

How Important is the Church?

Bible Answers About The Church

The world at large de-emphasizes the importance of the church and, indeed, it sometimes appears to be the case that the church has been eliminated from the minds of men. This is to be expected from those who make no claim to religious belief, but even among those who claim to be seeking after God's will, there are many who regard the church as being of little importance.

There is a very significant movement in modern Japan called the "Nochurch Movement." This means simply that many thousands of people who were formerly Buddhists and Shintoists have come in more recent years to realize the tremendous appeal of the person of Jesus Christ. Many of them have accepted Him in a personal way and would call themselves Christians. While they have a great interest in Christ and are impressed by His teachings, His life, and His influence, they are not, however, impressed by His church. They want Christ, but do not wish to be involved in His church.

Also in the view of many people, the church was simply an afterthought in the mind of God when Christ was rejected and put to death by men and His earthly kingdom did not materialize.

It is regrettable that such views of the church exist when the Bible is crystal clear concerning the importance of the church. The Scriptures clearly teach that the death of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the church were included in the eternal purpose of God.

Paul stated, God "chose us in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blemish before Him" (Ephesians 1:4). At least three points should be emphasized concerning God's choice: (1) its location; (2) its time; and (3) its purpose. First, the choice is of those who are in Christ; secondly, the choice is made before the foundation of the world; thirdly, the purpose is that we should be a particular kind of people. God had an eternal purpose from "before the foundation of the world" and that that purpose was to save those who would obey the gospel, that is who would be in Christ and that those in Christ "should be holy and without blemish before Him." The same writer, in his second letter to Timothy, stresses again the eternal nature of God's purpose in that He "saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before times eternal, but hath now been manifested by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death" (2 Timothy 1:9-10). Notice the contrast between the eternal purpose of God and its temporal manifestation in the appearance of the Savior. What took place in the ministry of Christ (including the abolition of death through His own death and resurrection) was the temporal manifestation to men of God's eternal purpose.

The apostle emphasizes this same theme of God's eternal purpose being revealed to men as he writes to the Ephesians. In the third chapter he stresses the importance of the "mystery" which had

been made known to him by revelation, a mystery which in ages past had not been made known, but had now been revealed to the apostles and prophets in the church. The content of the mystery is given in verse 6, namely "that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." It is of importance to note that the content of the mystery has to do with the fact that the Gentiles would be fellow-members of the same "body" which is the church (Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:16; 5:23). Therefore, we see that God's purpose, hidden from ages past, had to do with the saving of souls in the church. This thought is further emphasized as Paul speaks of his ministry "to the intent that now unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Ephesians 3:10-11).

We have therefore seen that before the foundation of the world, it was God's eternal purpose (1) that Christ should die; (2) that those in Christ-that is, those who obeyed Him-would be saved; and (3) that those who were saved would belong to a particular "body," the church (1 Peter 1:18-20; Revelation 13:8). It is necessary to point out that if, as so many hold, God did not intend the death of Christ, then He did not intend the shedding of Christ's blood; if He did not intend the shedding of Christ's blood, then He did not intend men to have remission of sin, and if He did not intend men to have remission of sins, then He did not intend men to be saved (Hebrews 9:22).

However, we thankfully conclude from the Word of God that God did intend men to be saved and that His eternal purpose for the church is that it should be the body to which the saved belong and of which Christ is the head.

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