

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WORD **FIRST**

### INTRODUCTION

- I. An old classmate of mine (Hugh Fulford) recently wrote an article on the word "FIRST", pointing out that the word "first" indicates something foremost, paramount or of primary importance before other things.
  - A. In this lesson, we shall note several matters the Holy Spirit obviously considered to be of utmost importance, as the word "first" is used.
  - B. These matters themselves are important, but there is something about them that gives them reason to have them introduced with the word "first".
- II. Now let's give consideration to some "firsts" in the New Testament.

### DISCUSSION

#### **I. The 1st "first" of interest is on the "day the church began."**

- A. The Jews of old met on the day of Pentecost, which came on a first day of the week. Acts 2:1; cf Lev. 23:15-16
  1. The "day after" the 7<sup>th</sup> sabbath following the Passover, which would be ON the first day of that week.
  2. This is significant, as Jesus was raised from the dead as on the first day of the week after He observed His last Passover, and this day became the "Lord's day. Mark 16:1-2; Luke 24:1; cf Rev. 1:10
  3. It became a revealed custom for the church to meet on the **first day of the week** to worship God and remember the death of Jesus in the Lord's supper. Acts 2:42; 20:5-7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; 10:16; 11:23-26
- B. Speaking of "first" (relative to CHURCH), the Roman Catholic Church **claims** to be the oldest and FIRST "church" and is therefore the RIGHT church, and all "Protestant churches departed FROM it, and are in error."
  1. IF it is the oldest church in Christianity, why does not the New Testament tell us such, rather than associating it with the "falling away" of the church, and the practicing of things contrary to the teachings of the New Testament?"
  2. The New Testament speaks ONLY of the church of CHRIST, and never names or alludes to the Roman Catholic Church.

#### **II, The second "first" pertains to the "preaching of the gospel."**

- A. The apostle Paul said HE "first" or prioritized the GOSPEL in His preaching, as he emphasized first the death, burial and resurrection when he preached. 1 Cor.15:1-4; cf 2:17-18; Rom.1:16
- B. Peter also preached the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus on the day the church began. Acts 2:22-24
  1. The word of the Lord was and still is the seed of the kingdom, and today when the seed is not proclaimed, souls are not saved. Luke 8:11
  2. The new birth involves the action of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. John 3:3-5; 1 Pet. 1:22-23

#### **III. The third "first" of interest relates to the "great apostasy of the church."**

- A. Paul had declared that the apostasy WOULD involve the eldership of the church some place in the known world. Acts20:28-30
  1. History records the fact that elders exalted themselves in the leadership of the church, to the point that ONE rose to the exalted point of claiming authority over the whole church.
  2. The brethren at Thessalonica were looking for the return of Christ **in their lifetime.**

B. Paul NOW tells them that the apostasy of the church (of which he had prophesied) would come **“first”** or before the coming of the Lord in the last days. 2 Thess. 2:3-5

#### **IV. The 4<sup>th</sup> “first” of interest has to do “with giving in worship”**

A. The scripture states that our giving relates to several things.

1. 1<sup>st</sup>, it should be upon the first day of the week. 1 Cor. 16:1-2
2. 2<sup>nd</sup>, it should be based on our prosperity. 1 Cor. 16:1-2
3. 3<sup>rd</sup>, it should be based on our ability to give. Acts 11:29
4. 4<sup>th</sup>, it should be based on what we purpose in our hearts to give. 2 Cor. 9:7
5. 5<sup>th</sup>, it should be done cheerfully. 2 Cor. 9:7

B. Preceding all this is the fact that we are “first” **WILLING** give, as we give ourselves to the Lord. 2 Cor. 8:3-5

#### **V. The 5<sup>th</sup> “first” of interest has to do “with the resurrection.”**

A. The day and hour of the coming of Christ is not known to us. John 5:28-29; 1 Thess. 5:4

B. However, something is said about something being **“first”** relative to the resurrection.

1 Thess. 4:16

1. Some think this is saying that the dead in Christ being raised “first” or before the dead “out of Christ” will be raised.
2. However, Paul is not dealing with the dead “out of Christ” **at all** in this passage, but rather is saying that the dead “in the Lord” will be raised **before the living will be changed**, as verse 16 speaks of the DEAD, and verse 16 **begins** with the word “then”, which is **“second”** with reference to the “living”--meaning that the living have no advantage over Christians who have died, for THEY will be raised before the living are changed to meet the Lord, and ALL shall meet Him at the same time.

#### CONCLUSION

I. For you and I to benefit by any of these promises, we must FIRST be IN CHRIST seeking FIRST the kingdom of God. Matt. 6:33

II. We begin seeking the things above when we are born again. John 3:3-5

DON TARBET

(Thanks to Hugh Fulford for the idea for this sermon)