

What The Church Was Called

The scriptures call the church by various terms in view of the different figures of its relationship to Christ. First, the church is called the BODY (Eph. 1:21; Col. 1:18). It is called "the body" because Christ is its HEAD. Just as the head directs the body so Christ directs his church. Individually, Christians are called "members" (1 Cor. 12:27). Each member of the body has a different function, still it remains a part of the one body.

The Church is called a FLOCK (Acts 20:28, Jn. 10:16). It is called a flock because Christ is the Good Shepherd (Jn. 10:11). The shepherd cares for his sheep; he feeds them, medicates their diseases and, if called upon, lays down his life for them. John contrasts a shepherd with a hireling. The hireling uses the flock to his own advantage and deserts them in time of danger. The Shepherd upholds the flock instead of himself. Of course in this figure we recognize that Christians are "sheep" of his pasture.

The church is called God's TEMPLE (1 Cor. 3:16f). A temple is a "dwelling place" and God's Spirit is said to dwell both in the church and in the Christian (1 Cor. 6:19f). On one hand, Christ is the chief corner stone in this building; Christians are living stones (1 Pet. 2:6, 5). At the same time Christ is our high priest after the order of Melchizedek and Christians are a royal and holy priesthood (Heb. 5:5f; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9). As the chief corner stone, Christ is the support and strength of the temple; Christians as living stones are part and parcel of this structure which rests upon Christ. As a high priest like of Melchizedek, Christ is both priest and king whose sacrifice was himself; as priests, Christians offer up their bodies as a "living sacrifice" and with their tongues they offer up a sacrifice of praise to his name (Rom. 12:1ff; Heb. 13:15).

Many other figures also can be found. The church is Christ's bride (Eph. 5:23f). It is the Lord's vineyard (1 Cor. 3:9). It is God's family (1 Tim. 3:15). All these figures serve to show different aspect of God's care; His provisions and providence; His authority and headship. These words, CHURCH, KINGDOM, BODY, FLOCK, VINEYARD, FAMILY, TEMPLE and BRIDE all present different views of God's people for that is what the church is: God's people. Thus we see Christ promise "I will build my church" (Mt. 16:18).

We hear Paul speak of it as the "Church of God" (Acts. 29:28). We read where he wrote to Romans "The churches of Christ salute you" (Rom. 16:16). These terms are not intended to be proper names but to show

ownership and possession. The Church is Christ's because he bought it, with his own precious blood!

Jim McDonald