

# **THE CHURCH OF CHRIST: "CULTURE-DRIVEN" OR "CALLED OUT"?**

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The word “church” appears in the New Testament some 115 times. It comes from the Greek word ἐκκλησία meaning “a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place; an assembly.”<sup>1</sup> The word is made up of two Greek words ἐκ and κλησι. κλησι comes from the meanings of “summon” and “invite” and develops into the figure of “call” as calling someone to something. Christians have been called from darkness into light (I Pet. 2:9), into fellowship with Christ (I Cor. 1:9), and by the preaching of the gospel of Christ (II Thess. 2:14).<sup>2</sup> ἐκ means “from, out of, away from.”<sup>3</sup> The word denotes separation according to renowned lexicographers Arndt and Gingrich. The word of God is the divine standard by which men and women are called out of the wicked world and placed into the church of Christ. The apostle Peter wrote, “But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you” (I Pet. 1:23).

Although these truths are unassailable, some in prominent positions of higher education in the field of religion who are training men to fill pulpits in the churches of Christ seem to be unable to speak on virtually any subject without touting “culture” and the direct operation of the Holy Spirit. Consider the following: “This eternal hope gives me confidence in what God will do through another generation or cultural group. Without confidence that the Spirit works in those around me, I know my love, honor and zeal will diminish.”<sup>4</sup>

Recently, Tom Holland wrote an article on “The Challenge of the Culture” in which he exposed the danger of following the allurements of the contemporary culture. He said, “Our Lord knew the potential threat posed by the culture. He prayed that his people might be delivered from the evil of the world/culture (John 17:14-21).

“The Holy Spirit, through Paul’s inspired pen, warned of the danger world/culture would always be to God’s people (Rom. 12:1-2). . . .

“The impact of the culture on religion generally and on the Lord’s church specifically is seen in the division of the so-called ‘traditional and contemporary’ worship. The entertainment mentality of the culture has invaded some churches.

“The pragmatism of the ‘Church Growth Movement’ denigrates doctrine and seeks to offer people what they want in religion even in preference to what they truly need.

“But if the leaders of God’s people—elders, deacons, preachers—appreciate the fact that God in His people is greater than ‘he that is in the world’ (1 John 4:4); if God’s leaders know that the salient characteristics of the world/culture are still lust and pride (1 John 2:15-17); if God’s leaders realize that God’s power to save is still in the gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16-17); if God’s leaders commit anew to congregational autonomy, then there is hope that the Lord’s church will again be distinctive in a world of religious confusion.”<sup>5</sup>

The “culture-driven” members of the church of Christ need to repent of their failure to remain in the “old paths” of God’s inspired word (Jer. 6:16). The church of Christ must remain distinct as the ones who are “called out” of a wicked world by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Joseph Henry Thayer, **Thayer's Greek Lexicon**, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 2000 by BibleSoft.

<sup>2</sup>William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature** (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 400.

<sup>3</sup>**Ibid.**, p. 233.

<sup>4</sup>Evertt W. Huffard, “From the Dean—Be Joyful in Hope” in **The Bridge**, Harding University Graduate School of Religion (May 2001), 42:3, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup>**The Christian Chronicle** (May 2001), 58:5, p. 18.