

BIBLICAL CHURCH FORMATION

Richard Oostra

People have different concepts and perceptions about the church.

To some people the church is like a **government** agency that

- Is in constant need of money;
- Confronts the people for more support (taxes);
- Makes promises but produces little.

To others the church is like a **corporation** which is

- Run by talented people,
- Governed by shareholders and directors,
- Out for profit and growth.

The last group sees the denominational church as a **franchise** that

- Offers a career opportunity to entrepreneurs;
- Gives the privilege of using their expertise;
- Has distributorship conditions.

Which of the above do you feel best describes your church?

The Biblical Meaning of the Church

The word “church” in the original Greek manuscripts was “ekklesia,” a term meaning “a gathering of called-out ones” or “a holy assembly of privileged people.”

The incorrect translation used, however, is the word “kyriakos,” a term referring to a building of a wealthy person, a structure used for business (or military) purposes. In old English, the word translated from this term was “kirka.” That term today is translated as the word “kirk.”

The word “Kyriakos,” however, was only used twice in the New Testament (I Corinthians 11:20; Revelation 1:10), while the word “Ekklesia,” describing the church, had been used over one hundred times. Eventually, for lack of finding a better word, the term was given the name “church,” except in Acts 19:32, 39, 41. In these cases, the word was correctly described as a “holy assembly.” This description fits right in with many other references that describe the church as

- A supernatural organism of God.....I Corinthians 12:13.
- The workmanship of Christ.....Ephesians 2:10.
- Jesus being the founder.....Ephesians 2:20.
- Made up of Christ-followers.....Ephesians 2:19, 21.
- A place for the Spirit’s (Christ’s) presence....Ephesians 2:22; Matthew 18:20.

Proper Labeling Gives Better Results

Using the word “church” has belittled the concept of meeting as believers. The description “assembly of believers” has no commercial connection and describes the purpose of the meeting as a supernatural gathering with Jesus being present.

On the contrary, those who look at the Christian assembly merely as a teaching-gathering expect their help from an earthly source. Those sites, however, that focus on Christ are being directly ministered to by His Spirit, just as He promised.

Jesus instructed us not to place our trust in earthly leaders and not call anyone our “Rabbi” or “father” (Matthew 23:8-12), but our spiritual direction should always come from the Lord himself.

The apostle Paul made this instruction clear when he said that his ministry was not to lord over the believers (II Corinthians 1:24). Again, the apostle Peter did the very same when he challenged the elders in the churches not to lord over their flock but rather be an example to them.

How Serious Is this Offence?

When King David brought the ark back to Jerusalem, we read that during this journey, when the oxen pulling the ark stumbled, one of the priests reached out to support the ark. The ark, however,

represented a holy habitation of the Lord and was not to be touched by human hands. Of this incident, we read that the Lord struck the priest and the man died on the spot (II Samuel 6:6, 7).

As it was with the ark, so it is with the church. A true Christian assembly is holy unto the Lord. The Bible tells us that the Lord will dwell among His people as they gather unto Him. The church, therefore, was not to be under men's but under God's control. The church was meant to be a sacred gathering of believers and not a gathering of a mixed audience of spectators who come together to hear a lecture. Many Christians, through the years, have desired to see the New Testament church restored again as we read of it in the Bible. How can that be if we are not meeting on God's terms and not by His design?

Wrong Understandings Lead to Wrong Beliefs

During Jesus' times on earth, we read that many believed in Him, but that these same people would shout a day later: "We will not have this man rule over us." In John 11:12, we read that as many that have received Him to them He gives the privilege to be called "the sons of God."

From this Scripture, we may conclude that "believing plus receiving equals salvation." Besides, we receive Jesus not only for salvation but also that His Spirit may indwell and enlighten us (II Corinthians 13:5).

When Jesus asked His disciples whom they thought He was, it was Peter who made the right confession when he said, "You are the Christ the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). Jesus was impressed and replied that neither intellect nor reasoning had given him that understanding, but revelation of the Spirit of God (Matthew 16:17).

In contrast, we have Nicodemus who came to Jesus at night and addressed Him as being sent from God. Nicodemus could say this because he knew the Word of God, but he could not comprehend the meaning of the new birth because he was not enlightened by the Spirit of God.

Not Leaning on our Own Understanding

Scripture has always told us not to lean on our own understanding (Proverbs 3:5, 6), and from this declaration, we may conclude that unless we are enlightened by the Spirit of God, we will never understand the meaning and purpose of the church of God.

Yes, God wants believers to be enlightened by His Spirit and see His people gather as a holy assembly. His church was meant to be a supernatural organism and not to be referred to as a building or an organization formed by the wisdom of men (Romans 12:2).

Only when we become truly a New Testament gathering again, based upon Jesus Christ and the teachings of the apostles, will we experience the mighty work of God in our midst. It was Jesus who said that He came to do his Father's will and that He would only do as the Lord instructed Him to do, and so should we.

What a joy it would be if on the Lord's Day we, as believers, would gather as a holy assembly of people called by the Lord. Such an event, where Jesus promises His presence and where the Holy Spirit is free to speak through those in worship, would be a gathering in time of ministry unto each other. Such is the church that Jesus had in mind for us.