

Life Notes

THE HISTORY OF CHRIST'S CHURCH

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#22. Summary of The Church in the Twenty-First Century

We know that in the period described in Scripture as “The Last Days,” there are two prophetic streams which flow side by side. There is a great outpouring of evil, manifested as “Babylon,” a system under the dominion of Antichrist. At the same time, God has promised to pour out His Spirit, and the result will be the redemption of Earth and those who embrace the rule of the King. In His teaching about the wheat and the tares, Jesus explained that the Church and evil must exist side by side until the time of the harvest.

So, as we progress further into the 21st century, we ask two questions: Are these the “last of the last days?” And what should we anticipate as the Church moves along?

Concerning the first question, we simply do not know. It is in the DNA of Christ's Church to expect His return in every generation. Whether the final day is now or later, we know we are daily moving closer to the end of this age. Every generation of Believers has fancied itself as the last generation, but we must “live as though He were returning tomorrow, and serve as though His coming is centuries away.”

Concerning specific trends, I believe the Church of Christ will face a foundational battle that will determine whether we walk in apostasy or spiritual purpose in the remainder of this century. It is the issue of the nature of Scripture. There is a trend in many Christian circles to marginalize the idea of inspiration. By inspiration, we speak of the belief that the Bible is a unique book that is “God breathed,” or the very words of God through human instrumentation. We believe the Bible writers were carried along by the Holy Spirit and preserved from error and contradiction. Though human personality is evident in the writings, the oversight of The Spirit ensures there is no human corruption in the original manuscripts.

We believe also in the inspiration of the very words of Scripture, not just the ideas or stories. We further believe that the Scriptures in their entirety (both the Old and New Testaments) are useful and serve a purpose in Christian discipleship. In order to remain true to our original calling, I believe there must be a return to the primacy of Scripture as the absolute authority in regard to matters of faith and living.

Secondly, I think we may be seeing the beginnings of the Church resorting to smaller units, even as she grows larger. The Church of the late 20th and early 21st centuries is discovering that care and community are small group matters. Churches will continue to grow and large churches will always exist, but only as they begin to understand the need for smaller groups in matters of functionality and family. The implications of this may impact denominations as well. Some church growth specialists believe we have entered the age of post-denominationalism, at least in Protestant churches.

Thirdly, though we are uncertain as to what the next move of God will look like, we can be confident that Jesus will keep His promise - “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it!”

In Part Two of these Life Notes, we will go back to the days of the early Church and begin a discussion of the prominent names and events that have shaped the history of Christ's Church.

Christian Life Church

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