

Respecting What God Has Built

Introduction. I'm going to show you several statements that people have made about the church. Have you ever heard them? Or other similar demeaning statements?

"You can be Christian without the church."

"I don't need the church."

"The church is full of hypocrites."

"The church is old-fashioned and outdated."

"The church doesn't care about me."

"The church only wants my money."

"The church is opinionated and dogmatic."

"The church doesn't meet my needs anymore."

Actually, I've heard all of those and even more derogatory accusations about the church. Sometimes these are said or posted on social media by professed Christians.

I understand that people can let us down. Not all preachers are ministering as God wants. Not all pastors are shepherding as the Bible teaches. And not all local congregations are following God's Word and fulfilling His purpose. However, in spite of human imperfections, we should respect and appreciate the church. And we should be an integral part of its work.

The church isn't just a place we meet. It's something really special and is worthy of respect and appreciation because of God's part, Christ's part, and our part, and I want to dive deeper into those reasons in this lesson.

I. The Church Was a Part of God's Plan

- A. The Bible says the church was a part of God's "eternal purpose" (Ephesians 3:10-11). Although human beings comprise the church, it isn't of human origin. It's the result of God's plan and purpose (Ephesians 1:4-5, 9-10). Its existence demonstrates the accomplishment of God's intention "before the world was."
- B. The same Bible text tells us that the church is a manifestation of the "manifold wisdom of God." The word "manifold" means something complex and intricate. Some of the ways God's wisdom is revealed in the church are as follows:
 - 1. He planned salvation before it was fully revealed.
 - 2. He accomplished it through Christ's death and resurrection rather than human achievement.
 - 3. He reconciles sinners to Himself by grace.
 - 4. He breaks down hostility between peoples and joins them in one life under Christ — with different gifts, backgrounds, and functions.
- C. Christians enjoy spiritual blessings in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). Our fellowship together is a source of encouragement, enlightenment, and edification (1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 27).

II. The Church Was Founded by Christ

- A. It's been said, "Preach Christ, not the church." But they're inseparably connected. Jesus promised, "I will build My church" (Matthew 16:18). It's His.

Furthermore, God made Christ its head, and the Bible speaks of the church as “His body” (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18).

- B. In his commentary on Ephesians, Colly Caldwell offered this insight about the body of Christ: “It is a union of believers in Christ, fellowshiping one another in an organic living spiritual body. It is animated, given life, by Him. Jesus Christ is not simply an external authority but the internal life Giver and Sustainer of His body. He should be recognized as such by all members.”
- C. Paul told the Corinthian Christians “you are bought with a price” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). When Paul addressed the Ephesian elders, he identified that price as the blood of Jesus (Acts 20:28; Revelation 5:9-10). This implies several facts:
 - 1. The church is immensely valuable to God. Its value is measured not by its wealth, size, reputation, or perfection, but by the cost Christ paid for it.
 - 2. Salvation is costly grace. Forgiveness is freely given to people who obey it, but it wasn’t cheap; it rests on Christ’s self-giving death.
 - 3. Sin is serious. If redemption required Christ’s blood, sin can’t be treated as a minor defect or merely a mistake.
 - 4. Christ’s love is personal and active. He didn’t merely make salvation possible in the abstract; He gave Himself to obtain a people for God.

III. The Church Was Established for Holiness

- A. I remember, as a kid, my mom saying to me when I was rowdy, “Behave yourself.” I knew what she meant. Our heavenly Father is issuing the same exhortation to those in His family.
- B. People are added to the family of God because they’re saved and redeemed (Acts 2:47; Ephesians 2:19). They then perfect holiness because that’s the elementary object of Christians (2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Peter 1:16).
 - 1. Old Testament priests were consecrated by God under the Old Law (Leviticus 21:1-22:16). They had righteous standards to live up to.
 - 2. The fact that we’re a “royal priesthood” alludes to the responsibility of consecration as well (1 Peter 2:9).
 - a) Christians who are serious about their calling have put on the new man and put off sin (Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:5-11).
 - b) Furthermore, Christians should treat spiritual family members with kindness, consideration, and compassion. Express love, show respect, and don’t talk disparagingly about your fellow brothers and sisters who also belong to the family of God.
 - 3. Hypocrisy among church members is one of the biggest reasons why people depart from the faith.
 - a) Our actions do have the potential to drive others toward unbelief. Try as we might, we still sin. There always have been accounts of graphic hypocrisy and sordid misconduct on the part of Christians (cp. Acts 5:1-11). Please remember that what you do and who sees it is important.
 - b) While we acknowledge the devastating effect that can result from the hypocrisy of believers, and while we make no attempt to justify or excuse such conduct, at the same time we have to recognize the fact that it’s unfair to blame God for the blunders of humanity. Understanding the

Bible properly, there's no logical reason to walk away from God because of the hypocrisy of ones who claim to follow Him.

- C. Our conduct should reflect favorably on Him whom we serve, the commands of Scripture, and our fellow brothers and sisters. Let your conduct be good, holy, honorable, respectful, and pure (James 3:13; 1 Peter 1:15; 2:12; 3:2).

Conclusion. A true understanding of what the Bible says about the church challenges us to further its cause, to fulfill its mission, to participate in its ministry, to share its message, and not to discredit, defame, dismiss, disdain, or deride God's church. The church is the instrument by which God's glory is revealed to all mankind (Ephesians 3:21).

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