

## What do you look for in a church?

by Hendrik Joubert

We live in a society where people fight for what they consider their individual rights and privileges. We are encouraged to *demand* even the credit we *deserve*. I must get what I want, and no avenue of life is excluded as personal choice is considered extremely important. Another popular slogan of our time encourages one to *Worship with the church of your choice*. What is it that you look for in a church?

Consider where the idea for *church* comes from to see if it influences your choice. The concept originated with the Bible, where the first time we read of it Jesus promises to *build His church* – at some future date: ...***upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. (Matthew 16:18)*** The Lord adds that not even death would prevent Him from accomplishing His goal. Many are not aware that Jesus made, as well as fulfilled this promise, and that we are able to read of His church in the Bible.

Open your Bible to **Romans 16:16**. Here we find a reference to ***churches of Christ*** (plural), confirming the existence of more than one church of Christ. All churches we read of in the New Testament were churches of Christ, assembling in different locations. If you turn the page in your Bible, you will find Paul addressing a letter to ***the church of God which is at Corinth. (1 Corinthians 1:2)*** If every church in the New Testament was a *church of Christ*, why then is there mention of the *church of God*? Are we talking about two churches in the sense that there are so many denominations today? The church of Christ is also the church which belongs to God. The *name* is not a title, it signifies *ownership*. In **Acts 20:28** we read of ***the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. It is the church of God*** – the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Son died on the cross, therefore God paid for this church ***with His own blood***.

We are obviously not talking about a church started by a man, or group of men. That idea originated in Corinth, where believers were identifying with the person through whom they were brought to the faith. (**1 Corinthians 1:10-13**) Paul uses himself, Peter and Apollos as examples (**1 Corinthians 4:6**) as he rebukes these individuals for attempting to divide the *body*, or *church* of Christ among men. Yes, the Bible teaches us that the church is His body, and just as there is only ***one Lord*** and ***one God***, there is only ***one body***. (**Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:1-6**)

Although the body of Christ is not to be divided into *denominations* (or pieces) among men, it is prophesied as a reality that many denominations will be formed as the desires of men dictate: ***For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, <sup>4</sup> and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. 2 Timothy 4:3-4***

Pause for a moment. Compare the slogan “*Worship with the church of your choice.*” with the prophecy God makes through Paul: ***For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, ... ..of your choice – in accordance to their own desires...*** Should we ignore the obvious fulfillment? The implications are outside the realm of possibility as men see it; therefore the Scriptures are *interpreted* to accommodate dividing the body of Christ.

The church is a spontaneous result of the preaching of the gospel. The word literally means “*called out body of people,*” and the *call* rings out through the gospel. (**2 Thessalonians 2:14**) The gospel contains a number of simple instructions to be obeyed in order to be saved. These actions have no merit in themselves so that after obeying them one has absolutely no room for boasting. Failing to obey the gospel results in eternal damnation. The Lord Jesus will return to deal ***out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 2 Thessalonians 1:8***

Those who **believe** in the Lord (**John 3:16**) and **confess** their faith in Him, (**Romans 10:9**) **repent** of their sins and are **baptized** for the remission thereof (**Acts 2:38**) are **added** to the number of *called* – the church. (**Acts 2:47**) After being baptized *into* Christ one becomes part of His body, the church. (**Romans 6:3-4; Ephesians 1:22-23**)

The church of Christ is therefore not merely an invisible body in heaven, but it assembles as God’s church all over the world. The work as well as the organization of the church is revealed in the Scriptures. Every congregation is autonomous under the Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. (**Colossians 1:18**) The local church is governed by elders when such men become qualified. (**1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9**) Other local servants are the deacons, for which we also find the qualifications in the Bible. (**1 Timothy 3:8-13**)

Over the ages men have taken many of these concepts and adapted them to their liking. Faith in God and in His Son is demonstrated by doing things God's way, and not man's way. Sinners do not have the right to adapt what the Lord and Master revealed, and through Jude are instructed to contend earnestly for the faith which God revealed to the first Christians. (**Jude 3**). We should search for the church of God's choice, and not our own... ***For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, <sup>4</sup> and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. 2 Timothy 4:3-4***