

The Church and the Churches

by C.I. Scofield

C.I. Scofield's sermon explores the biblical understanding of the church as a distinct assembly called out by God, its formation, relationships, and mission in relation to Christ and the kingdom of God.

Scripture: Acts 7:38, Acts 19:32, 1 Corinthians 6:2, 1 Corinthians 12:12, Ephesians 1:22, Ephesians 2:19, Ephesians 5:29, Philippians 1:1, Titus 1:5, Hebrews 12:22

Topics: "Ecclesiology", "Holy Spirit"

Description

C.I. Scofield delves into the significance of the word 'church' in the Acts and the Epistles, emphasizing the importance of understanding its various meanings as used by the Holy Spirit. The Greek word 'ecclesia,' translated as 'church,' signifies the 'outcalled assembly,' whether referring to the New Testament church, Israel in the wilderness, or other gatherings. The focus is on the 'church which is His body,' composed of believers baptized into Christ by the Spirit, united with Him as the Head. The sermon explores the formation of the church through the baptism with the Spirit, the relationships of the church to Christ, the world, heavenly inhabitants, and future judgments, as well as the order of the apostolic churches and unbiblical perversions that have arisen.

Transcript

Whoever reads with attention the Acts and the Epistles observes the frequent occurrence of the word church, in both the plural and singular forms of that word. Indeed, so constantly does the word recur that it is evidently of most urgent importance to the student of Scripture to understand its meanings. The Epistles, especially, concern the church and the churches. Very little is said about Israel, very little about the kingdom. It is the church which is prominently in view in this large and important part of the Bible. Evidently, then, it is impossible to read those writings intelligently unless we are able to define the various senses in which the Holy Spirit uses that word.

The Greek word, ecclesia, translated "church," is formed from ek --"out" or "out of," and kalleo --"to call," and in itself, therefore, signifies the "outcalled." But, since the word is never used of a single individual, but always of many individuals together, it takes on the larger meaning of an "outcalled assembly." It is thus appropriately used, not only of the New Testament church and of the New Testament churches, but also of Israel in the wilderness (Acts vii:38), and of the town meeting of Ephesus (Acts xix:32, 39, 41, "assembly").

The word means, in itself, no more than a called out assembly. The Israelites were called out of Egypt by the words of Moses and Aaron; the town meeting of Ephesus was called out of the mass of Ephesians by the guild of silversmiths; the New Testament church is called out of the mass of the inhabitants of the earth, Jews and Gentiles, by the preaching of the Gospel of the Grace of God. In each use of the word the distinctive character, privileges, and responsibilities of the called out assembly must be determined by the declarations of Scripture concerning each. But the mere use of the word church affords no more warrant for making the assembly of Israel in the wilderness identical with, or a part of, the New Testament ecclesia, than for so identifying the town meeting at Ephesus. As a matter of fact Israel in the wilderness and the New Testament church have but one thing in common--the same God.

In this, and the addresses which are to follow^ we are to consider the word only as applied to the "church which is his body, the fullness of him which filleth all in all" (Eph. i:22, 23), and to the local assemblies called churches in the Acts, Epistles, and in the Revelation; and we are first of all to look at the Scripture teaching concerning "the church which is his body."

The Historic Background.

The church is first mentioned in Scripture by our Lord Himself in the words recorded in Matthew xxi:18, and that in a setting which is both interesting and illuminative.

Note, first, that our Lord does not mention the church until the rejection by Israel of the kingdom of heaven, and of Himself as King has become manifest. In Matt, xi:16-24, Jesus declares the national rejection both of John the Baptist, the herald, and of Himself, the King. For that generation there remained but judgment; and that great discourse closes with a wholly new message. It is no more "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," but: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"--a very different proclamation.

In Matt, xii our Lord puts Himself morally outside of Israel, identifying Himself and His disciples with David and his followers in the time of the rejection of that king by Israel (Matt, xii:1-4; 1 Sam. xx, xxi, xxii), and again (Matt, xii:40-45) declares judgment upon that generation.

In Matt, xiii Jesus goes "out of the house" (Israel) and utters the "mysteries of the kingdom":-- i. e., those things which are to be fulfilled between His first and second advents, and which have already found their fulfillment in Christendom--the so-called "Christian world." Then, in Matthew xvi. He announces a purpose hitherto hidden in God (Eph. iii:9, 10), and constituting something quite different from either the Old Testament foreview of the kingdom, or from "the mysteries of the kingdom" described in Matt, xiii; but which, like the mysteries of the kingdom, must be fulfilled between the first and second advents, namely, "I will build my church"--my "called out assembly."

In other words: Israel being under judicial blindness and rejection (Matt, xiii:13-15), two things are announced to go on contemporaneously--the development in Christendom of the mixed condition--wheat and tares, good and bad fish--called "mysteries of the kingdom" (Matt, xiii:11); and also that other "mystery" (Rom. xvi:25; Eph. 1:9; iii:4, 5), the church, which He purposed through the proclamation of Himself as "the Christ, the Son of the living God," to build upon Himself as the Rock foundation--a called out assembly, the church.

How the Church Is Formed.

Closely connected with our Lord's announcement of His purpose to build the church are repeated references to the baptism with the Holy Spirit; and these promises concerning the Spirit are, in turn, intimately associated with instructions for a world-wide preaching of the Gospel. The disciples were bidden to tarry at Jerusalem until endued with power from on high, before beginning the testimony to Christ, the effect of which has been the outcalling of the church (Luke xxiv:46-49; Acts i:4, 5, 8).

These two ideas are inseparably linked in the final instructions of Christ--the world-wide ministry, and the baptism with the Spirit. And 1 Cor. xii:i2, 13 supplies the fact which links the church inseparably to the baptism and the preaching:--"As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."

That, then, is the church, of which Jesus Christ, crucified, risen, ascended, glorified, seated, is the Head (Eph. i:22, 23). That this is a fact of immense positional importance to the individual believer is evident. Indeed, the whole positional doctrine of the Epistles is based upon this great fact, that every believer is thus positionally identified with Christ Himself. It is a fact which explains and defines the important expression, "in Christ Jesus." Baptized into Christ by the Spirit, every believer is "in Christ," or "in Christ Jesus" (Eph. i:1, 3, 4, 6-13; ii:6, 10, etc.). This exalted position is especially the theme of Ephesians. But it is necessary to remember that our union to Christ as members of His body is effected by that same baptism with the Holy Spirit which our Lord connected with the whole world-wide service of preaching the Gospel.

Evidently the truth that the church which our Lord announced His intention to build would be composed of believers baptized into Himself by the Spirit, was one of the "many things" which the disciples were not "able to bear" until after they should be illuminated by the Spirit, and which were reserved for the great ministry of Paul (John xvi:i2, 13; Eph. iii:3-10).

But, now that the revelation through Paul has been made, we may, nay we must, in coming to an understanding of how the church is formed, unite the three facts--the worldwide preaching, the baptism with the Spirit, and the building of the church.

In other words, Christ is building His church through the church itself, by means of the baptism with the Spirit. An illustration of this is afforded by the events of Pentecost. On that day the first event was the uniting, by the baptism with the Holy Spirit, of the gathered disciples to Christ their risen Head. But those disciples were, as we know from 1 Cor. xii:7-31, united to Christ as living members of His body in an orderly way with reference to the activities of that body. Some were made apostles, some prophets, some teachers, some miracle-workers, some healers, some helpers, some rulers, some speakers of tongues (1 Cor. xii:28, etc.). And all this was done sovereignly, in God's own wisdom (1 Cor. xii:11, 18, 24).

Furthermore, these members, thus united to Christ and gifted by the Spirit for the various activities of the worldwide ministry were, like the members of the human body, subject to the will of the Head. "There are differences of administrations, but the same Lord" (1 Cor. xii:5.) And, in ordering as Head and Lord the uses of His members, He distributes the gifted members, here apostles, to do apostolic work; there prophets, to minister that gift; in another place evangelists; and elsewhere pastors and teachers (Eph. iv:11). But all these varied gifts, exercised here and there as the Head directs, are to one definite purpose: "for the perfecting of saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ" (Eph.

iv:12, R. V.). And this "building up" looks toward a definite termination: "unto a full-grown man, even the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. iv:13).

In other words, as the human body, having received all of its members, and having developed all of its members, becomes complete, so it will be with the church which is Christ's body. It builds itself up, through the gifts, under the Lordship of Christ the Head, until every member is there. As the Spirit father says: "All the body, fitly framed and knit together, through that which every joint [member, gift] supplieth, according to the working in due measure of each several part, maketh the increase of the body, unto the building up of itself in love" (Eph. iv:16, R. v.).

We now have a complete account of the formation of the church which is His body, and may return to our pentecostal illustration. Baptized into one body and vitally united to Christ, every one of the disciples was definitely endued with gift for some particular service. Under the headship of Christ, Peter stood up to preach, and the effect of the preaching was that "the same day there were added to them about three thousand souls" (Acts ii:41). The body, formed by the baptism with the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, had begun the building of itself up, through the testimony that Jesus was "both Christ and Lord" (Acts ii:36).

But not all who heard the testimony were converted and joined to the body of Christ--far from it. The disciples were still an ecclesia --a called out assembly, the church. And so it will be until the body is complete.

The idea that in building His church Christ is converting the world is not only negated by the very word ecclesia, since "to call out of" implies that some called do not come out, but is also negated by express Scripture (e. g., Acts XV:14), and by all experience. Paul found that while unto some he was the savor of life unto life, to others he was the savor of death unto death (2 Cor. ii:15, 16). His gospel was "hid to them that are lost" (2 Cor. iv:3); and He was made all things to all men that he "might by all means save some" (1 Cor. ix:22).

All Jerusalem was not converted on the day of Pentecost, neither subsequently. Nor was Antioch converted, nor Corinth, nor Rome, nor Paris, nor London, nor New York, nor, it may be added, the smallest village in Christendom. The church is, and will remain, an ecclesia. The world is to be brought back to God, but through the kingdom, not the church.

The Relationships of the Church.

The church is a part of the kingdom of God, but is not the kingdom of God--of it, but not the whole of it, precisely, as the kingdom of Saxony is in the German empire, or as Pennsylvania is in the United States. It would be inexact to speak of the kingdom of Saxony and the German empire as equivalent expressions, though both of those bodies politic have much in common--language, literature, laws, supreme head, etc. So the church is in the kingdom of God, but not co-extensive with the kingdom. The kingdom of God includes all moral intelligences in every age and every sphere which are willingly subject to the divine authority. This appears sufficiently from Heb. xii:22, 23: "But ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect."

The "church which is His body" is not before the mind of the Spirit in the parables and other teachings of our Lord concerning "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. xiii:ii). The sphere of profession in the

widest sense, during the present age, is the subject of those parables. Doubtless the "children of the kingdom" (Matt. xiii:38) are the individuals who, by baptism with the Spirit, are formed into the body of Christ; but the body, as such, is in no way the subject of the "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." For the body is itself a distinct "mystery" (Eph. iii:i-ii), the unfolding of which was committed to the Apostle Paul. It is a striking fact that while the church is mentioned but three times in the Gospels, and but nineteen times in the Acts, the word occurs sixty-two times in Paul's Epistles.

The "church which is His body" is related to the kingdom of heaven as it will be set up at the second coming of Christ, as the present Queen of Great Britain is related to that kingdom, namely, as being the bride of the King (Eph. v:29-32; 2 Tim. ii:12; Rev. vi:10), and so associated with him in rule. It cannot be too clearly held that the work of God in this dispensation is not the gathering of subjects of the coming kingdom, but the outcalling of the ekklesia, the co-ruler with Christ of the coming kingdom. Individually the "many members" are by birth both royal and priestly, but the millennial authority is corporate rather than personal. Eph. v:30, 31 ("For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh") is quoted from Gen. ii:23, 24, and connects therefore with Gen. i:26-28, the central idea of which is joint dominion.

But the church is related to the coming kingdom in that "the bride, the Lamb's wife," is also the "new" or "holy" Jerusalem (Rev. xxi:2, 3, 9-27). The distinctive glory of the ancient Jerusalem was that it was "the city (or capital) of the great king" (Matt. v:35; Psalms cxxxv:21; Isa. ii:3), and that it contained the Temple (Psalms lxxviii:29; cxvii:6-9). Both these distinctions meet in the church, the heavenly Jerusalem. It is "the tabernacle of God" (Rev. xxi:2, 3), and the "Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it."

It is not at all that the earthly Jerusalem is done away during the kingdom age, but that the church, the Lamb's wife, the heavenly Jerusalem, is over it, as both the place and the means of the manifestation of God who dwells in it.

The "church which is His body" is related to God as temple and habitation (Eph. ii:19-21; 1 Pet. ii:4-7; 2 Cor. vi:16). Here we are brought into the most intimate connection with Old Testament type and prophecy concerning Christ. For, while the Old Testament vision does not see the church, it does see Christ as the fulfiller of all the great types--the association of the church with His sufferings and glories, and with the mystery of His person, being reserved for the New Testament revelation.

The Tabernacle (and afterward the Temple, which was but the Tabernacle made permanent) was primarily the place of Jehovah's abode among His people (Ex. xxv:8; xxix:43-46; Lev. xxvi:11, 12; 2 Kings xi:13; Eph. ii:22). Secondly, the Tabernacle or Temple was a house of worship (Eph. ii:21; 1 Pet. ii:5; Heb. xiii:15, 16). Here the figure changes. Seen as one body with Christ, the church is a habitation of God, and also His temple, or spiritual house. Seen as "many members" (1 Cor. xii:20), the church is "an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. ii:5). In other words, the "many members" of the one body are an hierarchy of priests, of which Jesus Christ is the High Priest. The stones of the "spiritual house" are "living stones" and utter the praises of the God who abides in that house. It is as if every stone of Solomon's Temple had broken out with praise and prayer. The manner of God's possession of the "spiritual house," which is His temple and habitation, is "through the Spirit." The Spirit builds the house (1 Cor. xii:12, 13) and then takes up His abode in it (Eph. ii:22) as the manifestation of God. The Spirit is the holy cementer of the living stones to each other and to the "head of the corner," Christ; and the Spirit animates each stone with praise and prayer.

The relationships of the church to Christ have already, of necessity, been indicated, but may be briefly repeated.

(a) Corporately the church is "His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. i:23). A body is for service and for manifestation. Every "member" is united to the body in a specific and not in an indefinite way (1 Cor. xii:12-27). That is to say, each "member" is assigned in the divine will to the exercise of a specific function in the service of the Head (1 Cor. xii:4-11). These functions are called "gifts"; and with such designation to specific function goes, as part of the "gift," an enablement or "manifestation of the Spirit" (1 Cor. xii:7). In true Christian service, therefore, nothing is left to self-pleasing or self-will. We serve the Head, whose members we are, when we take joyfully the place assigned us, ministering there as He may direct. The foot must not try to do the work of the hand.

The body is also for manifestation. By His incarnation the Word, who had previously been invisible to men, became visible by His human body (John i:14; 1 John i:1, 2). Precisely so, in the divine will and intent, "the church which is His body" is charged with the marvelous privilege of making Him still visible to men (2 Cor. iv:10, 11; 1 Pet. ii:9, R. V.; Gal. ii:20; Phil. i:21; John ix:5, with Matt. v:i4).

(b) The church is the bride of Christ (Eph. v 129-32; 2 Cor. xi:2; Rev. xix:6-9). Since the divine thought of marriage is absolute identification, absolute oneness, it is obvious that the eternal position of the church is to be that of Christ Himself (Eph. v:30; i:6; John xvii:10, 16, 21-24).

Upon the relation of "the church which is His body" to the world, Scripture is absolutely silent. It may therefore be said that the church, corporately, has no relation to the world. It should be needless to add that a large and most important body of teaching has to do with the individual Christian and the world.

Since the gift of evangelist is one of the gifts for the upbuilding of the body of Christ, and since that body can grow only by winning "members" from the world, it may be said inferentially that the relation of "the church which is His body" to the world of mankind is a missionary relation--to save men out of the world. But this mission is, in a purely Biblical sense, the mission not of the body, corporately considered, but of each individual Christian.

The relation of "the church which is His body" to the heavenly inhabitants is, in grace, so exalted as almost to stagger faith. Not until we see that this dispensation is distinguished from all past and all future dispensations by the reign of grace (Rom. v:2i) is it possible to receive this truth.

(a) The church is related to the Old Testament saints as a bride is related to the "friends" of her bridegroom. This is clearly stated by John the Baptist, the last of the Old Testament saints: "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled" (John iii:29). Abraham was called "the friend of God" (Jas. ii:23; Isa. xli:8).

(b) No passage speaks of the relation of the church corporately to the angels, but it may be surely derived by inference from Heb. ii:12, where *ekklesia* is the inspired rendering of the Hebrew *qahal* in Ps. xxii:22. This quotation from Ps. xxii indicates how the Old Testament, while not mentioning the church, yet leaves room for it. For certainly the church, and not Israel, is meant in Ps. xxii:22, for this part of the Psalm is not only messianic, but unmistakably post-resurrectional. Furthermore, the passage is quoted in Heb. ii:12 to show Christ's oneness with the church. It follows that not only individual Christians, but the church corporately is brought into the position of the Son Himself as described in the first and second chapters of

Hebrews. These chapters have been called by Dr. A. T. Pierson "the inspired philosophy of the plan of salvation." Briefly, the doctrine is that the Son of God was better than the angels" as being Himself "God" and "Lord" (i:8-io). In incarnation He entered humanity, which was "made a little lower than the angels" (ii:7), that He might save men. Having saved them, He brings them into His own primal position, "for both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one" (ii:11); whereupon follows His triumph "in the midst of the church" (ii:12), which is thus associated with Him above the angels.

(c) The relation of the church to future judgments is still measured by her identification with Christ, 1 Cor. vi:2, 3: "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that ye shall judge angels? How much more things that pertain to this life?" So far, then, from becoming the subjects of future judgments, the "many members" of Christ's body are associated with Him in judgment.

II. THE CHURCHES.

In a preceding address we have been looking together at the word church in its larger meaning of Christ's "body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." We have seen that the church, in that sense of the word, is a living organism in the same way that the human body is a living organism (1 Cor. xii:12); that it is composed of a Head, Christ in glory; and of living members, the whole number of the regenerate between the two advents of Christ; that these living members are, by the Holy Spirit, baptized into Christ and into each other (1 Cor. xii:13); and that these members are gathered out of the world, and edified by means of believers who, endued by the Holy Spirit with diverse gifts (1 Cor. xii:4-28), are themselves gifts of the risen and glorified Head to various companies and localities on earth (Eph. iv:8, 11-16). This church not only as to its Head, but in part as to its members is in heaven. It is obvious, therefore, that it cannot be in its entirety a visible church.

We come now to consider a second common use of the word church in the New Testament Scriptures, namely as applied to local assemblies of professed believers. Such use is found in such passages as, "the church of God which is at Corinth" (1 Cor. i:2); "the church that is in their house" (Rom. xvi:5).

Doubtless both meanings were in the mind of our Lord in His twofold use of the word (Matt, xvi:18), "Upon this rock will I build my church; and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it," and (Matt, xviii:17), "and if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church." The first of the passages quoted could only refer to that body, not one member of which shall ever perish; the second passage implies a visible brotherhood competent to deal with questions of discipline.

The First Churches.

As a result of the first preaching of the Gospel after the descent of the Holy Spirit, "about three thousand" souls were converted and "added unto them," i. e., unto the group of believers upon whom the Holy Spirit had fallen. This body of believers, all in Jerusalem, constituted the first of the local churches. For a moment, as one may say, the church which is his body was identical with the church at Jerusalem. Both were one. But when the Gospel broke its Jewish limitations, and some went as far as Antioch "preaching the Lord Jesus," a "great number believed," and these believers are immediately called a church (Acts xi 119-26; xiii:1, etc.). From Antioch, in turn, preachers--this time the great Apostle Paul, with Barnabas--were "sent forth by the Holy Ghost" (Acts xiii 14); and, as had previously happened at Jerusalem and Antioch, the believers called out by the preaching of the Gospel, in every place, are, collectively spoken of as churches in those places (Acts xv:41; xvi:5; xviii:22).

The Order of the Apostolic Churches.

At first the churches seem to have been simple assemblies of the Christians of a place or city, after the order of our Lord's saying (Matt. xviii:20), "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." It will be remembered that these words are in close connection with verse 17, in which a local church is evidently in view. It is as if our Lord answered the unspoken question in the disciples' minds, "But what is this 'church' of which you speak, to which we are to 'tell' the sin of an unrepenting brother?" by saying: "It is where two or three are gathered together in (or 'into') my name" --the local assembly of Christ's disciples. The words imply more than mere human volition. "Are gathered" intimates a fellowship induced by the Holy Spirit in renewed hearts.

And it is most blessed that Matt. xviii:20 ever remains the resource of believers in a time of confusion and apostasy. Such a gathering is a church. And I trust I may be pardoned by any whose practices I may cross, if I add that no conceivable good purpose is subserved by calling such a gathering anything but a church. It is true that "assembly" might, lexically, have been a better word for our English translation of ecclesia, but this is true of many other words --among them atonement, for example--and with all else which unhappily divides Christians to-day it raises a needless and harmful issue, not far removed from that "strife about words to no profit" against which we are solemnly warned for these last days (2 Tim. ii:14) to insist on the words "assembly" or "gathering." There is an opprobrium inseparable from true separation (2 Tim. iii:12), but there is a needless insistence on new terms, and idle peculiarities, which brings a just opprobrium. A local gathering of believers unto His Name is a church. Let it be called so.

It is wholly congruous with Acts xx:7 to assume that the apostolic churches met on the first day of the week to break bread in remembrance of the Lord, as a testimony to His death, and expression of the unity of His one body, and a renewal of the hope of His coming (Luke xxii:19, 20; Acts ii:42; 1 Cor. xi:23-26; 1 Cor. x:16, 17).

It is only when the one passage (Acts xx:7), "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread," is hardened into a new Leviticus, so that the heart looks for blessing to the table instead of to Himself, and would be disquieted and unblessed if the table were wanting on any particular Lord's day, though He, assuredly, would be there, that the simple and beautiful custom becomes a snare. Our Lord would have no legality with His table, but left a gracious liberty in His "as often."

But, while such was the simple order at the first, the Acts and Epistles note as of great importance, and that at a very early date, the designation of elders or bishops (the office is identical, Titus i:5 and 7).

At first (e. g., Acts xiv:23) Paul, an Apostle, with Barnabas, an apostolic man, ordained or appointed the elders. This seems never to have been done at the first evangelistic visit to a place, but when the church, outgathered at the first visit, was revisited. The reason is obvious. Time was necessary for the development and manifestation of the gifts and graces necessary to the elders' office.

Later, it became necessary for the Apostle to send experienced and spiritual fellow laborers, as Titus and Timothy, to ordain (or appoint) elders. But when this stage had been reached, and the peculiar apostolic discernment could no longer be available, it is most beautiful to see that the Holy Spirit defines for all time in sacred Scripture, the tests by which the true elders may be known.

As in so many other things, the Scriptures replace the Apostolic presence and authority.

As to the mode of ordination of elders, it is indisputable that the word in Acts xvi:2[^] translated "ordained" means to elect or appoint by extending the hand. Rotherham translates: "Moreover appointing by vote for them in each assembly, elders." The Septuagint denotes those who assisted Moses (Exodus xviii:25) by the same Greek word translated elder in Titus and Timothy; and reference to Deut. i:13 will show that Moses but ratified the people's choice. This, it need scarcely be said, is not referred to as authoritative for a New Testament church, but as illustrating the meaning of Acts xiv:23. The Holy Spirit alone qualifies elders (Acts xx:28) but the Scriptures guide the saints in recognizing and appointing them.

Deacons (the word means servant) are also described and appointed. It is questionable whether Acts vi:1-6 refers definitely to this office, nor is the question vital. What we do know is that a New Testament local church as fully developed under the apostolic authority and direction, is defined in Phil. i:1, "The saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons."

It has been contended that as we have no apostles we can have no appointment of elders and deacons, though we readily discern them. But in face of the Word of God in Titus i:9 and 1 Timothy iii:1-13, and of the emphasis constantly put in the Acts and Epistles upon the orderly appointment of these officers, we cannot doubt that now, as then, our Lord would have His churches constituted after His own divine order.

That the practice of ordination has been monstrosly abused is no reason for its abandonment, but only for a return to its right use. 18

Unbiblical Perversions.

In Scripture, ordination (which simply means appointment) is never to preach or to administer ordinances, so called. Ministry of the word is wholly by gift (Eph. iv:11, 12), ordination is to the local offices of elder and deacon. It should be added that of one elder over a local church, or one bishop over many churches the Scripture knows nothing. The divine order is many bishops over one church.

Again, the Scripture knows nothing of a church composed of churches--as the Methodist church, the Presbyterian church, etc., meaning many churches united into one church. It is wholly a Roman Catholic perversion retained in Protestant use. Any such "church" must be, like Romanism itself, simply a sect. In every such "church" there survives the papal leaven of a required love of and "loyalty" to, the sect. Innumerable are the evils produced by this utterly unscriptural practice. The multiplication of churches in every village, when one true apostolic church would include easily and naturally all Christians in the place; the reproduction on heathen ground of these wholly unnecessary divisions-- these are but a few of the evils. The local church is the beginning and end of divine organisation for this age. Whatever is less than "saints with the bishops and deacons" is to wilfully leave the divine organization incomplete (Titus i:5); whatever is more than the local church, is a man-made addition to the divine organization.

If it is objected that Christian fellowship and missionary effort would fail if local churches are not somehow united organically, the sufficient and triumphant answer is that neither Christian fellowship nor missionary effort suffered during the first century, but, on the contrary, that century remains the ideal in these respects never even approximated by a sect divided by Protestantism; still less by Romish organic solidarity. May the Lord give us grace to take our place about Himself, in the midst, neither deliberately refusing to perfect the divine order, nor, on the other hand, going beyond it.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ci-scofield/the-church-and-the-churches/>

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