

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).

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).

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).

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).

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).

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)

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)

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).

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.

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).

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).

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.