The Church

“And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).

Chanting anti-establishment slogans, thousands of marchers paraded down the city streets. Walking aggressively and defiantly, one young man waved a banner high over his head. On one side of the sign, scrawled in bold, red paint, were the words, “Jesus, Yes!” On the reverse side the sign declared, “Church, No!” Elsewhere in the same city, among the various graffiti messages that plastered the faded walls was one real attention-getter: “Jesus is dead and the church is a joke!”

In the suburbs of that city a pastor answered the telephone. The caller was excited. “Pastor, my wife and I have wonderful news for you. We want to be baptized as Christians.” Just as the pastor enthusiastically responded, “That’s great, I’ve been waiting for this day for months,” the man said, “Pastor, we want to be baptized into Jesus as Christians, but we do not want to join any church.”

What exactly is the church?

Preview

There was a time when the church was considered to be the most prominent and necessary institution in the life of a person, community, or nation. That, however, is not the case today. In reaction to the church’s abuse of its role and function in society, many people have come to perceive the church as an irrelevant relic of the past. Others regard the church at best as a religious social club of human origin. Still others judge the church to be the institution that has shackled the positive progress of human existence.

Over against such human history, experience, and perceptions is the biblical profile of the church. The Bible presents the church as not of human origin but of divine planning. Christ is the Founder, Lifegiver, and Sustainer of the church. God’s successful plan of salvation is evidenced by the global extent of the church.

Points to Ponder

1. Jesus began the Christian church as His “body” on earth. Why?
   It was intended to demonstrate that Jesus has successfully enacted the plan of salvation, whereby human beings who accepted that plan are restored to their rightful place in God’s plan. As the benchmark for all societies and cultures, the church was to be the new community, showing people how to live in a harmonious relationship with God, each other, and the environment.

2. Sometimes a person may choose to be a Christian but does not want to be a part of the church. Why?
   Unfortunately, negative perceptions or disappointing personal experiences may influence an individual to decline membership in the church. A huge chasm often exists between what the church claims to be and what the seeker finds it to be. This gap may be too wide for some to cross. It is the responsibility of the church as a body and the members individually to ensure that the gap does not exist.
3. Being a Christian includes membership in the church. Is membership important?
Unfortunately, many people are of the opinion that church membership is an optional extra to be taken up or discarded as they choose. But the Christian faith expects Christians to experience it in community. Hence, the existence of the church. Participation with Jesus is not complete without membership in His "body"—the church. It is not an optional extra. Individuals do have the freedom of choice in deciding which denomination of the church to belong to. That choice should be guided by the desire to be a member of a denomination that most closely reflects the character of Jesus. The choice should be one that declares an accurate, integrated understanding of life as taught in the Word of God.

Nuts & Bolts

1. How can I be sure that the church is of divine origin rather than human?
Matthew 16:18: "And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this ____________ I will build my ______________, and the ________________ of hell shall not ______________ against it."

2. What gifts can church members expect to find in this body of believers?
1 Corinthians 12:28: "God hath set some in the ________________, first ________________, secondarily ________________, thirdly ________________, after that _________________. then gifts of ________________, ________________ diversities of ________________.
In regard to this last gift, Paul adds: "But if there is no ________________, let him keep ________________ in church; and let him ________________ to himself, and to ________________" (1 Corinthians 14:28)

3. How extensive is the authority God gave His church on earth?
Matthew 16:19: "I will give unto thee the ________________ of the ________________ of ________________, and whatsoever thou shalt ________________ on earth shall be ________________ in ________________; and whatsoever thou shalt ________________ on ________________ shall be ________________ in ________________.

4. What plan did Jesus present for resolving differences and misunderstandings among members of the church?
Matthew 18:15: "If thy brother shall ________________ against thee, go and ________________ him his ________________ between thee and ________________ alone. If he ________________ the, thou hast ________________ thy brother."
5. What assurance did Jesus give concerning the meeting and fellowship of His followers?
Matthew 18:20: "Where _______________ or _______________ are 
_______________ together in my _______________, there am I in the 
_______________ of them."

6. What directions did Paul give to attain unity in the church?
Galatians 3:26-29: "For ye are all the _______________ of _______________ faith 
_______________ into Christ have put on _______________. There is 
neither __________ nor __________, there is neither __________ nor 
__________, there is neither __________ nor __________; for ye are all 
____________ in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's then are ye ______________ seed, 
and heirs according to the ______________."
Thus the New Testament church was a universal church. Unlike the restricted community of Israel, Jesus 
founded the church to include the redeemed from all nations.

7. What metaphor (word picture) is used to describe the church in the following texts?
Matthew 5:13-15: _______________
Ephesians 1:22, 23; 2:16: _______________
Ephesians 3:15: _______________
Ephesians 5:25, 26; 2 Corinthians 11:2: _______________
1 Corinthians 3:16, 17 _______________
1 Peter 2:5 _______________
1 Timothy 3:15 _______________ and _______________ of truth.
Ephesians 6:12, 13: God's soldiers fight in _______________ army.

8. What commission did Jesus give His disciples and the visible church?
Matthew 18:19, 20: "_____________ ye therefore, and _______________ all nations, 
_______________ them in the name of the Father, and of the _______________, and of the 
_______________; teaching them to _______________ all things 
whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am _______________ you _______________, even unto the 
_______________ of the world."

9. What two things must one do to become a part of the body of Christ and receive the Holy Spirit?
Acts 2:38, 39: ____________________________ ____________________________

10. What are some of the functions of the church?
Hebrews 10:25: ____________________________
Philippians 1:5: ____________________________
John 6:68: ____________________________
Matthew 28:19, 20: ____________________________

11. What qualifications must characterize the elders of the church?
1 Timothy 3:1-7: ____________________________

12. If church discipline is needed, how should it be carried out?
1 Thessalonians 5:14, 15: “Now we exhort you, brethren, ____________________________ them that are unruly,
_________________________ the feebly-minded ____________________________ the weak, be
_________________________ toward all men. See that none render ____________________________ for evil unto
any man; but ever follow that which is ____________________________ both among yourselves, and to all men.

Words to Remember
Community: A group of people bound by a common faith and fellowship.
Metaphor: A word picture. A descriptive illustration, i.e., the church is the bride (the bride is the metaphor).

The Difference Between
The Church: A divine institution that consists of those who have heeded the call of God to accept Jesus as their
personal Saviour.
A Club: A voluntary association of individuals who come together for a common purpose or interest.
A Company: An organization of employer and employees established to produce goods or services.

I Truly Believe
Nestled close to the Rocky Mountains is a humble home filled with unusual treasures. Mr. Ross enjoys a
lifetime hobby of collecting and studying rocks, minerals, and gems.
“Y’’ll like my thunder eggs,” he said, pointing to ugly, round, rough, unpromising rocks. “With my diamond
saw I’ve cut them in two.”
As he opened the parts, his friends gasped in wonder. Inside one was a beautiful display of quartz crystals. Another had a banded agate with multi-colored bands circling the core. Others were imaginary scenes of landscapes with mountains, valleys, ocean waves, or trees along a river.

From these masterpieces of nature, Mr. Ross had cut thin slices and mounted them as colored slides. Thrilled at the beauty of each, his friends noted that nature had supplied her own picture frame with a crystalline quartz border around each lovely scene.

Thunder eggs are like Jesus’ counsel about His church. Do not judge by outward appearances. Let the “wheat and the tares” grow together until the harvest. People who aren’t rock hounds would never pick up those ugly geodes or thunder eggs. Like Mr. Ross, who knew inward beauty, Jesus looks at the heart. What most folks see as ugliness is really a stone all glorious within. What does Jesus see inside your heart?

If you truly believe the concepts of each statement below, place a check in the box.

[ ] I believe the church is ordained of God.
[ ] I believe participation in the church is an essential response to the plan of salvation.
[ ] I choose to be part of God’s church.

**My Prayer**

Dear Father,

Thank You for the church You have built on Christ Himself. I praise and thank You that its ultimate victory is assured. Lord, transform me into Your likeness, and make me a living stone in Your temple to spread Your light to someone today. Amen.
**The Church**

*Read the following Bible texts and with the help from the lesson above, answer the following questions by circling “T” if the statement is true or “F” if the statement is false. (Hint: there are 7 true and 3 false)*

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1. **T or F** There is no concept of the church in the Old Testament (see pg. 164-166).

2. **T or F** Metaphoric descriptions in the New Testament include: the church as a body, the church as a temple, the church as a bride, the church as family, the church as Jerusalem above, and the church as the pillar (see pg. 167-170).

3. **T or F** People who wish to become members of His church must accept Jesus Christ as Lord and savior, repent of their sins, and be baptized (see pg. 172).

4. **T or F** Though there is difference in function between clergy and laity, we are all part of the priesthood of believers (see pg. 172-73).

5. **T or F** Some major functions of church organization are to gather believers for worship and exhortation, Christian fellowship, instruction in the Scripture, and administering the divine ordinances (see pg. 173).

6. **T or F** Christ gave the church the authority to disciple its members and provided the proper principles for doing so (see pg. 178).

7. **T or F** The authority given to the church is merely human authority (see pg. 165).

8. **T or F** Christ, himself, is the head of the church (see pg. 175).

9. **T or F** An elder of the church must first and foremost be a spiritual leader. An elder must also model the Christian lifestyle and set an example of liberality (see pg. 177).

10. **T or F** Church members should shun persons who have been removed from membership lest they themselves be tainted and subject to church discipline (see pg. 179).