

Are the O Rings in Place?

A few months ago, an Eastern Airlines jet departed the Miami International Airport bound for Nassau in the Bahamas. This airplane, an Eastern Airlines L1011 carried 172 souls aboard. Just a few minutes out of Miami, they lost all power and the plane began to plummet down toward the water below. All of the people on board including the pilots thought that they would surely die. Through the skill of the pilots, they were able to establish a glide. The pilots finally managed to start one engine and they were able to make a straight in approach to the Miami International Airport and landed without harming a soul. In the investigation that followed, federal officials in Miami determined that the cause of the power failure in all of the engines was the absence of the critical 'O' rings on the metal chip detectors. This allowed the engine oil to seep out and the engines quit. Two mechanics were blamed for this negligence. One mechanic was blamed for the failure to replace the critical 'O' rings and the other mechanic was blamed for not catching the mistake. The mechanic's union is going to court to fight to keep these mechanics from being fired.

There are other people who might have failed to do something to that plane and it would not have been so serious.

For example, the people who clean the airplane between flights, they could have failed to do their job and no danger would have resulted. The people who bring food on board the airplanes could have failed to do their jobs and there would have been no danger just a little nuisance to the passengers. But, for the mechanic to fail to install the critical 'O' rings borders on being far more than negligent. Those two mechanics are very fortunate that they do not have the deaths of 172 souls on their conscience.

Even as that airplane took off with a plane load of passengers bound for a happy vacation and suddenly returned back to earth, so we see souls take off for heaven. Time after time, we have watched them come down the aisles of this church joyfully. We have witnessed their baptisms and our own hearts have sung for joy as we greeted them and welcomed them to the congregation. We have expected such great things. A few weeks later or a few months later, we have witnessed those same souls come crashing back to failure and we cry out "what is wrong?"

Just as federal officials investigated that L1011 to find out what was wrong, we should investigate why so many souls fail to be faithful in living the Christian life.

The answer is found in Acts 2. What happened to these souls that took off for heaven with such an outburst of joy on the day of Pentecost? They continued to be filled with joy. They continued to be faithful. Why were they faithful? Why are Christians today not faithful? The answer can be found in the 42nd verse which is our text. "And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in the breaking of bread and in prayers." There are the critical 'O' rings of Christianity!!

The Church of Christ is compared to a city four square. It is compared to a field hedged in on four sides. It is compared to a building with just one door to enter. One does not get a proper view outside of the city, outside of the field, or outside of the building. You have to be on the inside before you can see the beauty of the temple. Let us look at the church of our Lord

Jesus Christ as we examine carefully these four dimensions.

I. The first dimension of the church — the first critical ‘O’ ring if you please — if we are going to make the successful flight from earth to heaven is the width of the church. The width of the church is seen in its doctrine. The doctrine of Christ’s church is very narrow. Jesus expressed it like this in Matthew 7:13 and 14, “Enter ye in at the straight gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction and many there be which go in thereat because straight is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth to life and few there be that find it.” Does that mean that it is hard to get into the church? No, it is very easy to get into the church. Is it hard to understand a Christian life? No, it is very easy to know how to live a Christian life. The doctrine is narrow by contrast to the broad way that most people take which leads to hell. What is the Apostles’ doctrine? It is two fold. First, it is the doctrine of salvation. Secondly, it is the doctrine of Christian living. In Acts 2, it is quite clear.

The doctrine of salvation was the preaching of Jesus Christ. Peter preached from the prophets proving that Jesus Christ was the Son of the Living God and the Savior of the world. The doctrine of salvation involved believing this teaching that was preached about Jesus. It involved the repentance of sins committed. It involved the commitment of the life of Christ in Christian baptism and the purpose of that baptism was to remit all sins. It involved the doctrine of receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit whom we need if we are going to live the Christian life. Every example of conversion in the book of Acts follows that same doctrine. There was only one doctrine.

What about the doctrine of the Christian life? This is also a very, very narrow doctrine. It can all be summarized in Galatians 5. There are some do’s and some don’t’s. Let us consider the don’t of Christian living. Galatians 5:19-21 says, “Now the works of the flesh are manifest which are these, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies,

envying, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Here are the do's. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." This is the Apostles' doctrine and the New Testament says that these first members of the church were successful because they installed that critical 'O' ring. They continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine. II Timothy, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine." It is profitable for doctrine. Why? "So that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Romans 16:17, "Now, I beseech you brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you have learned and avoid them for they are such that serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple."

II. Let us examine the second dimension of the church. The depth of the church is seen in the fellowship. What is fellowship? Shaking hands? The holy hug? The holy kiss? That is not the primary meaning of 'fellowship'. The primary meaning is the paying of money into God's treasury that the kingdom of God might advance. It means giving our entire lives daily as a sacrifice for the kingdom of God. Fellowship means the depth that God's people are willing to go to see the kingdom of God succeed and in Acts 2:44 and 45, we see the depths of fellowship. "All that believed were together. They had all things common. They sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all men as every man had need." They had such deep fellowship that they actually sacrificed all that they had showing their love for one another that the kingdom might succeed.

III. The third dimension of the church is the length seen in

the breaking of bread. “And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine” is the ‘O’ ring #1, fellowship is ‘O’ ring #2, and breaking of bread is ‘O’ ring #3. It is a lengthy procedure. Christ began the breaking of bread and He said that we were to do it until He comes again. It has been going on for almost 2,000 years and it is going to continue to go on until Jesus comes. Why? Because it is very important that we meet every Lord’s Day and break bread. Jesus put it like this in John 6:53, “Verily, verily I say unto you except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, have eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day for my flesh is meat indeed and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood dwelleth in me and I in him.” I meet around the Lord’s table every Lord’s Day because I need to be there. I cannot do without this spiritual food. I need the body of Christ. I need the blood of Christ because I need the spiritual strength that Christ gives to me when I remember Him around the Lord’s table. May God allow us to be so concerned about this critical ‘O’ ring that we will forget about fishing on Sunday and golfing on Sunday and everything else on Sunday that keeps people from God’s house.

IV. The fourth dimension is the height of the church — prayer. “And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayers.” What happened to the church when they got into trouble? They prayed. When the Apostle Peter was in prison, the church met in Rhoda’s house and they prayed. What did God do? He answered their prayers and miraculously released Peter from the prison and he went out and preached the gospel elsewhere. What happened to the Apostle Paul when he met with the elders at Miletus on his way to Rome? He was concerned about the church because the wolves were entering the church. Paul prayed with the elders. They wept and they hugged each other as they prayed together and God answered their prayers. What

happened to Lydia when she needed to be saved? She prayed about it and Paul came and told her what to do to be saved. When the sick people were ill in the church, what did they do? They prayed and they were healed. The prayers of a righteous man availeth much. Jesus Himself demonstrated His own personal need by praying. He met the cross in Gethsemane as He prayed and He offered forgiveness to those who crucified Him on the cross as He prayed for them.

In a little village near Warsaw lived a German peasant whose name was Dobry. Because of adverse circumstances, he had become delinquent in paying his rent and the landlord was threatening to evict him. All his pleadings for an extension of time had been in vain and the next day he and his family were to be turned out into the snow. Hearing the church bells chime for evening prayer, Dobry and his loved ones knelt to ask the Lord to supply their needs for they were at the end of all human resources. After prayer, they rose to their feet and sang an old hymn: "Commit thou all thy grief and ways into His hands."

As they finished singing, they heard a strange tapping at the window. Opening it, they found a raven that Dobry's grandfather had tamed many years before. It held in its beak a ring of great value set with many precious stones. An investigation disclosed that it had been lost that day by the king who was traveling through that town. Dobry returned it and the king rewarded him with a large sum of money sufficient to build a house of his own.

To commemorate that wonderful event, a plaque was prepared on which was a carved raven with a ring in its beak and underneath the stanza of the hymn they had been singing when the bird pecked at their window. Dobry recognized it even as the prophet Elijah had been divinely fed by the fowl of the air, he too, had been rescued by a raven in answer to prayer. God is a prayer hearing and prayer answering God.

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