

Misconceptions About the Church

1) As we look around us tonight at the religious world that surrounds us, what do we see?

a) *Do we see peace? Do we see faithfulness? Do we see unity? No. What we see is confusion. In fact, I think we would all agree that the primary feature of the religious landscape in the world today is confusion -- confusion about the nature of God, about the will of God, about the word of God, and about the church of God.*

b) *One of the most reassuring and comforting verses in the Bible to me is a verse that deals with this very subject of confusion, and it says simply that God is not the author of confusion.*

i) **1 Corinthians 14:33** For God is not *the author* of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.

ii) Who then is behind all of the religious confusion in the world today?

c) *Satan is the author of confusion.*

i) Satan has sown confusion in the church for 2000 years, and he delights in creating confusion about God's word and his church. He was twisting the word of God right from the start in the Old Testament (Genesis 3) and right from the start in the New Testament (Matthew 4), and he still twists it today.

ii) Revelation 12:9 says that Satan "deceiveth the whole world."

iii) In John 8:44, Jesus said that Satan is the father of lies and that there is no truth in him.

iv) Confusion is one of Satan's most effective tools. He would love nothing better than to bury the Lord's church in a sea of confusion. He wants the world to view the Lord's church as a needle in a haystack of needles, and the best way to do that is to fill the world with false churches, which is what he has done.

2) The Church is the Focus of Much of this Confusion

a) *A Google search on the word "church" yields 181 million results.*

b) *Is it any wonder that there is so much confusion and are so many misconceptions about the church?*

i) Satan has been busy for 2000 years creating that confusion and those misconceptions.

ii) We have a responsibility to fight back. We must shine the light of God's word through the confusing fog that surrounds us. If we do not, then who will?

c) *I want us to consider some common misconceptions about the church -- misconceptions about its nature and about its role in God's plan.*

3) Misconceptions about the nature of the church

a) **Misconception: "There are many different churches"**

i) **But how, you might ask, can that be a misconception when the word "churches" (plural) occurs 37 times in the New Testament? Indeed, Romans 16:16 says "The churches of Christ salute you."**

(1) The answer is one of terminology. Where we generally say "church" and "congregation," the New Testament generally says "body" and "church." The New Testament also uses "church" to refer to all the saved, as it does in Matthew 16. We also often use "church" in two ways: one to denote all the saved and another to denote a "congregation." In that latter sense there are as many "churches" as there are congregations of the Lord's body.

(2) There is nothing wrong with referring to the Katy congregation as the Katy church, but there is a danger -- and it is a danger that did not really exist back in the first century.

(a) There are nearly 6000 religious groups called "churches" within 50 miles of Houston. There was little chance of confusion with using the term "churches" to mean "congregations" in the first century because there were not at that time countless denominations also calling themselves churches. Today, unfortunately, there is a big possibility of confusion, and so we should be very careful that we do not add to that confusion by using these terms loosely.

(b) I try to remember to refer to the Katy congregation rather than to the Katy church. We at Katy are a congregation of the one church established in Acts 2 and that is the message we should send to the world -- particularly to a world that sees 6000 other groups called churches scattered around us.

ii) **The Bible tells us repeatedly that there is ONE BODY.**

(1) Romans 12:5 So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

(2) Ephesians 4:4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;

iii) **The Bible also tells us that the BODY is the CHURCH.**

(1) Colossians 1:18 And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

iv) **Thus, there is ONE BODY; the BODY is the CHURCH; and so there is ONE CHURCH.**

(1) This one church is the church Jesus promised to build in Matthew 16 and it is the one church that was established with power in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. There was one church in Acts 2 and there is one church today, and it is the same church. There is one church.

v) This is definitely not a popular message today. Why?

(1) **The world does not want to have just one of anything! The world**

loves to have many choices, because we lose control when we don't have any choices.

- (2) *An article in the religion section of the Houston Chronicle a few weeks ago was entitled "When just one church isn't enough." It was about teenagers who "are comfortable participating not only in multiple churches, but also occasionally in multiple faiths." But what is wrong with that if there are many churches and many paths to God?*
- (3) *God tells us there is one faith. Man says there are many. God tells us there is one way to him. Man says there are many. God tells us there is one church. Man says there are many.*
- (4) *There is one church. It may not be not be a popular message, but it is a message that we must never cease to proclaim.*

b) Misconception: "The name of our church is the Church of Christ"

- i) Wrong! There are really two misconceptions here -- one, that the church is our church, and two, that the name of the church is "Church of Christ."
- ii) We in the church need to watch how we talk about the church -- particularly around outsiders.
 - (1) *The church is not our church or my church or your church. The church is the Lord's church.*
 - (a) The phrase "our church" appears nowhere in the Bible and neither does the phrase "your church." The phrase "my church" appears one time -- in Matthew 16:18, where Jesus said "upon this rock I will build my church." The church is Jesus' church -- it is the church of Christ.
 - (2) *Why does it matter? The church is distinctive -- and our language needs to reflect that distinctiveness. The world wants to categorize and compartmentalize us -- we must not let them! We are Christians, and Christians only.*
 - (3) *We open doors when we refuse to be categorized --- people will notice our refusal to be categorized, and their curiosity will give us an opportunity to teach them about Jesus and about his church.*
 - (a) We are not Campbellites. We are not "Church of Christ's." We are not Catholics. We are not Protestants. We are Christians. That is what the disciples were called in Acts, and that is what we should be called today -- and what we should call ourselves.
 - (4) *But won't we appear arrogant if we act like our church is the one true church? Yes --- if we call it our church! But no, we won't appear arrogant at all if we refer to the church as it really is -- the Lord's church.*
 - (a) But "you members of the Church of Christ believe that only members of your church will be saved!" The best response to that charge is that it is not our church! Others may have their own church, but we do not. We are members of the Lord's church, and yes, we believe that only members of the Lord's church will be saved. Why? Because people

are added to the Lord's church by God when they are saved (Acts 2:47), and if they are not members of the Lord's church it is because they are not saved.

iii) The second misconception in that statement is that the name of the church is the "Church of Christ."

(1) ***That is not the name of the church at all! The "church of Christ" is its description --- not its name! That is why we often write "church" with a lower case "c." We are the church that belongs to Christ - the church of Christ.***

(a) I always use the lower case "c" when I write the "church of Christ" for at least one very simple reason -- it causes people to ask questions. I have had people call me to correct my "typo," which gives me a wonderful opportunity to tell them about the Lord's church.

(b) Colossians 4:6 Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.

(c) We are never going to reach anyone by blending in.

(2) ***A large, prominent denomination in town was raising money from community businesses to build a new building. They approached a business man who was a Christian, and he made them an offer. "I will give you \$1000 if you put up a sign in front saying 'This is a church of Christ.'" "We can't do that," they said, "this is a ___ church" (where the blank was filled in with the name of a local denomination). "Well," the Christian business man responded, "I'll still give you a \$1000 if you will put up a sign saying 'This is NOT a church of Christ.'"***

(3) ***There is one church and only one church. It is the church that Jesus built in Acts 2. It is the church of Christ. That is not its name, but its description. It is the Lord's church.***

c) ***Misconception: "The church is a man-made organization"***

i) Wrong! Daniel spoke about the church 600 years before it was established in Acts 2, and here is what he said:

(1) ***Daniel 2:44-45 And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. ⁴⁵ Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.***

ii) Notice verse 45 --- God tells us that this kingdom (his church) would be made "without hands." It would not be an earthly kingdom like the Babylonians, the Medes and Persians, the Greeks, or the Romans. It would be established and created by God. That church was established in Acts 2 - and it was NOT man-made.

iii) What about denominations? They are man-made. It is men who create

denominations; it is men who create their creeds; it is men who create their doctrines; it is men who create their hierarchy. No man-made denomination can claim to be the kingdom made without hands in Daniel 2:45.

iv) Acts 17:24-25 tells us that God does not dwell in temples made with hands and is not worshipped with men's hands.

d) Misconception: "The church is a building"

i) Wrong! I think we all understand that the church is not a building, but I wonder if an outsider listening to us would reach that same conclusion.

(1) Example: "I am going to church" "I am driving over to the church to pick up something." "Let's meet at the church." "My church is located on 5th Street."

(a) Some might argue that it's just a word and our choice of words is not really important. God disagrees. He communicates with us through words and we communicate with him through words. We would know absolutely nothing about the gospel if it weren't for words. The very first description we have of Jesus in the Gospel of John is that he is the Word. Words are important.

(b) We sometimes contribute to the confusion about the church by using *denominational language* to describe the Lord's church.

(i) *If we act like there are many churches, then why are we surprised when people don't understand that there is one church?*

(ii) *If we talk about "our church" and "your church" and "my church" rather than the Lord's church, then why are we surprised when people think that the church is man-made and that we can each have our own different church?*

(iii) *If we talk about the church as if it were just another denomination, then why are we surprised when the world sees us as just another denomination? We need to be careful about not using the word "church" casually, particularly in today's world when there is so much confusion about the church.*

(iv) *The church is distinctive, but it will not appear distinctive to the world unless we understand that it is distinctive and present it as distinctive. The very last thing we should ever want to do is blend into or worse become a part of the confusing denominational landscape that surrounds us.*

(v) *The best way to refute misconceptions about the church is to do all we can up front to prevent people outside of the church from forming misconceptions about the church.*

(2) Song #296 in our books includes the line, "We have come into His house and gathered in His name to worship Him." Is that correct? Is this building God's house? No! We have not come into the house of God to worship him. The house of God has come into this building to worship him!

(a) We in the church are the temple of the living God. (2 Corinthians 6:16) The church (not the church building!) is the household of God. (Ephesians 2:19) We do not come to church to worship God - the church comes to this building to worship God.

- (b) I know there is such a thing as poetic license, but I think some poets should have their licenses revoked -- particularly when their poetry directly contradicts the word of God.

e) Misconception: "Denominations are part of God's plan for the church"

- i) Wrong! Believe it or not, there are some who look at the denominational mess in the world today, and they teach that it was part of God's plan for the church all along! They often point to John 15:5 as support for this strange idea:

(1) John 15:5 ⁵ I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

(2) Are the branches denominations? Of course not! Read the language! "HE that abideth in me, and I in HIM" -- the branches are individual Christians!

- ii) Paul dealt with the emerging problem of denominationalism in his first Corinthian letter. That congregation was beginning to divide up along man-made lines, just as the denominations have done today, and here is what Paul told them:

(1) 1 Corinthians 1:11-13 ¹¹ For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. ¹² Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. ¹³ Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?

(2) Note that some were saying "I of Christ" along with "I of Apollos" and "I of Cephas." Paul is telling us that we can wear the name of Christ and still be a denomination. We must always be on our guard that we do not become a denomination - perhaps one named "The Church of Christ." Sadly I fear that some formerly faithful congregations have become just that.

(3) How could we tell if we were becoming a denomination? There are warning signs!

- (a) We would start speaking about the church as being "our church" rather than the Lord's church. We would have our church, and the group down the street would have their church.
- (b) We would cease to proclaim any differences between "our church" and the denominational groups that surround us. We might even swap pulpits with them. We would never suggest there was anything wrong with them.
- (c) We would carefully study our "religious heritage" to firmly position "our church" among the other man-made churches.
- (d) We would water down any doctrine that might make us appear distinctive. After all, we wouldn't want to appear arrogant -- as if "our church" alone possesses the truth.
- (e) If you had to list the top three or four things that are distinctive about the church as opposed to most of the denominations that surround us, what

would they be?

- (i) *The necessity of baptism for the remission of sins?*
- (ii) *Instrumental music as a departure from the New Testament pattern for worship?*
- (iii) *The role of women in church leadership?*
- (iv) *The non-denominational nature of the church?*
- (f) Now list the top three or four things that are most under attack by change agents in the church today. Is it just a coincidence that we come up with the same list in response to each question?
- (g) The doctrines under attack in the church today for attacked for a simple reason -- they are the very things that make us distinctive to the outside world. Satan wants us to blend in with the surrounding religious noise and confusion; he does not want us to appear distinctive in any way.
- (h) I get the distinct feeling that these change agents are not tied to a doctrinal stance so much as they are tied to an intense desire to make the church be the same as the denominations. For example, if the church accepted musical instruments in the worship service and the denominational world rejected them, then I imagine these same change agents would be fighting just as hard to get us to reject them as well!
- (i) 2 Corinthians 6:17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,

4) Misconceptions about the role of the church

a) **Misconception: "You should join the church of your choice"**

- i) Wrong! We don't join the church, God adds us to the church when we are saved -- and it is not to a church of our church, but to the one church of God's choice.
- ii) A recently published book is entitled "The Unauthorized Guide to Choosing a Church" by Carmen Berry.
 - (1) *The book has been called "kind of a Consumer Report on how to choose a church."*
 - (2) *Berry writes: "We've reached an age in American religion where the shopping mentality, the consumer mentality, means people choose what appeals to them. ... Some of the 'seeker churches' that benefit from this trend have discovered that they can be victims of the shopping-around, too. So they try to have more intense small groups or service activities to draw people in and keep them."*
- iii) David Libscomb once said the following about this cafeteria view of the church: "No church can ever permanently prosper until it conforms to the will of God. We present that will, and simply in God's name protest that all departures from that will, how much soever of present good they may promise, bring permanent and lasting evil to the church. Let us strive to do the will of God and leave results in his hands."
- iv) The church should be Christ driven -- not results driven or numbers driven. Our job is to plant and to water -- NOT to give the increase. (1 Corinthians 3:6-7)

- v) But if we just change what we do here in our worship service then maybe we can do a better job of reaching the lost. Right? Let's entertain them and make sure we never say anything that might seem intolerant or rigid. Then maybe we can do a better job of reaching the lost. Right? Wrong! If we are going to catch more fish, the first thing we should do is find a lake!

(1) *When we change what we do IN HERE to try and reach the lost who are OUT THERE then we have taken a major **WRONG TURN**. If we are having trouble reaching the lost, then we need to change what we do OUT THERE where the vast majority of the lost are to be found if we ever want to reach them and bring them to Jesus Christ!*

b) *Misconception: "The church is optional for a Christian. You can be a Christian without being a member of any church."*

- i) Wrong! The church consists of all Christians, and all Christians are in the church. In fact, we don't have any choice in the matter! God adds people to HIS church when they are saved. Thus, if you are saved then you are in his church. If you are not in his church, then you are lost. By definition, there are no saved people outside the Lord's church.

c) *Final Misconception: "You can be a Christian and be a member of any church. They are really all just the same!"*

- i) As we have seen, there is one church, and it is not man-made. It is not our church, it is the Lord's church. We do not join it or add people to it or vote people into it. Instead, God adds people to his church when they are saved. That church is not the Catholic church, it did not arise from the Reformation movement, and it did not arise from the Restoration movement. It is the church that Jesus promised to establish in Matthew 16 and that was established in Acts 2.
- ii) If you are a member of something else or something more or something less, then you are not serving God according to his plan or according to his will. He wants you to be a Christian and only a Christian, wearing only the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, who is the head and the savior of the church, his body.

5) Conclusion

a) Our prayer should be that we would see the church as God sees the church.

- i) We should see it as the eternal kingdom not made with human hands. (Daniel 2)
- ii) We should see it as the house of God to which all nations are drawn. (Isaiah 2)
- iii) We should see it as a temple constructed according to God's exacting pattern. (Ezekiel 40)
- iv) We should see it as the church that Jesus promised to build. (Matthew 16)
- v) We should see it as the beautiful bride of Christ. (Ephesians 5)

vi) We should see it as the city of the living God. (Hebrews 12)

vii) We should see it as the beautiful city of gold. (Revelation 21-22)

viii) We should see it as it is -- the beautiful, eternal, blood bought church of Christ.

b) If you are not part of that church, then why are you waiting?

i) If you believe and confess that Jesus is the Son of God, if you repent of your sins, and if you are baptized for the remission of your sins, then God will save you and add you to the Lord's church. Not to our church or to your church, but to the Lord's church -- to the church of Christ.

ii) If you want to be a Christian and only a Christian, then please come now.