



THE NATURE AND CHARACTER OF CHURCH

When the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, at the close of the Apostolic age, just prior to his execution by the Romans, the Church was already on the course of spiritual decline. It's level of deterioration was enough for Paul to be alarmed. Therefore, he did not hesitate to severely caution the remnant. The Epistles of John, written at the close of the first century, also show that Christianity had begun to experience an extreme change. Paul saw by the Spirit of God, that the Church had lost it's primal, original character and nature. He realised, in the Spirit, that the Church would lose its original and basic constitution, if it did not turn away from its death-dealing course of deterioration and decay. It was in the consciousness of the onset of this change and shift that the Apostle wrote the letters to Timothy. In other words, a consciousness of this prompted him to write a few important things to the churches. The burden of the Holy Spirit was to reconstitute and recapture the original purity and authenticity of the Church. The Apostle Paul wrote these epistles to the churches with this burden in view so that they may retain the original character and nature that God had intended them to have. He sought to indicate the way, the only way, God's way of recovery, of keeping the things of God pure and maintaining them according to its original nature.

As far as God is concerned or in God's thought for a true Christian life everything had been and was intended to be wholly and fully spiritual — born of the Spirit, sustained by the Spirit and finally, consummated by the Spirit. This has always been God's original intention. God's thought for every church and every child of God, is that everything should be wholly spiritual. The Apostle Paul, however, began to see while he was yet alive and before his very eyes that the church was turning away from the path that God had

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(1 Tim 3:15 KJV)*

originally set for it. It became increasingly clear to him that the church was turning into something different. It had begun to unfold and develop into a system, a formal ecclesiastical system. It was becoming something that, at best, would be man centred - ordered, governed, arranged and carried out by man. This is what Paul was able to see, by the Spirit. He strongly appealed for the recovery, the maintenance and the upholding of that wholly spiritual character in every area and every aspect of the life of God's people. Beloved, the Spirit of God has the same burden for His churches today.

God's thoughts for Christianity are totally different from what we consider Christianity to be. In fact, we do not find the term *Christianity* mentioned in the New Testament. It is only in Acts 11:26 that we read of the disciples being called Christians in Antioch. The term *Christianity* is intended to mean another term in the New Testament and that is the *Church*.

In Chapter 3 of 1 Timothy, the Apostle Paul talks of the qualifications for elders in the local church. "(For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)". In verse 5, he uses the expression the church of God. The Holy Spirit uses the expression *the church of God*, to convey the depth of its meaning. The Church is something very special to the Lord. He gave His life for the Church (Ephesians 5:25). God did not bring forth the Church into this world by the word of His mouth, as He did with the sun, moon and the stars. He sent His Son to die for it! Therefore, we can understand that there is something deep and hidden in the expression 'the church of God' used by the Holy Spirit. This often escapes our mind.

"But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is *the church of the living God*, the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Timothy 3: 15). Here the Apostle Paul use the expression 'the church of the living God' with telling effect. He talks of the church of God, which is the church of the living God as the pillar and ground of the truth. Hallelujah! The church of God is of supreme importance to the Lord. *The House of God is the church of the living God*. It is the

place of His dwelling. *It is the ground of His testimony of truth and grace.* It is the most precious object unto God in the earth. The Apostle Paul saw the supreme preciousness of the people of God, the elect in God's sight. Paul endures all things for the elect's sake. The elect here refers to the church of God. "Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." (2 Timothy 2:10)

The letters of the Apostle Paul to Timothy were written at a turning point in the history of Christianity. *The departure from the original character and nature was a Church matter.* It was not a matter of mere Christianity. It was not just that some Christians were losing out and some spiritual decline had set in with some believers. *It was a Church matter.* We should come into the gravity of the situation. The departure was the departure of the Church! It was not the departure of some individuals from the ways of God. *The departure of the individual was the departure of the Church.* May that register in your being. This is why Paul cautions people to behave in the church of God. If brothers and sisters in the house of God do not behave themselves as they ought to, it is not just a matter of individuals, but a matter of the church. If a member of the Body of Christ lives in an unbecoming way, it is something that concerns the life and character of the church and not just the individual. These are the telltale signs that indicate that the church is departing from the original thought of God. It shows that the church is on the decline and is departing from its spiritual calling. It is not a matter of some brethren growing cold or losing out on what God is burdened to give them or of some brothers and sisters drawing back and backsliding. It is a matter of the life of the church of the living God.

This devotion is sent to you with a prayer and hope that it will secure something of eternal value. You could

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