

The Church Which Is His Body

by William MacDonald

The Church is a living, organic unit that is the body of Christ, through which He expresses Himself to the world today.

Scripture: John 10:16, Acts 2:4, Acts 7:38, Acts 20:28, 1 Corinthians 3:9, 1 Corinthians 10:32, Ephesians 1:22-23, Ephesians 2:15, Ephesians 2:22, Ephesians 5:25-27

Topics: "The Nature of the Church", "The Mission of the Church"

Description

William MacDonald emphasizes that the Church is not merely an organization but a living organism, a body of believers united in Christ through the Holy Spirit. He defines the Church using various metaphors such as a flock, God's husbandry, and the body of Christ, illustrating its vital role in worship and community. MacDonald also discusses the mission of the Church, highlighting the importance of preaching the gospel and grounding believers in the truths of the Church. He argues that the Church began on the day of Pentecost, marking a significant moment in God's plan for humanity. Ultimately, he calls for Christians to devote themselves to the Church's expansion and spiritual welfare.

Transcript

DEFINITION OF THE CHURCH

In the New Testament, the word church is a translation of the Greek word *eklesia*, which means "a called-out company," "a gathering" or an "assembly." Stephen used the word to describe Israel as "the church (assembly) in the wilderness", (Acts 7:38). It is also used in the book of Acts to describe a heathen mob at Ephesus (Acts 19:32,39,41). But the most common use of the word in the New Testament is to describe a group of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus Paul speaks of "the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). In his first letter to the Corinthian Christians, the great apostle divides the whole world into Jews, Gentiles, and the church of God (1 Corinthians 10:32). Again, he identifies the church of God as including the group of Christian believers whom he persecuted before his conversion (1 Corinthians 15:9).

It has often been said that the Church is not an organization but an organism. By this is meant that it is not a lifeless institution but a living unit. It is a fellowship of all those who share the life of Christ and who are linked together in living union by the Holy Spirit. It has been well called "a pure communion of persons without institutional character." Many descriptive titles are given to the Church in the New Testament, and one of the best ways of arriving at an understanding of the church is to consider the significance of each

title. The following are the prominent descriptions of the church:

1. A flock (John 10:16, R.V.).

The Jewish nation was a fold. The Church is a flock. In John 10: 16 the Lord Jesus said, 'Other sheep I have which are not of this fold (Israel): them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one flock (R.V.) and one Shepherd.'" The idea of a flock brings before our minds a group of Christians living together under the loving, tender care of the Good Shepherd hearing His voice and following Him.

2. God's husbandry (1 Corinthians 3:9)

The Church is God's garden plot in which He purposes to raise fruit for His glory. The thought of fruit-bearing is thus brought before us here.

3. God's building (1 Corinthians 3:9)

This expression pictures God as carrying on a building program. He is adding living stones to the Church. How important it is that our lives should be devoted to the construction project in which He is so vitally interested!

4. The temple of God (1 Corinthians 3: 16)

The word 'temple' immediately brings before us the thought of worship, and reminds us that the only true worship God gets on earth today is from those who are members of the Church. Worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:23, 24). Such worship can only come from redeemed hearts.

5. The body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23)

The body is the vehicle by which a person expresses himself. Thus the body of Christ is the unit through which the Lord chooses to express Himself to the world today. Once this great truth is grasped, a believer will never again think of the Church as of minor importance, but will devote himself unreservedly to the best interests of the body of Christ.

6. A new man (Ephesians 2:15)

Here the idea of a new creation is prominent. The greatest of all differences among men-that of Jew and Gentile-has been abolished in the Church, and God makes of these two peoples one new man.

7. An habitation of God (Ephesians 2:22)

This expression conveys the truth that God now dwells in the Church, rather than in a material tabernacle or temple, as in the Old Testament.

8. The bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:25-27; 2 Corinthians 11:2)

This view of the Church gives prominence to the idea of affection. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish." If Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it, then obviously the Church should be filled with bridal affection for Him.

9. The house of God (1 Timothy 3:15)

A house (or household) speaks to us of order and discipline. The thought of order is suggested in 1 Timothy 3:15: "That thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God." Discipline is suggested in 1 Peter 4:17: "Judgment must begin at the house of God."

10. The pillar and ground of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15)

In addition to being a support for a building, a pillar was often used in early days for posting public notices. It was a means of proclamation. The word "ground" means a bulwark or a support. Thus the Church of God is the unit which He has ordained for proclaiming, supporting, and defending His truth. We may safely say, therefore, that if Christians are to be in the current of God's will and purposes, they should devote their finest efforts to the expansion and spiritual welfare of the Church.

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Many boast today that their mission is to preach the gospel, and they take a detached view of anything to do with the church. They should notice that the Apostle Paul's ministry was twofold: (1) "To preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ," and also (2) "To make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery," that is, to ground them in the great truths of the Church (Ephesians 3:8, 9).

ORIGIN OF THE CHURCH

Great and godly men have differed widely as to the time of the beginning of the Church. Many believe that the Church is a continuation of the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. Others maintain stoutly that the Church did not exist in the Old Testament, but that it began in the new dispensation. In favor of the latter viewpoint are three considerations.

In Ephesians 3:4, 5, Paul speaks of the Church as a "mystery which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." Again, in verse 9 he states that the Church is a "mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God." (See also Colossians 1: 26; Romans 16:25, 26.) Thus the Church was a secret, kept by God throughout the Old Testament times, and never revealed until the New Testament apostles and prophets appeared. In Matthew 16:18, the Lord Jesus said, "Upon this rock I will build my Church." In other words, the Church was still future at the time He spoke. Again, in Ephesians 4:8-10, Paul emphasizes that it was the risen, ascended Christ who gave gifts to the Church. This argues strongly that if the Church existed before His ascension, it must have lacked gifts for its edification.

We believe it is not only possible to show that the Church began in the new dispensation, but, more specifically, that it was brought into being on the day of Pentecost.

The body of Christ is said to have been formed by the baptism with the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). Can we determine then when the baptism with the Holy Spirit took place? In Acts 1:5, immediately prior to the Lord's ascension, He promised the apostles, "Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." On the day of Pentecost, "they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4, 11:15-16). By the time we reach Acts 5:11, the Church has definitely come into being, because we read that "great fear came upon all the Church...." This certainly seems to pin-point the birthday of the Church as occurring at Pentecost.

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