

The Church of Jesus Christ

Matt. 16:13-18

Introduction:

1. "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" Jesus asked.
2. Peter expected that people would give a variety of responses: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.
3. Were we to ask people today a similar question, "What is the church?" we could get a variety of responses.
 - a. Some might say, "I really don't know."
 - b. Others, "It is a benevolent religious organization that feeds the hungry and provides for the homeless."
 - c. Others, "It is a community organization that helps the community be a better place to live."
 - d. Still others might say, "It is a religious institution that people get into to be saved."
4. So just as there was confusion about who Jesus was, there is confusion about what the church is.
5. But Jesus is concerned that we find our answers, NOT from the people, but from His Father in heaven (17).
6. So what does the Bible say about "the church"?

Discussion:

- I. The history of the word and its use in the N.T.
 - A. The English word "church" finds its origin in the late Greek term "kyriakon" meaning "the Lord's" (house). But this is NOT the Greek term translated "church" in our English Bible's.
 - B. Instead it is the word "ekklesia." "Ekklesia" is formed from the prefix "ek" meaning "out" and the word "kaleo" meaning "to call." Thus this term designates those who are "called out." Observe its use in the following passages.
 1. Acts 19:32, 39, 41. In this context it is used to refer to the "mob" or "assembly" "called out" of the populace of Ephesus to oppose the preaching of Paul. In this context it has no particular religious significance.
 2. Acts 7:38. Notice that in the NASB it is translated "congregation" and refers to the assembly of Israel gathered at Sinai when God gave the law.
 3. Strictly speaking the term "ekklesia" must be used in a special way to have any religious connotation
 - C. Notice that in the passages below it takes on a special use referring to God's people.
 1. Matt. 16:18. In this text "the called out" are those who "confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God."
 2. 1 Cor. 1:2. This passage connects a variety of similar concepts: church, sanctification in Christ, saints by calling, and calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. Eph. 1:22-23. This passage identifies Jesus as the head of the church (the called out ones) and identifies them as His body. The bodily image here probably suggests an authority element. Cf. The Lord's (Master's) House (kyraikon).
4. Acts 20:28. Here the called out are purchased with Christ's own blood. Called out of the world into the Lord's house, purchased with His blood. Those are powerful concepts. Even the gates of Hades (death) cannot overpower it. Even though Christ died on the cross death was not victorious over Him, nor is it victorious over those whom He purchased. It is important to note the strong association with life and being a part of the Lord's house/flock/group/church (cf. Eph. 2:1-22; Col. 2:12-13).

II. Based upon the N.T. uses of the concept of "church," it is easy to see that the church is not a physical building. But neither is it an institution people get into.

- A. Many have an institutional concept of church.
 1. They think of the church as an institution or organizational entity that you need to be in in order to be saved.
 2. I recently heard a graduation speech given by an attorney. He recalled how when he graduated law school the speaker said, "Graduation from law school doesn't mean a thing unless you pass the Bar Exam." Unless you are licensed you cannot legally practice law in Kentucky and the state of Kentucky in association with the Kentucky Bar Association are the institutions that determines that.
 3. But the church in Scripture is not an institution that determines who is saved and who is not.
- B. The word "church" is a collective noun like: flock, troop, crowd, congregation, family, assembly, crew or team.
 1. A flock of geese flew over our house the other day, but they were not an organizational institution.
 2. There are religious institutions. The Roman Catholic Church is an institution. As is the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church, etc. They determine their rules of membership, define their creeds and doctrines, determine who can teach and what qualifications those teachers must have, etc.
- C. When those on Pentecost repented and were baptized what were they added to? Acts 2:47 says, "The Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved" (NASB). KJV says, "The Lord added to the church such as should be saved." That is true but the word "ekklesia" is not used in Acts 2:47. They were added to their number, their group, their crowd. They were NOT added to an institution. The church **IS** the saved. It is NOT an institution that you get into in order to be saved. People want to compare institutions. "Which one do I need to be in in order to be saved?" The question misses the point. When God raises you to spiritual life that makes you a Christian and a member of His group. You can be

a member of the Lord's church without being a member of any denomination. There were no denominations in the first century. There was only "the church,"

“the household (family) of God.”

Summary:

1. The word “church” comes from the Greek term meaning “The Lord’s (house).” It translates the Greek term (ekklesia) in our English Bibles. It means “those called out,” and particularly those called out of the world and into a special relationship with God.
2. It involves an acknowledgement of Jesus as the Son of the living God. But not merely a verbal acknowledgement, it involves a commitment to Him as Lord.
3. When we receive the new life that is given us by God we constitute the church.
4. This renders the concept of church as a denominational entity obsolete.
5. It renders the concept and motives of denominational loyalty obsolete.
6. Evangelism is not conversion from one denominational entity to another.
7. These biblical concepts communicate to the world the unity in one body God intended.

III. The word “church” is used in two and perhaps three or four senses in Scripture.

- A. To refer to all those who are in the body of the saved (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22-23).
- B. To refer to the body of the saved in a particular locality who have organized themselves together to work together as a team (1 Cor. 1:2; Phil. 1:2). And of their assembly (1 Cor. 14:19, 23, 28, 35).
- C. To refer to the Christians in a particular household (Rom. 16:5; Col. 4:15; Philemon 1:2).
- D. In the universal sense there is no organizational structure except Christ being the head. In this universal sense the church is composed of those who confess Christ and have been joined together with Him through resurrection (Rom. 6:1ff).
 1. The universal church is not composed of congregations, but individuals.
 2. This is something missed by most.
 3. Those who miss, this tend to construct a hierarchy of authority between congregations and appoint heads over different divisions. There is no evidence of such in the N.T. The term “denominationalism” describes this. Contra. Eph. 4:4-6.
- E. Only in the local church is there organizational structure (Acts 14:23; 20:28; Phil. 1:4; 1 Tim. 3:1ff; Titus 1:5ff).
 1. The local church is a group of Christians that have organized themselves together, with common motives, pooling their resources, to do the work that God has authorized them to do.
 2. Thus they work together as a team.
 - a. They evangelize the lost (Matt. 28:19-20; 1 Thess. 1:8).
 - b. Train those who are saved (Eph. 4:11-16).
 - c. Care for needy saints (Acts 4:32-35; 1 Cor. 16:1-2).
 3. Association in a local group like this is voluntary (Acts 9:26ff).

IV. Observe that there is no mention of denominations in Scripture.

- A. No denominations existed.

- B. All those who were believers were one body, one group, one church (Eph. 2:11-22).
- C. This group had no one exclusive name. They were called
 - 1. The church (Eph. 1:22-23).
 - 2. The body (Eph. 1:23; 4:4).
 - 3. The church of God (1 Cor. 1:2).
 - 4. The church of Christ (Rom. 16:16).
 - 5. The family/household of God (Eph. 2:19).
 - 6. Etc.
 - 7. The individuals within the body were referred to as “disciples,” “Christians” (Acts 11:26), “saints” (1 Cor. 1:2) and “believers” (Acts 5:14). They were not Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Catholics.

Conclusion:

- 1. These principles are critical to our understanding of what the church is.
- 2. They are critical to our understanding of who we are as the people of God.
- 3. They are critical to our understanding of our mission and work.
- 4. The church is the people of God, those who have given their lives to Jesus Christ as Lord, those who have been raised to the life that God gives.
- 5. They are certainly not perfect people. One cannot read the N.T. and think that Christians are perfect, but they are forgiven.
- 6. Would you be forgiven? Then accept Jesus as Lord. He will add you to His number.