

## What Does Church Look Like?

*“And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him (Christ) to be head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” Ephesians 1:21-22*

Many Christians think that church has a pastor, a building, and a church service. Without these three, they do not believe a church is legitimate. But what does the Bible say church looks like? The Bible says the first century church regularly met in homes rather than in special buildings. Yet even this New Testament practice does not form the church's identity. The Bible says the first century church was normally led by a group of mature brothers or elders instead of a single pastor. Yet even this form of Biblical leadership does not establish the church's true identity. The Bible also says the first century church did not have programmed church services; instead, whenever the church met, the Holy Spirit led each member to share their spiritual gifts with one another to build up the body of Christ. But even this New Testament way of functioning together is not the basis of the church's identity.

What then is the real source and basis of the church's identity? The primary feature that identifies the true church is Christ's *life* (the Greek word is *zoe*). This is the divine *life* that Jesus described when He said, “I have come that they may have *life*, and have it more abundantly (John 10:10).” This is the divine *life* the apostle John referred to when he wrote, “He who has the Son has the *life*; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the *life* (1 John 5:12).” The true church is not a building or an organization. She is the church of the living God - the body of Christ. “Now you are Christ's body and individually members of it (1 Corinthians 12:27).” Because she is the body of Christ, the church must be properly submitted to Jesus Christ in order for her members to function and grow together in Christ's *zoe* life. “Christ is head of the body, the church... so that in everything He might have the supremacy (Colossians 1:18).” Thus we are

exhorted to “...stay connected to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God (Colossians 2:19).”

Once we know that our old sinful nature has died with Christ and was buried with Christ, we are free to lose our soul-life for Christ's sake (Romans 6:3-11). Jesus said in order to follow (or be connected to) Him and experience His *zoe* life, we must give up our soul-life (the Greek word is *psyche*). “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his *psyche* soul-life loses it, and he who hates his *psyche* soul-life in this world will preserve it for eternal *zoe* life (John 12:24-25).” When we are born again, God plants the seed of Christ's *zoe* life into our heart. We will then grow in Christ's *zoe* life if we lay down our *psyche* soul-life daily. What does it mean to lay down our soul-life for Christ and how do we do this? It means we give up our natural attitudes, affections and abilities for Christ's attitudes, affections and abilities. It also means we no longer depend on the power of our natural personality to live the Christian life and do Christian work. Instead, our power to live the Christian life comes by our faith in Jesus Christ who lives in us and our faith in what He accomplished for us on the cross. This dynamic relationship between Christ and His body is only possible if we believe and act on the Biblical truth that our sinful nature has died with Christ and was removed from us. Then we can live by faith in the Son of God so that His power and not our soul-power reigns in our lives (Galatians 2:20).

It is entirely possible for Christians to meet together in homes, minister together in the spiritual gifts, and have a plurality of elders who together provide pastoral oversight and yet still not have Christ's *zoe* life. If we are not taking up our cross and laying down our soul-life for Christ's sake, then we are not truly submitted to Christ's headship and we are not spiritually growing in Christ's *zoe* life. Remember that the only way we can take up our cross and lose our

soul-life is to believe God's Word to the point that we act on the truth that we have died with Christ. Then we will be free from bondage to sin and our spiritual ears will be opened to hear and obey the Lord. In the natural realm, when the body's major organic systems (such as the nervous system or cardiovascular system) become obstructed, the body quickly loses its vitality. The body's immune system becomes compromised; its members stop functioning; and the body itself can die. In the same way, if we try to function as Christ's body by relying on our natural abilities and church traditions instead of submitting to the headship of Christ, we block the power of Christ's *zoe* life from vitally nourishing His body, the church. The outcome is spiritual apathy and lifelessness. “Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain (Psalm 127:1).”

Although there definitely are Biblical principles that govern church life, the devil is not overly concerned whether we belong to a mega church or a house church, as long as we never come into a true knowledge of what Christ's death on the cross means. In fact, the devil does not care whether the church does everything according to a New Testament pattern as long as she never walks in the power of Christ's crucifixion. Jesus said, “I am the *life* (John 14:6).” The only way the body of Christ can experience Christ's *zoe* life is if it stays connected to Jesus Christ its head. And the only way the body can remain united to Christ is to abide (stay rooted by faith) in Christ's death and resurrection. But death always comes before resurrection life. This is the divine order. When the church learns to abide by faith in the power of Christ's death, she will express the power of Christ's *zoe* life. Then heaven and earth will see the glorious manifestation of the sons of God and the *zoe* life that comes from Christ alone.

*“God's intent was that now, through the church, His manifold wisdom should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to His eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Ephesians 3:10-11*