

# THE CHURCH MUST BE MILITANT

by Thomas B. Warren

The word "militant" is heard quite often in our land these days. Usually the word is associated with those who are involved in riots, the burning of buildings, attacking of police, disrupting the educational processes of our colleges and universities, etc.

In saying that the church must be militant, I do not mean that the church must be associated with any of the matters just mentioned. I do mean that the church, as Christ's army (2 Timothy 2:3, Ephesians 6:10-17), is to be aggressive in carrying out its mission of preaching the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15,16). To say that the church is Christ's army is to say that it faces a battle—a fight! and that it is to be aggressively involved in this fight.

In spite of the fact that most of their contemporaries were largely indifferent to religion, the Christians of the first century exercised a tremendous influence on the Roman Empire. In fact, the early church was described as having "turned the world upside-down" (Acts 17:6) and as being "everywhere spoken against" (Acts 28:22). Within a very short while they carried the gospel to the then known world (Colossians 1:23).

However, the church of the twentieth century is not "turning the world upside-down" as did the church of the first century. Largely, the church is unknown, and many of those who know of it are indifferent to it—they neither admire it nor hate it. Why is this the case? Is it not because the church of the twentieth century is not doing what the church of the first century did, or else that it is not doing what it is doing in the way the church of the first century did?

It ought to be of significant interest to Christians to consider why the early church had such a tremendous impact on the culture in which it existed. Why did the early church have such tremendous influence? If we can ascertain the reasons for this influence, surely we will be wiser in accomplishing our task today.

1. The early church had such great influence upon the world of its day because of its attitude toward God. Early Christians were not willing for the one true eternal God to be recognized as simply one god among many other equally valuable gods of similar nature and power. They would have none of this for a moment. Rather, they declared that there was one, and only one, true, living God! While they preached this message with kindness and love, they never compromised it; they never sounded an uncertain voice about it. (Acts 17:24-31; Ephesians 4:4-6).

2. The early church made a terrific impact upon the world of its day because it refused to stand in silence in the face of the view that Christ was only another "savior" among many other saviors of like power. Christians preached that men could be saved by Jesus Christ of Nazareth and only by Him (Acts 4:12; Acts 3:19-22; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). They constantly affirmed the truth stated by Jesus and recorded in John 8:24.

3. The church of the first century turned its world upside-down because it rejected the view that the gospel of Christ was only one religious message among many other equally valuable messages. Christians contended that the gospel was the one and only message by which men could be saved! They declared, "there is . . . one faith. . ." (Ephesians 4:4-6). They militantly rejected the view that "one faith is as good as another." They contended that acceptable faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10:17). They held that truth is absolute and objective—not relative and subjective.

4. The early church made a tremendous impact upon the world of its day because it preached that one message—the gospel—everywhere (Acts 8:4). Christians went into the very midst of the Jewish doctors of the Law and there preached “Christ crucified” as the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the Messiah in the Old Testament scriptures. Then, they challenged these Jewish doctors to refute that affirmation! They went into the midst of the Greek doctors of philosophy and there preached “Christ—the wisdom of God” and challenged these “men of wisdom” to refute that affirmation. While it is true that they did not do this preaching in the spirit of arrogance or of self-righteousness, it is also true that, while being motivated by love for God and man, they were nevertheless firm in their conviction and in their preaching.

5. The early church turned the world upside-down because of its attitude toward the body of Christ, the church (Ephesians 1:22,23). Members made it clear that reconciliation unto God is in that one body (Ephesians 2:13-16) and in no other! They made it clear that the church—that one body for Christ—was purchased by the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28).

6. The church of the first century made a tremendous impact upon the world of its day because the members of it lived lives of sincere dedication to Christ. Members truly presented their bodies as living sacrifices to the Lord. They knew that the greatest battle going on in this world is not some political or military battle, but is the battle between Christ and Satan—between the church and every person or group which opposes the work which Christ has given the church to do. Many of these members were willing to die rather than be unfaithful to Christ (Acts 21:13). They realized that they could not “spare themselves” but that rather they must “give themselves away”—that the only way they could ever really live was to die—to die to the world and become alive to Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17-19; Romans 6:3-5)! They were willing to take up the cross daily and suffer whatever came their way because of their faithfulness to Christ (Luke 9:23,24).

Because it did these (and other things, no doubt) the church of the first century “turned the world upside-down.” People everywhere were talking about it—they either loved or hated the church. No doubt, it is the case that if we who are Christians in the twentieth century would begin to do these same things, we also would make a tremendous impact with the truth (on the world in which we live), with the gospel of Christ. It is surely the case that the New Testament lays upon the church the obligation to preach the gospel in such fashion as to constitute a challenge to the world. In a very real sense, the world must be “staggered” by the gospel! The world must learn that not only does the gospel differ from the doctrines of men, but that that difference really does make a difference! The world must learn that the difference between truth and error is the difference between eternal life and eternal punishment for every responsible person in this world. Perhaps some well-meaning brethren will object in this fashion, “We must make a positive approach; we must not build up prejudice by preaching any negative matters.” To such an objection I would reply, “Jesus and the apostles were motivated by love both for God and man and yet they preached the truth plainly, exposing false doctrine and false teachers. In doing so they turned the world upside-down. This is the very job the Lord gave the church to do. Since He wants it done, and since He has given us the job of doing it, He will be with us in the doing of it (Matthew 28:18-20).”

“Let us go up at once and possess it, for we are able to overcome it” (numbers 13:30)—with God’s help.