

1944

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Friends
Are A
Church

Northwest Yearly Meeting

Archives



*"Christ also loved the church,
and gave Himself for it"*



FRIENDS ARE A CHURCH

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**Published by
Board of Publication of
Oregon Yearly Meeting
1944**

Friends Are A Church

This subject is presented for consideration in view of the fact that a very general misunderstanding exists as to what Friends are from an organization viewpoint. This is because there is not a unity of thought among the various groups which use the name Friends, as to what we are and what we stand for. The situation is brought prominently into view through the fact that it has, in an unfortunate manner, been introduced in the public press; this has been to our confusion before the public generally. An outstanding instance (though not the first by any means) is of recent occurrence. An article appeared in the Liberty Magazine of October 30, 1943, under the heading, "They Call Themselves Friends — And Mean It."

Many friends would not recognize themselves as they are pictured in this article. The following statement is printed at the head of the article on a red background: **"The Quakers recognize no Sabbath, have no written creed, and stick to no ritual. The fascinating story of a religion without a church."** The writer has been asked a number of times by other than Friends as to the truth or falsity of the last sentence in particular; **"Are you not a church?"** is the query. I have replied that we are a church and have stated the

facts in the matter, but if we bore a generally recognized name with a Christian meaning it would be an answer to the question and would require no explanation.

The statement that "**Quakers have no Sabbath**" is certainly not true of Friends generally. Further, that we have no doctrinal standards, which is implied in the words, "**no written creed,**" is decidedly untrue. We do expect our members to accept the beliefs of Friends and also that our ministers shall preach in accordance with them.

There is a further statement made in the article that should receive consideration. The author states that there are three groups of Friends, "Orthodox Independents representing some 15 per cent of the Quakers, the Hicksites representing 20 per cent, and the Five Year Meeting group, which makes up the remaining 65 per cent All three have removed restrictions on card playing, dancing, theater going, drinking and music. They leave it to the individual conscience not to over indulge." We know that these statements do not represent the Orthodox group correctly; and we recognize that many in the Five Years Meeting group are orthodox; they have not removed the restrictions mentioned. But to mention music in such a grouping is beyond comprehension. However, those who have removed such restrictions never use the name "Church" as applicable to them; they do not claim to be of that class. Statements similar to

that in the Liberty Magazine are current, but this one has received special attention because it is typical of much that is found in the public press. It is, however, the most recent and is therefore attracting considerable attention. Its errors as to Friends are, in a large measure, stigmatical and should be corrected. There should be a right understanding of what we are, in the minds not only of Friends, but of the public in general. The name by which we are known is a matter of outstanding importance in this connection. It gives an immediate impression as to what we are and what we stand for.

Is it correct to say that we are a church? We say that we are. Then it should stand out clearly so that there need be no confusion. It should be a concise, definite term which could admit of no misunderstanding in the minds of any. To this end the name, The Friends Church, is contributory. With it generally used, there would be no need of extended explanations as to what we are. Unfortunately it is not generally used as it ought to be; this is due to the fact that there are divergent forces, all using the name Friends in some manner or other; this leads to confusion. For this reason we are brought face to face with this vital question, what are we? In order to make this matter clear the meaning and use of the term "Church" is presented. We trust that Friends will read it carefully and

reach conclusions that will be promotive of good and be to the glory of God.

THE CHURCH

What is the Church? Through what means was it brought into being? Of whom is it composed? This name, "Church," is a New Testament term and is used of the "called out ones" who have confessed Christ as their Saviour and Lord and have associated together in worship and service. Of them Christ said, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." John 17:14.

We find it first used in the New Testament by Christ in Matthew 16:13-18. Jesus asked His disciples, "But whom say ye that I am?" To this Peter replied, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered and said unto him, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona; for flesh and blood have not revealed it unto thee but My Father which is in Heaven." He added this remarkable statement: "And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Peter's confession is the very epitome of the Christian's faith as concerns Jesus Christ. There is clearly brought to view the fact of the unique Divine Sonship of Christ as the only begotten Son of God. Christ's unqualified affirmation of the truth thus stated by Peter is the basic, fundamental rock upon which He will build His Church, against which the gates of

hell shall not prevail. He only can save men unto everlasting life; "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." His church is then composed of those who have believed in Him and have determined to follow Him unto the end.

Of the Church Christ is the head: "And He is the head of the body, the church; who is the beginning, the first born from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence." Col. 1:18. An exceedingly important and interesting fact is brought into view by the use of the body as a simile of the church. In this connection a study should be made of the relation of the body to the head in both physical and psychological senses. The head controls the body through the nerve centers extending from the head through the spinal cord to all parts of the body. So Christ motivates His body, the church, in lines of action that produce the highest types of moral and spiritual good. The church is therefore under the immediate control of Christ Himself in all normal functions. It is thus that Christ has the preeminence in this close relation of the body, the church, to Himself as its head. This same truth is developed in Ephesians 1:22,23: "and hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all."

THE CHURCH IS CHRIST'S POSSESSION

The means whereby He came into this relation to the church is that in its very origin He brought it into being. This is fully presented in Acts 20:28, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood." At this tremendous cost He established the church that through it He might be glorified in the sight of men. The super-abounding love of Christ for lost men actuated Him in this sacrifice of Himself that He might restore them to His grace in salvation. Ephesians 5:23-27, "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church; and He is the Saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ so let wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." As this objective in the mind of Christ is brought into view we can but most fully realize what the plan of Christ through His church is, in its complete development. No ordinary organization has ever drawn upon the thought and love of God as has

the church. As He cherishes it let those who are bound together in it arise to a true conception of its evaluation by our Lord, and may a holy determination so possess us, as to this Divine plan, that He shall not be disappointed in us.

GOD'S PURPOSE THROUGH THE CHURCH

The church as the body of Christ exists that through it He may make the world to know the way of salvation through His grace. Men without God do not sense the working of His Spirit; to the natural man it is mysterious. It is at this point the church functions as is stated in Ephesians 3:9-11. "It is the stewardship of the truth which from all the ages lay concealed in order that the church might now be used to display to the powers and authorities in the heavenly realms the innumerable aspects of God's wisdom. Such was the eternal purpose which He had formed in Christ Jesus our Lord." Weymouth Translation.

This is the primary thought of God through the church in order that the world might know the eternal purpose of His will. It was His determination that by the means of Christ's sacrificial death men might receive the salvation provided, deliverance from the power of sin. The church has thus become the repository of the truth. From it are to emanate those influences which turn men from sin to righteousness. All humanitarianism, how-

ever it may be clothed with the garments of religion, if it does not function according to the will of God, does no more than bestow transient benefits. There is in it no transforming power, no presentation of spiritual illumination and life; consequently the favors extended bestow no lasting benefits, and those to whom they are given are left in as hopeless a state as they were before. They should, on the contrary, be an aid to the recipient in seeing the good hand of God in bringing salvation.

If the church fails in the accomplishment of its task to "go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature" and devotes itself to social service only, it ceases to be the church of Christ in any true sense. The by-products of Christianity are of value as a means to an end; that end is the knowledge of God and the working of His grace; if these are not reached the service performed is of no permanent value.

In the sixth chapter of St. John our Lord presents in a clear light the relation of the temporal and the eternal. He said to the Jews, "Your fathers ate manna in the wilderness and are dead. This is the bread that cometh down from heaven that a man may eat thereof and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." In this presenta-

tion we have the very epitome of the mystery of the Gospel. It is not strange that the Jews could not understand this. "How," they said, "can this man give us His flesh to eat?" The manna which was given to the Israelites was a purely temporal bread; it was nevertheless a gift of God. But it had no power to bestow eternal life and thus to make death impossible. Therefore it could not meet the need of men's souls; it was a benefit in the temporal realm only. It was an egregious error to think that it could take the place of a provision for eternal life. Yet they thought that it provided for spiritual need. But Jesus told them, "Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven."

In this we see a clear line of demarcation between the benefit of the temporal on the one hand, and of the spiritual on the other. The temporal we need, and God provides it on the condition our Lord named: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you." As we receive these things from the hand of a loving heavenly Father the obligation comes clearly to us to give to the needy as He has given unto us. But this does not cover our spiritual and eternal need of everlasting life. We hear the Saviour say, "Except ye eat my flesh and drink my blood ye have no life in you." The broken body and the shed blood! Who can understand

this with our finite powers of comprehension? But we can know it for a fact in experience, something that passes all understanding. Humanity is suffering and its need can be met in no other way than by the Divine provision through the atonement by Jesus Christ our Lord. Of this glorious truth the church is the steward. Unto it this glorious Gospel has been committed. If we meet the demand thus made upon us, mankind will be blest and we will have our reward; if we fail, souls will perish for whom Christ died and we will suffer loss.

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CHURCH

The study of the church as we find it presented in the New Testament is a very interesting line of consideration. How was it constituted? What were the methods followed in its upbuilding and perpetuation? Our study of it in the preceding lines of consideration is of its spiritual character in its relation to Christ as its head. The general line of its structure has been a matter of basic importance, but we come now to questions of detail and its development from small beginnings to the larger features of its growth.

1. The believers met in the early days as they found opportunity, out in the open, or in homes, or wherever there were open doors. But in every case or condition it was the church gathered for

worship and service. These groups, however small, are referred to as the "Church." Paul in writing to the Romans (16:5) directs that Priscilla and Aquila be greeted and adds this: "Likewise greet the church that is in their house." And again in I Cor. 16:19 the same "church" is referred to: "Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord with the church that is in their house." In Col. 4:15 we find another instance of the same type: "Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church which is in his house." In the epistle to Philemon Paul addresses him and "the church that is in thy house." These are called to attention in order that it may be recognized that each gathering is a church in its individual capacity.

2. In various cities the church is named as of the city in which it is located. We have the following instances of these: Jerusalem, Acts 8:1, 11:22; Antioch, Acts 13:1; Corinth, I Cor. 1:2; Thessalonica, I Thess. 1:1.

3. Church groups, geographically and racially designated. The churches of the Gentiles. Romans 16:4. "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria." Acts 9:31. The churches of Galatia. I Cor. 16:1. The churches of Asia. I Cor. 16:19. The churches of Macedonia. II Cor. 8:1. The seven churches in Asia. Rev. 1:4.

4. The term **church** has such various usages as to develop fully the fact that it covers all the activities of the Christians referred to in New Testament times. It is declared by Paul in I Tim. 3:15 to be "the pillar and ground of the truth." To each of the seven churches in Asia the message came, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." Thus God has by His Spirit communicated His will to the churches. We note further the fact that the church occupies a unique place in the program of God concerning His saints; in the epistle to the Hebrews, 12:23, we find the church placed in an outstanding relation to them in a grand climax in which it is declared that "the general assembly and church of the first born" are written in heaven. Membership in the church on earth is a gracious privilege, but how gloriously it is enhanced in the light of the fact that the children of God, who constitute the church, are enrolled in the heavenly record! The church! How marvelously is it exalted, in being thus recognized of God! Let no one discount it, nor count it of minor importance. We thank God for it as the means God has provided for the protection of His people, the greatest institution of which this earth has any knowledge.

THE FRIENDS CHURCH IN HISTORY

Friends did not use the term church in the early days in England. It was restricted as to usage to the Established Church of England, which had a legal right to be called the church by reason of enacted law. Friends did use it, nevertheless, in a religious and spiritual sense very frequently. We will note some of these in which they use the term as applicable to themselves as a Christian body and to their particular groups which met for worship and for Christian service. The first is found in the Autobiography of George Fox as quoted in the London Discipline of 1906, in which he mentions attending a meeting at Skipton in 1660 "for the affairs of the church, both in this nation and beyond the seas." It is quite evident those were affairs pertaining to Friends, and that the church was the Friends Church. Vol. II, page XV of the Introduction. In this discipline we find quotations taken from the epistles sent out in 1830, 1861, and 1868 which contain the following expressions: "As a Christian Church we accept the immediate operations upon the heart in their inseparable connections with our risen and exalted Christ." Page 20. On page 139 of the same volume the following occurs: "We love our country and we are in the largest sense a Protestant church." On page 142 we read: "Wherever two or three are gathered in the

name of Christ there is He in the midst of them and **there is a church.**" The same expression is found in the Richmond Declaration of Faith under Public Worship; also in paragraph six under the same heading the term **church** is used twice; in the seventh paragraph the term is used again. This usage of the term church in these instances is very important in that the documents from which they are taken are official in character.

From the Apology by Robert Barclay we quote as follows from Prop. X, Sec. III, page 264, on the subject of the church: "**The Church** is to be considered as it signifies a certain number of persons gathered by God's Spirit, and by the testimony of some of His servants raised up for that end, unto the belief of the true principles and doctrines of the Christian faith, who, through their hearts being united by the same love, and their understandings informed in the same truths, gather, meet, and assemble together to wait upon God, to worship Him, and to bear joint testimony for the truth against error, suffering for the same, and so becoming through this fellowship as one family and household in certain respects, do each of them watch over, teach, instruct, and care for one another, according to their several measures and attainments; such were the **churches** of the primitive times gathered by the Apostles; whereof we have divers mentioned in the Holy Scriptures."

The term **church** was thus used by other writers among Friends as we find by a study of their history. Among these was Joseph John Gurney, one of the most gifted of them. We find in his "Observations," a book of great worth, the following statement: "As the church of God increased in those days, said one of our worthy elders, about the year 1655, in reference to the meeting of Friends at Colchester, my daily care increased." Page 324. (It appears that this worthy Friend functioned as do the worthy pastors of the present day.) This same writer refers to Christ as "the head of **His whole church**," thus speaking of the entire body. Again he writes that "**each little church** among us is thus brought to a deliberate view, at certain periods, of the condition of its members."

J. Bevan Braithwaite, an English Friend of great influence, in writing to a friend concerning a matter of importance, said: "It is right that we should know what is the direction in which things are going in other parts of our widely scattered **churches**." Memoirs by his daughter, page 305.

The first Monthly Meeting in America was set up at Burlington, N. J. They made a record as follows in their first minutes: "For the well ordering of the affairs of the **church** a monthly meeting was set up the 15th of the Fifth Month, 1678." From the history of Friends in America by A. C. and R. H. Thomas, page 85.

THE PRESENT DAY FRIENDS CHURCH

We call the reader's attention to the following clear statements of, first, a local church:

The church of Jesus Christ is composed of those persons, who, through repentance of their sins and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour, have been born into His kingdom through the Holy Spirit. By the revelation of the Holy Spirit they look to Christ as their Prophet, Priest, and King, and by His baptism with the Holy Spirit are cleansed from all sin and receive the power of His Spirit enabling them to witness effectually to the world of Christ as their Saviour.

The second is of the denomination:

A Christian denomination is an organization composed of those who hold similar views of the teaching of the Holy Scriptures, who maintain certain practices based upon these teachings, and who voluntarily associate themselves for joint participation in worship, for fellowship and mutual help, and for united effort in the promotion of truth and its righteousness. The denomination known as the **Friends Church** is such a Christian body.

There are those who use the term Friends but not the term church. Such employ "The Society of Friends" as the preferred name. The Hicksites and the Modernists are of this class; The American Friends Service Committee, composed

largely of these two groups, uses "The Society of Friends" in all of its literature, as far as the writer has observed.

Orthodox Friends are very generally known as the Friends Church. All should do so who recognize Christ in His Deity and Lordship as the Head of the Church. All Christian bodies stand before the public as churches. For us to do otherwise gives rise to the implication that we are not a church, as is noted in the article from which we have quoted in the Liberty Magazine.

In the yearly minutes of five yearly meetings the term church is used. These are Western, California, Oregon, Ohio, and Kansas, which in its sessions of 1943 ordered that all its official documents be so phrased. It is to be hoped that all orthodox yearly meetings will follow the same course. This will present our denomination in a clear light as a Christian Church. If we fail to give to the world a true conception of what we are, we shall fail to exert the influence for Christ which is our primary responsibility. We have a great heritage in the example of our founders; shall we not measure up to our responsibility by letting our light shine for Christ and the Church?

WHAT CONSTITUTES ONE A FRIEND?

What are the essential elements of the character of a Friend without which he could not be properly so designated? Or

what is his relation to God and his fellowmen which makes the name Friend applicable? In considering these questions it is vitally important that we view them from a Scriptural viewpoint, seeing that the term Friend has spiritual implications which are based upon the Word of God. So we turn to it for light upon these matters.

Christ gives us an outstanding expression as to these questions which is basic in its character. Listen to Him as He says "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you." John 15:14. Friends of Christ! What a marvelous expression of intimate relationship! In this we have a basic line of consideration of the whole matter, one which makes the entire subject clear as to our relation to Him and to our fellowmen; for His commandments reveal to us our obligations to them as well as to Himself. Neither of these relations can be set aside as unimportant. The relation of our lives to Christ comes first. If this is not recognized and fixed as a supreme consideration there can be no true line of service to others. It is just as much out of the question to consider that we have no responsibility to our fellowmen and that the whole fulfillment of obligation is Christward. If we love not our brother whom we have seen how can we love God whom we have not seen?

It will be seen that these relations center in Christ as supreme. It is more than

a friendly relationship; it goes far beyond organization for mutual enjoyment. Although social opportunities are in a degree beneficial, if as Friends these are an end we have come far from the fulfillment of the condition of Divine relationship as laid down by Christ. Even in the religious realm there may be established friendly relationship without any purpose as regards Christ and obedience to His commands. At one time I was in a meeting of Friends where the evening before we began the special services the church put on a community supper. There was a fine crowd and much outward show of interest in the church and its program. I was given an opportunity to present the purpose of the meetings to be held and a kind invitation was extended for all to be present. I went to the opening service the next night with high expectations, but to my chagrin only fifteen of the number present the night before were in attendance. The crowd of the previous night was not interested in Christ. The chicken supper was the attraction. Even the religious coloring was hardly visible.

The conclusion is evident that it is only as we are obedient to Christ in all of His requirements that we can be termed Friends in any Christian sense. This leads to the consideration of a common use of the name Friend in certain circles; that is, "A Friend of the Friends," in which there is no reference to any basic Christian experience. Some one feature of

Friends' belief is accepted. These people are oftentimes attracted by Friends' position on the subject of peace, and that only, but they are accepted in fellowship as though they were truly Christians in some Friends meetings. These belong to the Society but not to the church of Christ. Their names are not written in heaven although they are found in the Monthly Meeting record.

In CPS camps these pseudo followers of the peace principles are found oftentimes, but their presence in such connection is exceedingly detrimental to the cause of peace as a Christian program. This arises from a desire to ingratiate themselves with Friends as conscientious objectors for personal advantage in respect to combat duty as required by the government.

The Savior's admonition, "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you," is a far reaching one, one that vitally affects the believer, and forms an integral part of a Christian's character and service. I once heard a Hicksite say that he had no use for any part of the Bible except the Sermon on the Mount and the Golden Rule. In even this he said much more than he really thought. A careful examination of these Scriptures (one might say even a casual one) will lead one into the deepest scriptural lines of Christian truth. In the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount Christ said, "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto

a wise man who built his house upon a rock."

That saying comprehends the utmost in Christian faith and action. What does it say is the first thing? "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all of these things shall be added unto you." But "Every one who hears these sayings and doeth them not shall be likened unto a foolish man who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house and it fell; and great was the fall of it." A life may be wasted because the words of Christ are not followed; not a part of them, as one might select, but all of them in sincerity and truth. Such a consideration will lead one into a very careful examination of all that He said so that eternal bankruptcy may not ensue.

I cannot go through the three chapters of this sermon in detail but one feature demands careful thought: Christ said in the seventh chapter that "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire." Why is one good and the other evil? What is the cause of the differentiation? And if one is evil can it become good or is destiny fixed? Is man responsible for the condition in which he is, and if not why must he be cast into the fire if he is evil? This opens the great question of salvation by

the efficacy of the shed blood of Christ in delivering one from sin. At the last supper Christ said, "This is my blood which is shed for the remission of sins." Listen to Him as we hear Him say, "Except ye eat my flesh and drink my blood ye have no life in you." Friends believe that these utterances have a spiritual application. Very well, but to us there are greater questions to be answered as to the how of these things than to those who think that the use of the emblems is sufficient. The words of Christ bring forcefully to us the urgency of the matter in a striking way; the command is there for us just as truly as for any believer. With us there must be a living sense of reality if we are to be the friends of Jesus Christ. But, may it be asked, how often do we follow these words through to a state of active realization of experience? Not just once in a while, but a continuous partaking of His broken body and shed blood is essential, even as in the physical the blood is the active cause of continuous life.

All this means much more than a mere joining of an organization without a spiritual birth. It is to become a living member of Christ's body, the church. From this there will result a continuity of living force which can but cause one to enjoy a sense of what it means to be a friend of Christ and thus to be a part of the church for which He gave Himself in His death. Thus, and thus only, can we be said to be **Friends** in deed and in truth.