



The Church

“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 16:18).

Chanting anti-establishment slogans, thousands of marchers paraded down the city streets. Walking aggressively and defiantly, one young man waved a banner high over his head. On one side of the sign, scrawled in bold, red paint, were the words, “Jesus, Yes!” On the reverse side the sign declared, “Church, No!”

Elsewhere in the same city, among the various graffiti messages that plastered the faded walls was one real attention-getter: “Jesus is dead and the church is a joke!”

In the suburbs of that city a pastor answered the telephone. The caller was excited. “Pastor, my wife and I have wonderful news for you. We want to be baptized as Christians.” Just as the pastor enthusiastically responded, “That’s great, I’ve been waiting for this day for months,” the man said, “Pastor, we want to be baptized into Jesus as Christians, but we do not want to join any church.”

What exactly is the church?

Preview

There was a time when the church was considered to be the most prominent and necessary institution in the life of a person, community, or nation. That, however, is not the case today. In reaction to the church’s abuse of its role and function in society, many people have come to perceive the church as an irrelevant relic of the past. Others regard the church at best as a religious social club of human origin. Still others judge the church to be the institution that has shackled the positive progress of human existence.

Over against such human history, experience, and perceptions is the biblical profile of the church. The Bible presents the church as not of human origin but of divine planning. Christ is the Founder, Lifegiver, and Sustainer of the church. God’s successful plan of salvation is evidenced by the global extent of the church.

Points to Ponder

1. Jesus began the Christian church as His “body” on earth. Why?
It was intended to demonstrate that Jesus has successfully enacted the plan of salvation, whereby human beings who accepted that plan are restored to their rightful place in God’s plan. As the benchmark for all societies and cultures, the church was to be the new community, showing people how to live in a harmonious relationship with God, each other, and the environment.
2. Sometimes a person may choose to be a Christian but does not want to be a part of the church. Why?
Unfortunately, negative perceptions or disappointing personal experiences may influence an individual to decline membership in the church. A huge chasm often exists between what the church

claims to be and what the searcher finds it to be. This gap may be too wide for some to cross. It is the responsibility of the church as a body and the members individually to ensure that the gap does not exist.

3. Being a Christian includes membership in the church. Is membership important?
Unfortunately, many people are of the opinion that church membership is an optional extra to be taken up or discarded as they choose. But the Christian faith expects Christians to experience it in community. Hence, the existence of the church. Participation with Jesus is not complete without membership in His “body”—the church. It is not an optional extra. Individuals do have the freedom of choice in deciding which denomination of the church to belong to. That choice should be guided by the desire to be a member of a denomination that most closely reflects the character of Jesus. The choice should be one that declares an accurate, integrated understanding of life as taught in the Word of God.

Nuts & Bolts

1. How can I be sure that the church is of divine origin rather than human?
Matthew 16:18: “And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this _____ I will build my _____, and the _____ of hell shall not _____ against it.”
2. What gifts can church members expect to find in this body of believers?
1 Corinthians 12:28: “God hath set some in the _____, first _____, secondarily _____, thirdly _____, after that _____, then gifts of _____, _____, _____ diversities of _____.”
In regard to this last gift, Paul adds: “But if there is no _____, let him keep _____ in church; and let him _____ to himself, and to _____” (1 Corinthians 14:28)
3. How extensive is the authority God gave His church on earth?
Matthew 16:19: “I will give unto thee the _____ of the _____ of _____, and whatsoever thou shalt _____ on earth shall be _____ in _____; and whatsoever thou shalt _____ on _____ shall be _____ in _____.”
4. What plan did Jesus present for resolving differences and misunderstandings among members of the church?

Matthew 18:15: "If thy brother shall _____ against thee, go and _____ him his _____ between thee and _____ alone. If he _____ the, thou hast _____ thy brother."

5. What assurance did Jesus give concerning the meeting and fellowship of His followers?

Matthew 18:20: "Where _____ or _____ are _____ together in my _____, there am I in the _____ of them."

6. What directions did Paul give to attain unity in the church?

Galatians 3:26-29: "For ye are all the _____ of _____ faith _____ in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been _____ into Christ have put on _____. There is neither _____ nor _____, there is neither _____ nor _____, there is neither _____ nor _____; for ye are all _____ in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's then are ye _____ seed, and heirs according to the _____."

Thus the New Testament church was a universal church. Unlike the restricted community of Israel, Jesus founded the church to include the redeemed from all nations.

7. What metaphor (word picture) is used to describe the church in the following texts?

Matthew 5:13-15: _____; _____

Ephesians 1:22, 23; 2:16: _____

Ephesians 3:15: _____

Ephesians 5:25, 26; 2 Corinthians 11:2: _____; _____

1 Corinthians 3:16, 17 _____

1 Peter 2:5 _____

1 Timothy 3:15 _____ and _____ of truth.

Ephesians 6:12, 13: God's soldiers fight in _____ army.

8. What commission did Jesus give His disciples and the visible church?

Matthew 18:19, 20: "_____ ye therefore, and _____ all nations, _____ them in the name of the Father, and of the _____, and of the _____; teaching them to _____ all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am _____ you _____, even unto the _____ of the world."

9. What two things must one do to become a part of the body of Christ and receive the Holy Spirit?

Acts 2:38, 39: _____

10. What are some of the functions of the church?

Hebrews 10:25: _____

Philippians 1:5: _____

John 6:68: _____

Luke 22:19: _____

Matthew 28:19, 20: _____

11. What qualifications must characterize the elders of the church?

1 Timothy 3:1-7:

12. If church discipline is needed, how should it be carried out?

1 Thessalonians 5:14, 15: "Now we exhort you, brethren, _____ them that are unruly, _____ the feebleminded _____ the weak, be _____ toward all men. See that none render _____ for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is _____ both among yourselves, and to all men.

Words to Remember

Community: A group of people bound by a common faith and fellowship.

Metaphor: A word picture. A descriptive illustration, i.e., the church is the bride (the bride is the metaphor).

The Difference Between

The Church: A divine institution that consists of those who have heeded the call of God to accept Jesus as their personal Saviour.

A Club: A voluntary association of individuals who come together for a common purpose or interest.

A Company: An organization of employer and employees established to produce goods or services.

I Truly Believe

Nestled close to the Rocky Mountains is a humble home filled with unusual treasures. Mr. Ross enjoys a lifetime hobby of collecting and studying rocks, minerals, and gems.

“You’ll like my thunder eggs,” he said, pointing to ugly, round, rough, unpromising rocks. “With my diamond saw I’ve cut them in two.”

As he opened the parts, his friends gasped in wonder. Inside one was a beautiful display of quartz crystals. Another had a banded agate with multi-colored bands circling the core. Others were imaginary scenes of landscapes with mountains, valleys, ocean waves, or trees along a river.

From these masterpieces of nature, Mr. Ross had cut thin slices and mounted them as colored slides. Thrilled at the beauty of each, his friends noted that nature had supplied her own picture frame with a crystalline quartz border around each lovely scene.

Thunder eggs are like Jesus’ counsel about His church. Do not judge by outward appearances. Let the “wheat and the tares” grow together until the harvest. People who aren’t rock hounds would never pick up those ugly geodes or thunder eggs. Like Mr. Ross, who knew inward beauty, Jesus looks at the heart. What most folks see as ugliness is really a stone all glorious within. What does Jesus see inside your heart?

If you truly believe the concepts of each statement below, place a check in the box.

- I believe the church is ordained of God.
- I believe participation in the church is an essential response to the plan of salvation.
- I choose to be part of God’s church.

My Prayer

Dear Father,

Thank You for the church You have built on Christ Himself. I praise and thank You that its ultimate victory is assured. Lord, transform me into Your likeness, and make me a living stone in Your temple to spread Your light to someone today. Amen.