

"MY CHURCH"

Robert C. Welch

Many people compare other religious bodies with that of which they are members, ultimately speaking of the things relative to "my church." Perhaps they have no idea of expressing ownership; but of their peculiar relationship to the church of which they are members. This does not attempt to describe such a human relationship. The title refers to a divine relationship.

The Son of God, who had just been declared to be God's Son, said in response; "upon this rock I will build my church." (Matt. 16:18). While men take pride in those churches to which they belong, we should concern ourselves with the church which Jesus said is "my church." In comparison with the multiplicity of different churches, there are some distinct features of the church to which the Lord lays claim. He sets forth these features in the New Testament.

THE LORD'S POSSESSION

The church of which the Lord spoke in Matthew 16:13-19 as "my church" is his own possession. This is not merely the relationship of membership, but of ownership. This passage declares him to be the builder. Human doctrines and arrangements did not found it. This is in contrast with the many religious bodies which point to the time of their being founded upon the work and doctrines of their great leaders.

It is the Lord's by virtue of his great purchase price: "Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood," (Acts 20:28). Those who have been redeemed or purchased by the blood of Christ compose its membership.

It is the Lord's by virtue of the supreme rule which he has over it. A king may rightfully speak of HIS kingdom. The head, because of its control over the body, may rightfully speak of ITS body. In the same sense the Lord as king of HIS kingdom and head of HIS body, the church, speaks of HIS church. "And he is the head of the body, the church; who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence." (Col. 1:18).

POSSESSIVE TERMS

Some terms are used in the New Testament to denote possessiveness, other than the expression "my church."

An inspired apostle was speaking of the Lord's people in their various places of work and assembly as he said; "all the churches of Christ salute you." (Rom. 16:16). This is not to be construed as a peculiar name or title to be given to the church. It merely denotes that these congregations were the possession of the Lord.

This is the same intent of the statement made by the same inspired writer; "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth." {1 Cor. 1:2}. This inspired man has not given two different names to the church, in the above passages, he has used two terms to denote the origin and authority of the church. In fact, no name is given the church in the New Testament. The individuals who are his disciples are given the name CHRISTIAN (Acts 11:26); but not his church. To name it, or denominate it, would make of it a denomination. The Lord's church was not denominated by him; it is his church and the only one of its kind.

SINGULAR IN NUMBER

Most people think that there are many churches. There are many denominations. Apparently they think it add that some teach that there is only one. In the same way there are men who think that there are many Lords. But if we respect and accept the New Testament we accept the statement that there is one Lard. In the same way and from the same passage we also accept its statement that there is - one body. "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. " (Eph. 4:4, 5). The body has already been defined in e book as the church (Eph. 1:22,23). There is one Lord and he has one church.

WHO ADMITS WHOM

Most religious bodies have established rules and terms of admittance into their membership. Some require a vote of the present members upon the candidate for membership.

The Lord who builds, owns and rules his church says who shall be in it, and how. He does the admitting, "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." (Acts 2:47).

When we find how men are saved, then we will know who are in the Lord's church. "He that believeth, and is baptized shall be saved." (Mark 16:16) ; "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38).

Some religious bodies teach that the person is saved before he is baptized and that he is then baptized into that religious body. Such doctrine is directly opposed to the Lord's teaching as given in the passages above. To be in the Lord's church men need to heed his words.

WORSHIP AND WORK

The Lord has directed what shall be the work and worship engaged in by his church. "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers. " (Acts 2:42). "and upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread," (Acts 20:7). "Upon the first day of the week let each one of you lay by him in store, as he may prosper. " (1 Cor. 16:2). "Speaking one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord. ¹¹ (Eph. 5:19).

The above New Testament passages give every item of worship which the Lord authorizes in his church. Any other element or item is derived from human wisdom, not divine.

Aside from this worship and edification, the church is given the work of supporting the preaching of the gospel to sinners and of supplying the needs of poor saints (see 2 Cor. 11:8; Phil. 4:4-16; Acts 4:35; 6:1-3; 1 Cor. 16: 1-4). Look for those marks. They denote the Lord's church.