

LET THE BIBLE SPEAK SERIES

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THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

Matthew 16:16-18

The word church is a part of most people's vocabulary. Many, however, do not understand its meaning. What is the church? When Jesus said "I will build by church, what did he mean? To what did he have reference?

Ephesians 5:25-25 "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church, and gave himself for her, that he might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word., that he might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish."

Acts 20:28 "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

From these verses, we see the importance of both understanding and properly regarding the church. Something that cost so much, something that demands such love, certainly is deserving of our love and respect.

I. What The Church Is not.

The church is not a building, or meeting house. We often speak of "going to church," as though the church were the building to which we were going. What we really mean is that we are going to the place where the church comes together. Christ did not die for a building. We are told in Acts 17:24 that God does not dwell in "temples made with hands." An Acts 5:11 "And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things." Fear does not come upon a building. Hence the church is not a building. Also in Acts 11:22 the scripture speaks of the "ears of the church." Buildings don't have ears. The thought here is that the people who comprise the church "heard" the things spoken of in this passage. In Acts 8:3 we are told that Saul "made havoc of the church." We don't understand from this that Saul harmed or tore down a building, but that he actually harmed those who were a part of the church. He was persecuting people not buildings.

Neither is the church just a religious body. There were many of these in the days of Christ. The Pharisees, the Sadducees, and others. These existed long before Jesus said "I will build my church."

Nor is the church a denomination or party who has pulled away from all others to teach their own doctrine. There are many denominations in the world today. Many of them claim to be the church Jesus built, however they all teach different doctrines, follow different

creeds and wear different names. They are not the church, they are just denominations or divisions.

II. What Is The Church?

First of all the church is a called out body of people that have come out of the world into a saved state with Christ. The original word for "church" in the Greek language means to "call out of, or from." The bible teaches that saved people have been called out of the world of sin into Christ. And if anyone is in Christ he is a new creature 2Cor.5:17. This being the case, means that "everyone" was not in the church. Only those called out of the world. But how is one called? Is the calling mysterious? Is it some strange sign? The answer from the bible is that we are called by the Gospel 2Thess.2:14. Thus everyone who hears and obeys the gospel is "called of God" and is thereby a member of the church.

The church is also the house of God. The family of God. There is no better way to study the nature of the church than to notice the various designations given it by the New Testament writers. In 1Timothy 3:15 "that you may know how you ought to behave yourself in the house of God which is the church of the living God.." The house of God is the household or family of God. We are children of God. In Romans 8:16-17 we learn that our spirit bears witness with His Spirit that we are the children of God. In this family relationship God is our Father, and we the church are His children. "But Christ as a Son over his own house, whose house we are, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." Since the church is the family of God, the following must be true: all of God's children are in his family---the family of God is the church---therefore all of God's children are in the church. The conclusion is mandatory. Are you in the church? If not you need to be.

The church is the temple of God. We read in Ephesians 2:19-22 that the church is a holy temple in the Lord. We have already learned that God does not dwell in temples made with hands, hence the church is a spiritual temple. Just as God recorded his name in the temple Solomon built, He has also recorded his name in the church. He met the Jewish people in the temple in worship, and he meets us in worship in the church today. The temple figure describes the worshipping nature of the church. Some people claim that they can worship God out in nature as well as in the church. In fact they claim they are closer to God when hunting or fishing etc. However, when one understands the true nature of the church, he is made to realize that it is here (in the church) that God meets us for worship, not on the fishing bank.

The church is the bride of Christ. Christ is the bridegroom and the church the bride. In Ephesians 5:22-23 Paul discusses the husband/wife relationship only to conclude "nevertheless I speak concerning Christ and the church." There are close ties between Christ and the members of the church. The church is one as are the husband and wife. Christ is head of the church as the husband is the head of the wife. Christ has only one bride. There is only one church, Ephesians 4:4.

The church is the Kingdom of God. Hebrews 12:28 tells us that we have "received a kingdom that cannot be moved." Colossians 1:13 informs us that we have been translated onto the kingdom of God's dear Son." This translation takes place when we are called out of the world of sin into Christ where we are a new creature 2Cor.5:17. The kingdom aspect of the church demonstrates the type of government prevailing in the church. the church is an absolute monarchy. Christ is the sole lawgiver, the only king. The only expression of His will is the bible. He alone possesses authority to command. The people in the church do not make the laws that govern it. Christ does that, and these laws are revealed in His word. The church is not a democracy. It is not run by either the majority or the minority, but by the will of Christ. There is no voting in the church. One cannot be voted in or voted out. We are added to the Church by Christ, no one else.

The church is the body of Christ. In Romans 12:4-5 the scripture tells us that we are one body in Christ and that a body has many members, "so we being many are one body in Christ." The same principle is restated in 1Corinthians 12:12-20. This aspect of the church deals with the relationship of Christians one to another, as members of the same body. We learn from Ephesians 1:22-23 that Christ is the head of the body. The body of Christ cannot be an optional and spiritual body at the same time. The church is either essential or unnecessary. We have already seen that it is necessary. It was purchased with the blood of Christ. There is only one body, one head. The idea that there could be one head (Christ) and 1200 bodies (churches) is foolish.

The nature of the church must be understood in order for us to understand God's plan for our salvation. The importance of the church is seen in the many designations given her in the Bible.