

Report No. I of the Findings Committee.  
Box 5, B, 7A

The Scriptural Concept of the Church.

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I. The Nature of the Church.

A. The Church is a fellowship of assembled believers.

1. "The Church is the called out congregation of believers, assembled and acting according to its calling. . . The church of Christ is composed of all that through true faith in Jesus Christ and through obedience to the Gospel have separated themselves from the world and have their fellowship in the Holy Spirit with God the Father and Jesus Christ their only mediator". (Conf. of Faith, p. 18 - 19)
  
2. All who by the work of the Holy Spirit are born again follow the Lord in baptism and unite in fellowship with a local body of believers. "And they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about 3000 souls. - - And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved". (Acts 2:41, 47) Eph. 2:19 - 22.
  
3. Thus upon the examples and teachings of the New Testament the church will receive into its fellowship all those, whatever their background, who: (1) have been regenerated by the Spirit of God (1. Cor. 12:13) (2) have been baptized (Acts 10:48) and (3) who gladly accept the Words of Scripture as the inspired and infallible word of God, and are willing to submit to its teachings as understood by our brotherhood, as a guide in Christian living.

Gal. 1:11, 12: "But I certify you, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached of me is not after men. For I neither received it of man neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ".

1. Cor. 14:37 ". . . let him acknowledge that the things I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord".

4. In this body of believers there is no distinction in class or rank. Christians are brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus. Col. 3:11 "Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all". There are, therefore, no social, economic or racial distinctions. Neither is a sharp distinction between laity and clergy warranted in the N. T. Church. Classification of Brethren into laymen and clergy is only with reference to duty and service, not to rank. Members of the church are closely bound together by ties of love and mutual concern and act toward one another as members of a spiritual family. (Eph. 4:11 - 16, also v. 7. 1. Cor. 4:6, 7)

B. The Church is a brotherhood of many local bodies of believers.

1. Although there exist many local and separate bodies of believers (or churches) they nevertheless compose one brotherhood. They have one faith and practice, and exercise a mutual Christian concern one for another. In the N. T. we learn that churches moved forward unitedly, although they were scattered living in various geographical areas. While local churches were independent bodies of believers, working together as a complete organization, they were, however, not absolutely independent. The decision and advice of the conference of brethren, as in Acts 15, was sent to all the churches that it might guide them in the matters at hand.

The Apostle Paul never separated one church from another in his thinking. (A. H. Unruh) Whenever he wrote to one church, his letters became applicable to all the churches. Col. 4:16 "And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church at Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea".

2. The local church assumes full responsibility in its spiritual ministries, and to follow the Lord according to His revealed Word, Col. 2: 5 - 6 "For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ, As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him". The local church, furthermore, is inwardly constrained by the Spirit of the Lord, to consider earnestly the wishes and decisions of the total brotherhood, (or conference) to prayerfully examine such in the light of Scripture, and to accept them in the spirit of love and brotherhood. If, however, there is a dissatisfied minority, that minority must be denied the right of re-opening a question or issue for reconsideration.

C. The Church is the company of all the redeemed of all ages and all peoples.

"Although the members of the church belong to all nations and ranks scattered here and there throughout the world and are divided in denominations, yet they are all one and among one another brethren and members and exist as one body in Christ their head, who is Lord, chief Shepherd". (Conf. of Faith, p. 19) Romans 12: 5 "So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another". (Eph. 4:4 - 6) In recognition of this universal body of true believers the local church and individual believers sense the spiritual oneness with other Christians. The local church cooperates with other true believers in the community in such efforts which promote advantageously the work of our Lord.