

CHAPTER 18 – THE CHURCH

Purpose

The purpose of this lesson is to help the believer understand the importance of the Church as it relates to God's overall purpose, to see how God wants to use the Church as His vehicle to accomplish this purpose and to appreciate the great restoration that God is effecting in the Church these days to make His purpose a reality.

Key Verse:

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.
Matt 16:18-19 (KJV)

I. What is the Church?

- a. The word “church” literally means, “the called out ones”. The Church is not a building but it consists of all those people who have been “called out” from the world, who have separated themselves unto God and have gathered together unto the Lord Jesus Christ for worship and fellowship (1 Peter 2: 4 – 10).
- b. The Church is God's present instrument, or vehicle, in the earth through which God desires to extend His kingdom and fulfil His purpose (Matthew 21: 43; Ephesians 1: 3 – 14; 3: 9 – 11).
- c. The Church has two main aspects: the universal and the local.
 1. The universal Church consists of that company of believers in Christ in all ages, living and dead, who are distinct from the world by virtue of their calling in God (Ephesians 1: 22; 3: 21; 5: 25 – 32).
 2. The local Church consists of groups of believers in given localities which are marked out by:
 - a. Confession of faith;
 - b. Discipline of life;
 - c. Obedience in baptism;
 - d. Gathering to the person of Jesus Christ;
 - e. Having gifted ministries from Christ;
 - f. And keeping the memorial of the Lord.

They are always spoken of as complete units within themselves, which may voluntarily cooperate and fellowship with other local bodies (Acts 13: 1; 1 Corinthians 1: 2).

II. Why is it important to have an understanding of the Universal or Invisible, Church?

It is important to understand the concept of the universal Church so that:

- a. We can see our connection and mystical union of all believers of past ages who have run before us, realizing that they are counting on us to finish the race (Hebrews 12: 1 – 2).
- b. We can see that all believers in the world are really one in Christ. When one suffers we all suffer and when one rejoices we all rejoice (Acts 11: 27 – 30; 1 Corinthians 12: 26).
- c. We can see that what God is doing is bigger than one local church, sect, denomination or people but includes every nation, kindred, tribe and tongue in each and every generation (2 Peter 3: 9; Revelation 5: 9 – 10; 14: 6 – 7).

III. Why is it important to have an understanding of the Local Church?

It is extremely important not to exalt the universal Church above the local church in our practical living. The Bible uses the word “church” some 114 times and 96 references are clearly to the local Church. We must put the emphasis where God puts it for the following reasons:

- a. It is in the local Church that we are going to put our covenant commitment into practice. (Matthew 18: 15 – 20).
- b. It is in the local Church that we are going to find the dynamics to bring us to maturity (Ephesians 4: 11 – 16).
- c. It is in the local Church that our ministry and function is going to be realized (Romans 12: 3 – 8; 1 Corinthians 12: 18 – 28).
- d. It is in the local Church we are going to find protection from deception (Psalms 91).

IV. What are some other names and titles given to the Church?

- a. The Israel of God (Galatians 6: 16).
- b. The Pillar and Ground of Truth (1 Timothy 3: 15).
- c. The Temple of God (Ephesians 2: 21 – 22).
- d. The House of the Lord (Hebrews 3: 1 – 4; 1 Timothy 3: 15).
- e. The Family of God (Ephesians 3: 14 – 15).

- f. The Household of Faith (Galatians 6: 10).
- g. The Body of Christ (Ephesians 1: 22 – 23).
- h. The Army of God (Ephesians 6: 10 – 13; 2 Timothy 2: 3 – 4).
- i. The Bride of Christ (Ephesians 5: 28 – 32; Revelation 10: 6 – 9).

V. What is the nature of the Church that Jesus is building today?

The Church of Jesus Christ is going to take on the nature of its Builder and Maker. Nowhere in the Bible do we read of a defeated or failing Bride of Christ. Hence, we can expect the Church to be strong and glorious (Matthew 16: 18 – 19).

- a. The Church will be holy unto the Lord (Ephesians 5: 23 – 32).
- b. The Church will be unified (John 17: 18 – 23).
- c. The Church will be victorious (Matthew 16: 18 – 19; Romans 16: 20).
- d. The Church will enter into dominion (Ephesians 1: 20 – 24).
- e. The Church will come to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4: 11 – 13).

VI. What is the relationship of the Church to other para-church organizations?

The Bible is clear that it is through the vehicle, or instrument, of the Church that God is going to accomplish His great purpose. However, because the Church has not always been what it was supposed to be, many have become discouraged with the Church's ability to meet certain obvious need. For this reason, caring and concerned individuals have, over the years, established missionary societies, orphanages, Christian businessmen's organisations and other like institutions to meet these pressing needs. As God continues to restore and strengthen His church, the need for these organisations will diminish and the Church will be ministering to these needs.

Conclusion

Because of many negative experiences by Christians today, many have written off the Church as having nothing to offer them personally or the world in general. Unfortunately, the Church experiences that have offended them or otherwise caused them to become disillusioned were not in God's original design for His Church. When we get back to God's original plan and blueprint for the Church it will be the most exciting organisation on the face of the earth. The challenge to God's people in these days is to get a vision of what the Church can be and put all of their faith and energy into seeing that vision become a reality.