

WHAT IS THE CHURCH? By Bern Zumpano, M.D.

The following Scriptures are keys to the understanding of this topic, read them now.

- Eph. 1:22,23
- 1 Cor. 10:16,17
- 1 Tim.3:15

From your review and understanding of what you have just read, the following should be apparent to you:

In Eph. 1:22,23 the TRUE CHURCH is defined as a SPIRITUAL ENTITY and NOT a temporal or physical organization or structure. It is referred to as HIS BODY, that is, the body (assembly) of BELIEVERS (those who are His). It is understood that HE (Jesus) is firstly and foremost a SPIRITUAL BEING who HAS a physical body.

And so with the CHURCH. It is made up of spiritual beings in physical bodies, for we are made in His Image (Gen. 1:27). The first description that we encounter of the Church in scripture, then, is that of an "organization" which is a SPIRITUAL ENTITY and not a physical entity. The true church is spiritual in its existence, and as such, cannot be divided. It has NEVER BEEN divided and it never will be.

In 1 Cor. 10:16,17 the Holy Spirit reveals to us that although we are many, we are of ONE BODY, that is, ONE CHURCH because we all partake of the ONE BREAD, the Bread of Life which is Jesus Our Savior. Anything other than this revelation of scripture, then, would be a counterfeit.

In 1 Tim. 3:15 the Holy Spirit again defines the TRUE CHURCH as the HOUSEHOLD of God, that is, the FAMILY of God made up of true believers. True believers are those who have received the New Birth (John 3:3-5). It goes on to make two more points:

- Such is the CHURCH of the LIVING GOD, (NOT that of man).
- It (alone) is the PILLAR of THE TRUTH.

The TRUE CHURCH, then is a SPIRITUAL ENTITY and NOT a physical entity made up of TRUE BELIEVERS from ALL DENOMINATIONS who, upholding the TRUTH of the scriptures ARE the PILLAR OF TRUTH, the CHURCH itself. This is not a concept or doctrine of men but an article of DIVINE REVELATION.

What, then, of denominational churches which are earthly structures? Are each of them the true church? NOT according to the revelation of scripture. Are they then worthy of support? YES!!! AS LONG AS THEY PROFESS THE TRUE, UNADULTERATED AND CORRECT DOCTRINE OF CHRIST AS DEFINED IN THE SCRIPTURES. Why? Because God is a God of order and practicality and, as such, man MUST have organizational structure to carry out the MINISTRY and GOOD WORKS of CHRIST to reach a dying world. It takes organization and structure to do so. It is simply a matter of understanding their place in the Lord's scheme of things and understanding that each denomination is a PART of the BODY as a whole (the true church) through its true believers.

One must have a healthy spiritual attitude regarding denominationalism. The word “denomination” comes from the Latin which means “in the name of”. The LITERAL meaning of “the Baptist denomination” (as an example), then, would be “in the name of the Baptists”. That of the Lutheran denomination would mean “in the name of the Lutherans” or “in the name of the Lutheran Church”. That of the Catholics would mean “in the name of the Catholics” or “in the name of the Catholic Church”, and so on.

What is the point? The point is that the TRUE CHURCH comes in the NAME OF CHRIST and CHRIST ALONE and walks in the TRUTH of CHRIST and TRUTH OF CHRIST ALONE. What, then, does all of this mean? It means that all true Christians, regardless of their denominations, MUST develop a healthy attitude and perspective as to WHAT the TRUE CHURCH really is and put their denomination, if they have any, in proper perspective as a VEHICLE of MINISTRY of the works and teachings of Christ. If it is more important, then, for a person to be a “Presbyterian” first, and THEN a Christian, that person has made an IDOL of his/her denomination and needs to recognize it and put it in its proper perspective.

The sad fact is that ALL denominationalism is ROOTED in the SIN OF PRIDE, for it has, in each instance, the foundational concept of DOCTRINAL EXCLUSIVITY, that is, the idea that “We have an exclusive doctrine and interpretation of the Scriptures that is unique and different from everyone else and which sets us apart from everyone else, and we and we alone are correct.’ If this were not true, there would be no denominations as they exist.

Denominationalists recognize it as “their truth” or “their interpretation” of the doctrine of Christ. The Holy Spirit recognizes it as SPIRITUAL PRIDE and the Spirit CANNOT BLESS anything that is rooted in pride. Is it any wonder, then, that the FRUIT of denominationalism is DIVISION. Jesus said that we judge something, IF it be of God, by its FRUIT. The Scriptures are quite clear that the TRUE CHURCH ALWAYS acted TOGETHER (Mt. 17:22; Acts 2:1) and moved IN ONE ACCORD. UNITY, not disunity, is the way of action and conduct of the TRUE CHURCH because it is a SPIRITUAL entity guided by the Holy Spirit, not men. It CANNOT be divided.

With this perspective, then, it becomes essential for every Christian to realize that his/her denomination must serve ONLY as a VEHICLE of ministry for the TRUE CHURCH, to do its works and preach the truth of the CHRISTIAN FAITH. There IS no other faith than the CHRISTIAN FAITH. Denominations must be put in their proper place and MUST BE MADE TO SERVE THE CAUSE AND PURPOSE OF CHRIST and NOT exalt themselves or PERMIT themselves to be exalted by their members. God shares His glory with NO ONE (Is. 42:8) and those who worship God MUST worship in SPIRIT and IN TRUTH... IN TRUTH... IN TRUTH (John 4:23).

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