

## What The New Testament Says About The Local Church

### Introduction

#### A. Matthew 16:16-19

#### B. The local church in the eternal purpose of God.

Let men say what they please, the church with it's affairs, it's origins, fortunes, and consummation, is the most simple and elevated theme to which the mind of man, to which the towering hierarchies of heaven can aspire ... Let haughty mortals, aspiring to be gods on earth, frown and fret. The eternal glory of the church stands engraven on her gates and towers as the final consummation of God's eternal purpose in creation, providence, and redemption.<sup>1</sup>

#### C. The essential unity of Christ, the Word of Christ, and the Church of Christ.

The rejection of Christ means the rejection of His Word and His Church. The rejection of the Word of Christ – the sacred Scriptures, means the rejection of Christ and His Church. The rejection of the church of Christ means the rejection of Christ and His Word.<sup>2</sup>

### I. The Local Church IS the Church

#### A. The Reformation concept of ecclesia invisibilis – the Invisible Church

1. Sources: Augustine, Wyclif, and Hus; the attempt to reconcile the corrupted earthly institution with the Biblical ideal.
2. Character: Platonic dualism

#### B. The church exists universally, and local church membership is neither coextensive nor coterminus with the Book of Life, but this is not the doctrine of ecclesia invisibilis. In its essence, the church is one; the church of the New Testament is local, i.e., people meeting in congregations. In Scripture, to be a Christian is to be a member of a local body of believers; church membership is not a mystical connection to a transcendental ideal. The glory of the Church is the glory of the LOCAL Church (Phm 2; Rev. 1:4; II Cor. 1:1; Col 4:15 et al.)

### II. The Local Church AND the New Testament (the connection between Scripture and Church)

#### A. Wrong concepts

##### 1. Neo-orthodoxy

- a. The church as primary revelatory event, created and shaped DIRECTLY by the Holy Spirit.
- b. Scripture as secondary testimony of limited authority, a fallible human witness to “Jesus event” as expressed in the faith of the apostolic church; Scripture as “a norm, a guideline and a boundary”<sup>3</sup> of the church; Scripture subject to validation by the historical-critical method.

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Campbell, MH, III (March 5, 1832), 111-112.

<sup>2</sup> G. M. Elliott, RH (July, 1975) 6.

<sup>3</sup> H. Küng, The Church (New York: Doubleday, 1976), p. 35.

2. Roman Catholic

- a. The church created and shaped DIRECTLY by the Holy Spirit moving in progressive revelation.
- b. Scripture as a product of the church and subject to the interpretative authority of the church (tradition emerging from church fathers, councils, and popes).

3. John Calvin

- a. Church as dominant institution in the theocratic society of the elect.
- b. Scripture as a handbook of the theocratic society; the “level Bible”; the language of the Bible homogeneous and prescriptive.

B. The Biblical concept

1. The church created by the Holy Spirit BY MEANS OF THE APOSTOLIC WORD (spoken and written). I Thess. 2:13; Eph. 2:20.
2. Scripture, the words of God and the Word of God; the absolute authority on, for, and over the church; the positive, apostolic design for the local church.

III. The Church and the Old Testament

A. The parenthesis/dispensational view: Church as parenthetical mystery, not in the prophets; not the Messianic Kingdom in any primary sense; church as preliminary.

B. The Biblical view: Church as the eschatological people of God.

1. The spotlight of prophecy upon the church: Luke 24:25-27; 44-47; Acts 3:24; 26:22, 23; Heb. 12:22-29; I Peter 1:10-12.
2. The “church age” as the Last Days: Acts 2:15-17; Hebrews 1:1, 2; II Tim. 3:1ff; II Peter 3:3; I Jo. 2:18.
3. Christ claimed the promises for Himself when He came: Luke 1:31-33; Matt. 11:2-6.
4. During the public ministry of Jesus, the Kingdom “at hand”: Matt. 3:1, 2; 4:17; Mark 1:14, 15.
5. Kingdom preaching characterized the ministry of Jesus and the apostles: Matt. 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:14; Acts 8:12; 15:13-18; 28:23.
6. Jesus promised that some of His generation would witness the coming of the Kingdom: Mark 9:1; Matt. 16:28.
7. The church and the Kingdom are synonymous: Matt. 16:15ff.
8. A figurative understanding of prophecy is normal: Numbers 12:6-8; Hosea 12:10; Luke 22:29, 30; Luke 3:3-6; Matt. 17:1-13.
9. The parallel use of “Kingdom of God,” “Kingdom of Christ,” and “Kingdom of Heaven”: Eph. 5:5; Matt. 11,12; Luke 16:16; Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:14, 15; Matt. 5:3; Luke 6:20; Matt. 10:7; Luke 9:2; et al.
10. Christians are said to have inherited and to be in the Kingdom of God: Col. 1:13, 14; Heb. 12:28; Rev. 1:9.

C. The local church is the world’s last chance; the redemptive work of Christ is committed to the local church; the local church must understand its own significance, glory, and responsibility.

IV. The Local Church as Ekklesia (the “called out”)

- A. Christians as those who have answered a divine call: I Thess. 2:12; II Thess. 2:14.
- B. Christians as those who stand distinct from the world: Eph. 4:17.

C. Christians as those who congregate in affirmation of their identity: Acts 20:7.

## V. New Testament Images of the Local Church

A. The Body of Christ: Eph. 1:22, 23; Ro. 12:4-8; I Cor. 12:12-31.

### 1. Significance of the analogy

- a. Christ the Head of the Body; authority administered through apostolic word: John 20:21-23.
- b. Christians as members of the body
  - (1) Submission to the Head in all things: Eph. 5:24.
  - (2) Unity in diversity: Eph. 4:11-13.
  - (3) Mutual and common responsibility within the local body: I Cor. 12:25-30.
  - (4) The mission and expression of Christ in the world: Eph. 4:14-16.

2. Limitations of the analogy: The attachment of faith vs. mystical union.

B. The Temple of God: I Cor 3:9-17; Eph. 2:21, 22; I Peter 2:5.

### 1. Significance of the analogy

- a. We must build according to the divine pattern: I Cor. 3:10.
- b. The sanctity of the temple of God must be observed and preserved: I Cor. 3:17; Eph. 2:22.

2. Limitations of the analogy: God does not build His temple/building in such a way as to limit human activity and responsibility. The agency and dynamic of God in the building process is His Word.

C. God's Cultivated field/Vineyard: I Cor. 3:1-9; 9:7; Matt. 21:33-41; Matt. 13:1-9 cf. 18-23; 24-30 cf. 36-43.

### Significance of the analogy

1. The dynamic identification of God with His church and the work of His church: I Cor. 3:9.
2. The requirement of fruitfulness: Matt. 13:23; 21:43.
3. The seed is the Word of God: Matt. 13:19; I Peter 1:23.
4. Human responsibility in sowing: I Cor. 3:6
5. Human responsibility in receiving the seed: Matt. 13:18-22.
6. The danger of Satanic interference: Matt. 13:19; 38.
7. The vineyard taken from national Israel and given to the world at large: Matt. 21:41-43.

D. Christ's Flock: John 10:1-16; Acts 20:28-30; I Peter 5:1-4.

### Significance of the analogy

1. Christ as "Chief Shepherd": I Peter 5:4
2. Elders as shepherds: I Peter 5:2; John 10:1ff.
3. The unity of the flock: John 10:16.

E. The Bride of Christ (elect): Eph. 5:25-32; John 3:29; Rev. 19:7; 21:2-4; 22:16; II Cor. 11:2; Matt. 22:1-10.

### Significance of the analogy

1. Based on the O.T. image of Israel betrothed to the Lord: Isa. 62:1-5.
2. The requirement of virginal purity: II Cor. 11:2.
3. The church as the beloved of Christ: Eph. 5:25.
4. The future honor and glory of the wedding feast: Rev. 19:9; Mark 2:19, 20.
5. Constant readiness for the arrival of the groom: Luke 12:35, 36; Matt. 25:22:8ff.

6. National Israel rejected because she rejected the wedding invitation: Matt. 22:8ff.
7. The bride is the possession of the groom: Ro. 16:16.
8. The bride wears the name of her groom: Acts 11:26.

F. The Household of God: Eph. 2:19; 3:15; Gal. 6:10; I Tim. 3:15.  
Significance of the analogy

1. God as patria potestas.
2. The Church as family – benefits and responsibilities.

G. The Israel of God: Gal. 6:16; I Peter 2:9, 10; Ro. 9:25, 26; Matt. 19:28; Jas. 1:1; (Heb. 12:22 & Rev. 21:2).

Significance of the analogy

1. The church as “the hope of Israel”: Acts 26:6, 7; 28:20.
2. Christians as the sons of Abraham: Gal. 3:29; Ro. 4:16.
3. Christ, the Ruler on David’s Throne: Acts 2:29-31; 13:34.
4. The church as the true circumcision: Phil. 3:3; Ro. 2:28, 29.
5. The church as the remnant: Ro. 9:27; 11:5-7.
6. The church as the elect: Ro. 9; 11:15.
7. The church as the exodus pilgrims: I Cor. 10:1-12.
8. The church as the olive tree: Ro. 11:24.

H. Minor Images

1. A letter from Christ: II Cor. 3:2, 3.
2. A fishnet: Matt. 4:19; 13:47-50.
3. The ark: I Peter 3:18-22.

## VI. The Local Church as the Fellowship of the Forgiven

- A. The objective character of union with Christ – Justification: Ro. 3:26; II Cor. 5:20, 21.
- B. Salvation by faith vs. the theory of mystical union.
- C. Sanctification not a test of justification.

## VII. Leadership in the New Testament Church

- A. The collegiate eldership – leadership by principle vs. personality: Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; Acts 20:17ff; I Tim. 3:1-7.
- B. Deacons: I Tim. 3:8-13.
- C. Evangelist: Eph. 4:11; Acts 21:8.

## VIII. Significant Characteristics Required of the Church in the New Testament

- A. Fidelity to the Apostle’s Doctrine: I Jo. 2:24-28.
- B. No respecter of persons: Jas. 2:1-9; Acts 11:1-18.
- C. Expecting the Return of Jesus: Jas. 5:8; Phil. 3:20.
- D. Obedient to the Word of Christ: Phil. 2:12-16.
- E. Jealous of its freedom in Christ: Col. 2:8-23.
- F. Earnest and faithful in prayer: Acts 2:42.
- G. United: Eph. 4:3-6.
- H. Missionary minded: Acts 13:1-3.
- I. Generous to sister congregations: II Cor. 11:8, 9.

J. Faithful in the Lord's Supper: I Cor. 11:23-34.

K. Given to agape: I John 4:7-21.

IX. The Glorious Destiny of the Church in the New Testament

A. The defeat of death: Matt. 16:18; I Cor. 15:54, 55; Rev. 1:18; 21:1-4.

B. The Return of Jesus and the resurrection of the saints: I Thess. 4:13-5:11; I Cor. 15:50-58.

C. Eternal fellowship with God: Rev. 21:3.