

Is The Church A Building?

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While on a hunting trip several years ago, I stumbled across an old cemetery. Nearby was a half-standing building that was almost completely covered with kudzu (southern ivy) and honeysuckle vines. As I approached it, I made out the word “church” on the front wall.

All across our land there are many buildings-large, small, brick, steel, old, new – which are called “church.” Most of these buildings come complete with nice comfortable pews, air and heat, stained glass windows, and a steeple. To the majority, believer and non-believer, “church” has come to mean a building. I am not suggesting that God does not use physical buildings today. He obviously does! There is nothing wrong with being taught the Bible and worshipping God in a building. But

many people have difficulty separating the real church from the physical building. What exactly is the church?

Old Testament Rituals

Under the Old Testament teaching of the Mosaic Law, God used a special priesthood, a complex sacrificial system, and a physical building called the temple, to make Himself known to man. The Jews learned many details about God’s redemptive plan through the use of all of these things. Israel was immersed in the activity that surrounded the temple.

The temple was so important to God that He used specially gifted craftsmen to construct it. These uniquely chosen builders were given special tasks to perform. There were engineers, carpenters, brick masons, and others, all working together following a special blueprint given to them by God (Heb. 8:5).

“All who are gifted artisans among you shall come and make all that the Lord has commanded” (Exodus 35:10).

“And Bezalel and Aholiab, and every artisan in whom the Lord has put wisdom and understanding, to know how to do all manner of work for the service of the sanctuary, shall do according to all that the Lord has commanded” (Ex 36:1).

At an appointed time, the invisible God revealed why such great care was taken in constructing this building. God revealed His awesome presence in the temple in the form of a cloud and fire. This unveiling of His presence was called *His glory* (that which shed light upon Him).

“Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle” (Ex. 40:34; see I Kings 6-8).

New Testament Reality

At Pentecost, fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, God did a remarkable thing. He set aside the temple, the old physical building made with human hands, along with the entire legal system that it represented. He replaced it with a new spiritual temple! This new temple was not made of brick and wood – but of people! He then relocated the expression of His glory in people.

“For you are the temple of the living God; as God has said, ‘I will dwell in them, and walk with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people’” (2 Cor. 6:16).

“Don’t you know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (2 Cor. 3:16).

“Now, therefore, you are no more strangers and sojourners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone, In whom all the building fitly framed together grows unto an holy temple in the Lord; In whom you also are built together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph. 2:19-22).

This spiritual building is made up of both Jewish and Gentile Christians placed together into a living organism built of “living stones” that pulsate with the very life of God.

“You also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5).

Today our invisible God locates Himself not in physical buildings but in those people who belong to Him. The bodies of believers have become the dwelling place of God – the body of Christ. Believers, not buildings, are the church. Believers are the “house of God.”

“For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and His church” (Eph. 5:30;32).

Built On A Firm Foundation

Architects know that a building is only as strong as the foundation upon which it stands. The church of Jesus Christ is built on an everlasting, solid foundation. Peter expressed the true identity of Jesus Christ by saying that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God. He recognized that Jesus Christ was God in human flesh. It was upon this truth that Christ told Peter He was going to build His church (Matt. 16:18). God’s living temple is being built upon the foundation of the deity of Jesus Christ.

Gifted Craftsmen

Just as gifted craftsmen built the old physical temples (Bezalel and Oholiab), gifted craftsmen are also building up this living structure. At His ascension, taking His role as the High Priest and the head of His body, Jesus Christ placed gifted craftsmen into His body in order to build it.

“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore it says, ‘When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, And He gave gifts to men’” (Eph. 4:7-8).

Each member placed into the body of Christ becomes a craftsman designed by God to play a part in constructing this living body.

“For the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12).

This special capacity for construction comes from the Greek word “*charismata*.” It is a supernatural God-given capability for service, given to believers when they become a member of the body of Christ. Each member of the body is equipped by God and is challenged to become a part of the building process. Both Paul and Peter mention these special gifted craftsmen in their letters (Rom. 12:6-10; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; Eph. 4:11, 1 Pet. 4:10-11). Upon completion of this living building, the Head – the Lord Jesus Christ – will reunite His spiritual body to Himself.

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:16-18).

The Bible teaches that God is present everywhere (Psa. 139:7-12) and that the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him, much less a physical building (2 Chron. 6:18). But God today chooses to locate Himself, not in buildings made with hands, but in people who have trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior.

The next time you see a physical building on the corner with the name “church” on the outside, remember *who* the real church is.