -order of Melchizedek -- not according to O.T. order of Levi  
 -He is superior to O.T. priests & is eternally a Priest. So He offers perfect salvation to those who believe  
 -He entered into this Priesthood after sacrifice & upon His resurrection (Heb 7:13,14; 8:4; 4:14; Ps 110:4)

b. Royal Priesthood (I Pet 2:5-9; Rev 1:6) (c.f. Ex 19:5-6)  
 This describes the individual priesthood of believers and was the reformation cry.

1) consists of worship  
 (Heb 13:15) in the presence of God -- this was not so in the O.T.

2) consists of service of sacrifice  
 (Rom 12:1,2) self  
 (Phip 4:18) substance  
 (Heb 13:16) doing good service  
 (Phip 2:17) souls

3) consists of intercession  
 in OT (Heb 5:1-3; Ex 28:15, 21, 29)  
 in NT (Heb 10:19-22; I Tim 2:1; Col 4:12; Eph 6:18-19)

#### 5. The Head and Body (Central Passage I Cor 12)

This emphasizes that the church is an organism of living members of interdependence.

a. Head = Christ (Eph 1:22-23 5:23; Col 1:18)  
 b. Body = Believers (Col 1:18)

1) A self-developing body (Eph 4:11-16)  
 2) Body members are appointed to specific service & given abilities  
 4 passages deal with gifts:  
 (Rom 12; I Cor 12; I Pet 4; Eph 4)

3) The body is one (I Cor 12:12,13)  
 one new man (Eph 2:15-16)  
 unity (Eph 4:4-6)

6. The Last Adam and the New Creation  
 (Central Passage Rom 5:12-21; I Cor 15:45-49)

a. Last Adam is Christ  
 Head of a new race of people  
 Adam -- death -- condemnation  
 Christ -- life -- justification  
 Resurrected Christ is first fruits of new humanity  
 Heb 2:14 -- tasted death as God-man  
 Eph 1:20-23 -- raised again as God-man  
 Phil 2:7-11 -- exalted as God-man

b. New creation  
 II Cor 5:17 -- New perfect standing  
 Eph 2:10 -- New works  
 I Cor 15:20, 49 -- New life  
 Phil 3:20,21 -- New body  
 I Jn 3:2 -- New state

7. The Bridegroom and the Bride (Central Passage Eph 5:22-23)

a. The Bridegroom = Christ  
 His three expressions of love for the church:  
 Past -- Eph 5:25  
 Present -- Eph 5:26, 29  
 Future -- Eph 5:27 (c.f. Rev 19:7-8)

b. The bride = church  
 Her expression of love for the bridegroom:  
 Subjection -- Eph 5:24  
 Respect -- Eph 5:32-33

**D. The Duty of the Church**

"Strictly speaking, the church has no mission, for God never commissioned her as a corporate body to undertake any task whatsoever....all divine commissions are to the individual believers." Chafer

"Another error to be avoided in connection with this subject is the supposition that the divine purpose in this age is the conversion of the world." (This will happen after Christ's return.) Chafer

"The believer is never appointed of God to a world improvement program, but the believer is called to be a witness to all the world to Christ and His saving grace." Chafer

NOTE THREE MAIN DUTIES OF THE CHURCH:

1. To glorify God (Eph 1:6, 12, 14; 3:10; I Cor 10:31)

a. In worship -- individual and corporate praise & thanks  
 b. In witness -- individual and corporate exhibitions of the excellencies of

## Christ

### 2. To evangelize (Matt 28:19-20; Acts 1:8)

- a. Authority: risen Lord = has all authority in Heaven and earth. Christians have authority to evangelize.
- b. Essence: to make disciples  
The main verb is, "make disciples" and the infinitives are, "go," "baptize" and "teach."

### 3. To edify the saints (Matt 28:19-20; Eph 4:7-16)

- a. Provision: gifts to each one /all believers (Eph 4:7)
- b. Process: to equip the saints for the work of service for building the body (Eph 4:12)
- c. Purpose: to come to the unity of *the* faith (doctrine)  
knowledge of Christ --growth to maturity of the church  
stability in doctrine & life  
speaking the truth in love  
functioning in love

## E. Destiny

### 1. Rapture (Central Passage I Thessalonians 4:13-18)

- a. Definition: that event at which Christ returns to catch up His true church in the air so that they may always be with Him.
- b. Description:
  - 1) Christ returns in the air -- I Thess 4:16 -- personally, bodily
  - 2) "The dead in Christ" are raised -- I Thess 4:16
  - 3) The living are transformed -- I Thess 4:17; I Cor 15:51; Philip. 3:20
  - 4) The 2 groups are caught up together to be with the Lord forever -- I Thess 4:17; John 14:1-3
  - 5) Accomplished "in a moment" -- I Cor 15:51
  - 6) Called a mystery -- not revealed as part of God's program for His people in the O.T. -- I Cor 15:51

### 2. Reward (Central Passage I Cor 3:10-15; II Cor 5:10)

#### Judgment Seat of Christ

Note: Judge: God the Son  
 Subjects: Christians  
 Matter: Built on Christ's foundation by Christians  
 Basis: Quality of work  
 Results: Remaining works will receive a reward.  
 Worthless work will perish.  
 Time: During Tribulation Period  
 (Note: I Cor 4:5; II Tim 4:8 Revelation 19:7-8)

### 3. Return and Reign (Central Passage Rev. 19,20)

- a. The church will return with Christ at His glorious second coming and will rule with Christ as His bride.

- b. The bride of Christ (the church) will have made herself ready to return with Christ (see Rev. 19:7-8,14).
- c. She will rule as a royal priesthood under Christ (see Rev. 1:5-6 Note her place in the new Heavens and the new earth as in Rev. 21:1-2, 9-10).

## II. THE CHURCH AS AN ORGANIZATION (the LOCAL CHURCH)

### A. Definition:

A local church is an assembly of professing believers in Christ who have been baptized and who are organized to do God's will (see Ryrie p.141,142).

### B. Organization:

The present forms come from various interpretations of the officers and their functions in the N.T. plus traditions.

#### 1. Hierarchical or Episcopal

- a. The Bishops govern the church. Not found in the N.T. but arose in the 2nd century.
- b. Catholic, Methodist, Episcopal, Lutheran

#### 2. Federal or representative

- a. Church is governed by the elders who are given their authority by the congregation.
- b. Presbyterian and some independent
- c. In the N.T. the elders ruled the churches (Heb 13:7, 17), led in discipline (I Cor 5; I Tim 5:17,20), and were appointed by the Apostles (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; I Pet 5:1-4).

#### 3. Congregational

- a. Followers of this polity believe that no man or group of men should exercise authority over a local assembly; therefore, the government should be in the hands of the members themselves. They rule by assembly.
- b. Baptists, Evangelical Free, Disciples, some Bible and independent churches.
- c. Arguments in favor. With the exception of Acts 6:3-5, none of these are in the context of church government.
  - 1) Passages that speak of the responsibilities of the entire church (I Cor 1:10; Phip 1:27)
  - 2) The committing of ordinance to the entire church, not just its leaders (Matt 28: 19,20; I Cor 11:2,20).
  - 3) The involvement of the whole church in choosing leaders (Acts 6:3-5). This selection was initiated and approved by the Apostles.
  - 4) The whole church was involved in exercising discipline (Matt 18:17; I Cor 5; II Thess 3:14,15).

#### 4. The national church (e.g. the church of England)

#### 5. No government (ruled directly by Christ)

### C. Officers



## 1. Elders (Central Passage I Tim 3 & Titus 1)

### a. Titles -- I Timothy 3

- 1) Overseer (bishop) = office and duty (*Episcopos*)  
overseer (Acts 20:28)
- 2) Elder = office and dignity (*Presbuteros*)  
(Acts 20:17; Titus 1:5)
- 3) Shepherd (pastor) = duty and concern (*Poimaino*)  
(Acts 20:28; Eph 4:11)

### b. Qualifications (Summary term: blameless)

- 1) Personal (I Tim 3:2,3; Titus 1:7,8)
- 2) Family (I Tim 3:4,5; Titus 1:6)
- 3) Social (I Tim 3:6,7)
- 4) Doctrinal (Titus 1:9)

c. Number -- difficult to determine whether singular or plural. There was more than one elder in each city but maybe not more than one in each church. In I Timothy 3:1-7 "Bishop" is singular while deacons is plural in I Timothy 3:8-13. Acts 20:17 implies that there was more than one elder at each church (also James 5:17).

### d. Duties

- 1) Shepherd (I Pet 5:2; Acts 20:28; Eph 4:11)
- 2) Teach (I Tim 5:17; I Pet 5:2)
- 3) Preside, guide (I Tim 3:5; I Tim 5:17 "rule"; Heb13:17)
- 4) Protect (Titus 1:9-11; Acts 20:28-31)
- 5) Be examples (I Pet 5:3)
- 6) Pray for sick, etc. (James 5:14)
- 7) Handling of finances (Acts 11:30)

## 2. Deacons (Central Passage I Tim 3:8-13)

Helpers of elders; deacon = servant

### a. Title -- Acts 6:1-7; I Tim 3:8

### b. Qualifications -- I Tim 3:8-13

Similar to elders with addition of not being a gossip

### c. Duties

- 1) to help
- 2) to serve -- Acts 6
- 3) no reference to teaching as a duty
- 4) no reference to ruling in church -- they are helpers to rulers and teachers

## 3. Deaconesses

### a. Two possible passages for support

Rom 16:2 -- *Phoebe* -- but probably means a servant in an unofficial sense.

I Tim 3:11 -- the word here is simply that for "women" and probably referred to a deacon's wife

b. So it is highly doubtful that such an office existed in the N.T.

## D. Ordinances

Some people call ordinances "the sacraments", but a sacrament usually has the idea of

conveying grace automatically to the one partaking of the sacrament. Roman Catholic Council of Trent said: "A sacrament is something presented to the senses, which has the power, by divine institution, not only of signifying, but also of efficiently conveying grace." An ordinance however, is "an outward rite prescribed by Christ to be performed by His church."

Both ordinances symbolize our union with Christ:

Baptism -- initial union and the Lord's Supper -- continuing union.

## 1. Lord's Supper

### a. Four leading views

#### 1) Transubstantiation (Roman Catholic)

The wine and bread are actually changed into the blood and body of Christ by the words of the Priest. It is unscriptural because it includes the idea that the body and blood of Christ are offered every time the mass is celebrated. Scripture states that His death was complete, effective & once for all (Heb 10:10-18)

#### 2) Consubstantiation (Martin Luther)

The elements remain bread and wine, but Christ is present in body in the elements. The Lutheran view of the ubiquity of Christ's body is the basis of this. The true body and blood of Christ is in, with and under the element although there is no change in them.

#### 3) Spiritual presence (John Calvin)

Holds that there is the spiritual presence of Christ with the elements when taken in faith. Christ is separate from the elements, but is spiritually present in a peculiar way to bless the one taking of them by faith.

#### 4) Memorial (Ulrich Zwingli)

This holds that the Lord's Supper is a commemoration. It is in memory of the Lord's death and is only a remembrance in spiritual exercise. The elements represent His body and blood.

### b. Purposes served (Mt 26:26-29; I Cor 11:23-31)

- 1) It is a remembrance of the life and death of our Lord
- 2) The supper is an announcement of these basic facts of the gospel (I Cor 11:26)
- 3) To quicken our anticipation of His 2nd coming (I Cor 11:26)
- 4) Remind us of our oneness with each other in the body of Christ and of the fellowship which we share as fellow members of that body (I Cor 10:17)

### c. Another approach:

- 1) It is a reminder of Christ's sacrificial death for us -- justification (Luke 22:19)
- 2) It speaks of the source of our present new life -- "new covenant" (Luke 22:20)  
The present benefit and blessings under the new covenant -- sanctification
- 3) It is the pledge of our future blessedness and glory -- glorification (I Cor 11:26)

## 2. Baptism

### a. Definition:

1) Greek words -- *baptizo, baptismus, baptisma, bapto*  
The primary meaning is "immerse"

2) Theological meaning (used of believers only)

a)cleansing -- as O.T. usage of water -- a ceremony

b)identification with Christ

c)identification with Christ's people (Acts 19:4,5)

3) "Most definitions are constructed in terms of the etymological idea of immerse or submerge, but a theological definition of baptism would best be understood in terms of identification or association with something like a group or message or experience." Ryrie

### b.Mode

1) Affusion or sprinkling

Meaning: many feel that this represents the pouring out of the Holy Spirit and His resultant ministries to believers.

It represents a work of grace.

2) Immersion

a) Meaning: generally symbol of identification with Christ in death, burial, resurrection.

b) Support

(1) Immerse is the primary meaning of the Greek work *baptizo*

(2) Every passage of Scripture demands it or at least allows it

(3) Use of prepositions in and into (motion) baptized in Jordan (Mark 1:5-8)

(4) Nature of circumstances

Mark 1:10 - coming up out of water

John 3:23 - much water

Acts 8:38 - both went into the water

(5) Jewish proselyte baptism -- self-immersion

(6) Best picture of union with Christ in death, burial, resurrection (Rom 6:1-

5)

(7) Was the universal practice of the early church

(8) The Greek language has words for pour and sprinkle but these are never used of baptism.

### c. Subjects of baptism

#### 1. Arguments for INFANT BAPTISM

a) The analogy between circumcision

(which was usually done on 8-day-old infants).

b) Baptisms of entire households would certainly have included infants (Acts 16:33).

#### 2. Arguments against infant baptism and for BELIEVERS' BAPTISM

- a) If baptism is an initiatory rite it must only be performed on those who have exercised faith in Christ and thus have been made members of God's family.
- b) Household baptism in the N.T. does not specify the presence of infants (Acts 16:31-33).
- c) If baptism is the sign of association with Christ and Christianity, then the sign should only be used by those who have so associated. And since the only way to associate is through the personal act of faith in Him, then baptism can only be properly experienced by those who have believed.
- d) Acts 19:1-7 These men who had been baptized by John before salvation were rebaptized upon accepting Christ.

## THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

One of the most serious enemies facing the evangelical church today is the modern day ecumenical movement. The ecumenical movement -- the organized attempt to unify ALL churches regardless of doctrinal differences -- *is nothing new*. Churches and denominations with a low view of Scripture and a high tolerance for theological variances have long sought to unite the visible church. To these organizations truth is not as important as getting along and presenting a united front to the world -- even if this front is only a facade. Therefore, the drive toward ecumenicism has long been on the agenda of the liberal churches, and is the goal behind the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the National Council of Churches (NCC). It is taken for granted by fundamental believers that those churches that join the WCC or the NCC have apostatized from the faith. As a result, in obedience to Scripture the true follower of Christ separates himself from such churches, parachurches, and denominations (II Cor 6:14-18).

But there are new and dangerous winds blowing on the church today. It is no longer just the liberal, apostate church that is calling for unity at the expense of doctrine, now many so-called evangelicals are doing the same. This is not altogether unexpected since, in recent years, many evangelicals have developed the "live and let live" attitude toward those who teach heresy. But only recently have strong and trusted evangelicals called for the Christian community to ignore important doctrinal truths and unite with virtually anyone who claims to be a believer. To follow the leaders of this movement will ultimately cause many more church related organizations to apostasize, it will cripple our witness for Christ, and will further dampen true believers' interest in the truths found in the Word of God.

## THE ECUMENICAL CALL TO THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH

The motivation behind ecumenicism among evangelicals originally was evangelism. Paul Crouch of Trinity Broadcast Network boldly states the case:

"I don't care about your doctrines as long as you name the name of Jesus, as long as you believe He died and was buried but came out of the tomb on Sunday morning and ascended to the Father... I don't care about anything else! Let's join hands... to get this gospel preached in all the world... The rest of this stuff is what Paul the Apostle calls dung -- human excrement! It's not worth anything! Get rid of it... and get on with winning the lost...."

Crouch says rather bluntly what all of those who are involved in ecumenical evangelism (e.g. Billy Graham, Luis Palau, Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ, Youth for Christ, etc.) have been saying for years. Doctrine (God's truth) is not important, only the spreading of the gospel is. Apparently, in the opinion of these leaders, the Epistles of the N.T. were wasted words. Scripture warns of false doctrine but the evangelical church acts as if this is no problem. See I Tim 1:3-4; 6:3-5; Titus 1:9; Col 2:8; Gal 1:6-8 and Acts 20:26-31. Yet they claim we don't need to understand anything more than John 3:16. It should also be noted that these individuals misrepresent the Great Commission (Matt 28:19,20). We are not called to evangelize, we are called to make disciples (followers) of Christ. This cannot be accomplished without doctrine -- the doctrine taught in the Epistles.

Charles Colson has perhaps become the most vocal evangelical calling for ecumenicism today. His recently published book, *The Body*, while mingled with many great truths, is basically a treatise on the greatness of the modern day Roman Catholic Church (RCC). Both by way of illustration and by actual statement, Colson argues that the RCC teaches the same truths as fundamental and evangelical churches. Therefore, we must break down the walls that separate us and unite as "Christians."

Nevermind that the RCC teaches 1) works salvation 2) that the RCC church traditions and the popes are given equal authority with Scripture 3) that the sacrifice of Christ was not sufficient for our salvation and is repeated at every mass 4) that Christ is not the only mediator between us and the Father -- rather we need Mary and the saints to go to bat for us, etc.

One of Colson's heroes is Mother Teresa, who has done much humanitarian good in India, but nevertheless teaches traditional Catholic doctrines. Colson says, "I can't tell you how many letters I've received over the years protesting my use of Mother Teresa as an example of holy living. Many even suggest that I visit her so I can give her the plan of salvation. To me this reaction is astounding. How could anyone deny this woman's faithful witness" (*The Body* p87)?

Colson seems to be totally confused. The issue is not whether someone is kind, or religious, or pious, but are they the child of God as a result of receiving the free gift of salvation by faith alone. Mother Teresa, as well as all *true* Roman Catholics, believe in works righteousness and thus cannot be saved.

Since the writing of *The Body*, Colson has led the evangelical community toward an ungodly unity with unbelievers through two major events. The first one was the acceptance on his part of the Templeton Prize. The purpose of the \$1 million prize is, "To encourage understanding of the benefits of each of the great religions." It was presented in 1993 as part of the Parliament of the World's Religions held in Chicago. The panel that chose Colson included leading Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims and Jews. Rather than expose the heresies represented at the Parliament, Colson chose to receive their praise and money. Could anyone imagine Elijah accepting a prize from the priests of Baal, or Jesus from the Pharisees?

Even more blatant, for the Christian community, is the signing by leading evangelicals and Catholics the statement entitled "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium." The idea was born during discussions between Colson and Catholic priest Richard John Neuhaus of NYC, and was signed by prominent evangelicals such as Pat Robertson of CBN; Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ; Os Guinness; Mark Noll of Wheaton College, J.I. Packer and author John

White. Several leading Catholics also signed the statement including William Ball, constitutional attorney. The Peoria Journal Star of April 2, 1994 stated:

"They toiled together in the vineyards of the movements against abortion and pornography, and now leading Catholics and evangelicals are asking their flocks for a remarkable leap of faith: to finally accept each other as Christians.... They urged Catholics and evangelicals to increase their efforts against abortion and pornography and to lobby for value-laden education, but to no longer hold each other at theological arm's length and to stop aggressive proselytism of each other's flocks. 'As evangelicals and Catholics, we dare not by needless and loveless conflict between ourselves give aid and comfort to the enemies of the cause of Christ,' said the signers.... The statement also declares evangelicals and Catholics affirm the central beliefs in the resurrection and divinity of Christ. 'All who accept Christ as Lord and Saviour are brothers and sisters in Christ,' the declaration says.... What has brought the two communities to this point, some of the signers said, are the experiences of worshiping together in the charismatic movement and working together in political causes such as the anti-abortion movement."

If this document is to be taken seriously we would have to admit that the Reformation was a mistake (something even *Christianity Today* is not ready to admit; May 16, 1994 p16). In addition, we would immediately remove our missionaries from Catholic countries, such as Spain and Brazil, because we are trying to evangelize those who are already saved. To continue such efforts among Catholics is no more than sheep stealing (according to the signers of the document).

## **THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD TO ECUMENICALISM**

What has brought the evangelical church to the place of such compromise? Why are we willing today to cave in on important doctrines that we would have died for a few decades ago? Although many things could be identified, let us suggest three steps that have led to where we are today:

1) Ecumenical Evangelism: For decades many believers have been willing to compromise essential doctrines for the sake of winning the lost to Christ. The motto has been, "Win the lost at any cost." Ultimately, of course, such concessions lead to a watering down of Biblical teachings in order to accommodate and avoid offending the various groups involved. The Fundamentalist Movement is distinguished from the Evangelical Movement in that the Fundamentalists have refused to unite with liberals and doctrinal deviates in order to evangelize.

2) Ecumenical Social Involvement: Political involvement and strong efforts to change society has not been a part of the evangelical or fundamental church until recently. One of the reasons that many conservative Christians broke from the mainline denominations in the 1930's was to move the church back to its primary task of preaching the gospel and discipling believers. And so, until recently the push to change the political landscape into conformity with Christian beliefs was unknown within the evangelical community. That has all changed. Today it would appear that Christians are more concerned with changing society than calling and preparing people for God's Kingdom. This is a marked change from just a few years ago. If our goal is to change society, then we must have numbers. Since there are not enough doctrinally-correct Christians to make much of a dent in the political world, it is then necessary to unite with others who share our values --whether or not they teach Biblical truth. Hence our dilemma. If we stand fast for doctrinal integrity we are unable to change society due to lack of numbers. If we compromise our beliefs by uniting with those who have similar values but poor

theology, we have political clout at the expense of a compromised message.

3) A premium placed on experience rather than truth: In David Wells' book, *No Place for Truth*, he studies the evangelical community and forcefully demonstrates that, as a whole, Christians are no longer interested in, or motivated by, truth. Following the lead of our society, we cry for "life -- not doctrine." We have forgotten that it is TRUTH that sets us free (Jh 8:32). Life cannot be found apart from doctrine, yet what believers look for in a church today are programs, entertainment, great music and productions -- not sound Biblical teaching. Wells says, "Within the church, strong winds are blowing from a range of religious consumers who look to the churches and ministers to meet their needs -- and who quickly look elsewhere if they feel those needs are not being met. Basically, these consumers are looking for the sort of thing the self movement is offering; they just want it in evangelical dress. A genuinely biblical and God-centered ministry is almost certain to collide head-on with the self-absorption and anthropocentric focus that are now normative in so many evangelical churches " (p256).

Since truth is no longer the dominate force behind the evangelical church something has had to take its place. That something is experience and pragmatism. People are interested in feeling good, and in "what works." If they have to compromise their beliefs in order to have a good experience, or in order to accomplish some desirable goal, then so be it. The end result -- a church that stands for nothing and falls for anything.

### **COMPROMISES NECESSARY FOR MODERN DAY ECUMENICALISM**

Many evangelicals who are pushing for ecumenical unity say that those who resist unity are making a big deal out of nothing. They assure us that while there may be a need for concession in minor areas of doctrine, compromise on the essentials is not necessary. As a matter of fact Colson says, "Everyone who believes in the orthodox truths about Jesus Christ -- in short, every Christian -- is a fundamentalist" (*The Body* p186). Colson based this statement on a book published in the early part of this century called, *The Fundamentals*. This book was a collection of writings by some of the finest pastors, theologians and Christian leaders of the day. It was written to define the nonnegotiables of the faith -- those things to which all true believers must adhere. The nonnegotiables that Colson mentions are: the infallibility of Scripture; the deity of Christ; the Virgin Birth and miracles of Christ; Christ's substitutionary death; and Christ's physical resurrection and eventual return. However, he fails to mention several other fundamentals that are just as essential to the faith but are denied by the RCC. As a matter of fact, chapter 49 of *The Fundamentals*, is entitled, "Is Romanism Christianity?" The chapter goes on to prove that the RCC is not true to the faith; in fact, that it preaches "another gospel" (Gal 1:6-9). This view is based on several false teachings of the RCC including those mentioned on page 16 of this study.

Can the truefollowers of Christ close their eyes to suchheresies?

Are doctrines such as salvation by faith alone, a negotiable? Are we to pretend that those who teach that we must work our way to heaven are truly born again? Are we to work side-by-side with those who teach another gospel, especially in light of the fact that Paul pronounced a curse on those who did in his day (Gal 1:8,9)?

It is interesting to note that at the very time evangelical Christians are being called upon to be more tolerant toward Catholics, the Catholics are becoming more vocal against Fundamentalists. An article found in the Peoria Journal Star during the month of March, 1994 reports the following:

"A new Vatican document on how to interpret the Bible condemns the fundamentalist approach as distorting, dangerous and possibly leading to toracism.... 'Without saying as much in so many words, fundamentalism actually invites people to a kind of intellectual suicide, said the document, written by the Pontifical Biblical Commission.... The commission's authors saved their harshest language for Christian fundamentalist denominations, which have been posing a growing challenge to the church, particularly in Latin America.... 'The fundamentalish approach is dangerous, for it is attractive to people who look to the Bible for ready answers to the problems of life."

## **A BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO THE CALL FOR ECUMENICALISM**

How should the child of God, seeking to honor the Lord through obedience to His Word, respond to the ecumenical movement? Rather than tolerance and compromise with those who teach false doctrines, the Word instructs us to take four actions:

**REFUTE:** Titus 1:9 says that the elders of the church must be able, not only to exhort in sound doctrine, but to refute those who do not teach sound doctrine. Far from ignoring doctrinal error, we are to oppose it. All faulty doctrine leads to faulty living. Faulty living, in turn, ultimately disgraces God. Therefore, it is important that we know and live Biblical truth.

**EXPOSE:** Eph 5:11 is speaking in the context of living out our theology. Vv9,10 says, "For the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth, trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord." So we are to know the truth of God's word, and live it, if we desire to please Him. Then in 5:11 Paul says, "And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them." We expose both false doctrine and false living by bringing it into the light of God's Word (v13). We are called to examine the teachings of those around us in the light of Scripture. That which is sound doctrine should be embraced. That which is not in agreement with the Bible is not only to be rejected, but to be exposed in order that others are not deceived by it.

**REMOVE:** The local church is given the authority and the mandate to remove from the fellowship those who will not turn from heresy (I Tim 1:20; II Tim 2:18; Titus 3:10). It is disobedience to this principle that has led the church astray doctrinally.

**SEPARATE:** The N.T. is abundantly clear that when apostates cannot be removed from the fellowship, that the believer must then remove himself from their presence (II Cor 6:14-18; Rom 16:17; Acts 19:8,9). To fellowship with (or support in any way), those who teach major doctrinal error is to participate in their evil deeds (II John 10,11). Rather than minimize the importance of the truths found in God's Word, believers are called to become grounded in sound doctrine in order that they might mature in the faith (II Tim 3:13-4:2; I Tim 4:1-6; Eph 4:11-16).