

Respecting The Church

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Introduction

A divine institution dedicated to the furtherance of God's plan and purpose, the church is composed of those who have committed their lives to Christ. Living stones being built up as a spiritual house (1 Pet. 2:4-5), the church represents the "called out" body of believers (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

1 Peter 2:4-5 ... 4 And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (NASB95)

1 Peter 2:9-10 ... 9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (NASB95)

In Scripture, the word "church" is used in two ways: In a universal sense, it encompasses all faithful children of God (Acts 2:46-47). In a local sense, it identifies Christians in a given area who have banded together to work and worship as the New Testament dictates (1 Corinthians 1:2).

Acts 2:46-47 ... 46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 1:2 ... 2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours: (NASB95)

Many would minimize the importance of the church. They deride God's plan, ridicule His pattern, and scoff at His purpose. Do we also evidence such cynicism? How should we view the church? Let us consider various reasons why we should respect the church of Christ.

Because Of Its Importance

We respect the church because of its importance to God. The fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Isa. 2:1-4; Dan. 2:44-45), the church is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23), an expression of God's manifold wisdom, and a demonstration of his eternal purpose (Eph. 3:8-11). It was purchased with His shed blood (Acts 20:28).

Isaiah 2:1-4 ... 1 The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. 2 Now it will come about that In the last days The mountain of the house of the Lord Will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it. 3 And many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, To the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways And that we may walk in His paths." For the law will go forth from Zion And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. 4 And He will judge between the nations, And will render decisions for many peoples; And they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they learn war. (NASB95)

Daniel 2:44-45 ... 44 "In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever. 45 "Inasmuch as you saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold, the great God has made known to the king what will take place in the future; so the dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy." (NASB95)

Ephesians 1:22-23 ... 22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. (NASB95)

Ephesians 3:8-11 ... 8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; 10 so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. 11 This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, (NASB95)

Acts 20:28 ... 28 "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (NASB95)

Because Of Its Head

We respect the church because of its head. The Lord's promise, "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:13-19) was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2). The church belongs exclusively to

Jesus, who is its head (Eph. 1:22-23). The possessor of all authority (Matt. 28:18-20), Christ is our Leader (Isa. 55:4), Judge (2 Tim. 4:1-2) and Lawgiver (James 4:12).

Matthew 16:13-19 ... 13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" 14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." 15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. 19 "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." (NASB95)

Ephesians 1:22-23 ... 22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. (NASB95)

Matthew 28:18-20 ... 18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (NASB95)

Isaiah 55:4 ... 4 "Behold, I have made him a witness to the peoples, A leader and commander for the peoples. (NASB95)

2 Timothy 4:1-2 ... 1 I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. (NASB95)

James 4:12 ... 12 There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor? (NASB95)

Because Of Its Law

We respect the church because of its law. While the New Testament affirms that we are saved by grace through faith, it also states that we are "under law to Christ" (1 Cor. 9:20-21). In contrast with the deficient, ever-changing standards of men, the law of Christ is perfect (James 1:25) and unalterable (Jude 3).

1 Corinthians 9:20-21 ... 20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; 21 to those who are without law, as

without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. (NASB95)

James 1:25 ... 25 But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does. (NASB95)

Jude 3 ... 3 Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. (NASB95)

We are not a church that belongs to Christ simply because of a sign in front of the building. We are a church of Christ because our faith and practice is based upon the Word of God (Col. 3:17; 1 Pet. 4:11). Therefore, we must guard against the introduction of human dogmas and doctrines that would lead us away from the truth (John 8:31-32; 2 John 9)

Colossians 3:17 ... 17 Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. (NASB95)

1 Peter 4:11 ... 11 Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (NASB95)

John 8:31-32 ... 31 So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (NASB95)

2 John 9 ... 9 Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. (NASB95)

Because Of Its Work

We respect the church because of its work. The Divine Architect designed the church to perfection. In His infinite wisdom, God provided work for the church to accomplish. The work of the church is threefold: evangelism, edification and benevolence. When the church fulfills her mission, she honors the God above while meeting the spiritual and physical needs of the members here below.

Evangelism: The church continues the work of Christ who came to "seek and save" the lost. Before the Lord returned to heaven, he gave the church its marching orders (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:45-49). Preaching the gospel is the chief obligation of the church (2 Tim. 2:2)

Matthew 28:18-20 ... 18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the

nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (NASB95)

Mark 16:15-16 ... 15 And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. 16 “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. (NASB95)

Luke 24:45-49 ... 45 Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, 47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 “You are witnesses of these things. 49 “And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” (NASB95)

2 Timothy 2:2 ... 2 The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. (NASB95)

Edification: After being converted, disciples are expected to grow in the faith (1 Pet. 2:1-2). The body of Christ is built up as each member does its part, through mutual encouragement, scriptural oversight, and Biblical instruction (Eph. 4:11-16; Heb. 10:23-25).

1 Peter 2:1-2 ... 1 Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, 2 like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, (NASB95)

Ephesians 4:11-16 ... 11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. (NASB95)

Hebrews 10:23-25 ... 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; 24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. (NASB95)

Benevolence: In times of special need (Acts 4:34-35), or in the face of continuing obligations (1 Tim. 5:3-10), the church provides for the physical needs of its own. The Biblical pattern of benevolence is far more efficient than the bureaucratic, hierarchical structures of men.

Acts 4:34-35 ... 34 For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales 35 and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need. (NASB95)

1 Timothy 5:3-10 ... 3 Honor widows who are widows indeed; 4 but if any widow has children or grandchildren, they must first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God. 5 Now she who is a widow indeed and who has been left alone, has fixed her hope on God and continues in entreaties and prayers night and day. 6 But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives. 7 Prescribe these things as well, so that they may be above reproach. 8 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. 9 A widow is to be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, having been the wife of one man, 10 having a reputation for good works; and if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has assisted those in distress, and if she has devoted herself to every good work. (NASB95)

Because Of Its Worship

We respect the church because of its worship. Simple yet profound, New Testament worship requires submission to the message of truth and the manifestation of a proper disposition of heart (John 4:23-24). It is centered around preaching, prayer, singing, giving, and a weekly observance of the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:23-25; 16:1-2; Eph. 5:18-19; Col. 3:16). Heartfelt worship is a source of great joy. We should have the attitude of the Psalmist who delighted in opportunities for worship: "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord'" (Ps. 122:1).

John 4:23-24 ... 23 "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. 24 "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (NASB95)

Acts 2:42 ... 42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (NASB95)

Acts 20:7 ... 7 On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight. (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 11:23-25 ... 23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 16:1-2 ... 1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. 2 On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come. (NASB95)

Ephesians 5:18-19 ... 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; (NASB95)

Colossians 3:16 ... 16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (NASB95)

Psalms 122:1 ... 1 A Song of Ascents, of David. I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord." (NASB95)

Because Of Its Organization

We respect the church because of its organization. First century churches were organized by divine guidance. Each congregation was independent and autonomous (self-governing). Elders were appointed in every church (Acts 14:23). Such men were given the responsibility of feeding and overseeing the flock (Acts 20:28-32). However, their oversight was limited to the local congregations of which they were members (1 Peter 5:1-2). Elders are assisted by deacons, teachers, and active members (1 Cor. 12:12-26).

Acts 14:23 ... 23 When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (NASB95)

Acts 20:28-32 ... 28 "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 "Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. 32 "And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. (NASB95)

1 Peter 5:1-2 ... 1 Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, 2 shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 12:12-26 ... 12 For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.

13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. 14 For the body is not one member, but many. 15 If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. 19 If they were all one member, where would the body be? 20 But now there are many members, but one body. 21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; 23 and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, 24 whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, 25 so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. (NASB95)

Conclusion

How shall I view the church? Will I cherish and esteem it as the handiwork of God, or will I ridicule its very existence and manifest contempt for its laws? In light of Biblical teaching, how dare we underestimate the value of being a member of the church of our Lord? The church is destined for greatness (Heb. 12:22-24; 1 Cor. 15:23-28). Are you numbered among those who are called out of sin unto salvation and service? Do you share a covenant relationship with Jesus Christ? Have you been baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:3-4; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:26-27)? If not, we implore you to obey the gospel, and thus be added to the church, before it is everlastingly too late.

Hebrews 12:22-24 ... 22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel. (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 15:23-28 ... 23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, 24 then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be abolished is death. 27 For He has put all things in subjection under His feet. But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. 28 When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all. (NASB95)

Acts 2:38 ... 38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (NASB95)

Romans 6:3-4 ... 3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 12:13 ... 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (NASB95)

Galatians 3:26-27 ... 26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. (NASB95)