

Does The Church Matter?

Introduction. When God created the physical Universe, including the animals, what more majestic object could have been created? On the sixth day, God showed us — He then created man in His own image. This was a crowning achievement (Psalm 8:3-9). But after man sinned, a few thousand years later, the medium by which man would be redeemed, Jesus Christ, came into the world. Only ten days after His ascension, the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost and the church was established.

There are unfortunately too many people who devalue the church. They have either grown tired of it or they believe other gatherings and associations (such as Bible studies in people's homes, secular education combined with biblical studies, recreation combined with biblical studies, etc.) can take its place. It is inconceivable that anything built by Christ could (or would) be considered unimportant, unnecessary, and irrelevant. Therefore we will examine from inspired scripture six reasons why the church matters.

I. It Matters Because Of What It Is

- A. A consideration of all that the Bible says concerning the time and place of the church's beginning will reveal that the church was established in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ (Luke 24:46-49; Acts 1:4-8; 2:1-4).
- B. It was on that occasion that the gospel of Christ was first preached in the fulness of its facts, commands, and promises. It was on that occasion that people responded in penitent faith to the gospel and were saved from their sins (Acts 2:37-41). These saved people constituted the church, and on every subsequent occasion when the gospel was preached, believed, and obeyed, people were saved and added to the church (Acts 2:47).
- C. The church is the community of people who have been redeemed from their sins by the blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19). They constitute "the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). The church is a spiritual body of Christ in which reconciliation to God takes place (Ephesians 2:16), and outside the church there is no salvation. To talk (or even think) in terms of salvation apart from the church is to reveal a glaring misunderstanding of what the church is.

II. It Matters Because It Was Eternally Purposed

- A. There was never a time when God did not plan to redeem fallen man through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:20), which is to say that there was never a time when the church was not in the eternal purpose of God.
- B. The epistle to the Ephesians sets forth this tremendous truth in all of its wondrous beauty and clarity (Ephesians 3:11). Paul reiterated this grand truth in a later letter (2 Timothy 1:9-11). In the infinite wisdom of God and according to His eternal purpose, Christ was the lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8).
- C. Throughout the Old Testament God's grand scheme of redemption was gradually unfolded — first in promise and then in prophecy. In the gospel records we see it in preparation and prospect. In the book of Acts (and following) we see it in its

divine perfection as the church becomes the fruition of all that God had planned and purposed.

III. It Matters Because Of Its Relationship To Christ

- A. Christ is the only foundation of the church (1 Corinthians 3:11).
 - 1. In contrast to the opinions of men who identified Christ as John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets, Simon Peter confessed Him to be the Christ (Matthew 16:16). In response to this confession, Jesus promised to build the church on that rock (v. 18).
 - 2. It is important to note that it was not on Peter that Christ promised to build His church but on the confession that made. Christ and who He is — the divine Son of God — is the only basis on which the redeemed of Earth can stand.
- B. Jesus described Himself as the chief corner stone of the church, yet one that was a “stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence” (Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10-11; Luke 20:17). Peter and Paul described Him that was too (Acts 4:11; Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:6-8; cp. Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 8:14; 28:16).
- C. Christ, likewise, is the head of the church, and He is the savior of the body, which is the church (Ephesians 5:23). Christ loved the church and died so that the church, the body of the saved, could be a reality (v. 25).

IV. It Matters Because The Holy Spirit Dwells In It

- A. James reminds us that a body without a spirit is dead (James 2:26). The church, the body of Christ (Colossians 1:18), is not a dead body; it is indwelt by the Spirit of God. The Spirit of Christ is to dwell in each Christian — each individual member of the church (Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 6:19).
- B. The Spirit dwells in the church as a whole. The church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets through the Spirit (Ephesians 2:21-22). This is done through the inspired word (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21; Jude 3). Paul, likewise, appeals to the church at Corinth to cease its destructive actions on the basis that the church constitutes the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16-17).

V. It Matters Because There Is One True Church

- A. Jesus built a church, not churches. Yes, there are many local congregations scattered around the world, even as there were in New Testament times (Romans 16:16).
 - 1. The apostle Paul spoke of “the churches of Macedonia” (2 Corinthians 8:1), “the churches of Galatia” (Galatians 1:2), and “the churches of Judea which were in Christ” (v. 22).
 - 2. The apostle John addressed “the seven churches which are in Asia” (Revelation 1:4) and later identified each of them by their geographical location (v. 11).
- B. In no case, however, were these different kinds of churches regarding faith, doctrine, and practice such as is evidenced in modern day denominationalism (Ephesians 4:4-6). Paul was careful to identify that one body as the church (Colossians 1:24). The New Testament does not sanction religious division and the existence of different kinds of churches (1 Corinthians 1:10-13).

1. Denominationalism is of man's wisdom, not God's wisdom. The oldest Protestant denomination — the Lutheran Church — is less than 500 years old, having been established in 1530 by Martin Luther in Augsburg, Germany.
 2. Were one to begin with the last denomination established by man and move back in history, eradicating each denomination as he went, one would find himself in the first century and in the presence of only one church which was established through the agency of His Spirit-guided apostles on Pentecost.
- C. Of course, innovation did not stop centuries ago. Just this week, Paul Di Lucca, a creative director at the church branding agency Lux Dei Design, announced a venture called The McMass Project which seeks to raise one million dollars to put a McDonalds inside a church building. Di Lucca said, "Christianity is unable to capture modern audiences ... There's a lack of innovation and lack of design thinking in church communities."
- D. Doctrines originating with the commandments of men are the highest authority for the existence of denominational churches and their gimmicks to attract and entertain man (Matthew 15:8-9, 13). Do not confuse the magnificent Lord's church with the churches of men.

VI. It Matters Because Of Its Destiny

- A. At the second coming of Christ several events will take place, one of which is the resurrection of the dead and the presentation of the kingdom to God the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24). This kingdom is the church, the people of whom Paul spoke as being "transferred" (Colossians 1:13), which is the same as Luke's statement of being "added to the church" (Acts 2:47).
- B. These blood-redeemed citizens of Heaven's kingdom are being delivered up from this doomed Earth and presented to God the Father to dwell forever in His presence (1 Peter 1:3-5). Paul explains the fate of both the dead in Christ and those alive at His coming in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17. The spectacular end of this blood-bought institution made Paul exclaim, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law" (1 Corinthians 15:55-56).

Conclusion. It is inconceivable to think that something which required so much time in planning and preparation on the part of God should not matter — to assert that the church does not matter is a serious charge. The church is the aggregate body of those who have been cleansed of their sins by the blood of Christ. It was purposed and planned by God from all eternity. It is sustained by its vital connection with Christ. It is indwelt by God's Holy spirit. By its very nature and composition it is singular in number. Its destiny is with God in the realms beyond. "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Ephesians 3:21).