

## You Can't Go To THE Church!

On a hunting expedition I met a fellow hunter while walking through a forest. We had not met before but soon struck up a conversation. You know how it is: "Been hunting long today?" "Where are you from?" "What do you do?" etc. He said he was a retired insurance salesman and I said I also was in the insurance business – the Eternal Life Insurance Business.

He said, "I've never heard of that company." I said I was a pastor of a church and the purpose of my life was to introduce people to Jesus Christ as their Savior. Instantly he became vocally antagonistic and verbally abusive. Thrusting his fist into my face he said, "Look at that ring! That is my church!" His ring identified him as a member of a well known fraternal society. I said to him, "Is Jesus the Head of your group?" "No!" he said and stomped off into the forest.

Jesus declared to a handful of rag-tag followers, "*I will build My church.*" (Matthew 16:18) To anyone in the fringe crowd that day who did not know who Jesus was, that must have sounded like some egotistical braggart sounding off. But Peter knew for he said, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" Jesus has been building His church ever since.

The word "church" conjures up many images in the mind depending upon one's country, culture and convictions. The majority of religiously minded persons the world over would equate synagogue, mosque, temple, abbey, basilica, cathedral, mission, priory, house of worship, Kingdom Hall, etc. with "church." When the average person uses either of the above terms the mental image they have is that of an edifice, a building, a place.

The Online Internet Dictionary doesn't help us to understand what "church" means either. It defines "church" as, "A [Christian](#) house of [worship](#); a building where [religious services](#) take place; A Christian religious [organization](#), local or general; A time of public worship; a worship service. A group of people who follow the same Christian religious beliefs, local or general."

To be biblically correct we do not "go to church." We go to a mall, a store, a doctor's office, a gymnasium, a museum but we do not go to church. Biblical terminology always depicts the church as people not a place. The word translated "church" in the New Testament is from the Greek word "ecclesia" and means "an assembly of called out ones." The church is an assembly of the twice-born, a gathering, a congregating, a family, a meeting of citizens of heaven who are temporarily on earth.

The church is not a physical edifice but a spiritual entity; it is not an organization but an organism; it is not an architect's rendition but an assembly of the redeemed! The church is both seen and unseen. It is unseen when scattered and it is seen when gathered. Christians are not the church individually anymore than a baseball player is the team personally. Or, to use a scriptural analogy, for the finger to say "I am the body" is to misrepresent the identity of the body. The body is the reality of its members collectively.

I have no illusions about correcting how society in general or Christians in particular speak about the church that Jesus is building, but I can raise my voice in objection to Christians cooperating with the culture in changing the meaning of biblical terminology; substituting an edifice for the essence.

I suppose that all of us are guilty to some degree of perpetuating a false image of what the biblical meaning of the word “church” is by saying, “I am going to church” when, to be biblically correct, we could say, “I am going to the meeting of the church”; “I am giving my finances to the Lord, the Head of the Church” or, “I am going to Work Day at the building in which the church meets”, etc.

If your building is your church then maybe your ring, like that of the hunter that I met in the forest, is your church also. In that case, you had better go hunting for the real thing!

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