

Calendar

Group 8 Meeting — Today after AM service at the Raposa's home.

Group 4 Meeting — Today after PM service at Hank and Debbie Cain's home.

The Lord's Church: Means or result of salvation?

When followers of Christ are likened unto a physical body, Christ is the head and the saints are the members of that body, the church (Eph. 1:22-23). All who are in Christ are, by this figure, considered members of His body. We ignore priorities if we say one becomes a saint by becoming a member of His body. The body figure describes certain characteristics of Christ's followers---it does not tell us how to become followers, *nor does it provide the means of becoming such.*

The church is not the means of our redemption from sin, it is the result. The church does not save, it is the saved. The Christian life is lived in faithfulness to the LORD (Acts 11:20-23), not to the "church." When we say one can not be saved without being in the church we mean that all who are saved become, by the same process, members of His universal church body.

What was God's "eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus"? Paul says it was "that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel" (Eph. 3:3-6, 8-11). Salvation from sin, in Christ, for whosoever will; that was God's eternal purpose. The wisdom (and love, and mercy) of God is "made known" (demonstrated) by the product: Jews and Gentiles serving God together in the church.

What was to be established "in the last days" according to Isa. 2: Dan. 2: Mic. 4 ; Joel 2:? The "mountain of Jehovah" was to be established---the rule or government of God in Christ. "Kingdom" (*basileia*) always refers to rule; then by extension to citizens, etc. "Out of Zion shall go forth the law (instruction), and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem." Those who came to the mountain, who followed the instructions of the King, were the fruit of result of the means of salvation, Jesus Christ. Thus, the church was established in Jerusalem.

The church is called the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16-17), the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:23-32), and other like terms which stress various characteristics of God's people. It is the *people* who are

The church of Christ

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Service Times

Sunday Morning Assembly
9:30 AM

Sunday Evening: 5:00 PM
Wednesday Bible Study
7:30 PM

Classes for all ages.

Private classes arranged at your convenience.

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under consideration, not some institutional concept of "church" apart from saints. Perhaps there is a sense in which God instituted *church* as He did *marriage*: by sanctioning and giving rules and regulations for all who enter this relationship; but neither marriage nor church exist apart from or before people so related.

We therefore reject the Catholic institutional concept of "church" as a "society" which is the means of redemption. They think of the New Testament as the product of the church; we think of the church as the product of the New Testament. Catholic Encyclopedia (V. III, p. 752) says "only by entering the Church can we participate in the redemption wrought for us by Christ." We say, only by participating in the redemption wrought for us by Christ can we enter the church. They say "Incorporation with the Church can alone unite us to the family of the second Adam." We say we are born of water and spirit into the family, which is the church (Jn. 3:5; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 2:19; Heb. 12:22-23).

The Catholic concept of "church"— sometimes called "historical" or "institutional" concept — puts a society between Christ and His people. Study this statement from Catholic Encyclopedia, V. III, p. 752: "It is to the Church that Christ has committed those means of grace through which the gifts He earned for men are communicated to them. The Church alone dispenses the sacraments. It alone makes known the light of revealed truth. Outside the Church these gifts cannot be obtained." This gives "the Church" sole right to teach truth, to baptize, and hence to establish new congregations. It explains why "historic" churches claim succession from the Roman or other "mother" churches. It denies the "restoration" concept, whereby an individual may learn truth from the written Word, obey, upon no authority save that inherent in the Word, and thus become a child of God.

The "Bible alone" was accepted in pioneer restoration days; but as "the church" grew this product took on new status. "We" alone can scripturally baptize, "we" must send (authorize) preachers, "we" must validate the Lord's Supper. Unintentionally, and without realizing logical implications

of our statements, many have accepted the Catholic, institutional concept. We have been slow to face this problem, thinking we might minimize "the importance of the church for which Christ died." But Christ did not die for a society or institution; He died for Sam, Ann, Ike, Ned, Tom, and Sue — and that spells SAINTS. Ironically, our reluctance to fight the basic institutional concept is due to our own institutional concept.

Should today's conservative churches all "go liberal" to the extent of complete apostasy, would an individual have the right to study the Bible for himself? Learning what he must do to be saved, could he obey without resorting to the apostate church? Teaching others, could he baptize them? Could they form themselves into a local church, partake of the Lord's upper, etc.? Does the "authority for" or validation of any divinely decreed service hinge upon approval of any man or group of men? I believe an individual could learn truth, obey, and serve God acceptably; for I believe succession is in the seed, not in the sower (Lu. 8:11-15).

This does not reject the N.T. concept of "church"— for the obedient individual is a member of Christ's church; and his kind, the world over, make up the universal church on earth. This does not reject the local church as an organized entity, for faithful followers of Christ must and will associate themselves with other saints as opportunity permits, to worship together and promote the cause of the Lord collectively as well as individually. To this end the scriptures authorize local church oversight, treasury, and function. But the authority for divine things comes from divinity, not from man. We reject the idea that God has given into man's hands (elders or "church") either legislative, executive, or judicial authority. Christ is absolute monarch, ruling directly through His Spirit-filled Word. We are individually and directly responsible to our King, to serve Him in all good conscience. We pray for God's help in doing this.

ROBERT F. TURNER
PLAIN TALK, VOL. 13, NO. 3, PP. 4-5, MAY, 1976