

The Church of Scripture

Introduction:

1. If we were to begin stopping people on the street and asking them to give a description of the church, what kinds of responses do you suppose we would receive? What different perspectives about what the church is might be reflected in these responses?
2. In many ways confusion about what the church is inhibits our effectively presenting the message of Christ.
3. I have knocked on people's doors, as you have, and heard people say, "I am a member of _____ church." This is meant to communicate, "I don't want to talk to you because I am already associated with a church." Maybe we have set ourselves up for this kind of response by introducing ourselves as associated with _____ church. Are we really interested in comparing religious institutions?
4. Maybe our perception is skewed. Maybe our perception is correct, and we are just not using the language that our friend can understand. I think we all understand that both our perceptions and our language need to be in harmony with the Scripture and be presented in a way that our friends can understand.
5. It is not an easy task. Maybe I will just ask them what kind of vacuum cleaner they have and ask if I can show them mine. Maybe I can talk to them about what kind of car they have and ask questions about it. One friend of mine always led me into talking about his mules, when I wanted to talk to him about his obedience to the Lord. He tried the same with Bobby Witherington and Bobby said, "Leroy, have you ever been baptized for the forgiveness of your sins?" You see, Leroy knew all along why we were there he was just avoiding his situation with the Lord. Sometimes we just must be more direct.
6. But in this lesson let's talk about the church.

Discussion:

- I. The word that is translated "church" in the N.T. is from the Greek word "ekklesia," which comes from "ek" meaning "out" and "kaleo" meaning "to call." Thus, the term designates those who are "called out."
 - A. Observe its use in the following passages.
 1. Acts 19:32, 39, 41.
 2. Acts 7:38.
 - B. Unlike the term "church" "ekklesia" does NOT have a particular religious association.
 1. Really it is kind of an "odd" way to translate "ekklesia."
 2. "Church" really does not translate "ekklesia."
- II. There is a special use of the term to designate God's people.
 - A. Consider its use in the following passages.

1. Matt. 16:18.
 2. 1 Cor. 1:2.
 3. Eph. 1:22-23.
 4. Acts 20:28.
- B. The church is not a building, although we may use the term accommodatively to refer to the building that God's people meet in.
 - C. The church is not an institution people get into. Illustrate with jar and rocks.
 - D. The church is a collective of people like a herd is a collective of cattle, a covey a collective of birds. The church is a bunch of people called out by God. Other collective nouns like church are: flock, troop, crowd, congregation, family, assembly, crew, team. Can you think of other collective nouns like these? Each of these terms denotes that the individuals involved are related to one another in a special way.
 - E. What did the people constitute who were "added to the number" of the saved on Pentecost? See Acts 2:47.

III. The word "church" is used in two senses in Scripture.

- A. It is used to refer to all those who are in the body of the saved (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4).
 1. If one has believed in Christ, repented of their sins and been baptized they are in the universal body of Christ, the church.
 2. They have been called out of the darkness of the world and called into the kingdom of God (Col. 1:13; 2 Cor. 6:17; 1 Cor. 1:2, 18-24).
- B. It is used to refer to the body of the saved in a particular locality (1 Cor. 1:2).
 1. Christians choose to associate themselves with the body in a particular locality (cf. Acts 9:26ff).
 2. In these local groups Christians banded together with common motives, pooling their resources, to do what the members of that local church agreed that God wanted them to do.

IV. Some observations and questions.

- A. There is no mention of denominations in Scripture.
 1. No denominations existed.
 2. All those who were believers were one body, one group, one church. See Eph. 2:11-2.
 3. Why can it not be like this today?
- B. This group had no one exclusive name.
 1. They were called "the church," "the body," "the church of God," "the church of Christ," "the family-household of God," etc.
 2. The individuals within the body were referred to as "Christians," "disciples," "saints," "believers."
- C. This renders the concept of church as a denominational entity obsolete.

- D. It renders the concept and motives of denominational loyalty obsolete.
- E. Evangelism is not conversion from one denominational entity to another.
- F. This projects the concept of unity in one body that God intended.

Conclusion:

1. Do you think all believers should be members of the same church? Why do you suppose people are so divided? Does it make a difference?
2. Of which church do you want to be a member?
3. How can we go about “reconciling” (Eph. 2:16) people into this one body?