

Who Needs Church?

Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. -Matt. 16:18

Have you ever heard someone say, "Who needs church? I don't need church."? If the research can be trusted there is a decline in the number of Americans that are affiliated with a local church and of those who are affiliated, the level of involvement has declined. ***Professing Christians want Christ without the church.*** This is partly due to the influence of a culture that values individualism; an individualism that is both revealed and promoted by messages like, "Have it your way." "Be your own person". "The only person you can rely on is yourself." I found a powerful article on the Huffington Post by a 20-something named Krysti Wilkinson entitled, "We are the Generation That Doesn't Want Relationships". Now, I am never comfortable with attempts to place whole generations of people into single categories, painting them with a broad brush, but that does not diminish the reality that her words are applicable to many people, and not just millennials.

There are several reasons for the "I don't need church" attitude. One reason is that it is due to BAD THEOLOGY. Some Christians feel that being a part of a local church is unimportant due to a misconception of what "church" is about. Some of this is due to a failure on the part of ministers like to clearly and compellingly communicate the biblical concept of church and to lead the church to become what God intends it to be.

Another reason is that people have had a bad experience in church. They have been hurt or offended. I will cover this second issue later in

this series. For today I want to focus on correcting bad theology; *a misconception of what the NT says the “church” is.*

I. What is the Church?

Matthew 16:18 is the first place in the NT where we find the word church mentioned. Jesus came to build His church. If I asked what Jesus came to do it would rarely include this in the answer. Usually the focus is on individual salvation. What Jesus is building is not a building!

1. Not a place but a people The word translated church in your bibles is a word that literally meant an assembly of people. Whenever you come across the word church in your NT think “assembly” or “gathered community” rather than a building.

2. Not just any people, the “people of God”. When Jesus said, I will build my church, he was saying, I will build a group of people who exist for my glory and my purposes. This is an Assembly of the people of God; the family of God. The church consists of all who belong to Christ. If you belong to Christ you belong to His church.

How does a person become a part of this family; part of his church? One of the main purposes behind Paul’s letters to the Romans and Galatians was to address that very question. In these letters he communicates as clearly and forcefully as he can that there was and is one condition for being a part of God’s family and that condition was and still is faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is important to add that this “faith” has a certain quality to it that consists in more than just a profession of belief. Genuine saving faith necessarily produces within the person a change of heart and mind towards God. It is always accompanied by repentance from sin and the indwelling presence of the

Holy Spirit. Paul couldn't express it any more clearly than he did in Romans 8:9 when he wrote, "*... And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.*"

So the church is not a place but a group of people. And not just a group of any people, but a group of people who belong to Christ by faith.

In the NT the word church is sometimes used to describe the universal church, the worldwide family of God. At other times it refers to a local church; a smaller group of Christians living in a specific locale who worship together, study together, pray together, support one another, encourage one another, and keep each other accountable. These groups of Christians had recognized leaders and were organized as a community that worked together to fulfill the will of Christ.

In the NT whenever and wherever people were converted to Christianity they were immediately incorporated into a local church. The notion that a Christian can serve or worship God "on their own" without the accountability, encouragement and support of a local church is completely foreign to the NT.

II. How is the church supposed function?

There are several metaphors used in the NT to describe the church such as the temple of God, the household of faith, the bride of Christ. But the most prominent metaphor and the one I want to focus on today because it is most instructive is the Body of Christ metaphor. In fact, the implications of this metaphor are so tremendous that, when understood and believed, will absolutely compel anyone who professes to be a Christian to commit himself/herself to the church.

Paul uses this metaphor in four of his letters: Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians. For the sake of time we will just focus our attention on Ephesians 4:15-16. Paul had written that God gave leaders as gifts to His church. He wrote, “their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.

*“Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like **Christ**, who is **the head of his body, the church**. He makes the whole **body fit together perfectly**. As **each part does its own special work**, it **helps the other parts grow**, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.”*

1. The church has a head and His name is Jesus. Just as the head is in control of your physical body, so Christ is in control of His church. Just as your brain determines the functions of your body parts, the individual members of Christ’s body should function in line with the values, purpose, and desires of Christ. In short, the body is supposed to perform the will of the head. To glorify God and reflect his image in our relationships with one another. The very fact that the church is the body of Christ indicates that it’s reason for being is to carry on the work of Christ.

2. They individual parts must fit together. The word together is the key. The parts of your body don’t work independently of one another and neither does the Lord intend for his body parts to work independent of one another. Would you rather have your body parts connected or disconnected? Doesn’t Jesus deserve His body parts to be connected?

Before body parts can work together they need to be connected. The “Lone Ranger” Christian is completely foreign to the NT. Spiritual growth takes place in the context of relationships. Jesus didn’t die just

to redeem individuals. He died to redeem a body, or family, or community of individuals.

3. Everyone has a role to play.

The third highlighted portion indicates that each part is supposed to do it's special work. We need to do what God has called us to do, not what God has called someone else to do. After service today I will drive home. I am counting on my body parts working together and playing the part I need them to play. If my eyes decide they want the afternoon off, expecting that my ears can fill in for them, I am going to have a problem – and so will you. If my feet decide to argue with my hands insisting that they should get to steer because they never get to steer...the end result will not be pretty.

4. Other people need you! You have a responsibility for the growth of others! You have something vital to contribute. The church is not just for superstars. If Christians decide to disconnect from the church because they didn't get anything out of it, they have failed to understand the purpose of being connected. It is not just about what you get it is about what you give. Imagine what would happen if every Christian went to a gathering of God's people – whether it be a service, class, life group, or other activity - with the intention to find someone to bless and encourage rather than focused on the personal benefit they were hoping to derive from the experience. Some people disengage from church thinking, "I don't need other people". But what about those that need you!

5. You need others.

The last principle is implied by everything that has already been said. If every part needs the support of the others, then not only do others need me but I need others. You need to learn from others, and you need others for support, encouragement and accountability.

These principles, derived from this metaphor, are so tremendous that, when understood and believed, will absolutely compel anyone who professes to be a Christian to commit himself/herself to the church. Once you recognize that Jesus expects His followers to function together as if they were parts of his body, participation in a church is a given.

In the beginning of this message I said that many people want Christ without His church. But to reject Christ's body is to reject Christ. To support the body of Christ is to support Christ. To love Jesus is to love Jesus body.

This doesn't mean you can never leave a local church. People need to find the local church that God is leading them to.

Today, as we close God is calling us to recommit to Christ by recommitting to His body.