

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

Is One Church As Good As Another?

By Bobby Witherington

It is very obvious that we live in a religiously divided world. And to those people who care about others and who desire harmony in the most important and meaningful areas of life, this division produces both concern and sadness. It also causes frustration — especially on the part of those concerned individuals who have reasoned for hours on some disputed passage and finally conclude the discussion with the parties thereto being as far apart as when they began. So, being unable to break the stalemate, they frequently seek to justify it by saying, “Well, when all is said and done, it really doesn’t make any difference, for after all, one church is as good as another.”

Do People Really Believe This?

If so, to be consistent, they must admit that for one church to be as good as another, then, there must be some standard that determines whether a thing is either good or bad. And they also must maintain that all churches, equally measure up to that standard, for, you see, if one church falls short of other churches in measuring up to that standard, then it is not as good as the others are. Moreover, to say that one is as good as another is not only to say that all churches are equally as good; it is also to say that all churches are equally as bad! Friend, are you a member of some church? If so, may I ask, do you believe the church of which you are a member is as bad as some others? If your answer is negative (and I suspect it is), then you do not really believe that one church is as good as another.

Is One Person As Good As Another?

By this question, I do not have in mind those persons who have never made any effort whatever toward following the Lord. I refer to those who profess to being his disciples. I read of some who are *“weak in the faith”* (Rom. 14:1) and of others who are *“strong”* (Rom. 15:1). I read of some who are likened to *“gold, silver, and precious stones,”* and others who are likened to *“wood, hay, and stubble”* (1 Cor. 3:12). I read of some who are *“carnal”* (1 Cor. 3:1), and others who are *“spiritual”* (Gal. 6:1). Can any say that all of these persons are equally as good, and therefore equally as bad? It is a fact; we do not, without qualification, say that one person is as good as another.

However, a local church is composed of people who are banded together in faith and practice. Moreover, the “faith and practice” of those people determine the right-ness or wrongness of the church that was formed by their together relationships. If, per chance, one church is composed of people who have failed to comply with those terms which make for discipleship to begin with, and another church consists of people who have complied with the scriptural requirements for discipleship, then is the former church “as good” as the latter? Moreover, if one church is composed of people who *“bite and devour one another”* (Gal. 5:15), and another church of people who are *“knit together in love”* (Col. 2:2), then is the former church “as good” as the latter?

What Saith The Scriptures?

In the 2nd and 3rd chapters of Revelation, we note letters written to seven churches. One church (Ephesus) had some who had left their *“first love”* (2:4). Pergamos had some members who held “the doctrine of the Nicolaitans,” a doctrine of which the Lord said *“I hate”* (2:15). The church in Thyatira permitted *“that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols”* (2:20). The Lord described the church at Sardis as being *“dead”* (3:1), and the church at Laodicea as *“lukewarm”* (3:16). On the other hand, there was not one word of censure against the church at Smyrna (2:8-11), and approval was also expressed toward the church at Philadelphia (3:7-13). Can any person intelligently read these seven letters and then honestly conclude that every one of these seven churches was

“as good” as the others? Friend, if we can’t say that about all churches then, why do we say that of all churches now?

Let Us Not Use A False Standard!

When one person says “I am as good as another,” he is making the same mistake made by some at Corinth. They measured **“themselves by themselves,”** and compared **“themselves among themselves,”** and Paul said they **“are not wise”** (2 Cor. 10:12). They used the wrong measuring rod. If I say that “I am as good as you are,” and you say the same for yourself with reference to me, that does not prove that either of us is as good as we ought to be. When one man sets his watch by another man’s watch that was wrong to begin with, both watches are then wrong! So it is in religious matters. Since **“it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps”** (Jer. 10:23), then neither a man’s life nor his individual doctrine is to be the standard that determines religious conduct.

The True Standard

“God hath in these last days spoken unto us by his son” (Heb. 1:2). Jesus said, **“the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day”** (John 12:48). By reason of his death, Jesus became **“the mediator of the New Testament”** (Heb. 9:15), and it is through this covenant or testament that Christ speaks to us today. This, then, is the standard that determines what it takes to become and to remain his disciple.

Becoming A Disciple Involves:

(1) Believing in God and his Son (Heb. 11:6; John 8:24). (2) Repenting of all sins (Acts 2:38; 17:30). (3) Confessing faith in Jesus Christ (Matt. 10:32; Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:10). (4) Being buried with Christ in baptism for the remission of sins (Rom. 6:3, 4; Acts 2:38). At this point, one rises to **“walk in newness of life”** (Rom. 6:4) and is **“added to the church”** (Acts 2:41, 47).

It is a fact that many churches are composed of those who have not complied with these simple terms that make for discipleship, but who have followed the terms that man has laid down. Friend, if a church consists of those who have not obeyed the Lord’s requirements for discipleship, then are its members disciples? If the members of one church have become disciples, and the members of another church have not, then is the latter “as good” as the former?

“Together Activity” Required For Discipleship

A true disciple (follower) of the Lord is a person who: (1) Became a follower of Christ, and (2) continues to follow him. In addition to living a morally upright life, the latter includes uniting oneself to a group of fellow disciples, being banded together as it were by a common faith and practice. In the first century those who did this were **“called Christians”** (Acts 11:26), and **“they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers”** (Acts 2:42). Upon **“the first day of the week”** they **“came together to break bread”** or to partake of the “Lord’s supper” (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:20-28), and to **“lay by . . . in store”** or to give as **“prospered”** (1 Cor. 16:1, 2). They sang praises unto God (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), their music being vocal or acappella in nature. Moreover, their “together activities” involved membership in a local congregation whose total organization consisted of **“bishops”** (or elders), deacons, and saints (Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:5, 7). Each congregation was to have its own officers (Acts 14:23) whose oversight was confined to that one church (Acts 20:28). A denominationally structured federation of churches was unheard of in New Testament days.

A Final Remark

Friend, if you can read in your Bible what it takes to become and to remain a Christian, and can also read of a band of Christians who have (and are) complying with those terms, what does that make them? A New Testament church! Now if you look around and observe a group of religious people who have not and are not following the conditions for discipleship, then is the latter “as good” as the former? Remember, it is not merely a matter of moral uprightness; it is a matter of showing respect for, and complying with the Lord’s standard. ■

Service Times — Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM — Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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