

# The Church: God's Way

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One of the amazing things about Scripture is that it never changes. What it said when it was first spoken is the same thing it says now. The Scriptures were written in a language called *Koine* Greek, a type of the language which is no longer spoken and so is frozen in time. That is no accident; it is a providential provision. That means that the language of the Bible is never in a state of flux like other languages. Its word meanings are sealed in time. It still says the same thing it said when it was first revealed to the apostles and prophets (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13).

But people have changed the language of the Bible to suit themselves. There is no longer an appeal to the literal interpretation of the Scriptures in religion today. It is loosely interpreted, if at all. Take the term “church” for instance. It just meant “the called out” in the New Testament. Today it can mean anything from some benevolent institution, a sort of religious corporation, or even a kind of political establishment. Actually, the way the term is used today it seldom means what it meant in the New Testament, just the saved of God. When it says “the Lord added to the church daily such as were being saved” (Acts 2:47), it simply means that those who obeyed the gospel were added to the saved, not to some institution or religious establishment.

The church is people. It is saved people. And the church never saved anybody. The church is the saved, not the means for being so. You’re not in the church to be saved, you’re in the church because you are saved. The church is the saved.

The local church is the saved in a certain location. It has bishops and deacons (Philippians 1:1) and saints (1 Corinthians 1:2), those who have been called out or sanctified. Its work is mainly in the area of edification or building itself up (Ephesians 4:11-16). This work is accomplished by building itself up numerically (Acts 8:4) and by growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). It may, as the occasion demands, participate in benevolent activities for its own (2 Cor 8:11; Acts 11:27-30).

*The church is not a benevolent society.* It has never been the work of the church to provide social welfare programs for the poor. To seek to do so is to rob the church of all its resources and deplete its energies for performing its spiritual obligation to “go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:16). The church’s mission has to do with the spiritual welfare of men. And while it may have some benevolent obligations to its own, those obligations are secondary to the provision for their spiritual needs. There is no enjoiner or recognized plan in Scripture for building a para-church organization to feed the poor, house the indigent, or shelter pregnant-out-of-wedlock

girls. Those activities are the work of the home or individuals (Galatians 6:10), and even then the first priority is to “those of the household of faith.”

*The church is not a country club.* Churches of Christ all over the country are now involved in providing social programs for their members ostensibly to “keep them interested.” They have changed their services to include what is called a “contemporary worship service” in addition to the “traditional worship service.” You now have a choice. The contemporary service is very casual and offers a kind of coffee-and-doughnuts religion, one where you sit around in a circle and sort of worship at your own pace and in your own way. Such a service robs the church of the dignity due God. It demands little and allows much. Women are being used in some of these services in contradistinction to what the Scriptures teach about the role of women in the public worship (1 Cor. 11:2; 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:12).

*The church is not in the entertainment business.* Many churches are providing their members diversions by booking into their services choirs, quartets, and the like. Their use is justified by the fact that “they contain a spiritual message.” There is still no scripture for the church providing such activities. Many of them charge for such events, but some even provide these amusements out of the church treasury. All these programs are intended to appeal to the aesthetic nature of man in preference to seeking the approval of God. There is certainly nothing wrong with good, wholesome entertainment, but such is not the business of the church. And there is a difference between entertainment and worship. One is directed toward man, the other toward God.

*The church is not an educational society.* Certainly the church has some obligations to educate its people to cause them to understand God and His word (Eph. 3:1-10; 5:19; 1 Tim. 3:14-15), but it is the work of the *home* to educate its children. Many churches now have kindergartens, day-care centers, and schools of various sorts. They don’t have a scripture for such, however. Congregations sponsor Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops, softball and soccer teams, and other secular activities; but without a scripture authorizing such.

*The church is a spiritual entity.* It is a group of saved people who are authorized to worship God, preach the gospel to a lost and dying world, to strengthen its members by teaching them the scriptures by pulpit preaching and in Bible classes. It has no need for fellowship halls (1 Cor. 11:22, 34) or gymnasiums. It is not a boys’ club or a girls’ club or a health spa. It is the people of God doing the work God gave them to do.

The work of the church is to teach people what to do to be saved and what to do to stay saved.