

The Church, Just What Is It?

I must admit to having spent considerable time of late preaching and talking about the New Testament church. I feel very strongly that our young people (and others of us as well) need to know for sure why we believe and teach what we do about the church. “The things that hast heard of me,” says Paul, “the same commit thou unto faithful men who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2). Maybe you can take this little piece and sit down with your youngsters (or by yourself, for that matter) and discuss some of these important and vital considerations.

First, let me see if I can show how the church comes to be the church. When the seed (the word of God, Luke 8:1-18) is sown into the hearts of men, if it is allowed to germinate, it will produce faith in the heart of the hearer (Rom. 10:17). It will likewise convict a man of his sin. Having been so convicted, that man will be sorrowful for his sins (2 Cor. 7:10) and that will bring him to repent, or change his mind regarding his way of life and seek out a new direction—want to change his way of life (Acts 2:37-38). Having considered carefully the word of God, he will confess his faith in Christ (Rom. 10:9-10), and be baptized in accordance with what he reads in the book that caused his faith in the first place (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21). Having done this, He is added by God to the church, the family of the saved (Acts 2:47). This is the church universal. It’s all the saved—the saved viewed in the aggregate. Please note that you’re not in the church to be saved; you’re in the church because you are saved. The church is the saved. Now, when Christians (the name given to those who have been saved, Acts 11:26), come together for mutual edification in the manner prescribed by God, they constitute a local church. The universal church—containing all the saved of all the ages, present as well as past—has no function. But the local church does. It meets for purposes of worship and edification. It sings (Eph. 5:19), it prays (Acts 2:41-42), it observes the Lord’s Supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:20-30), its members contribute to the needs of the church (1 Cor. 16:1-2) and, in consideration of one another, assemble together each Lord’s Day for these mutual benefits (Heb. 10:23-26).

Now the Bible is the word of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17) and it is sufficient for all the needs of the people (Jude 3), both as individuals or as a congregation of saved ones. It will tolerate no changes (Gal. 1:6-10), nor are any needed. It’s complete and completely accurate. Please take note of what is said in that word about the church of Christ.

Its origin. It was conceived in the mind of God (Eph. 3:1-11). It was founded by Christ. It was promised by Him (Matt. 16:18) and it was built by Him (Acts 2:41-48). It was not conceived by man, nor could it have been (1 Cor. 2:9); and it was not built on man, nor on his ideas and concepts (Eph. 2:20-22). Christ is its foundation (1 Cor. 3:11), and there is no other—not Mohamed, not Buddha, not Martin Luther, not even John the Baptist or Peter the Apostle. It’s Christ’s church, the church of Christ.

Its organization. The church of Christ is not a denomination, nor is it many denominations under one head. The church of Christ is Christ's body (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18-19). Just as Christ has but one body, so it is with His church—there is one church. I'm not afraid to say that because that's what the Bible says—there is one body (Eph. 4:4); and the body is the church (Col. 1:18); so there's just one church. That's not so hard to see when you understand that the church is the saved (Acts 2:47) and there's only one group of the saved.

Its Creed. The church has only one system of belief—one gospel. The gospel is the teachings of Jesus Christ, his apostles and prophets (Rom. 15:4; Matt. 28:18-20; Rom. 1:16-17). Those teachings are the foundation on which a man's obedience is based—and by the approval of Christ Himself (Jn. 12:48). Any other gospel is forbidden (Gal. 1:6-9; Jude 3; 2 Jn. 9). There is no reason for adding to or taking from the word of God. It does all that God wants done, when and how He prescribes, and by whom. To add some "discipline," "catechism," or "creed" to it is to change its form and substance and make it what God didn't intend. Just as it's possible to take a blueprint, recipe, or schematic and build something according to it, the Bible is the blueprint, the recipe, the schematic for the church. It will produce the same thing generation after generation, no matter the time or culture. It's God's plan. It works.

Its law of pardon. The New Testament church—the church of Christ—offered only one law of pardon, one way for salvation, and that's Christ's way. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh to the Father but by me" (Jn. 14:6). That's the way it is, folks. It's His way or no way. I don't mean to be harsh, but that's just how it is. His law of pardon for the alien is found in terms set forth in the gospel—the ones we mentioned above. They cannot be changed, no matter what, and they are just as applicable now as when they were first stated. No matter how culture and society have changed, the gospel doesn't change because Jesus Christ doesn't change (Heb. 13:8). It will be the same 1,000 years from now, should time remain. The law of pardon is not the Bible plus a catechism, nor the Bible plus a creed, or the Bible plus a discipline, nor any other man-made document. It is not the Bible plus anything. It's the Bible, and that's all.

Its work and worship. When the Bible says a thing, that's the end of the matter. It is the complete authority, the "mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16). When it doesn't say a thing, that thing does not have the "mind of Christ" to approve it. God made known what He wants. For instance, when the Bible says that we are to sing praises to God (Eph. 5:19, etc.) and it says nothing at all about playing anything other than the instrument of the heart, that's what it means. No long explanation is needed to explain the silence of the scriptures. We use that logic everyday: When one thing is called for, we need not cite a hundred or more things that are not. Furthermore, the Bible nowhere assigns to the church the care of the social needs of man—things like daycare centers for working mothers, Boy Scout troops, guidance centers, and other like appendages to the church. The church is the church, not a benevolent organization, nor a social entity. Its business is to meet the spiritual needs of men (Eph. 4:11-16), not to provide for their

physical comfort, pleasure, or entertainment. Those things all have a place, but the church is not that place.

It's a serious matter. That's right, it's a serious matter to try and make God's church into something He never intended, no matter the motivation. He is not pleased with sacrifices that are not authorized (Gen. 4:1-9; Lev. 10:1-3). We dare not tamper with God's plan lest we construct something He didn't authorize and put our faith in something less than He planned and approved.

Let's remember who we are, folks—just New Testament Christians. Let's teach our children so that they may be right with God and that they may teach their children to be the same—Christians, nothing more and nothing less.

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