

In Reponse to the “One True Church” as Asserted by Pope Benedict

Surprisingly I found myself agreeing with Pope Benedict’s recent statements concerning the church. (I am not Roman Catholic.) There is only one church ... I agree. The Orthodox churches are defective ... I agree. Other Christian denominations are not true churches ... I agree. But I would go one step further and observe that the Roman Catholic Church is also defective, and is not the one true church!

The one true church is invisible. It is simply the total collection of Believers in Christ Jesus around the world ... regardless of where, or even if, they attend a “visible church.” Some may decide to attend or be part of a “visible” church, but this is not necessary. There are many other ways to fellowship with other Believers outside of these man-made “church” settings.

The one true Church has no required creed, nor are there articles of religion or other regulations to which one must consent in order to join. Water baptism is not necessary ... membership of any kind is not necessary ... attendance is not necessary. These various requirements are part of the many man-made churches, and are often based on mis-interpretations of the Scriptures. But they are not required by God to become a part of His one true Church.

Long ago God spoke, Abraham believed, and this was counted by God as “righteousness.” Through the Bible and through His Son Jesus Christ, God has spoken. We who believe are “Believers” and are AUTOMATICALLY a part of the one true Church, also known as the Body of Christ. We do not believe because we are smarter than those who do not believe. Nor do we believe because we are more obedient. If this were the case we would have cause to boast in the fact that we have believed. God ENABLED us to believe, not because He loves us more than others, but because He illustrates His grace and love through us, and desires to use us to serve as His ambassadors to the world. We are the example of how God is working to ultimately save ALL of mankind.

It is not necessary for all Believers to agree on all points. God has spoken through His Word, and we sometimes have differing opinions as to what He is saying. We who believe should be working together to better understand what God has revealed. Our agenda should not be to make up our minds about an issue and then seek to justify our chosen set of doctrines from Bible texts. All man-made churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, are guilty of doing this. Disagree and you are expelled from the group, which is controlled by the hierarchy (i.e. bishops, ministers, professors, etc). The goal is not to seek a better understanding of what God has revealed. It is instead to enforce the doctrines already determined to be correct by the individual man-made church or denomination.

Here is the root problem. The Greek word in the New Testament that is commonly translated “church” is “ekklesia.” The word means “the called-out ones.” This is a group of people “called out” from humanity. But the group being called out is not always the same. Bible translators make the assumption that “ekklesia” is always the “church,” and this is why we run into problems with Bible interpretation.

Do you want proof? Look at Acts 19:32 where the “ekklesia” is an unruly mob. Here most translations agree that “church” would not be a proper translation, so they use a word like “assembly.” Or look at

Acts 19:39 where “ekklesia” is a legal assembly, and is not translated “church.” So clearly “ekklesia” is not always referring to the “Church.”

Now to go one step further, how do we know that the other times where the Bible translator has rendered “ekklesia” as “church” that they are correct? Could “ekklesia” in these various instances refer to DIFFERENT groups of called-out-ones?

Pope Benedict believes the “Church” was founded in Matthew 16:18 when Jesus said to Peter, “... on this rock will I be building My ekklesia...” But is this ekklesia really the “Church,” and is it right to require a succession from Peter for church leadership? Consider this. Throughout the entire book of Matthew, Jesus and His twelve apostles went only to the Israelites. Look at Matthew 10:5-6, Matthew 15:24 and Matthew 19:28. When Peter spoke in Acts 2:22 he addressed the Israelites. Look also at Acts 4:10 and Acts 11:19.

Think about this. There were twelve apostles, and only twelve ... just as there were twelve tribes in Israel. When one of the twelve departed (Judas) he was carefully replaced with just one replacement apostle, returning the number to twelve (see Acts 1:15-26). But then along came Paul who was also an apostle ... in ADDITION to the other twelve. How can this be? It is because Paul was ushering in a new thing that God was doing. In the past God had worked through Israel, and the twelve apostles were the apostles Jesus had selected to go to the “sheep of Israel.” The ekklesia (not yet the “church” of our day) was comprised of Jewish believers. It was not until Paul came along that God began working directly with the Gentiles.

Paul was not just one of the twelve apostles ... he was a different kind of apostle. He was the apostle to the nations! So why do the man-made churches of our day insist upon tracing their roots to Peter or the twelve? Paul did not simply learn doctrine from the twelve. What Paul proclaimed came through a revelation directly from God (Galatians 1:11-12). This was not the same gospel the twelve were proclaiming ... it was Paul’s gospel (Romans 2:16 and Romans 16:25). Whereas Peter was proclaiming, to the Israelite believers, the gospel of the Circumcision ... Paul was proclaiming to the nations the gospel of the Uncircumcision (Galatians 2:7). This was not the SAME gospel going to two different groups of people. Through Paul God had begun doing a new thing!

Paul was the first to speak of the Body of Christ ... of being new creations (not just born again). He was the first to go directly to the nations ... the non-Israelites. This was unheard of in Paul’s day, which is why he faced so much opposition.

Pope Benedict insists that the “church” must trace its succession through Peter. But the Body of Christ was not initiated by the words Jesus spoke to Peter in Matthew 16. Most “churches” today, including the Roman Catholic Church, improperly focus on the writings of Peter and the twelve, when in fact Paul was the apostle to the nations ... and Paul brought to us the gospel of the Uncircumcision. The church (ekklesia) Paul spoke of met in homes and was non-bureaucratic. There were no articles of religion. There was no membership. There was no required succession from Peter. This church had some who were leaders (elders) because God called them as such, but they were not appointed by bishops or popes. These leaders were simply those that had certain gifts from God that prepared them to serve a specific role such as preaching or teaching.

Some may dispute my conclusions, doubting that the huge majority of Believers within the visible church could be wrong in how they have formulated the doctrines and structure of the “church” in our

day. But read 2 Timothy, which is the last thing the apostle Paul wrote. Here you will find that he was largely abandoned by other Believers. He and those select few that followed him were a small minority. When did Believers who understood truth wise up to become the majority? Biblical truth has ALWAYS been understood only by the minority outside of the traditional religious community. Consider the Old Testament Prophets, or John the Baptist, or Jesus Himself. Consider Paul even as he concluded his apostolic career. The majority have always distorted truth. Beware of the majority (i.e. the traditional, man-made churches of our day). Study what God has revealed in His Word, and think for yourself!

There is a huge difference between the many visible man-made churches we see in every town and countryside ... and the one true Church that God has created. Let us not be deceived by those within any of the man-made churches.

- Bob Evely (7-18-07) -

+++

Bob Evely is a business man and an independent minister, teacher and writer. He and his wife Jill have five children (two married) and reside in Wilmore, Kentucky. Bob has an M.Div. degree from Asbury Theological Seminary. For 8-1/2 years he served as a bi-vocational pastor within the United Methodist and Free Methodist denominations before stepping down due to theological differences. He writes, teaches and leads a weekly small group in his home. More information can be obtained through his web site at www.GraceEvangel.org