

CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH

In our country, over half the people are members of some religious body. Consequently, the church is familiar to most people. Even those who are not members of any church hear of it when watching television, reading newspapers and in other aspects of life. However few have gained their knowledge of the church by reading about it in the pages of the New Testament. In this article, we shall answer some questions about the church you read about in the Bible.

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

The church is not a building, a denomination, just an organization, or a social club. The church is people - people that have been called out of the world by the gospel of Christ and who constitute a saved body unto the Lord. Someone has described it as a living organization.

WHAT IS IT LIKE?

The Bible uses several descriptive term to describe it.

- **The church is a body (1 Cor. 12:12-27).** The head of our human body directs and controls our bodies and our bodies follow the direction and orders of our head.
- Likewise, Christ is the head of His body (Eph. 1:22-23) and the members of His body follow His direction and place themselves under His control. And like our human body, Jesus' body is made up of many members. Those members are from different backgrounds, races and are yet one in Christ (Eph. 2:10-22).
- **The church is a kingdom.** In Col. 1: 13, Paul tells us that God, "hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." Paul and the brethren at Colosse were in the kingdom or church. So was John, "I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1: 9).

Four elements are necessary to have a kingdom: a king, citizens, a law and territory. In the kingdom, Christ is king. Christians are citizens. The law is the gospel of Christ. Its territory is the heart of men and women who have yielded themselves to the King. With Christ as king, the citizens of the kingdom follow his law and take it to the world.

- **The church is a family.** (Eph. 2:19; 1 Tim. 3:15) To get into a. family, one must be born into it. A birth is also necessary if one enters the family of God. Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).

This relationship shows the close relationship that each member is to sustain one to another. They are to love one another as brothers and sisters in the family of God.

WHAT IS ITS LAW?

The church has no right to make laws. It is to follow law. Paul said it is to be "the ground and pillar of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). It is to support and preach the truth that already has been revealed (Gal. 1:7-9; 2 Jno. 9; Rev. 22:18, 19).

WHAT IS ITS ORGANIZATION?

The organization of Jesus' church is simple, but effective. Christ is its head (Eph. 1:22,23). He alone is the lawgiver. Each congregation is to have qualified men called elders or bishops who oversee the Local church (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). In these congregations, there are special

servants who are called deacons (I Tim. 3:8). They take care of simple tasks so the elders might give their full attention to spiritual matters.

Each congregation is to be autonomous (self-governing) (I Pet. 5:2). They are not to be bound together in any super organization above the local congregation.

WHAT IS ITS MISSION?

The church's primary mission is to preach the gospel (I Thess. 1:8). To hear the gospel is the greatest need of mankind. The church is to edify itself by worship and teaching (Eph. 4:12) and also to care for needy saints (Acts 6:1-4; 2 Cor. 9:1).

WHAT IS ITS NAME?

Frequently, the church is simply called the church. Sometimes it is called the "church of God" (1 Cor. 1:2), and "churches of Christ" (Rom. 16:16).

Its members were called: disciples (2 Cor. 1:1), saints (Rom. 1:7), brethren and children (Gal. 6:1; I Jno. 3:10). The most distinctive name that they wore was "Christian."

CONCLUSION

You can be a member of the New Testament church by being born into it. Those on Pentecost were born into it by being taught by the Holy Spirit (as He guided the apostles) and by being baptized into Christ (Acts 2:41).

—Robert C. Archer