

Maintaining the Purity of the Church

by Bill Crews

“Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). “For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, being himself the savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives also be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it; that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish (Ephesians 5:23-27 [emphasis mine - BC]).

From the divine standpoint the purity of the church is assured; from the human standpoint the purity of the church must be maintained. The sacrificial blood of Christ (the purchase price of the church, the cleansing agent of all who constitute the church), the headship of Christ, and the gospel of Christ (the perfect pattern or blueprint) will always keep the church pure if men and women who compose the church yield themselves to them.

The task of maintaining the purity of the church is a constant one. Both a responsibility and a privilege, it rests upon every member of the church. Purity today does not guarantee purity tomorrow, nor does purity yesterday guarantee purity today. The task must be dealt with on a congregational level. The members of each congregation are to endeavor to maintain the purity of the church.

Since each church is composed of members, individuals, its purity demands their purity. Impure members cannot constitute a pure church, and such impurity will spread and pollute other members in the church. *“Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump”* (1 Corinthians 5:6; see also Galatians 5:9).

Each congregation must be kept pure in the organization by which it functions, the worship it engages in, the mission it performs and the doctrine it proclaims. All must be according to the divine pattern — the New Testament of Christ. Worldliness and religious error must be kept out. Strife and discord must be resolved by the Scriptures. Maintaining the purity of the church is not a matter of burdening or holding down the church, but of preventing or removing encumbrances that will divert, corrupt and destroy the church. Keeping the church pure will keep it potent and vibrant and will glorify God.

The task of maintaining the purity of the church is no easy one. There are so many things that make it otherwise. Many members are babes in Christ, not well-grounded and established in the faith. They are easy prey for teachers of false doctrines (Ephesians 4:4). All the members have escaped the defilements of the world, and Satan has not willingly given them up (1 Peter 5:8). The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of life will be used constantly to attract them and lure them back into the world (2 Peter 2:20-22; 1 John 2:15-17). Many members have come out of religious errors, and so often some of those errors have not lost their appeal to them; they want to bring them into the Lord's church. Religious plants which God did not plant are on every hand, and such things have their appeal, particularly to those who are not *“full-grown”* (Hebrews 5:13-14). Counterfeits can be so convincing! Human organizations, arrangements, appointments and goals, with the Lord's name attached by men, are often used by the devil to destroy the purity of the Lord's church.

Let us measure up to the task of maintaining the purity of the church. The Lord's will — the New Testament model, pattern, standard — must be faithfully, fully and constantly taught and preached. That will must be completely respected individually and collectively by the members of each local congregation. Religious error must be exposed and opposed. The seeds of apostasy must be removed before they bear their bitter fruit. Righteous living must be exalted. Worldly pleasures must be denounced. Members who are walking disorderly must be dealt with according to the Scriptures. The Lord's church must be *“a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but... holy and without blemish”* (Ephesians 5:27).

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