

Prayer List

Sierra
Gene
Veda
Judy
The Williams' Family
Ophelia

Services:

Sunday

Bible Class 9:00 a.m.
Assembly 9:50 a.m.
Assembly 6:00 p.m.

Wednesday

Bible Class 7:00 p.m.

Pinole Tidings

www.pinolechurchofchrist.com

Vol. 14, No. 20 - February 24, 2013

Elders:

Brad Behrens - bradbehrens@pinolechurchofchrist.com
Michael Odom - MichaelOdom@pinolechurchofchrist.com
Ernie Sprinkel - preacher@pinolechurchofchrist.com

This Week's Question:

What prophet, speaking the words of the Lord, said, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave"?

Answer To Last Week's Question:

Micaiah - 1 Kings 22:17

Published by the church of Christ which meets at 755 Pinole Valley Road, Pinole, CA 94564, Phone (510) 724-1994, (Mailing address: church of Christ, P.O. Box 453, Pinole, CA 94564)

What Is "The Church"?

Robert F. Turner

A Simple question should have a simple answer, and this one has. "The church is God's people. The word "church" is a derivative of kyriakon, a compound word meaning Lord's house. In the New Testament this would refer to the Lord's "household" or people, for only via metaphor did it refer to the Lord's dwelling place. The Greek ekklesia means "called out," and was applied in earlier secular Greek to people "called together" for political or other purposes—something like our "town council." Applied to the people of God in Christ, we tend to think of their being "called" by the gospel, which is true; although the concept of "gospel" is not inherent in the word. Webster says, "The collective body of Christians; all who are identified with Christ as his sincere followers;" and that is a surprisingly good definition coming from a secular source. First and basic advice—think people when you say "church."

"Church" is in many ways like "herd" or "flock" or "covey;" it is a collective noun. It gathers or considers as one its units. One cow does not make a "herd," but many cattle are considered as one when called a "herd." The rancher can vaccinate his herd, only by vaccinating his cattle. "Herd" is not something apart from the cattle: it is the cattle. "Church" is not

something apart from the saints. Christ bought the church by dying on the cross for any and all who would come to Him for remission of sins (Acts 20:28). He paid the price for people—Sam, Ann, Ian, Ned, Tom, Sue. He cleanses the church by cleansing these people “by washing of water with the word” (Ephesians 5:25–26). We “put on Christ” in obedient faith (Galatians 3:26–27); and are “added to them” who have before obeyed the Lord (ASV footnote says, added “together,” Acts 2:47). The King James Version “added to the church” means “added to the saints”—period.

Because “the church” is the Lord’s (approved people), “church” may have a qualitative sense—the Lord’s people in contrast to Satan’s people; or, the church versus the world. “Great fear came upon the church, and upon as many as heard these things” (Acts 5:11); upon the saints and upon some who were not saints. This is also an example of “church” in the distributive sense—saints considered individually. It was people who feared (Sam was afraid, Ann was afraid, etc.); there is no reference to an institution that was afraid. In Acts 9:31, “Then had the church rest ...” Robertson says the singular is undoubtedly the true reading here; and “Luke either regards the disciples in Palestine as still members of one great church in Jerusalem ... or ... in a geographical or collective sense covering all of Palestine.” I do not believe the Scriptures will justify the first alternative, and the second could best be understood by considering “church” distributively—the saints in Palestine, as we may speak of the “church in Texas.”

The church consists of people who sustain an acceptable relationship with God through Christ; and this relationship is described by different figures. The saints are likened unto citizens in a kingdom, with Christ as King. They are likened unto children in a family, with Christ as the elder brother; to members of a body, with Christ the head; to branches, growing on Christ the vine; to lively stones, built upon Christ the foundation; etc. The kingdom figure emphasizes the “rule” of Christ; the family figure emphasizes God-family

characteristics; the body, unity (1 Corinthians 12), or preeminence of the head (Ephesians 1:22–23); branches must abide and bear fruit; and God dwells in the house built upon Christ. In all of these figures (there are fifteen or more) the unit is an individual Christian. “The church” is a brotherhood, not a “churchhood.” It is made up of individual saints, not of congregations. We come to Christ as individuals, are individually responsible for worship and service, and will be judged as individuals (Romans 14:12; Revelation 3:4–5).

The divine plan calls for our working with other saints, and to this end gives instructions for local church organization, worship and work. The word “church” is applied to this “team” of saints, and because they worship and work together (via a common treasury and overseers) they often provide a fixed place of meeting and become identified with that location. Saints who covenant together to work as a team should develop close ties with one another, and they do become an organized entity. Each member owes and accepts obligations to the “team,” and gives up some independence in so doing. But our first allegiance must remain with God! We must learn, and teach new converts, to be faithful to the Lord rather than to “the church.” If the local church is what it should be, and we are faithful to the Lord, we will be a credit to that local church (Acts 11:20–24).

Obviously so great a subject could not be discussed in detail here; and to save space I have limited scriptural references—especially where the point is fairly well established in the thinking of prospective readers. But this is an evernew subject, and its importance will continue. Give it prayerful and unbiased attention. The “church” is glorious because it is the culmination of God’s plan to save all who will come to Him through Jesus Christ (Ephesians 3).