

The Church of Jesus Christ: 28 Things Every Christian Ought To Learn

By

John S. Waldrip

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This book is dedicated to Archie and Shirley French, faithful and true to the Savior, the ministry, and as friends and encouragers. Many pastors make jokes about deacons and deacons' wives. Such 'humor' does not apply to these two. They were true trophies of God's abundant grace. I loved them both.

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Preface

I did not grow up in a Christian home. I remember being exposed to the Gospel when I was six years old. When I was thirteen and living in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, I responded to an invitation to come to the front of the Church auditorium after one of the few services my family attended.¹ I was immersed a week later, though I have no recollection of the sermon I heard, the conversation that took place during the invitation, or the reason I was baptized.

I certainly was not a Christian at that time and do not recollect hearing the Gospel preached. A second occasion I remember hearing the Gospel was when I was fifteen and a third time was when I was in engineering school.

The first time was in a vacation Bible school on the Fort Totten Indian Reservation in North Dakota, where my father worked for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The second time was when I was witnessed to by my newly converted uncle, Leon Waldrip, on yet another Indian reservation in Oregon. The third time was when a Campus Crusade For Christ (now Cru) worker led me through a Four Spiritual Laws booklet on the campus of Oregon State University in Corvallis, Oregon.

I was not converted as an immediate result of those interactions. On the half dozen or so trips to Church when I was in high school, the notorious reputation of that Church's pastor in that small town ruled out any interest I might have had in taking anything he said seriously. My overall impressions of Christianity were not good as I was growing up, partly because all but one or two Christian men I knew seemed decidedly effeminate.

After my conversion, I was so profoundly ignorant of the Christian faith that I had no awareness that attending Church

¹ I have sought throughout to use capitalized Church to refer to a legitimate Gospel preaching congregation and uncapitalized church to deal with that which I am persuaded are not the Churches of Jesus Christ.

was appropriate for a Christian; I gave no thought to why anyone went to Church. It certainly had never been an enjoyable experience for me. Therefore, for the six weeks or so that I was a believer in Christ, I did not think I needed to attend Church.

However, once I was invited to Church, I did attend and did not miss a service for about eighteen months. I attended Church because I wanted to because I found worship fulfilling, and because I learned from God's Word through attending and interacting with Christians before and after worship.

Once I started attending Church after my conversion, I yielded to a voracious appetite for reading the Bible, for reading Christian books, for attending Church services, for participating in organized Church outreach, and for doing whatever a Christian might consider doing.

I was a single young professional whose world was turned upside down by my new Savior, and I loved everything about my new life in Christ.

A bit more background is in order at this point. After obtaining my engineering degree in Oregon, I moved to Southern California, far from my college and where my family lived. Even in Southern California, I lost every workplace friend as a result of my conversion and my refusal to continue participating in the "liquid lunch lifestyle." Instead, I was excitedly diving headfirst into my new life in Christ. God even "arranged" for my apartment to be burglarized so my new scuba gear would be stolen and I wouldn't be distracted by scuba diving on weekends. Most sources of temptation that would encroach on my Sunday involvement in my new Church were thereby eliminated.

As I reflect on those early years of my Christian walk, one of the first things I did after my conversion was to obtain ***The Genesis Flood*** by Henry M. Morris and John C. Whitcomb, Jr.; I devoured it! Morris and Whitcomb dispelled whatever concerns I might have had about the supposed conflict between science and the Bible. It was and is the most wonderful resource.

The next thing I recall was investigating this very new to me subject called the Church. And it was during my investigation of the Church that I began to experience frustrations of various kinds. I could not persuade my pastor to answer me definitively when I asked him, "What is the Church?" When I read books devoted to the doctrine of or the meaning of the Church, I found them to be incomplete and some of them intellectually dishonest, regardless of which perspective the authors advocated.

When I went back to school to begin my lifelong preparation for the Gospel ministry, I faced the same problem; Instructors were unwilling to be definitive about the Church. As I write, I find that in my library I have sixty-six books that are devoted to the Church, with none of them satisfying my curiosity about crucial issues related to answering the question "What is the Church?" This book is the result of my decades-long quest for the answer.

The product that I present to you is not what I would describe as a scholarly work. I have not the training, the time, or the patience to attempt a truly scholarly book on the subject. This book is a work cobbled together by a pastor, a very much convinced Baptist pastor, consisting of material first presented as a series of sermons delivered to Sunday evening gatherings of our congregation.

What surprised me was God's Providence in bringing to our Baptist Church twenty senior saints who spent forty to fifty years in the nearby Nazarene Church. Imagine my thoughts at the beginning of a strongly Baptist series of messages, only to suddenly have as a significant part of the audience a very loving group of lifelong Nazarenes with very different soteriologies not to mention ecclesiologies. I admit to being filled with dread at the possibility of offending them.

Nevertheless, I forged ahead, not knowing how those precious people would react to very strong Baptist Church doctrine presented in a very direct way. I am happy to say they re-

ceived every message, attended almost every service, and, though they were surprised by some of the positions I held and explained, their responses were always positive. I mention this to allay the fears of any preachers or Bible teachers reading this book who might think folks are always going to choke on strong Baptist doctrine. I have not found that to be my experience.

What do I want you to take away from this work? Two things: *First*, I want you to put the book down after coming to see that the Church of Jesus Christ, while not a cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith, is far more important than most Christian Church members realize. *Second*, I want to provide for you specific Bible reasons and applications to show you why and how the Church of Jesus Christ plays such an important role in God's plan for the ages and ought to play an important role in your life as a Christian.

A bonus would be to convince you to embrace Baptist convictions by the end of the book.

Introduction

I have now been a believer in Jesus Christ for more than forty-five years. Having grown to adulthood on an Indian reservation, I spent most of my growing up years on the outside of our country and culture looking in. For most of my first eighteen years, I was part of an ethnic minority observing the workings of a culture that was only superficially Western. Later at university, I was once more a member of a minority. Having served in the Armed Forces briefly before being medically discharged and at the same time being in engineering school, I was part of a quickly shrinking member of the conservative political class on campus. Finally, not growing up in a Christian home, when I came to faith in Christ after college and began attending and serving as a Church member, I entered into Church life with a decided lack of experience and found myself in the familiar setting of an outsider looking in. Even in my decades in the Gospel ministry, I have related to other Gospel ministers as one who did not feel comfortably situated in the fraternity but saw myself as someone observing the goings on of preachers' meetings as though standing just outside the friendly circle.

I can tell you from a lifetime of experience that being something of an outsider, maybe even in some respects an outlier, provides a useful perspective. One can observe and evaluate a bit more objectively than individuals who are caught up in the group dynamic. I think my perspective has been both beneficial and costly. On the one hand, I have missed some of the comraderies that I am sure benefitted my colleagues. On the other hand, I think my somewhat looser connection with others of like faith and practice has enabled me to examine certain problems more objectively. I address three of those problems in this book:

First, I was not born into the ranks as so many Gospel ministers and Church members were. I did not grow up in

Church. The result has been Bible doctrines many believers embrace uncritically have been somewhat more thoroughly considered by me than I likely would have had I grown up in Church. Second, the processes of studying and applying have been more consciously my experience than I imagine would have been the case had I grown up in Church. Third, I have noticed so many second-generation pastors, and second-generation Church members treat far more casually doctrines that were considered crucial by their pastor fathers or their deacon fathers.

This book is an attempt to treat an important doctrine importantly because the doctrine of the Church is important. However, the doctrine of the Church must be properly understood. The doctrine of the Church is not a cardinal doctrine. It is in my view a costly error to treat every rise in the terrain as a lofty peak, for then your children will conclude for themselves that your logic is faulty and your emphasis on molehills that are not mountains is a reason to suspect the importance of those truths that are lofty peaks of truth. Again, the doctrine of the Church is not a cardinal doctrine, and it is a terrible error by both pastors and Church members to emphasize ecclesiology so that the genuinely cardinal doctrines that make the Christian faith what it is are thereby diminished. That said, the prevailing problem in the ranks of too many Baptists, in my opinion, has been to hold to the biblical doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ without always understanding it well or teaching and applying it thoroughly to Church members' lives.

It is my fervent prayer that the loss of the next generation to freelance Christianity that is divorced from an informed and illuminated appreciation of the Church of Jesus Christ in every Christian's life will be reduced by the insights contained on the following pages.

A final remark about the contents of each chapter is in order. I have written this book with a view to each chapter standing alone. I recognize that most readers will not read the

book through and that is perfectly okay. However, to make sure the reader does not miss important foundational concepts underlying the truths dealt with in each chapter there are enough repetition and reminder included in each chapter that those who do read the book straight through from beginning to end should anticipate.