

THE CHURCH (Part 2)

In April 2001 almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of the population of Great Britain (71.8%) called themselves 'Christian' (41,014,811). Christianity is the main religion in the United Kingdom. (The second largest religion is Islam, 1.6 million.)

You wouldn't think there were as many 'Christians' in the country! Of course, to make up this figure the census grouped every type of 'Christian' group together ... from the Roman Catholic Church, Church of England, Baptists, Methodists, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc etc.

In 1998, in the Republic of Ireland over 84% attended a place of worship. In Northern Ireland 60% of the population attended worship. The 2004 figure for attending church in Scotland, England and Wales *and Northern Ireland* ... was only 7% (bear in mind, by far the highest attendances at church, - by a long way, - is in Northern Ireland).

So, ... out of these 41,014,811 'worshippers' in the UK ... how many *actually* and truly belong to the redeemed Church of the Lord Jesus Christ? Well, of course, the answer is hidden to us ... God alone knows the number of the Elect, but we are told in Rev. 5 that no man can number them. They are born again of the Holy Spirit, washed in the blood of the Lamb, and a people whose Father is Almighty God.

This truly-redeemed Church, of course, has undergone a 'development of variations' throughout the centuries. Evangelicals are not united in all their doctrines; however, the uniting factor is that the sinner has been, - through the grace of God, - brought into saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. As you can appreciate, we are only studying this subject of the Church very sparingly, at this time. ...

THE SUBSTANCE OF THE CHURCH

* The Church, - it *must* be emphasised, - consists of no less than the complete number of those whom God has chosen ... chosen in Christ in eternity. (Samuel John Stone, "Elect from every nation, Yet one o'er all the earth; Her charter of salvation, One Lord, one faith, one birth")

* Each member of Christ's Redeemed Church has been, is, and will be sought out and wonderfully saved so that Christ on the Day He presents His Bride to the Father will say, [Jn. 17:12 those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost.](#)

- * Indeed, we have the confidence in our salvation through the merits of the Good Shepherd, [Jn. 10:27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.](#)
- * The *substance* of the Church is made up of those who are soundly and genuinely born again of the Holy Spirit of God.
- * They are the Father's gift to the Son, [Jn. 6:37 All that the Father giveth me shall come to me ... and, v.39 this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.](#)
- * It is an absolute privilege to be saved ... and there is also a purpose for those who are saved.
- * We are not saved merely to escape the flames of Hell; God chose us unto Himself in order to bring Him glory.
- * Being saved from Hell, - all-important as it is to us, - is merely secondary; God's primary purpose for the salvation of His Elect is that He has saved a people out of this world to love, serve and honour Him.
- * Yes, it is a great responsibility being a Christian ... and God does not accept 'second best' or any old pattern of life lived for Him. He expects the *very* best!
- * The substance of the Church then is simply those Who know Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE CHURCH

- * There are different structures inside Christendom. For example, in [Anglicanism](#), there is a General Synod which is the national assembly of the Church of England and there are other Church bodies such as 'diocesan synods' (convened by the bishop and consisting of elected clergy and lay members), and 'deanery synods'.
- * Presbyterianism has a General Assembly. On a more local level they are divided into 'presbyteries' with a moderator. These 'presbyteries' address the business of the local churches in the area. Each church also has its 'Kirk Session' which is the body responsible for the day-to-day running of the local church and assists the Minister in the pastoral care of the congregation.
- * Our Baptist structure, however, is different; we believe in the *autonomy* of the local church. Each church is independent. There is no outside body to impose itself on the decisions we make.

* Yes, we are part of the Baptist Union of Scotland but each church within a Baptist confederation is independent, autonomous, and has the option of upholding their own views and opinions.

* Of course, one of the dangers of such a church structure is that a fellowship can be led into the wilderness of uncertain doctrine and non-Baptistic beliefs. This is why I believe it is so important to have a recognised basis of faith as our *1689 Confession*.

* Another danger with some forms of independence is that we can become so 'independent' "no-one else is right" and we become *isolationist* ... and we have no fellowship with others.

* Isolationism is not Biblical, for we find Paul going from church to church ... bringing and sharing news amongst the fellowships ... and also bringing finance to help some of the poorer churches.

* Yes, we hold to the independence of the local church, and we also find the Biblical example of *interdependence* ... i.e. various fellowships *depending upon* sister churches for the work of Christ.

* I have brothers and sisters in the Church of Scotland for whom I have the highest respect; I have brothers and sisters in Pentecostal-type churches, in Methodism ... I don't have to agree with all their theologies (in fact, I might be in total disagreement with some of their theologies!) but for the sake of the Name of Christ the Bible commands, - if they are saved, - [Eph. 4:3 \[Endeavour\] to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.](#)

* Now, coming home to our own fellowship. ... Not every church member agrees in absolutely every point of doctrine, - we would not be 'a million miles apart' but there are sometimes variations.

* I have been with you for almost seven years and you know my doctrines. I don't keep my doctrines a secret, they are founded on God's Word and presented in the *Baptist Confession*. I have spent much time, much reading and much studying to arrive at what I believe. I believe and am fully convinced of the Doctrines of Grace, - it is *my foundation*.

* I won't preach to you a sermon based on these doctrines one week and the following week preach you a sermon that is contrary.

* If someone confronts me and tells me they don't like what I preach ... I can't do anything about it because what I preach is what I believe in my heart and am totally convinced the Word of God teaches.

* I would rather be dead than compromise on the truth of God's Word!

* I have a responsibility the Bible teaches me is given by God.

- * I wouldn't be so pompous as to claim that everything I say is 100% because I'm only human, but I *know* I have a responsibility to seek to ensure I preach what is faithful to Scripture, in accordance with its truth.
- * You see, that is one of the criteria of an elder; Paul told Timothy that their labour is in the Word and doctrine (I Tim 5:17). It is my priority to study God's Word and to preach it faithfully (Para. 10, "to be engaged in the ministry of the Word and in prayer, and to seek the welfare of men's souls as those that must give account to the Lord".)
- * When I am confronted I need to know and be convinced that what I am preaching is God's Word and not my own thoughts.
- * How do you do that? Well, firstly, you need to know God's Word, - you need to know its history, its background and how it all ties in.
- * Secondly, I believe, it is important to know the writings of faithful men of God because it keeps you in line with tried and tested teaching.
- * Writings of men like the Reformers and the Puritans have so much to teach us because they were so faithful to the doctrines of God.
- * Please pray for my work in this church; I apologise for when I don't get it right but I trust there are times when I do. Pray ... because the work of a Pastor needs much prayer.
- * Pray for the deacons. I know it is easy to point fingers and find fault but, like myself, they have a duty to be faithful to the work you have entrusted them to do in this place for God. Like me, their first priority is to be answerable to God.
- * To be a deacon is no less a responsibility than to be an elder. To be a deacon is to be called of God to be a deacon!
- * They have responsibilities, the *Confession* says (para 8), "to arrange for the carrying out of what the Lord has ordained, and to use the powers entrusted to them for the execution of their duties".
- * Some people wrongly think that to be a deacon is somehow a lower position than an elder ... and in some churches it is not unheard of for a long-serving deacon to be 'elevated' to become an elder. That is wrong!
- * Yes, they may have different types of responsibilities but their work is being done as unto God. They deal with items I don't have to deal with ... and it allows me to get on with my work.
- * Their work is necessary and compliments the work of the elder/pastor.
- * Pray too for fellow church members and adherents. We are brothers and sisters in Christ ... with the same goal of seeing His Name glorified.
- * What place has "disturbing the peace of the church" in God's plan? (Para. 13) What glory does God receive from unbrotherly conduct?

- * In some situations, who needs the devil when you've got Christians! James said, [3:10 My brethren, these things ought not so to be.](#)
- * What place has absenteeism from the assembling of the church (Para. 13)? Without good reason (e.g. illness, old age), how obedient to the Word of God is it to continually stay away from the meetings of God's people? *God does not excuse such unfaithful behaviour, and those causing offence to God's Word will have to give account.* Are they guilty of burying what the Master has given them in the ground?
- * Church members *do* have responsibilities. Each of us needs each other in the work of the Lord.
- * Yes, it is my responsibility to fulfil the work of a Pastor; it is the deacons' responsibility to fulfil their work; and it is the responsibility of each member and adherent of this fellowship, - before God, - to work together towards His glory.
- * We are not doing that as we should. You might say to me, "Why don't you say these things to the church on a Sunday morning?" Well, I sometimes used to say it to them individually and I have also said it on Sunday mornings ... but it makes no difference.
- * If the interest is not there, I cannot create it. If the interest used to be there but it's not there now then I need your help to pray that the Holy Spirit would intervene.
- * Just about every church has the problems of coldness and apathy among some of its members as we have. Pray for this fellowship ... that we would become spiritually mature.
- * Something else, we are over 100 years old ... pray that God would breathe into us new life founded upon His never-changing truth.

Conclusion It is a great responsibility being a part of a local fellowship; I don't always think people understand how great the responsibility and privilege is.

* God has saved you and me to be part of this fellowship. It is not some form of entertainment to attract us to keep us here in the way the world understands it; we are part of this church because of 'something' God has placed in our hearts. If we do not believe that, then we would be better searching out where it is God would have us to be.

* Let us serve God in this place together; let us pray He would bring others to work with us here; and let's pray that His *shekinah* glory would hover over our congregation.