

What Is The Church?

Bible Answers About The Church

It is very sad that the majority of people of our day have become so accustomed to thinking in terms of denominationalism that it is a most difficult task to persuade them that the church of Christ is not a denomination. Peter, Paul, nor any other Christian of the first century belonged to a denomination. Yet, all Christians in apostolic times belonged to the church.

The term "church" translated from the Greek word *ekklesia* appears in the New Testament more than one hundred times. It is generally translated into English by the word "church." Literally, it means "the called out." When the term "church" is used in connection with Christ as in "church of Christ" we have the "called out" "belonging to" Christ. Therefore, the phrase church of Christ simply means the called out ones belonging to Christ. Such people are called by the gospel out of the world of darkness into the glorious light of the kingdom of Christ. (Romans 1:16; Colossians 1:13; 2 Thessalonians 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9) The various designations of the church emphasize its various aspects or characteristics.

It is the church

Jesus said to Peter, "And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates hell shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18). Christ established the church on the first Pentecost following Lord's resurrection (Acts 2:1-47). From that time forward it was always spoken of as a reality. "Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" ((Acts 2:47).

It is the kingdom

The church and the kingdom signify one and the same body. Jesus said to Peter, "And I say also unto thee, that thou are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:18-19). The terms "church" and "kingdom" are here used interchangeably. From Luke 22:17-30, coupled with Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 11:20-24, it is evident that the church and kingdom are one and the same. Jesus said that the Lord's Supper would be observed in His kingdom, but it was actually observed in the church. Therefore, we must admit that the church and the kingdom are the same or else charge the apostles with taking the Lord's Supper in the wrong body. The apostles were to partake of the Lord's Supper in the kingdom but they ate it in the church.

It is God's building

Peter said, "Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house" (1 Peter 2:5). Paul said, "Ye are God's husbandry, God's building" (1 Corinthians 3:9). The church is sometimes referred to as a building, and yet it is not a material structure (Acts 7:48; Ephesians 2:19-21). The church of our Lord is a spiritual house.

It is the family of God

Paul wrote, "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). The term house signifies "household" or family. We read that Cornelius "feared God with all his house" (Acts 10:2). The Philippian jailer was told to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ "with all thy house" (Acts 16:31, 33).

In conversion a person is "born again" (John 3:5). Thus, by a rebirth a person becomes a child of God, and by the same process, he becomes a member of God's household or family. Men may join denominations but if one enters the family of God it must be by the new birth.

It is the body of Christ

Numerous passages make it clear that when the New Testament speaks of the body of Christ reference is not made to His physical body but to His spiritual body, which is His church. "And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all" (Ephesians 1:22-23). "And He is the head of the body, the church; who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence" (Col. 1:18).

All who are obedient are added by the Lord to His church (Acts 2:41, 47). Beautiful pictures of the church are set out in the New Testament. All of these different pictures are used to set forth the same body. Jesus came into the world to establish one and only one body through which He would save a lost and dying world.

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