

Is the church...Evil? **TOUGH QUESTIONS**

Pt. 2

People, Christians and otherwise, love to hate on the church. They say organized religion is corrupt and Christians are mean. If you listened to some Christians talk, you'd think that being part of church is the most miserable burden they carry. But I wonder if the picture we portray of ourselves is really true. Does God still have a place for organized religion? Last week we asked the tough question, "Is God evil?" Today I'd like to ask, "Is the Church Evil?"

What is the church? The Greek word for church, ἐκκλησία (ek-klay-see'-ah), means called out. The church can be described in two ways, 1) The church invisible, all individuals who have accepted God's call on their lives. These people are in every nation, culture, and denomination. They may or may not be part of the church visible. 2) The church visible, an organization of believers with an organized mission to reach the world with the good news of Jesus. People in this church may or may not be in the Church Invisible. The church visible has two main purposes:

1 Timothy 3:15—1) The pillar and ground of truth— The church is supposed to raise high, promote, and defend the truth. Notice that it does not say that the church is the pillar and sword of truth, it should use influence not governmental force. Churches are often accused of being intolerant and unfortunately, too many are. But the real problem is that the church has tolerated far too much compromise with the society around it. Society is changing the church rather than the church changing society. The church is not evil; our world is more evil because the church's influence has been lessened.

Hebrews 10:24-25—2) Place of Exhortation—We all need encouragement and companionship in our spiritual journey. If you're trying to go it alone following God, it'll be a lot more difficult. This passage emphasizes that this need increases, not diminishes as we get nearer the Second Coming.

The devil would love to have us believe that we are not making a positive influence. But contrary to what we so often hear, the church is making many positive changes in Christians lives and other's around them.

Does the church really need to be organized? **Ephesians 5:25-26**—Maybe you're saying, I'm a Christian, but it's between me and God, I don't need an organized church. Paul, Peter, John and Jesus all felt the organized church was so important that they sacrificed for it. They were willing to accept personal pain for church because the benefit was so worth it.

Titus 1:5—Throughout the book of Acts we find that wherever Paul went he established churches. Later he sent Timothy and Titus to appoint leaders and strengthen the church organization. In Acts 15 a doctrinal controversy arose in the church so they had a kind of General Conference to study the issue and when the Holy Spirit led them to an answer, they proclaimed it with unity.

Matthew 28:19-20—Why do we need an organized church? None of us could accomplish the work of evangelizing the whole world on our own. But when we band together in a well organized church, we can accomplish so much more. The church is not the purpose, it's the vehicle.

Is the church too corrupt? **Luke 21:1-4**—The church could not get much more corrupt than the one in Jesus day. The religious leaders were literally and actively trying to kill the Son of God! Yet Jesus praised a poor widow for giving to God through this corrupt church.

John 11:49-53—God can work even though weak and sinful people. While the High Priest, Caiaphas, was plotting to Kill Jesus, God used him to give a prophecy. These days there are many different denominations available, so we do not have to settle for one that is trying to kill God. But we can certainly find the one that is closest to the Bible and actively support it, even if there are a few scoundrels in there too. Maybe instead of expecting the Church to be a "Good-person" hall of fame, we should accept it for what it is—a support group for Christ-followers. After all, if you ever found a perfect church, you'd have to stay away or it would no longer be perfect.

When a professional athlete messes up during a big game, their fans often talk about how terrible that player is—yet the pro player is better at the sport than all the people condemning him/her, but they hold him to a higher standard. Similarly people condemn the church by saying things like, "Why are Christians so mean?" "Why does everyone in my church judge me?" "The church is just full of hypocrites." Or "Christians think they're better than everyone else." It's true that all churches have problems; but so does any organization that is made up of sinful human beings. You will find mean, judgmental, hypocritical, and stuck up people anywhere you go. It's just that it bothers people more in the church because Christians are judged at a higher standard. We're playing in the "Big Game" so to speak. Is the church evil? No, it's God's earthly method of counteracting evil. No wonder the devil wants to attack it!

Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21—The book of Revelation describes the church at several different stages throughout history. In each one there are problems but in each one, Jesus does not say to get out, but to overcome. Instead of condemning the spiritual athlete who makes an error, let's get ourselves in the game and make a difference!