

The Lord Jesus Christ and HIS church (Matthew 16:18b)

God has directed circumstances in the last year which have helped draw attention to the variety of ways in which individual believers understand and relate to the church. It has shown how important it is to turn to the Word of God to understand the nature of the church. Perhaps the most important feature to understand is that the church is God's church. Jesus declared clearly that it was His church that He was going to build (Matthew 16:18). Three reasons from the New Testament explain and emphasize this truth.

I. The Church is HIS Church because it is His possession.

1. God bought it with His blood.

In Acts 20:28 Paul addresses elders of the local church in Ephesus and charges them to care for the church of God which He had acquired with His blood. In Titus 2:13–14 it is clear that Jesus redeemed us by His death to make for himself a people for His own possession.

2. Therefore, the Church is not primarily there to serve us, but to serve our God and Savior the Lord Jesus Christ.

The church is to bring glory to God (Ephesians 3:20–21), both individually (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:19b–20) and corporately. We are also created by God to serve, to do good works (Titus 2:14; Ephesians 2:10).

II. The Church is HIS Church because of His authority.

1. The Lord Jesus Christ has all authority.

Jesus Himself declared this when He commissioned His disciples to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18). His authority over all is taught clearly in the epistles (cf. Colossians 2:10; Ephesians 1:20–23), and God gave Christ as Head over all things to the church, His body. Cf. Revelation 1–3.

2. The authority of the Lord Jesus Christ over all things in and outside the church should both encourage us and warn us.

Be encouraged that nothing visible or invisible, in heaven or on earth, material or immaterial can work against the good purposes of God for His people. But remember that we are subject to Christ and to His Word. No earthly authority supercedes the Headship of the Lord Jesus Christ. Leadership within the church must give account to Him (Hebrews 13:17; cf. 1 Peter 5:1–4) and His Word defines and regulates the church.

III. The Church is HIS Church because of His relationship to her.

1. New Testament metaphors define the relationship of Jesus Christ to the Church, such as Head, Bridegroom, Shepherd, cornerstone and foundation of the Temple.

He is Head of the body (Ephesians 4:15) and thus believers are connected to Him as intimately as a body is to its head. Christ and the Church are joined as a husband and wife are joined as one flesh, so that He cares for the church as a man would his own body (Ephesians 5:23, 29–30). He is the Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep and rewards those who properly shepherd His sheep (John 10:11; 1 Peter 5:4; cf. Hebrews 13:20).

2. Because of the intimate relationship of Christ to the Church, the way you relate to the Church is the way you are relating to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Saul learned that persecuting the church meant persecuting Jesus Himself (Acts 9:4–5). How you treat the church –how you treat fellow believers– is how you are treating the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus Christ is exalted above all rule and authority and the Church is HIS; it is His Body. This should change how we relate to the church and it should drive us to want to know what He has defined the church to be and to do.

Questions for further thought and discussion:

- What might show a person's proper understanding of the church belonging to Christ and under His authority and what might show a deficient understanding?
- Is there a basis to say that something is wrong in how a church is structured or administered? If not, why not? If so, why and what would that basis be?
- How does the account of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11) further illustrate the intimate connection between the Church and the Lord Jesus Christ? What related applications might be made?