

The Independent Church (Part 1)

Lesson 31- Spiritual Discipleship and Growth

Intro: Our next study will look at one of the most confusing and misunderstood doctrines of the Bible. There are all kinds of ideas out there today about what a church really is. Some think it is a building (a cathedral, or some place of worship). Others think of the church is a denomination (a human organization) and speak of the “Catholic Church,” the “Presbyterian Church,” the “Baptist Church,” etc. Many Christians look at the church as consisting of all born-again believers in the world, a kind of “invisible, universal” church.

Our task today is to put aside all notions and determine what God says a church is in His Word.

A. The Church is a New Testament Institution:

a. The first mention of the Church in the Bible is found in Matthew 16:18

Who founded (built) this first Church? _____

b. John 1:42 What is the meaning of Peter’s name?

Note: Peter’s full name is Simon Peter bar Jona. He is also sometimes called Simeon.

c. 1 Peter 2:3-4, 6-8. Who did Peter identify as the “Rock” upon which the Church would be built? _____

Note: The Old Testament is primarily addressed to the nation of Israel. The New Testament is mainly addressed to churches. Do not confuse the two. The Bible makes the clear distinction between them in 1 Corinthians 10:32.

B. The Church is an Assembly:

The word “church, or churches” is found 114 times in the New Testament, and is rendered from the Greek word “Ekklesia”

This word “ekklesia” has only one meaning- a company of people called out to a specific place for a specific purpose. It has its roots in the democracies of the ancient Greek city-states, where the Town Crier would call the citizens to a meeting in order to conduct the city’s business.

In Matthew 16:18, the Lord Jesus did not change the meaning of ekklesia, but He distinguished it from other assemblies of the day with the personal pronoun “My.”

A New Testament Church is the “Lords Assembly”

There are three important facts concerning an “Assembly”

a. An assembly must be local:

1. People cannot “come together” and yet be all over the world! For example, an automobile is an “assembly” of many and various parts: We cannot think of it being everywhere, a universal car.

2. In all but 15 instances where the word church is used in a generic or institutional sense, it is always used in connection with a definite, geographic location.

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3. Look up the following Bible verses and write down the actual cities or regions where some churches were located.

Romans 16:1 _____

1 Corinthians 1:2 _____

1 Corinthians 16:1, 19 _____

2 Corinthians 8:1 _____

Colossians 4:16 _____

1 Thessalonians 1:1 _____

1 Peter 5:13 _____

Revelation 2:1, 8, 12, 18 _____

Revelation 3:1, 7 _____

4. For these reasons, the Bible does not speak of a (catholic), world-wide “church”. The New Testament mentions many churches, all which were meeting in different locations.

b. An assembly must be Visible:

1. People cannot “come together” and not be seen! Many like to talk about the invisible church but the churches mentioned in the New Testament were seeable.

2. Philippians 1:27 and 1 Thessalonians 2:17, 3:6. The Apostle Paul, writing to the churches at Philippi and Thessalonica, desired to come and _____ these assemblies.

c. An assembly must be organized:

1. An assembly is not a disorderly mob. The word “assembly implies organization.

a. Colossians 1:18 A church is figuratively likened to a _____.

The human body is an “assembly” of many parts; but does a random pile of skin, flesh, organs, bones, etc., constituted a body? Of course not! They must be put together according to a plan.

b. 1 Timothy 3:15 Here, a New Testament church is figuratively likened to a _____.

The house you live in is also an “assembly”, but does a dumped pile of bricks, timber, drywall, nails, etc., constitute a house? Of course not! These items must be put together according to a plan or blueprint.

Closing: The study of the Lord’s church will take us several weeks to get through. My prayer is that through it we will allow the Bible to be our guide. There have been many teachings about the church. Some are biblical and others are not. I pray that through these lessons we will see the biblical truths about the church.

Definition

A New Testament Baptist Church is an organized assembly of baptized believers working to fulfill the commands of Christ.