

CHAPTER EIGHT: SUMMARY AND WARNING

Having finished the study of PROVING THE CHURCH OF CHRIST, a summary seems in order. The student will find such a review permits him/her to “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” (1 Thessalonians 5:21) The following article was composed in April 1987, yet it seems appropriate for inclusion in our present discussion. Further, the warnings remain vital to our spiritual well being. The Lord’s church is precious! The souls comprising the church of Christ are thus equally precious. No man is without faults (Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:6 – 10). Still, our constant self-examination and cautious awareness of our brethren demands we rid ourselves of acquired wrongs (2 Corinthians 13:5; 1 John 4:1) through repentance and prayer (Acts 8:22). We must avoid willful sin! (Hebrews 10:25 – 26)

If this effort has benefited but one soul, all we have found necessary to complete this work has been wisely invested. Give God the glory, honor and praise you may have for this effort. I am but His humble servant and am duty-bound, as are you, to “work out [my] salvation with fear and trembling.” (Philippians 2:12) If you find me wrong in this study, I ask you to love my soul enough to correct me and bring me back to the truth!



THE COMPLETE BODY OF CHRIST

“And He is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He might have the preeminence.” (Colossians 1:18) Seven times the word T-H-E appears in the inspired text. According to Jewish custom, the number seven showed completeness. Such is implied when Peter asked Jesus, “Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? ‘til seven times?” (Matthew 18:21) In His answer the Lord says, “I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven.” (Matthew 18:22) Paul shows a completeness of the unity of the Spirit when he wrote of seven “ones” in the listing of Ephesians 4:4-6: viz. one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God who is Father of all, above all, and in all who obey Him. Thus our present passage of study shows completeness by saying, THE head of THE body, THE church: who is THE beginning, THE firstborn from THE dead; that in all things He might have THE preeminence. Seven times T-H-E appears. Seven times it means: “this certain one.”

The apostle Paul was specific in his statement of completeness with Christ and THE church. He states “And ye are complete in Him, which is THE head of all principality and power: in whom also ye are circumcised with THE circumcision made without hands, in putting off THE body of THE sins of THE

flesh by THE circumcision of Christ: buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through THE faith of THE operation of God, who hath raised Him from THE dead.” (Colossians 2:10 – 12) Note again Paul says “ye are complete in Him.” Would it not be eternally tragic to believe that even in Christ Jesus we lacked anything? Peter relieved such fears as by the same inspiring Spirit he wrote, “According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue.” (2 Peter 1:3). In the same chapter, Peter lists seven items (remember, complete number) that when added to our faith, each in succession to the other, bring about completeness. Faith being the foundation (Hebrews 11:1;6) must have virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and charity. He continues, “For if these things be in you and abound, they make that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 1: 5 – 6) In verse nine he warns of the danger of being incomplete in faithfulness by saying, “But he that lacketh things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.” Paul adds to this thought when he writes, “Beware lest any man spoil you ... for in Him (Christ) dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” (Colossians 2: 8 – 9) From these and other passages, one learns quickly we do not need the devices of mankind to create completeness in Christ: WE JUST NEED CHRIST!

For many years, man has attempted teaching completeness in Christ without these divine ordinances. One readily sees the incompleteness of religious teaching such a “faith only salvation” or “preachers only need to study” and such like. Sadder still is the fact brethren in Christ Jesus teach either by word or deed we “need more rules: to complete the work and challenge Christ places to His church’s responsibility”. In an attempt to combat such falsehoods, examine this statement: IF IT TAKES MAN-MADE IDEALS TO DO THE WORK CHRIST GAVE TO THE CHURCH, THEN GOD CREATED AN IMPERFECT BODY FOR HIS PERFECT SON! Further, IF IT TAKES MAN’S CREATION TO COMPLETE THE WORK OF CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH, THEN MAN BECOMES THE COMPLETER – a position reserved for Christ only! (Colossians 2:10)

Look at Paul’s inspired writings: “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is THE fellowship of THE mystery, which from THE beginning of THE world hath been hid in God, Who created all things by Jesus Christ: to THE intent that now unto THE principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by THE church THE manifold wisdom of God, according to THE eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: in whom we have boldness and access with confidence by THE faith of Him.” (Ephesians 3: 8 – 12) Paul’s statement is clear: THE (this certain one) church is to make known THE (this certain one) manifold wisdom of God! Man’s wisdom matters not at all. Paul told the churches of Christ in Galatia, “If any many preach any other gospel (wisdom) unto you than that ye have

received, let him be accursed.” (Galatians 1:9) The gospel is complete and is able to make the man of God complete, thoroughly furnished unto every good work (2 Timothy 3:16 – 17). It bears repeating: By virtue of the above truth, if it takes man’s device to make known God’s wisdom, then God created an imperfect church over which His perfect Son is the Head. Such simply can not be the case!

What of our lives and teaching of the gospel; is there any other way than word or deed to practice these actions? (Colossians 3:17) What do we command and what do we imply by our practices? While we prove the church complete, do we prove God’s Word complete as well? Or do we imply by our endorsement of various and sundry man-made items that attach themselves to the church and its members, God’s creation is not complete?

Peter’s words of inspiration are plain: “If any man speak, let him speak as THE oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of THE ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.” (1 Peter 4:11) God must be glorified in all things including our lives and the practices therein. Such is only accomplished when one speaks or ministers (serves) according to His will. We have already noticed, “all things that pertain unto life and godliness” are contained in the completeness of His divine will. Thus, we rightly conclude man’s ways are not God’s ways (Isaiah 55:8 – 9). Therefore, endorsement of man’s ways concerning the work of Christ and His church does not glorify God through Jesus Christ our Lord! Be reminded the Lord’s church does not belong to man – obedient souls are simply privileged to be a part of the Lord’s church (1 Peter 2:1 – 10). If it is man who receives the glory for what we say and do religiously, then it must be for a man’s religion! Name one man-made religion that pleases God!

How sad to note the many persons who have given themselves to the promotion of various man-made creations more than to the promotion of Christ and His church – the complete creation of God known as “THE body of Christ.” From education to entertainment, to training of men for preaching and many other areas of concern, brethren have, at least by implication and some by blatant statement, said, “The church is not doing the job so this or that man-made creation will.” While it is sadly admitted many churches of Christ are not doing what they should in caring for the needs (not desires) of its members, nowhere do we find authorization from God for man’s creations to interfere with the work He gave the church to do! Yet, some still contend their man-made institution must exist for that purpose! Just because the local church is not doing its work does not authorize man’s institutions to take it over! Instead, it shows the members of that local church of Christ need to get busy!

The guilty will be among those saying, “The church is complete,” but by their actions, they say otherwise. Thus, they are pretenders, and all know the eternal fate of the pretender! Do they not care? Are they ever going to change?

Do we who endeavor to prove the Lord's church is complete care enough to challenge these pretenders and correct their souls?

One of the more tragic dangers is the mis-teaching of the gospel to the lost. While we indeed teach truth regarding the salvation of the soul, some teach by implication their souls are added to an incomplete spiritual body. When some contend the "necessity" of camps, colleges, orphanages, old-folks homes, fellowship halls and dinners, etc. to "make their life as a Christian full," they admit to their believing the church of Christ is incomplete! If truth of the completeness of the church is taught, and then some Christian asks for endorsement to a man-made institution which claims to do the work of the Lord's church, the hypocrite is noted, a soul entangled, and both are lost! WHY CAN NOT BRETHREN SEE THE COMPLETENESS OF THE CHURCH AND THAT IT DOES NOT NEED MAN'S CREATED INSTITUTIONS?

By the mercies of Christ, we must implore our brethren to THINK before we speak; THINK before we act (Philippians 1:27; 4:8). Colossians 3:17 commands such, and yet we fail to comply. God has no mercy for such willful sin (Hebrews 10:26). Still, many implicitly indulge themselves in false teaching by way of their implications. We must teach THE truth, THE complete truth of THE scriptures to THE church and to THE world.

May we return to the law of Christ and His testimony. May we "prove all things" by the word of His counsel. If our "think-sos" have no proof/validation from God's word, let us pray God for the courage to avoid such in the very appearance of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22; Romans 12:9).

THE church is complete. THE gospel is complete. THE man of God can be complete (2 Timothy 3:16 – 17) if he continues in THE gospel, "grounded and settled, and be not moved away from THE hope of THE gospel ..." (Colossians 1:23). May we be just that way; neither adding to nor taking from His commandments. (Revelation 22:18 – 19)