

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA # 12

Dearest Grandchild,

Today's letter is about the church. As you know, the "church" is an assembly of people and not a building! Statistically speaking many children who were raised in church quit attending when they leave home. Unfortunately, there is often little or no difference between the lives of people who attend church and those who don't. One cynic said that the big difference between Christians and non-Christians is that Christians go to more meetings. Ouch!

So, I fear that I may face an up hill struggle convincing you of the relevance of the church. I have made Christ and the church the center of my life, and I want you to do the same. I hope this brief letter will encourage you to that end.

Granny and I began our ministry with a little country church in 1955 . It was a small congregation with an average attendance of 115. The nearest town was 6 miles away. It was founded in 1866. In those days the church building was also the "meeting house" for all community activities. Often the church house also served as a school during the week. I am told that in 1866 one out of four college graduates was a preacher. Sometimes the preacher was the only literate person in the community and people would bring their letters to him to find out what they said. He was often called the "Parson", which in modern parlance means "Person". Preachers in those days were also highly respected by almost everyone. In those days the church was the hub around which society revolved.

Today, that little country church has ceased to exist. The abandoned building still stands, but the people now drive to bigger churches in the city. Even in the modern city, however, the church is no longer the hub around which community activities revolve. Further, preachers are also often seen as irrelevant and out of touch. In many ways the church of Jesus Christ is like the ark of Noah. Those in it are saved, and those outside are lost. Someone quipped that if the storm outside the ark was not so bad, the stench inside would have been unbearable. Perhaps this same is true of the church. Yes! There are many problems in the church, but the storm outside unquestionably makes being in church the best alternative.

The Bible has many positive things to say about the church. Here are only a few:

- It is the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27). The concept is simple. What Jesus began to do in the Body, the Body continues to do in Jesus.
- It is also the Bride of Christ. Husbands are to love their wives in the same way that Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her (Eph. 5:25).
- It is the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15).
- It is a holy temple that God inhabits through His Spirit (Eph. 2:21, 22).
- Through it the manifold wisdom of God is seen by the principalities and powers in heavenly

- places (Eph. 3:10)
- Jesus loved the church and I want you to be like Jesus!

A BASIC OVERVIEW

Every living thing must have a proper environment to survive. Fish need water, animals need air, plants need sunshine and soil, and Christians need the church. Christians, as you know, are “new creations” (2 Cor. 5:17). The church is God’s special environment specifically designed to help these “new creations” prosper and grow.

From 1959 - 1965 our family lived in California. This is where Mary and Steve were born. As you travel along the Northern California coast you cannot help but be impressed by the giant redwood trees. These amazing trees come from a tiny seed that is only 1/8th of an inch long. The seeds are so small that it takes a million of them to weigh 8 lbs. The mature tree, however, weighs many tons. The General Sherman redwood, for example, is 275 feet high, 36 feet in diameter at the base, and contains an estimated 52,500 board feet of lumber. Three redwood trees have become special tourist attractions because they have tunnels in their base large enough for a car to drive through.

Jesus compared the Kingdom of God to a little seed that grows into a big tree. He said: **“What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade.”** (Mark 4:30-32)

Redwood trees do not grow everywhere. God had to create a special environment for them. Neither can they survive on their own. Their root system, in fact is quite shallow. The National Park System offers this quote: *“The root system of the redwood tree is surprisingly shallow, especially given the great height the mature tree attains. There is no tap root and the other roots may reach no deeper than 6-12 feet. The major roots are about 1 inch in diameter. and they typically spread 50 to 80 feet. One way in which the trees are able to remain upright for millennia is by growing close together with other redwood trees, intermingling root systems.”*

When you were “born again” you became a “new creation” and the church is God’s special environment for your protection and growth. Because we are rooted and grounded in love for one another we can withstand the storms of life that the devil sends our way. Christians need the church!

FACTS ARE FACTS

Permit me to remind you of a couple of quotes from Letter # 4.

When Charles Darwin returned to England after circling the earth gathering information to substantiate the “theory” of evolution, he found some of his colleagues making fun of missionaries.

Darwin rebuked them with these words:

"They forget, or will not remember, that human sacrifices, and the power of an idolatrous priesthood—a system of profligacy unparalleled in any other part of the world—infanticide a consequence of that system—bloody wars, where the conquerors spared neither women nor children—that all these have been abolished; and that dishonesty, intemperance, and licentiousness have been greatly reduced by the introduction of Christianity. In a voyager to forget these things is base ingratitude; for should he chance to be at the point of shipwreck on some unknown coast, he will most devoutly pray that the lesson of the missionary may have extended thus far." (Journals of Research by Charles Darwin p. 414.)

Howard R. Russell, in his book "A Lawyer's Examination of the Bible" (Pages 191 - 192) quotes James Russell Lowell. When he was Minister of State to England he also heard critics malign the work of missionaries. He said: *"I will challenge such skeptics to find a place ten miles square on the globe, where a man can live in comfort, security, and decency, where he can find education for his children, reverence for infancy and old age, honor for womanhood or any sacred regard for human life, where the gospel of Christ has not gone and cleared the way, laying a foundation for such a condition of affairs. If they can find such a place, it will then be in order for them to emigrate thither and advocate their unbelief. Scoffers against religion are dependent upon the religion they discard for every privilege they enjoy as citizens of a Christian community."*

Invariably, those who ridicule the church would not dream of living in a country where there is no church. Facts are facts!

WILLIAM WILBERFORCE

William Wilberforce was an English politician who led a movement to abolish slavery. His convictions date back to 1785 when he became a Christian. As was not alone in the abolitionist movement, but was aided by others in the church. His particular congregation was a small group of believers known as the "Clapham Saints". Clapham Common was a suburb of London. Even small congregations, however, are an important part of the Body of Christ that manifests itself though out the whole world. Christ, of course, is the Head of His Body. The Clapham Saints were a diverse group made up of merchants, clergy, CEO's, politicians, lawyers, and professors. In addition to their opposition to slavery, they started 69 other Christ centered initiatives. Most important, however, was their link to God, Christ, angels, and the power of the Holy Spirit. Note this commentary on Christian meetings from the Bible: **"But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."** (Heb 12:22-24) There is far more to the church than is seen by human eyes.

The struggle to defeat slavery was long. It took 20 years to pass the Slave Trade Act of 1807.

In 1826 Wilberforce resigned from Parliament due to failing health. The Slavery Abolition Act was not passed until 1833. This benevolent act abolished slavery in most of the British Empire, and Wilberforce died just 3 days later.. He was buried with honors in Westminster Abbey.

THE CHURCH IN AMERICA

David Barton is a Christian Historian. His ministry is known as Wall Builders, and is located in Aledo, Texas. This is a great place to get factual information regarding religion in America. In 1991 he published a book titled *The Myth of Separation*. While that book is out of print the same facts are available in other of his publications. He has an extensive library from American History and frequently quotes from original documents and books. Here are some facts from American History found in *The Myth of Separation*.

- One of the first laws providing for public education in America was enacted in 1642 and was known as the “Old Deluder Satan Law”. The primary purpose of this law was to teach children to read the Bible so they would not be deluded by Satan.
- The first college in America was Harvard College in Massachusetts. The official motto of Harvard was “For Christ and the Church”.
- William and Mary College was founded in Williamsburg, Virginia in 1692. It was founded by a preacher named James Blair for the propagation of the Christian faith.
- Yale was founded in 1701 by ten Congregational ministers to propagate the blessed Reformed Protestant Religion in the wilderness.
- Princeton was founded in 1746. The first president was the Rev. Jonathan Dickinson who declared: “*Cursed be all that learning that is contrary to the cross of Christ*”.
- Rutgers University was founded in 1766 through the efforts of the Rev. Theodore Frelinghuysen. It’s official motto was “Son of Righteousness Shine upon the West also”.
- In 1779 George Washington emphasized to congress the importance of “above all” teaching Native Americans “The religion of Jesus Christ”.
- 106 OF THE FIRST 108 COLLEGES IN AMERICA WERE FOUNDED ON THE CHRISTIAN FAITH!
- Here is a brief clip that will help introduce you to David Barton <http://www.cbn.com/tv/1720990360001>

To paraphrase a comment made famous by President Kennedy - do not ask what the church can do for you, ask what you can do for the church! If there is no church in your community, perhaps God will use you to start one. Please never forsake Christ or His Church! In the words of Scripture: “**Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching.**” (Heb 10:25).

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce