

THE FULL PORTRAIT OF THE CHURCH

We have already seen snapshots of the Church as an answer to the desire of the God Head. Today we want to start another series on true nature of the Church. However, I want us to know what the Church is Not before we look at What the Church is.

A) GOD'S PERSPECTIVE VRS OUR PERSPECTIVE

God has a way of seeing things and we also have a way of seeing things. But we should learn to see things from God's perspective.

- As far the God is concerned, there is only one Church Body. God doesn't respect the man-made divisions of the Church.
- In heaven, there are no denominations or sects. We are going to have one big family.
- The proof of our spiritual maturity is when we begin to see all genuinely born again people as brethren irrespective of their doctrinal positions and emphasis.
- On earth, we can distinguish the Church into the Universal Church and the Local church. The Universal Church refers to born again people everywhere while Local Church refers to particular community or local congregations. But God sees the Church as one big body.
- On earth, we distinguish between the Church in glory made up of the saints who are in heaven and the Church on earth. But God sees it as one big family (Eph 3:14-15, Heb 12:22-24)

- On earth, we see the Lord Jesus as distinct and separate from the Church. But God sees the Church as an enlargement of the Lord Jesus. Therefore, God loves the Church just as much as He loves Jesus. In the Tabernacle of Moses, there was a golden lampstand made up of seven knobs but only one stump (Ex 25:31-40). The seven knobs were not attached to the lampstand. There were beaten out of the same one lump of gold. It was a hammered work. In the book of Revelation, we see that the Lampstand refers to the Church (Rev 1:20). Thus from God's perspective, the entire Church is seen as one body with Christ

WHAT THE CHURCH IS NOT

- i) The Church is not a physical building: This is a very important point even though it looks mundane. The Church is not a physical building.
- God doesn't dwell in buildings (Acts 17:24)
 - No physical building can contain God (2Kings 8:27)
 - The early Church never built temples for the first 300 years.
 - God dwells in the hearts of men and it is the spirits of men that form part of the Church (Heb 12:23)

- The word Church is never used in scripture to refer to a physical building. Check these scriptures: Acts 2:47, Acts 5:11, Acts 7:38, Acts 8:1-3, Acts 11:22-26, Acts 12:1-5.
- When God tore the veil of the Temple from top to bottom, He said bye bye to physical temples forever.
- Therefore when we become born again, Church is NOT a place we go to, but what we become.
- We become living stones (1Pet 2:5) which are being built as a spiritual habitation of the Holy Spirit.

ii) The Church is not denominationalism:

Denominationalism refers to the phenomenon whereby groups of individuals with common beliefs and doctrinal emphasis see themselves as different, better or more acceptable than other groups.

- God doesn't respect sects, groups or gatherings on the basis of pride and fear.
- The Church in the Acts of the Apostles was only one Church with the distinction being only on the basis of locality. For example, we had the Church in Jerusalem, the Church in Antioch, the Church of Ephesus etc. we never heard of Apostle Paul's ministries international, Torchbearers Ministries International etc.
- Denominationalism came in when man took over the Church. Somebody aptly put the history of the Church as follows: In the beginning, God. After the beginning, Man...!
- The presence of denominations, groupings and sects in the Church is not the real problem. The problem is denominationalism. The two are different. Whereas denominations can refer to likeminded people coming together to worship God, denominationalism refers to the tendency of one group to build walls around itself, making it difficult for others to fellowship with it. That is bad.
- God is not against variety in the Church. Every congregation is different and will often be treated differently by the Lord as seen in His messages to the seven churches in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 2&3). However, there should not be differences on the basis of pride and fear.
- That has led to the current Babel we have now. Before God scattered the people in Babel, the people had one language and one speech (Gen 11:1). But when they started building what God had not commanded, God confused their understanding. This is what has accounted for the numerous languages in the world now. The same thing can be said concerning the Church. When man took over the Church, various 'languages' were born in the Church. God is not going to do away with the various 'languages' but He is going to repeat what happened at Pentecost, where each one heard what was being said in his own language.

- In other words, the unity is not necessarily going to be union. But our focus is going to be the same. When we all look unto the author and finisher of our faith, we will walk in love toward one another (1John 1:7).

- One thing that has also accounted for the sectarianism in the Church even after the reformation is the tendency to camp around a revealed truth and protect it out of fear and pride. Whenever God reveals a truth, the ones who were recipients tend to think that they have the whole counsel of God. As such they try to do what Peter suggested to Jesus 'Let us build three tabernacles for You, Moses and Elijah and let's remain here'. But that is not God's heart. The truth that Martin Luther discovered was for the Church not the Lutherans alone. The truth that John Wesley discovered was for the entire Church and not just the Methodists. Likewise, the truth about the Holy Spirit baptism is for the entire Church, not the Pentecostals and Charismatics.

- The destiny of the Church is to come into unity. This is not union but unity and this unity is the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God (Eph 4:13). A time is coming when the entire Church will get to know the Lord in the same way. When that happens, denominational barriers will come down and we can really be united as Jesus prayed for us (John 17:20-21).

- The Church is not a gathering of people: The Church is not a group or club to be joined. The Church is a spiritual body. A living organism. Therefore, it is the Lord who adds to the Church. Here, we see the two sides of Church membership. From God's perspective we see that God is the one who adds to the Church, the Spiritual body (Acts 5:14, 8:37, 11:24, 15:9-11). This is the real Church membership. From a human standpoint we can say that people join the Church. But in actual fact, you can't join. You must be baptized into it. So we can say we are first added to the Head(Christ) and then we are added to the Church (local assembly). See Acts 2:47.

God wants the Church to be a living organism held together by spiritual ligaments. When the Bible talks about not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, it was not just concerned about gathering together of people for a meeting, but rather the connecting of our hearts by the Holy Spirit in love (Heb 10:25). The body grows itself by that which every joint supplies (Eph 4:16). A joint is a connection between two parts. That connection is occasioned by the Spirit. Spiritually speaking, every member is eternally immersed into that one body, but in the local body, there must be a growth in love and understanding of God's purpose to the extent that we are solidly connected one to another. A building is not just a pile of stones but a connection of the stones by mortar.

- The Church is not Judaism extended: While it is true that Christianity was born in the cradle of Judaism, we must understand that the Church is an entirely separate entity from Judaism. Christianity is the 'new wine' of the new covenant placed in the 'new wineskin' which is THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH. Therefore, the Church is not in any way bound by the customs and rituals of the Old Covenant. Indeed, after the birth of the Church, the entire world can be divided into three main ethnic groups namely; The Jews, The Greeks and the Church (1Cor 10:32). The Church is contrasted with Judaism in Hebrews 12:22-24.