

PAUL'S VIEW OF CHURCH

Why is it important to know Paul's view of church? Because his view is very much in contrast to the traditional view of church.

Scripture: "To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours" (1 Cor. 1:2).

1. PAUL VIEWED THE CHURCH AS PEOPLE.

Scripture: "To the church....."

Illustration from Wikipedia: In 1949, Xerox Corporation introduced the first xerographic copier called the Model A. Xerox became so successful that, in North America, photocopying came to be popularly known as "xeroxing." Xerox has actively fought to prevent "Xerox" from becoming a genericized trademark. While the word "Xerox" has appeared in some dictionaries as a synonym for photocopying, Xerox Corporation typically requests that such entries be modified, and that people not use the term "Xerox" in this way.

Point: Similar thing happened with the term *church*. The place where the church gathers has become a church.

Oxford Dictionary: "a building used for public Christian worship."

Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary: "a building for Christian religious activities."

But how did Paul or the biblical writers view *church*?

- The Greek word "*Ekklesia*" means *congregation* or *assembly*. In secular Greco-Roman literature, it means a political assembly, especially coming together for decisive action. [Acts 19:32,39,41]
- Whether in secular world or in biblical sense [114 times in NAS], the term *ekklesia* was never used for property or material building but only for people.

2. PAUL VIEWED THE CHURCH AS PEOPLE OWNED BY GOD/BELONGING TO GOD/POSSESSED BY GOD.

Scripture: "To the church of God....."

- This is not any church, or any people or any community. This is a church of God.
- Church/churches of God/Christ, used 10 times in NT.

- Sometimes—Churches of the saints [1 Cor. 14:33]; Church of the Thessalonians [1Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1]; Church of the Laodiceans [Col. 4:16]; Churches of the Gentiles [Rom. 16:4]; Churches of Judea [Gal. 1:22]
- Paul planted the church at Corinth (Acts 18), but he didn't say "My church"; he said, "To the church of God..."

Note: When Paul spoke to the Ephesian elders, he didn't say, "Take care of your church"; he said, "...care for the church of God." (Acts 20:28)

Illustration: Paul said to them, "Watch over the flock..." Shepherds/pastors/leaders are watchmen; not proprietors. A watchman's job is to watch over his Master's property. Church [people of God] is God's property and pastors/elders are her watchmen.

- Don't say, "Stephen's church"; church is God's; church is ours. Shepherds are stewards of the church, not head of the church. Only Christ is the head and the church belongs to Him.

Church doesn't belong to any man or organization; it belongs only to God.

As a church we have to live with this sense of belongingness to God.

3. PAUL VIEWED THE CHURCH AS A LOCAL COMMUNITY.

Scripture: "To the church of God that is in Corinth." [Church is Global and Local]

Paul viewed the church as a local assembly wherein believers live together as a community in a particular locality and often come together for fellowship and encouragement.

Two things to observe: i) Every locality should have local churches and ii) every believer who lives in a locality should be a part of a local church.

Thom S. Rainer: The majority of the New Testament books are written about and to local churches. The book of Acts provides a historical narrative of the Spirit's work of the churches in Jerusalem, in Antioch, in Cyprus, in Thyatira, in Thessalonica, in Berea, in Athens, in Corinth, in Caesarea, in Ephesus, in Troas, in Rome, in Malta, and others. Look at how many New Testament books were written to specific local churches: Romans, 1 Cor, 2 Cor, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thess and 2 Thess. Four of Paul's books were written to individuals in specific church contexts: 1 Tim, 2 Tim, Titus and Philemon. Even the book of Revelation has the context of letters to local churches. The point? The Bible is clear that we are to be connected to a specific church in a specific context.¹

Remember—A BELIEVER WITHOUT A CHURCH IS A SPIRITUAL VAGABOUND.

¹ Thom S. Rainer, *I am a Church Member*, pg. 72

4. PAUL'S VIEWED THE CHURCH AS A SANCTIFIED COMMUNITY IN CHRIST JESUS.

Scripture: "To those sanctified in Christ Jesus."

- Church is not an assembly of unbelievers; it is a community of those sanctified in Christ Jesus.

Sanctification: The Greek word for sanctification is "Hagiazo", meaning, "to set apart for God."

Biblical sanctification is basically twofold:

- i. **Positional sanctification:** Perfect standing before God, justified in Christ Jesus.
- ii. **Progressive sanctification:** Progressive growth in the likeness of Christ Jesus.

Note: The use of perfect participle [completed action] in 1 Cor. 1:2 refers to positional sanctification.

Two things to know:

- i. We are sanctified only in Christ Jesus.
- ii. We are sanctified for God, set apart to live for the glory of God.

5. PAUL VIEWED THE CHURCH AS SAINTS.

Scripture: "To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints....." [Those who are sanctified have become saints]

Saints: The Greek word for saints is "Hagios", meaning, "holy ones."

Roman Catholic Church: The process by which someone becomes a saint is called **canonization**. Here are the steps that must be followed in the process of canonization:

1. A local bishop investigates the candidate's life and writings for evidence of heroic virtue. The information discovered by the bishop is sent to the Vatican.
2. A panel of theologians and the cardinals of the **Congregation for Cause of Saints** evaluate the candidate's life.
3. If the panel approves, the pope proclaims that the candidate is venerable, which means that the person is a role model of Catholic virtues.
4. The next step toward sainthood is **beatification**, which allows a person to be honored by a particular group or region. In order to beatify a candidate, it must be shown that the person is responsible for a posthumous [happening after a person's death] miracle. Martyrs -- those who died for their religious cause -- can be beatified without evidence of a miracle. On Oct. 20, 2003, Mother Teresa was beatified. She is now known as Blessed Mother Teresa of Kolkata.

5. In order for the candidate to be considered a saint, there must be proof of a second posthumous miracle. If there is, the person is canonized [declared as a saint by Pope].²

Now see who the Corinthian believers are:

- **1:11**, “For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers.”
- **3:3**, “For you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?”
- **4:18**, “Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you.”
- **5:2**, “And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.”
- **6:5-6**, “I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers?”
- **11:18**, “For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part.”

Note: In spite of who they were [carnal, worldly, divisive], Paul called the Corinthians “saints.”

Two things to observe:

- i. We are saints by our position in Christ, not by our practice.
- ii. And of course, our practice/deeds should be conformed to our position in Christ.

Holy living does not make us holy; it is because we are holy we practice holy living.

6. PAUL VIEWED THE LOCAL CHURCH AS PART OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH OF CHRIST.

Scripture: “To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours” (1 Cor. 1:3).

Although the Bible speaks about the importance of local church, we should be careful not to build walls around our local church and think we are the only church, having nothing to do with the universal body of Christ. A local church is a part of the universal church of Christ. [Church is Local and Global]

We will live with divisions if our predominant focus is on:

- i. Do they believe the same doctrines [non-essentials]?
- ii. Do they have the same practices?

² <http://people.howstuffworks.com/question6191.htm>

We will live in unity if our predominant focus is on:

- i. Do they call upon the Name of the Lord—pray to the same Lord?
 - ii. Do they have the same Lord—their Lord and ours—Lordship of Christ?
- Both their Lord and ours: the Lord of other believers is the Lord of ours. The Lord of Pentecostals, Brethren, Methodist, Baptist...etc is our Lord. And our Lord is theirs.
 - Doctrines may be different, practices may be different, but all of us call upon the same Lord and have the same Lord.

**We may be divided by non-essential doctrines/practices,
but we are united through the Lordship of Christ.**

Summary:

Scripture: “To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours” (1 Cor. 1:3).

- 1) Paul viewed the church as *people*.
- 2) Paul viewed the church as *people owned by God/belonging to God*.
- 3) Paul viewed the church as *a local community*.
- 4) Paul viewed the church as *a sanctified community in Christ Jesus*.
- 5) Paul viewed the church as *saints*.
- 6) Paul viewed the local church as *part of the universal church of Christ*.

CONTACT:

**Assembly of Living Witnesses
6-96, S.N. Colony
Ramachandrapuram
Hyderabad – 502032
Andhra Pradesh. India**

Blog: www.messageforourage.blogspot.com

E.mail: cstephendavid@gmail.com

Name: _____

Date: _____

1. What is Church?

2. To whom does the church belong to?

3. What is a local church?

4. Why is it important for a person to be a part of a local church?

5. What is the meaning of sanctified community?

6. What is the meaning of saints?

7. What is the difference between the local church and the universal church?

8. What unites all the churches and believers together?

9. How did God use this teaching to speak and encourage your heart?

10. Do you have any doubts or questions regarding the teaching?