

LESSON 32: CHRISTIANS BELIEVE IN THE CHURCH

(I) THE DOCTRINE (TEACHING) OF THE CHURCH

The church is God's idea. It is where we worship, grow together and accomplish His purposes on earth until he returns. The Bible encourages us to fellowship in the context of the church and Christianity that tries to exist without or outside of the church is both inferior and disobedient.

The church consists of those who are partakers in the blessings and benefits of Christ. The work translated church (Greek - ecclesia) in other places means an assembly or gathering. For our purposes, we will use this definition compounded with the concept of those being in the church as called out of the world by God. In essence, then, our understanding of the church means those "called out and assembled together." The church is always corporate, while Christians are individuals.

There are two common errors in understanding the church. The first error sees the church as being limited to a local concept, organization, denomination, or group. The second error sees the church as being only universal and invisible in nature. To limit our view of the church to either of these concepts will lead to ineffective witness and mission. The church is BOTH universal and local, yet it is important to see ourselves as part of both. The Roman Church was in gross error to think that both concepts could be brought together perfectly on earth. They set up a system of government which would identify and unify the church around the world. This eventually lead to church authority and power superseding that of Christ and the Bible. The other error is to simply see ourselves only as individuals separated from the Body at large.

Another common error is to let the church take priority over the kingdom of God. The church does not exist as an end in itself, but rather a means to an end. Our purpose is the furthering of the Kingdom of God, through the groups of bodies God has raised up to do this in a particular locality. When the kingdom takes precedence, the local body and believers suffer, when the church takes precedence, the Kingdom of God suffers. There is a fine balance somewhere in-between which we need to learn.

(II) DEFINITION OF THE CHURCH

- A. Ecclesia
 - 1. Used 111 times in the New Testament
 - 2. Used for assembly or called out (Mt. 16:18; Acts 19:39; Rom. 8:30, 16:4; I Cor. 1:2; II Cor. 6:17)
- B. The Church Belongs To The Lord
 - 1. He is the Head, He has dominion and authority.
 - a. Therefore, the church, universal or local, can have no other "head."

2. The church is the Body of Christ.
 - a. Col. 1:18; I Cor. 12:27 - this refers to both universal and local bodies.
 - b. Stresses unity
 - c. We can function together with Christ. (Eph. 1:22-23)
 - d. No life apart from the Head. (Col. 1:18; 2:19)
- C. Temple of the Holy Spirit of God.
 1. I Cor. 3:9-17; 6:19; Eph. 2:20-22; I Pet. 2:5
- D. The Jerusalem that is above
 1. Counterpart of the old Jerusalem, dwelling place of God, where the people are brought in communion with God, while on earth belongs in the heavenly sphere.
 2. Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22; Rev. 21:2,9,10
- E. Pillar and ground of truth
 1. The church is the guardian of truth, the citadel of truth.
 2. Defender of the truth
 3. I Tim. 3:15
- F. The church is the Bride of Christ.
 1. II Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 19:7; 22:17; 21:2
- G. The church is a flock.
 1. Acts 10:28

(III) ESTABLISHING THE CHURCH

- A. Foretold in prophecy by Christ
 1. Matt. 16:16-18; 18:15-20
- B. Founded by the Apostles (historically speaking)
 1. Acts 1 - 2:47; Acts 2:46; 12:12

(IV) CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

- A. Repentance and Baptism
 1. Acts 2:38-41; Matt. 28:19; Rom. 10:9-10
- B. Faith in Jesus Christ
 1. Matt. 16:16-18; Acts 2:38-39.
- C. Adherence to the Apostles teaching, i.e. the Bible
 1. Acts 2:42; Eph. 2:20

- D. Characteristics of the Early Church
 - 1. Believers, Acts 4:32
 - 2. Brethren, equality among believers
 - a. Matt. 23:8-10; Acts 11:29; Rom. 1:13
 - 3. Saints
 - a. Acts 9:13; I Cor. 1:2; Rev. 13:7
 - 4. Elect
 - a. Mk. 13:27; Rom. 8:33; Eph. 1:4

(V) THE ORDINANCES OF THE CHURCH

- A. Baptism
 - 1. Matt. 28:19-20; Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38,41; 8:36-40; 10:47-48
- B. The Lord's Supper
 - 1. Acts 2:42,46; 20:7; I Cor. 11:20-34

(VI) THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

- A. To worship God
 - 1. Eph. 1:4-6
- B. To build up the Body
 - 1. Eph. 4:11-15
 - 2. Failure to be part leads to trouble.
 - a. Heb. 10:25-28; I Thes. 5:11; I Cor. 12, 14
- C. To evangelize the world and make disciples
 - 1. Mat. 28:19-20 - GO!
 - 2. Acts 5:42; 6:5-8; 13:1-7; Eph 3:8; Acts 15:7; Acts 1:8
- D. To be glorified in Christ in the future
 - 1. Eph. 3:20,21; Rev. 21:9-27

