

The Church, A People

Striking at the Root

Heb. 3:4-6 ⁴*For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God.*

⁵*And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, ⁶but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.*

The words, 'church' and 'ecclesia' are a transliteration of the Greek 'ekklesia' taken from the 'Lexicon' (LXX) to mean 'an assembly of the people of Israel'. The term was not exclusively used by the Jews, therefore it was proper to be adopted for such a gathering which would include the Gentiles (Acts 19:32). As in the text above, we will see later that 'church' has never been used in Scripture to denote a physical structure in the form of a chapel or cathedral or meeting hall, nor has it been used to denote a sect or denomination.

In Scripture, the word 'church' is, on the one hand, used as a 'local community of believers', and on the other hand, as a reference to all

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believers, the world over (Acts 9:31, Acts 20:28, 1 Cor. 12:28, Eph. 1:22, Gal. 6:16).

‘Ekklesia’ is a reference both for a body of believers in Christ assembled locally as a congregation, as well as a universal body, whether assembled or not. As such, one can be a member of a local assembly of believers, participating in the ritualistic experience of a local congregation, yet fail to be a member of the true universal Church because the life lived is not in alignment to the faith of Christ.

A cathedral without believers is a museum. The first 300 years of church history had no cathedral, because the temple of God is not made with human hands. The believers are the house, living stones fitly framed together.

God’s vision of making mankind in His image, which He turned mission in the Garden of Eden, was for fellowship with Him eternally. This eternal intent was hindered by sin.

The fellowship was restricted to soul-inherent beings only. Sheep, oxen, fowls, fishes etc. were

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not made to fellowship with God in the same way that humans are.

The English dictionary wrongly defines ‘church’ as ‘a place in which Christians worship’. But the Bible, which I believe is ‘the dictionary of God’s love’, shows us that ‘the Church’ is ‘a people who worship God in Christ everywhere with or without a physical structure’, since worship under this regime of grace is in spirit and truth (John 1:17; John 4:20-24).

The Church is a believing people who may or may not have built their own corporate worship place. This does not negate the fact that worship or meeting halls or shelters offer protection from the sun and rain and afford a spacious place for many worshippers, thus remaining beneficial to have. They are however not built to house God, as God is too big to live in cathedrals constructed with human hands (Acts 17:24-25).

Evaluation Questions & Answers

1. What is the relationship between 'The Church' and the place(s) in which she gathers?
 - * The place is functional, not foundational. The Church existed before buildings (Acts 2:46), and will exist after them (Rev. 21:22). The place serves the people; the people do not serve the place.
2. Suggest a possible misplacement of priority when dealing with 'The Church' with regards to 'Church building'.
 - * When 'Church building projects' replace 'Church building people' (Eph. 4:12).
 - * When we measure growth by square metres not souls saved.
 - * When 'dedication of sanctuary' gets more energy than 'dedication of saints'.

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3. Can there be 'Church' on earth without a physical building? Why?

- * The first 300 years of Church history had no cathedrals. Acts 2:46 describes "house to house", Rom. 16:5 describes "the church in their house". The persecuted Church meets today in forests, caves, and online. Heb. 3:6 says that we are His house.

4. Can there be 'Church' on earth without 'believing people'? Why?

- * No. A cathedral without believers is a museum, not a Church. Matt. 18:20 required "two or three gathered in my name". Without faith in Christ, there is no ekklesia (John 3:3; 1 Cor. 12:13).

Prayer

Lord, forgive us for loving brick more than bride.
Make me a living stone, not a dead pew. Use me
to build Your people, not just Your property. In
King Jesus's Name, Amen.