

A CHURCH USING ITS BUILDING

Text: James 2:2-4

INTRO: The word “church” is never used in the Scriptures to refer to a material structure of wood or bricks. In our text, the brethren to whom James wrote had a meeting place or synagogue. The Corinthians obviously had access to a place where the whole congregation could gather together, 1 Cor. 14:23.

Thru God’s grace, we have a beautiful & adequate building--a place to assemble, worship God, & encourage one another in His service. This building is not the church. It is simply a building to be used by the church. We are the church. We are the dwelling place of God.

I. THE WORD “CHURCH” IS USED IN 3 DIFFERENT WAYS IN THE N.T. WITH REFERENCE TO GOD’S PEOPLE.

A. It is used in a general way to refer to all Christians, worldwide. The word “church” is used to translate the Greek word ECCLESIA, which is a collective noun signifying those who have been called out. The universal or general church has never yet been literally, physically, assembled, but the term is used frequently to view all God’s people as a unit. READ HEBREWS 12:23-29

B. The most common use of the word church in the N.T. is to refer to a local church or congregation of Christians who have joined themselves together to share their talents, resources & opportunities, working together in common agreement.

1. Local churches in the N.T. recognized 2 primary functions:

a. Evangelism--teaching the lost, causing the church to grow numerically.

b. Edification--causing the church to grow spiritually.

2. N.T. congregations also recognized a secondary work that was sometimes necessary--providing

relief for needy saints.

C. A few times the word church was used in its most literal sense to mean a group of people literally, physically, assembled, 1 Cor 14:34; Matt. 18:17.

II. A LOCAL CHURCH MUST HAVE ACCESS TO A PLACE TO ASSEMBLE, 1 Cor 14:23; James 2:2, etc.

A. God has not specified if that place is to be borrowed, rented, or purchased. Apparently, we are free to use our own discretion in making such decisions.

B. The building is not an END but a means to an end. Brethren have sometimes reasoned, "We have a building. Now we can relax." Not so! We have our building, now we must really get down to work!

C. The only justification for spending church money on a building is that the building is to be used to do the work God gave the church to do.

1. Assemble to worship, praise God, magnify His name
2. Teach the lost. A center of operation with chalk boards, copy machine, reference works, filmstrip equipment, etc.

3. Facilities to edify & instruct one another.

III. A LOOK AT SOME MATTERS THAT HAVE PROVEN CONTROVERSIAL AMONG BRETHREN.

A. Eating in the building.

1. Those who promote social activity on a congregational level cite Jude 12 & 2 Pet 2:13, assuming the "love feast" to be the same as found in the late 2nd & 3rd centuries.

- a. The love feasts of these verses could be the eating from house to house of A 2:46.

b. They could the L.S. Barnes makes some very strong arguments for this position. This is my personal opinion.

c. At any rate, the idea of church sponsored social gatherings is definitely not a “necessary inference.”

2. Brethren who oppose eating in the building often cite Rom 14:17, which, as far as I can determine has absolutely no bearing on the question at all.

3. Another passage often cited is 1 Cor 11:20-34. I am persuaded that it is the passage that we must rely upon for an understanding of the principles involved regarding social meals as a work of the church. READ I CORINTHIANS 11:20-34

a. It should be noted that the basic problem being dealt with in this passage was the abuse of the L.S.

b. However, in dealing with that problem, Paul distinguished between spiritual & domestic responsibilities.

B. Domestic & social functions are not the work of the organized church. Such matters might be engaged in to a limited degree as incidentals--sew on a button, get a drink of water, use the rest room, talk about social/domestic matters before or after the worship assembly, etc. Might eat a sandwich while here to do legitimate church work, etc.

C. What about weddings & funerals? It is assumed that these 2 matters are parallel. Not necessarily so. These matters are not mentioned specifically. Neither are Wednesday night Bible classes, business meetings, debates with false teachers, etc.

1. I believe a funeral can & should be conducted in

such a way as to fall into the category of things we can & should do in the church bldg. Every funeral I conduct consists of (1) a gospel sermon, (2) hymns, and (3) prayers.

2. I am also persuaded that weddings can be conducted in such a way as to fall within the scope of the teaching & preaching of a local church, though, of course, many weddings are not so conducted. Weddings & funerals are the only sermons some folks will ever hear.

3. It seems to me that if a person does not see a close connection between conducting a wedding & the teaching/preaching work of a local church, it might be poor judgment to ask a gospel preacher to spend several hours preparing, practicing & preaching a wedding sermon.

D. Secular education, political rallies, social gatherings, recreation, entertainment, etc., do not, so far as I can determine, fall within the sphere of activity assigned to the local church, thus they are not to be planned, promoted or provided for by the local church.

CONCLUSION: Brethren, I appeal to each of you to get busy helping fill this building with those who are interested in learning & doing the will of God. Let us use this facility as a tool to promote our own spiritual growth & as a springboard from which to reach out into our community & its surrounding territories with the soul-saving gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jonestown, TX., April 5, 1970
Springhill, LA, January 9, 1972
KBSF Radio, Springhill, LA, July 28, 1974
La Porte, TX, August 8, 1976
Exton, PA, February 7, 1988
Exton, PA, April 29, 1990
Susquehanna, Marietta, March 22, 1998

