

THE SOWER
ARTHUR (IL) CHURCH OF CHRIST
Ron Bartanen, Evangelist

JANUARY 6, 2019

Have you visited our web site lately? (Arthurcoc.com)

HOW IMPORTANT IS THE CHURCH?

It is troubling that there are many who claim respect for the Bible, and claim faith in Christ, but have chosen to regard the church as an option. Statements are often heard such as, "My religion is a personal religion. I don't need a church to feel close to God." These see little importance in the church—at least for themselves. How should we respond to this concept?

In the first place, one's feelings on the matter may be irrelevant. God's prophet, Jeremiah, declared, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9). In other words, to trust one's feelings would be to listen to a liar.

In the second place, religion is greatly over-valued. Jesus didn't come to make us religious. Universally, man has always been religious. Even worshipers of Satan are religious. They were religious people who cried out against Christ, saying, "Crucify Him!"

In the third place, most have a totally flawed view of what the Bible speaks of as the church. The church is not seen in Scripture as a denomination, or an aggregate of denominations. Many are turned away by what is sometimes referred to as "organized religion." Denominational structures and alliances are man-made sectarian fellowships bound together by human creeds and rules of faith and practice. The New Testament church was divided only by location, with no central headquarters, and had no sectarian allegiance to a religious party. Partyism within the one body was carnal, not spiritual (1 Cor. 3:3-4). The church was not something they joined, but it was a body of people who responded to the gospel (good news) of Christ in faith, repenting of their sins, and being baptized (immersed) in acceptance of the remission of sins. Of such it is said, "The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Read Acts 2:36-47). The church is not an organization, like a country club, that one might choose to join, but it is the universal fellowship of those who have committed themselves to Christ to serve and obey Him.

The importance of this relationship is seen in the fact that the church was purchased by the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28), and is spoken of as Christ's body, of which He alone is head (Colossians 1:18). The endearment with which Christ loves the church is seen in

the apostle Paul's comparison of Jesus' relationship with the church to the relationship of a man with his wife, even giving His life for her (Eph. 5:22-33).

Had the first Christians regarded their relationship to Christ as "a personal religion" apart from other believers, it would have been contrary to Christ who promised, in anticipation of this redeemed community, "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). Rather, from the first they "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, the fellowship, the breaking of bread and in prayers" (Acts 2:42), also "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs..." (Col. 3:16). Had they not been diligent in this, surely the Christian faith would have been quickly snuffed out. Christians need one another, and are to worship and work together in the body of Christ. We are admonished, "Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:25).

The church is obviously important to the Lord. The question is: Is the church important to **you**?

--Ron

"Do not use a hatchet to remove a fly from a friend's head." (*Chinese proverb*)

A NEW YOU

How would you like a brand new you in this new year of 2019? Such is not an unreasonable desire or possibility. In fact,; it is God's intent to eventually "make all things new" in the "new heavens and new earth" (Rev. 21:5, 1). Until that time, the Lord is preparing a people who are said to be "born again ... of water and the Spirit" (John 3:3, 5).

In the process of the new birth, we become children of God and receive the Spirit of Christ, entitling us to address God as our Father (Gal. 4:6). A truly new you is not through New Years resolutions, but only in Christ: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away...all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).

Newness of life is not found in just being a good neighbor, a good husband or wife, or a respectable person, or even in just being religious. Jesus expressed His purpose in coming into this world when He told His disciples, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). The gospel (good news) by which we receive this life centers upon Jesus' dying upon the cross for our sins, being buried, and raised to life, as witnessed to us through His apostles (1 Corinthians 15:1-4), The apostle Paul also made it plain that this justification is available to us through faith in Christ, saying, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). Justification by faith involves repentance and baptism, coming forth from the watery grave of baptism into "newness of life" (Rom. 6:1-6).

Mere New Year's resolutions will not accomplish this, but a personal commitment to Jesus Christ, the Son of God in faith and obedience to His word, as Peter explained it: "Ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit...being born again...by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." (1 Pet. 1:22-23). Have you yet received this new life?
--Ron

WORLDWIDE—THE LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH IN 2018

Gathering statistics worldwide, *Worldometers* reports the leading cause of death in 2018. It is not something you will be reading about in a newspaper or news publication, or see reported on TV news channels. It is not cancer, heart disease, AIDS, suicide or accidents. In fact you are in no danger of dying from this cause. Nor is anybody you know vulnerable to it. Yet, according to *Worldometer's* statistical report, there were nearly 42 million worldwide who died from it. By comparison, as of Dec. 31, 2018, 8.2 million died from cancer in 2018, 5 million as a result of smoking, and 1.7 million from HIV/AIDS, all of which are tragic enough to concern us. *Worldometers* also reports that the total number of deaths of the world's population from all causes was about 59 million worldwide. But the 42 million who died from this leading cause of death is not counted among the 59 million that comprised the populations of all the countries of the world, the reason being that these 42 million people who died were never counted in the population. For some reason they were purposely killed, and did not die from natural causes. These were the world's aborted.

For every 33 children delivered live, 10 others were not as fortunate, being aborted, according to reports from WHO (the World Health Organization). Someone once commented that the most dangerous place for any human being is his/her mother's womb. While not considered human by the politically correct crowd, each baby has 2 human parents, his/her unique DNA, is either a boy or girl, has a determined eye and hair color, and in most cases is old enough to have a beating heart. He or she is not just a "mass of tissue" or, as is commonly claimed, "a part of the woman's body", over which she should have the say-so of life or death.

In America, a little less than a million babies are aborted annually, and abortion is the leading cause of death. Since *Roe v. Wade* in January, 1973 60 million have experienced a horrible death in our abortion mills. —Ron

"HEAVEN—MAKING ALL THINGS NEWS" (Part 2) will be the message, with Revelation 21:1-7 as the reading.

PRAY FOR: Doris continues to recover nicely from her surgery. *** The date for the kidney transplant from David Ferguson to Bill Livesay has not yet been set.