

The Identity of the Church

- I. What is the New Testament Church?
 - A. Jesus spoke of it in Matt 16:18; 18:17
 - B. The book of Acts provides some history, (e.g., Acts 2:47; 5:11; 8:1-3; 11:22-26; 12:1,5,)
 - C. The Apostles wrote to and about the Church (e.g., I Cor 1:1-2; 12:28; Eph 1:19-23; 3:20-21; Col 4:16; Ill John 1:5-6,)
 - D. In the original New Testament manuscripts, it is the Greek word "Ekklesia" that is translated to English as "Church"; the Greek word literally means the "called out"
 1. Out of what is the Church Called?
 - a. We are called out of sin (Luke 5:32)
 - b. Devout Jews were called out of Judaism (Acts 2:5, 41, 47; 3:25-26)
 - c. Gentiles were called out of darkness (Acts 10:34-35; I Pet 2:9-10)
 - d. Idolaters were called out of idolatry (I Thess 1:9; Acts 17:22-31)
 2. Into what are we called?
 - a. Repentance (Luke 5:32)
 - b. Light, mercy (I Pet 2:9-10; I John 1:5-7)
 - c. To serve a living and true God (I Thess 1:9)
 - d. Peace of Christ (Col 3:15)
 - e. God's Kingdom and glory (I Thess 2:12; II Thess 2:14)
 - f. Fellowship with Jesus Christ (I Cor 1:9)
 - g. Eternal life (I Tim 6:12)
 - E. It is a divine institution (I Tim 3:15; Acts 20:28) described in the New Testament
 - F. It is the spiritual body of Christ (Eph 1:22-23; Col 1:18; John 18:36)
 - G. It is the body of baptized, penitent believers in Christ - Christians (Rom 12:4-5; 6:3-5; Gal 3:27-29; I Cor 12:12-14; I Cor 12:27, I Cor 1:2)
 - H. Its members are called Christians (Acts 11:26) or saints (Acts 9:1-2, 13; 26:10; Rom 1:6-7; I Cor 1:2; II Cor 1:1; Eph 1:1-2) - hagios: sacred, blameless, holy
- II. The New Testament Church is not a denomination
 - A. The Church was established in the first half of the 1st century long before any denominations appeared
 - B. Denominations are designated bodies founded by men
 1. For example: Lutherans – Martin Luther in 1520;
Presbyterians – John Calvin in 1536;
Methodists – John Wesley in 1739;
Mormon Church - Joseph Smith in 1830;
Jehovah's Witnesses - Charles Taze Russell in 1870s, etc.
 2. Denominations are divisions of designated groups or sects identified and united by a common set of beliefs and worship practices.
 - a. Denominations are not just branches of the Lord's 1st century Church
 - b. Denominations differ from the 1st century Church in founder, organization, doctrine, authority, worship practices, membership (to name a few)

- C. The mere concept of a denomination as a division of the Church violates the very spirit and intent of our Lord (John 17:11-12, 21-23; Eph 4:1-6)
 - D. Notice the emphasis placed on doctrine and teaching by the Apostles
 - 1. Act 20:28-32 warns to be on guard against perverse things to draw away disciples because the word of grace is what gives you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified
 - 2. II Pet 3:14-16 says the untaught and unstable distort the Scriptures to their own destruction (we have no right to distort God's way)
- III. What are Biblical uses of the word Church?
- A. It can refer to a local congregation of Christians meeting at a specific place (Col 4:15; I Cor 1:2)
 - B. The word "Church" can also refer to the universal, spiritual body of Christ including Christians throughout the world (Eph 1:22-23; Col 1:18)
 - C. The word "Churches" does not refer to denominations. It is congregations of the same spiritual body (Rom 16:16; I Cor 16:1; Gal 1:2; I Thess 2:14; Rev 1:4, 11)