

Church

The Scripture:

Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church (1 Corinthians 14:12).

... You will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15).

The thought:

The church is simply “the people of God.” However, how the church appears and functions around the world is quite varied. The church presents itself as the body of Christ in at least three ways:

1. The Church in a broad sense is an amalgamation of God’s people everywhere into one unified group. This includes all true believers from every tribe and nation. All of these people honor the truth of Scripture and aspire to a holy life. Differences of race, national origin, social status, and gender are less important than faithfulness to the truth of Jesus. This amalgamation takes on a supernatural and spiritual character in that God continues to honor and protect the Church as he has done down through history. The Church is the new Israel. Since the people of Israel did not accept Jesus as the true Messiah, the Church has become God’s instrument to work and minister in a broken world to bring about salvation and healing of spirit, mind, and body. Everywhere the true Church goes and everywhere Christ is proclaimed in power, people have been encouraged, blessed, and lifted up in every way.
2. The church is also a building or a place of worship. Most people when speaking in common usage about “church” are referring to the local church building. These buildings vary widely and represent different perspectives of how people think about God and his revelation to mankind. Churches can range from an immense and ornate cathedral to a simple clapboard building or even a place of worship under a tree or in a mud-brick house or a cave. The wonderful thing is that God is ready to meet his people and receive their worship in any place. A church building is not necessary for worship but it can be a useful instrument in bringing God’s people together and in spreading the gospel. Yet, undue focus on the physical church building itself can deter true worship if the reality of God is replaced by the reality of the bricks and mortar.

3. A third usage of “church” which is of course very similar to the first two mentioned above is the church as God’s people in a specific place. This is a primary group of people who are committed to regular worship and function together under some leadership structure such as a pastor or spiritual leader. This primary group combines its financial, educational, and spiritual resources to help one another in the struggles of life and also to seek to incorporate others into the kingdom of God. This is the church that often exists in the local church building but also goes out from there in Jesus’ name to bring healing and hope to a broken world.

The song:

*The Church’s one foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord,
She is His new creation
By water and the Word.
From heaven He came and sought her
To be His holy bride;
With His own blood He bought her
And for her life He died.*

*’Mid toil and tribulation,
And tumult of her war,
She waits the consummation
Of peace forevermore;
Till, with the vision glorious,
Her longing eyes are blest,
And the great Church victorious
Shall be the Church at rest.*

--Samuel J. Stone (1866)

The question:

What does it mean to be a part of the church? In what ways do I represent the Church and my church as I go about my daily responsibilities?

The experience:

Growing up I developed the conviction that the church was my family. When family was far away the church was our home. Wherever we went as a pastor’s family—and then later, after Joyce and I were married, wherever we have traveled—the church has “taken us in” and loved us. Overall it has been a good and happy experience. The church has affirmed, encouraged, and loved us.

I have experienced the church in a remodeled store, under a tree, and in the greatness of a cathedral. Wherever I have met the Lord, I have found his family and a place of belonging, comfort, and hope.