

KEEPING THE CHURCH SAVED

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For years the Lord's church taught rightly that the alien sinner must submit to and obey the will of God to be saved. However, today many congregations that profess to be the Lord's church believe in a "grace only" concept of salvation. Denominationalism has long pointed to Christ's finished work at Calvary as if such work did away with man's free moral agency and obligation to save himself *"from this crooked (perverse - NAS, NKJ) generation"* (Acts 2:40). It was the apostle of love who said, *"He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him"* (1 John 2:4). This one verse of Scripture is sufficient to destroy the erroneous "faith only" doctrine as the present tense force of *"keepeth"* indicates that the one who "keeps on not keeping his commandments is a liar" (Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament).

Neither is the "once saved, always saved" man devised doctrine true, but many brethren are now living their lives in a way that indicates they believe it. The apostle Peter makes it abundantly clear that a child of God can apostatize and lose his soul. Peter declared,

For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the last state is become worse with them than the first. For it were better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment delivered unto them. It has happened unto them according to the true proverb, *"The dog turning to his own vomit again, and the sow that had washed to wallowing in the mire"* (2 Peter 2:20-22).

The Holy Bible emphasizes many things that the church must do to keep saved. Let us note three things that are sorely needed but sadly neglected in many churches of Christ today.

First, the church must teach on and demand moral purity among the lives of its members. It is a terrible and tragic shame that immodesty and immorality are tolerated in many congregations under the guise of love for the brethren. Members of the body of Christ do not have the option of dressing like the world dresses and living like the world lives. When a Christian will not speak out against lascivious dress and immoral lifestyles, he actually encourages such ungodly behavior.

The church at Corinth was proud of the fact that they were tolerant of sexual immorality among some of their members. The apostle Paul rebuked these brethren and reminded them *"a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump"* (1 Corinthians 5:6). Sin, like a raging fire, will always spread if allowed to have its way. The righteous can have no fellowship with the ungodly (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:14). Moral purity is a must if the church is going to be saved.

Second, the church must practice discipline as taught in the Scriptures to preserve truth and strengthen the saints. When faced with unrighteousness in the lives of members, most congregations today can recall "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Matthew 7:1) while conveniently forgetting the command to "judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24). Judgment without true facts or based upon appearance is condemned, but judgment based upon the fruit of one's actions is commended and commanded (cf. Matt. 7:16-20).

A child of God who is out of step in his walk with the Lord and refuses to repent is to be "marked" or withdrawn from. Yes, this applies to those guilty of immorality (1 Cor. 5:11-13), those who are false teachers (Romans 16:17), and those who are promoting ungodly division and sowing discord (Titus 3:10). In fact, church discipline applies to any member who has chosen to continue to walk in a "disorderly" manner. The Bible says, *"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which they received of us"* (2 Thessalonians 3:6).

Third, sufficient teaching must be done on the uniqueness and identity of the Lord's church. Many brethren are no longer faithful soldiers of the cross because they have decided to offend no one and please everybody. In these congregations, bold denunciation of false doctrine and denominationalism is a thing of the past. How can one be led to Christ if he is not shown the way (cf. John 14:6)?

Some brethren now opt for seminars instead of gospel meetings. They have given up preaching the gospel to acquaint their friends and neighbors with the New Testament principles of worship, doctrine and church organization. But the Bible still says that the gospel is God's power to save (Rom. 1:16), and no faithful child of God will ever be ashamed of proclaiming it in its purity and simplicity. The Bible warns to those who will hear: *"But speak thou the things which befit the sound doctrine"* (Titus 2:1).