

The Universal Church

11-30-14 PM

In our series of lessons on the pattern of the church, we have seen that the church was purposefully designed with a repeatable pattern (on the local level). In many ways it is a pattern of priorities (I Corinthians 12:28, Ephesians 4:11) as well. Finally, we have discussed how the pattern of the church as a whole is dependant often on the mind and conduct of the members individually (1 Corinthians 12:12-28). Now we examine the structure of the universal church.

What is the Universal church? The term is not found in Scripture, but the idea is found, as well as many synonyms to that church. We will define it for our purposes as "the church of all believers". In Hebrews 12:22-28 this general assembly is called: the Kingdom; the Heavenly Jerusalem; (Spiritual) Mt Zion; all men made righteous. In general, in the Bible the Church is described as a Body, a Building, a City, and a Mountain. We will consider in particular the church as a body and as a building.

The Church as a Body (Colossians 1:24)

If the church is a body, then clearly the head is Christ Himself (Ephesians 5:23, Colossians 1:18). This means He has ALL authority (Matthew 28:18). What does the head do? He creates doctrine/law (II John 9); He makes all judgments (John 12:48).

Can the head be replaced? Obviously, the answer is no, but we need to know why it is no. First, it is because Jesus was uniquely qualified to be the head of a church. He died for the church, and purchased with his blood (Acts 20:28). He is uniquely qualified to serve as its mediator (High Priest) by the oath of God and His endless life (Hebrews 7:17-24). However, according to prophecy, those called the "Son of Perdition" will try to replace Him as head (II Thessalonians 2:3-7). This prophecy is fulfilled every time a church (denomination) appoints a head or oversight to human(s).

What then is the body? All saints are the body (1 Corinthians 12:27); all saved are the body (Luke 13:28). Thus the words of the Hebrew writer in telling us that it is the totality of the righteous. While this seems clear, some mistakenly believe that congregations (or even denominations) make up the body of Christ. This is simply not true; nowhere in the Bible is this stated. Instead, we are clearly told the body is individual believers

The Church as A Building (I Corinthians 3:9)

We see the church spoken of as a building with language about the foundation of the Church Christ, the Apostles & Prophets (Ephesians 2:20). However this speaks particularly to the idea that Christ is the sole foundation (I Corinthians 3:11), and that the Apostles are in Him in their works (Matthew 16:19 NASB)

CONCLUSION

How should we respond to this pattern? First, we need to confirm that we do not have permission to change it. Second, we do not have permission to be it; meaning, we cannot attempt to (as a church) activate or act as the universal church. This is the fundamental error of denominationalism as well as institutionalism.