

IF THE CHURCH DOES NOT MATTER...

The prevalent attitude toward the church among religious people for years has been, "Oh, the church is not important. It makes no difference whether one is a member or not. The church does not really matter in the least." If what is meant by these statements concerns man-made churches then we could not concur more heartily. In reality Roman Catholicism and Protestantism have no connection at all with one's salvation. However, if some are saying that the Lord's church does not matter, then we rise up in strong protest. None can supply Scriptural support for the argument that the church does not matter. When people assert that the church does not matter, ask them for book, chapter, and verse warrant for such reckless assertions. Jehovah's Book never has taught the concept that the church of Jesus Christ is a worthless institution, one void of all value. Yet such is conclusively the ultimate end of the modern Ashdodic statement that the church does not matter. By the employment of logical reasoning based upon Scripture we propose to suggest the ultimate conclusions that such concepts as this would produce. If the church does not matter, then:

The Blood of Christ Does Not matter

Paul told the Ephesian eldership at Miletus that the Lord "purchased (acquired) the church" with his own blood (Acts 20:28). In his epistle to the Ephesian church Paul said that Jesus "loved the church, and gave himself for it..." (Ephesians 5:25). The blood purchased the church. If the church does not matter, then the blood of Christ does not matter. How could the blood be of any importance if that which the blood purchased is a worthless institution? Yet inspiration teaches the great value of the blood. Jesus shed his blood "for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28). By means of the blood "we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins..." (Colossians 1:14). Silver and gold are totally inadequate in our redemption. Only the precious blood of Christ can insure redemption for us (I Peter 1:18-19). If we keep on walking in the light of gospel truth, the blood of Christ will keep on operating in our behalf (I John 1:7). Jesus "washed us from our sins in his own blood..." (Revelation 1:5). John witnessed a vast concourse of the redeemed in heaven. They were there as a result of the blood of Christ (Revelation 5:9; 7:13-14). If the church does not matter, then:

Salvation Does Not Matter

The saved are in the church of our Lord (Acts 2:47). Being saved, becoming a member of the church and putting on Christ all refer to the same process. One does not accept Christ at one point and seek church membership in the Lord's church at a later period. Such is denominationalism but it is definitely not New Testament Christianity. Someone wrote Mr. Billy Graham some years ago and related how he was saved fifteen or twenty years before but had never been a member of any church. Mr. Graham was unable to help the man for he is greatly confused himself in this very area of Biblical instruction. In New Testament times none of the saved remained outside the church. The church constituted the saved! Can you imagine a person's meeting Peter in Jerusalem in A.D. 44 and saying, "Brother Peter, I was saved on the memorable Pentecost upon which you and the other apostles preached for the first time the complete gospel but have never been a member of any church during the ensuing years. Can you tell me in what church I should currently seek membership?" That type of conversation never would have occurred in the first century for the disciples were taught that salvation and church membership are achieved at precisely the same moment.

The Bible teaches that Christ saves the body (Ephesians 5:23). Salvation is in the church. This does not mean the church is the Saviour. **The church is the saved!** If the church does not matter, neither does salvation matter which is graciously conferred

THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE

"...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel..." (Amos 7:8)

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

Text: _____

I. It's About A _____

Notes:

II. It's About A _____

Notes:

III. It's About A _____

Notes:

IV. It's About A _____

Notes:

V. It's About A _____

Notes:

VI. It's About A _____

Notes:

WHO CAN ABIDE THE JUDGMENT OF THE LORD?

Text: _____

I. _____ for Repentance

Notes:

II. _____ for Repentance

Notes:

III. _____ of Repentance

Notes:

within the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. However, dynamic passages such as Mark 16:26; Acts 2:38; 3:19; and 22:16 emphatically declare just how important salvation really is. If the church does not matter, then:

The Lord's Supper Does Not Matter

The Lord's Supper is to be observed at the Lord's Table and in his kingdom (Luke 22:29-30). In I Corinthians 11:20-34 the sacred penman taught the brethren at Corinth to observe the Lord's Supper in their church assembly. They had greatly abused this sacred ordinance but the language fully endorses the idea of the Lord's Supper as a religious ordinance which belongs in the church of the Lord. The church at Troas observed the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). God never commanded anyone to partake of His Son's Supper save those in the church and **only** upon the Lord's Day or Sunday. If the church does not matter, neither would the Lord's Supper be of any consequence. If the Supper does not matter then its origin in the Upper Room was a waste of time, its faithful observance by early saints was void of value, and its continued observance to the present has nothing to commend it. Is this what people mean when they say the church does not matter? Such is surely one of the consequences of "the church does not matter" philosophy. -concluded next week

-Robert R. Taylor, Jr.

NIPPER'S MASTER

During the mid-twentieth century, one of the most recognizable brand icons in America was a dog sitting in front of an old-time gramophone, head cocked, listening to the sound. That iconic image, owned by the RCA Victor record company, was taken from a painting by English artist Francis Baraud. The dog, Nipper, had been owned by Baraud's brother who had recorded his voice on early phonograph records. After the brother died, Baraud inherited Nipper and the gramophone and records. Whenever the records with Nippers master's voice were played, the dog would sit in front of the gramophone listening to his master's voice.

That's a beautiful image of the relationship between Jesus Christ and us. He has gone away from earth, so we can no longer hear His physical voice. But we sit in front of His Word and listen to our Master's teachings.

Listening for the Master's voice is a sign of loyalty and longing—an indication that we are eager to hear and obey.

THE BOOK OF DEVASTATION

Joel's book of prophecy is known for the devastation that is described in its narrative. In fact, at least six times in the book the word *devastation* is used in addition to words such as *devour*, *destruction*, *recompense*, *lament*, *weep*, *mourn*, *judge*, and *tremble*. The prophet employed these terms in his attempt to convict his brethren toward repentance. Thus, in that sense Joel's message was essentially the same as the message of all the writing prophets. Joel's approach, though, was one of reminding them of God's wrath and warning them of God's judgment to come in order to instill in them the brevity of life and the blessings found in godly submission.

The prophet Joel was the first writing prophet in Judah. His work took place in a very unique time in the nation because it appears that there was no kingly reign at the time. The priests, though, seem to be predominant figures in the book as though they have unusual governmental authority. This event could point to but one time in Judah's history, when after Ahaziah's death Athaliah seized control of the throne rather than her infant grandson, Joash. After her six years of power, Joash was anointed king at but the age of seven, therefore Jehoiada, the priest, led the nation until Joash was of age to carry out the duties. This would place Joel's work and writing around 830 BC, more than two hundred years before Judah's eventual demise and captivity.

The book itself is commonly recognized to be made up of three particular sections. First, in Joel 1:1-2:27, Joel reminds the people of the locust plague and the drought, attempting to bring the people to repentance. Second, in Joel 2:28-3:16, Joel heralds the day of the Lord to come at which time the Spirit would be outpoured. Then, in Joel 3:17-21, he pictures the glorious future of Judah and Jerusalem upon the people's repentance.

The first section in which Joel revisits the locust plague and drought pictures a dark day in the land. He emphasizes the extent of the plague by saying "*that which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten*" (Joel 1:4). Essentially there was nothing left. A locust plague can only be appreciated in its fullest by those who have actually experienced such. One eyewitness account of a locust plague from the early 1900s stated, "A few months afterwards, a much larger army alighted and gave the whole country the appearance of having been burned. Wherever they settled, it looked as if fire had devoured and burnt up everything" (John D. Whitney, "Jerusalem's Locust Plague," National Geographic, XXVII 1915, 511-550). The devastation was so complete that Joel said that the fields were wasted, wine and oil failed, and the land mourned (Joel 1:10). Livelihood was taken away, food was made scarce, and lives were lost. And likewise was the devastating effect of the drought which caused the land to not rejuvenate following the plague. These were emblems of God's wrath upon the people for their sins. But wherein nothing could be done to turn back the hands of time on the plague, God promised the people that upon their repentance they could "*be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month*" (Joel 2:23). He would restore to them the years suffered and by such would know that He was in their midst and that He is God (Joel 2:25-27).

The second section pictures Christ and the glorious redemption found in Him. Joel prophesies of the day of the Lord to come in which many great things would happen culminating with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon those present and the spiritual deliverance made available through the blood of Christ. This is a reference to the day of Pentecost, upon which day Peter referred back to this same prophecy and attributed the events of that day to what Joel had spoken centuries earlier (Acts 2:16ff). However, wherein this is understood to be a blessing of promise, it also is a warning because with deliverance would also come judgment, and except they would repent, they would once again face the judgment of the Almighty God.

The third section looks forward to the glorious future of that nation upon their repentance at which time God would bless them and the land in marvelous ways. God would dwell among them once more and wherein Egypt and Edom would be desolate, Judah would dwell forever and Jerusalem from generation to generation (Joel 3:19-21). God's blessings are always awaiting those willing to repent, and the glorious blessings awaiting Judah and Jerusalem as promised by Joel are examples of that to all.

Though relatively short, the book of Joel is filled with sadness, sorrow, and pain, but also filled with joy, hope, and anticipation of what was to come for the people. We, too, though are read of in Joel 2, for if we will call upon the name of the Lord, we shall be among those delivered. God's judgment is sure and set. Are we ready?

-Andy Brewer