

THE CHURCH

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About the author...

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Introduction

Anytime the word “church” is mentioned in a group of people, it is distinctly possible there will be as many different ideas about “Church” as there are people. Clearly the world does not have a proper understanding of the word “Church.” In fact, many people look upon the “Church” as nothing more than a social club, a hobby, a place to go when there is nowhere else to go, or an institution that exists merely for the purpose of helping those who will not work.

However, the Bible nowhere gives this picture of the Church. The truth is, inspiration presents the Church as being of Divine origin. The Bible teaches the Church has a heavenly mission and a righteous purpose. Paul makes a sobering statement in Ephesians 3:20-21 when he wrote, “*Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.*” Glory is directed toward the Great I Am “*in the Church by Christ Jesus.*” Does Deity have the same idea of the “Church” as man does? Certainly not!

Undoubtedly Paul’s thoughts were not based upon how historians see the “Church,” as theologians view it, modernists consider it, agnosticism sees it, denominationalism depicts it, or liberalism thinks of it. There is no doubt, inspiration’s view of the Church does not agree with the world’s concept. God’s view of it is distinctly different than man’s idea. They are as far removed for each other as the east is from the west.

The Church Is The “Called Out”

Our Lord first used the word “Church” in response to Peter’s confession that He was the Christ. He said, “*Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*” (Matthew 16:17-18). This word is found an additional one hundred and fourteen times in the New Testament. Interestingly enough, not one time is it ever used in the sense of a hobby, a social club, an oasis of recreation or “just some

place to go.”

The word translated “Church” denotes the idea of “called out.” The Church is comprised of those who have been “called out” of the world by the gospel. The apostle Paul wrote, *“Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father”* (Galatians 1:4). Peter adds, *“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light”* (1 Peter 2:9). The Lord informed Paul that his mission was *“To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me”* (Acts 26:18).

However, even though we are called out of this present evil world, we are not left in “limbo.” We are called unto a specific life. In Ephesians 4:1, we read *“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.”* The words here translated “vocation” and “were called” are from the same root word. Thus, we are to walk worthy (in a manner which befits) of that “calling.” This calling is by the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14), and we are called into His kingdom and glory (1 Thessalonians 2:12).

It is a “holy calling” (2 Timothy 1:9; 1 Corinthians 1:2), by which He calls us into fellowship with Him (1 Corinthians 1:9). We are called into the grace of Christ (Galatians 1:6), unto liberty (Galatians 5:13), in one hope (Ephesians 4:4), in one body (Col. 3:15), unto holiness (1 Thessalonians 4:7; 1 Peter 1:15-16), a “new man” (Colossians 3:10; Ephesians 4:24), and purity (1 Timothy 5:22; 2 Timothy 2:22). This is what Paul was alluding to when he wrote, *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”* (2 Corinthians 5:17).

When one walks worthy of that Divine calling, he presents to the world *“a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish”* (Ephesians 5:27). This, then, is the “called out” feature of the Church.

The Church Is the Body of Christ

Inspired men taught that the Church was the ‘body of Christ.’ Paul wrote, *“And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all”* (Ephesians 1:22-23). In very clear and strong terms, Paul tells us the “the church...is his body.” For one to deny this simple truth is to deny a clear passage of Scripture. This body is spiritual in nature, with Christ as its head.

Paul adds in Colossians 1:24, *“Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church.”* If we link this to the apostle’s statement in Colossians 1:18, there can be no doubt—the Church is His body. Here Paul wrote, *“And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.”*

The Church is the only institution through which God receives glory. Nothing man-made can attain to its glory, majesty, or pre-eminence.

The Church Is Blood-bought

The purchase price of the New Testament Church was the blood of Christ. In Acts 20:28, Paul told the Ephesian elders, *“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”* Never before this time or after this time has there ever been such an instance when the cost was so high!

It is amazing some view this blood-bought institution with such indifference. Anything which cost the only begotten Son of God His blood should be treated with respect and viewed with reverence and awe. No other institution, Divine or man-made, can make this claim. For instance, the ‘home’ is a Divine institution, but Christ did not give His blood to purchase the home. Likewise, civil government is of Divine origin, but it did not cost Christ His blood. From heaven’s throne, the Great I AM views the Church as something special and precious. Woe to the man who views the blood-bought body of Christ as trivial, unimportant, and non-essential.

The Church is blood-bought in the sense it is comprised of people who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. Peter wrote, *“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot”* (1 Peter 1:18-19). When one connects this passage with Romans 5:9, the results are impressive. Here, Paul wrote *“Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.”* Notice that ‘redemption’ and ‘justification’ are by the blood of Christ.

Let us now link these two passages to Acts 20:28 in which Paul said, *“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”* Herein is revealed an important aspect of the Church many fail to understand. Notice the following: (1) The Church was purchased by Christ’s blood, (2) We are redeemed and, (3) justified by His blood. Is there any connection? Surely no one would argue that Christ purchased the Church with His blood, that He redeems and justifies man by that same blood, yet there is no connection at all!

Without doubt there is a connection in the three ideas just presented. When one is ‘redeemed’ by the blood of Christ, he is also ‘justified’ by His blood; when one is ‘redeemed’ and ‘justified,’ he is also ‘purchased’ by the precious blood of Christ. It is at that moment this person is added by the Lord to the Church (Acts 2:47). What is this ‘purchase price’ and the means by which we are ‘redeemed’ and ‘justified’? The blood of Christ!

The Church Is the Bride of Christ

The apostle Paul clearly teaches this in 2 Corinthians 11:2. He writes, *“For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.”* No one can deny the clear implications of this passage.

This same writer further adds to this thought. In writing to the Roman Christians relative to the fact they were not under the law (see Romans 7:1-3), he made this astounding statement, *“Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto*

God” (Romans 7:4). Notice Paul mentions the idea of bringing “forth fruit unto God.” Can any who are not ‘married’ to Christ bring forth the fruit here mentioned? Surely not!

God intended for marriage to be the closest relationship man and woman would enjoy in this life. He said in the long ago, “*and they shall be one flesh*” (Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:31). It is only when man recognizes God’s plan, design, and purpose for marriage, can he truly appreciate “the bride of Christ.”

The Church Is the Family of God

In Ephesians 2:19, Paul wrote “*Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God.*” The ‘household of God’ clearly shows the Church is God’s family (see also Ephesians 2:19). Even though the Father loves all men, it is the Church that sustains a “family” relationship to Him.

He is the ‘Father’ (2 Corinthians 6:17-18) of those who comprise the Church. They have been adopted (Galatians 4:4-7); thus they are His children (1 John 3:1), and they are heirs (Romans 8:17; Galatians 3:29; 4:7; Titus 3:7) of the promises He has given. Truly we join with John in his exclamation, “*Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not*” (1 John 3:1).

No other institution can claim to be “The Family of God.” No wonder Paul wrote “*Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen*” (Ephesians 3:21).

The Church Is the Temple of God

Man has always erected magnificent edifices in honor of their deities. Although God instituted the Tabernacle, David wanted something greater (as man sees it) than a “tent.” Solomon, David’s son, erected a majestic structure that was truly an elegant edifice.

In the time of Christ, Herod had busied himself at least forty-six years (John 2:20) in the construction of an elaborate temple for the Jews. However, some forty years later, this magnificent structure was leveled by the Romans.

It seems that man does not understand these huge cathedrals and mosques do not impress the Father. On Mars hill in the city of Athens, the apostle Paul proclaimed the God which he served “*dwelleth not in temples made with hands*” (Acts 17:24). The very essence of Deity calls for something much more noble and grand than mere sticks and stones, mortar, timbers, jewels, or gold and silver.

He dwells in His temple, the Church. Paul said,

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord (Ephesians 2:19-22).

In this context, Paul establishes that God reconciled both Jew and Gentile unto God in one body

(Ephesians 2:16). This body is the Church (Ephesians 1:22-23), of which there is only one (Ephesians 4:4). It is this one body which, composed of Jew and Gentile, “*groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord*” (Ephesians 3:21).

In 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, we find these words, “*Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.*” This should forever cause sensible men to stop and ponder the greatness of God’s scheme of redemption, which necessarily includes the Church. God had determined to offer man a way whereby he could be saved. When man reaches that justification through Christ by obedience to the Divine will, he is added to this Church, which is the temple of God.

Realizing the Church is the temple of God, we ask, as did Peter, “*what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness*” (2 Peter 3:11). The temple of God can be nothing less than pure and undefiled. Paul asked, “*And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*” (2 Corinthians 6:16). Without doubt, God expects His temple, the Church, to be without “*spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish*” (Ephesians 5:27).

The Church and God’s Eternal Purpose

Paul wrote one of the most impressive statements ever penned about the Church. In Ephesians 3:10-11 we read, “*To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” Here, an inspired apostle clearly affirms the Church reveals God’s manifold wisdom and this was according to God’s eternal purpose in Christ Jesus. Thus, from the beginning, God determined that His great wisdom in saving man would be made known through the Church.

The Church is composed of all of the saved (Acts 2:47). Every single person who has been saved by the blood of Christ since the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) has been added to the Church by the Lord. There are no exceptions to this! Man does not vote to make his fellow man a member of the Church. Jesus adds to the Church those who obey from the heart that form of doctrine and is then made free from sin (Romans 6:17-18).

All people come to Him in exactly the same way. The richest man alive must come to Him in the same way the poorest man in the world comes to him, in obedience to the gospel of Christ (Romans 1:16). The greatest politician comes to God in the same manner as the lowliest of the low. God will accept the kings of the world, but they have no advantage over the pauper. Regardless of one’s background, he comes to the salvation that is in Christ exactly like everyone else. God plays no favorites in justifying man.

It is in this manner the Church reveals God’s eternal purpose in Christ. Whosoever will can come, but he must come upon those conditions God has set forth in the gospel of Christ. Regardless of whether one is rich or poor, black or white, red or yellow, educated or uneducated, king or pauper, high or low on the “social ladder,” employer or employee, each comes to God in precisely the same way!

This is how the Church reveals the “*manifold wisdom of God*” (Ephesians 3:10). No longer is acceptance with God conditioned on one being able to trace his lineage to Abraham. God no longer looks upon one’s ancestry, but upon the heart that is bowed in honor, adoration, reverence, awe, and humble obedience to the gospel of Christ.

In closing, we ask this very important question: Are you a member of the New Testament Church that is revealed upon the pages of inspiration? Are you satisfied with an attempt to “trace your church back” several generations? Why not simply go to the New Testament and do what first century Christians did that was acceptable to God. Why not simply teach what they taught with God’s approval, do what they did with God’s endorsement, and worship as they worshiped? If they did or taught something then with God’s approval, why can we not do the same thing?

What do you think of the Church? The importance of this question should never be underestimated.