

Why is Church Important?

If you were to ask people in the street, “Why is the church important?” you would probably get a wide range of answers. Some would laugh at the question, because for them the church is not important in any way. Others might see the church in the same category as museums: They both preserve things from the past. They’re a nice place to visit on rainy days, where you can observe how quaintly people used to live, but they’re out of touch with our modern world.

Young people might think of their naughty needs: Church choir and Youth brigade is where nice girls could be found in a group. Dating and love relationships are the only two things that come to their minds when they think of Church. Nothing more regarding its importance to the spiritual being; only the fulfillment of physical lust.

Others might couch their answer in political terms: They view the church as a powerful voting block to oppose the erosion of morality and to preserve the family. To them Church is a good place for canvassing. To them, Amen! Is the only response you’d get in Church without a challenge.

Or, some might respond to our question by saying that they see the church’s importance as a social institution. It helps meet the physical needs of the poor and the emotional needs of the lonely and distraught. It ministers to people at the pivotal times of life: birth, marriage, death, and times of crisis.

For many Africans, church is important because it meets many of their personal needs. It addresses their biggest challenge – Death. “I think Church is important because when I die it will run my burial service and when I have a birthday party I am sure my Church-mates will come. It simply gives me assurance.”

As we continue our man-on-the-street interviews, we come to a short, balding man with a beard, caring Bible and dressed nicely in a Black and White Suit with a badge engraved “Christian Men Ministry.” Somewhat hesitantly, we ask him, “Sir, we’re asking people the question, ‘Why is the church important?’ Would you care to comment?” We’re hardly prepared for his answer.

He says, “I believe the church of Jesus Christ is the most important force in the world today. Its task is more important than all the governments and universities of the world combined. There is nothing to compare with it!”

We reply, “That’s a pretty strong statement, sir! Why do you say that?” He responds, “Because the most significant event in human history was when the living God took on human flesh and lived among us as the Lord Jesus Christ to bear our sins. And since He ascended into heaven, His church now reveals Him on earth, even as He revealed God when He was on earth.” So,

The church is important because it reveals Christ, even as Christ reveals God in human flesh.

That is essentially what the Apostle Paul, is saying in 1 Timothy 3:14-16. The church is the continuing incarnation of God incarnate. The word “incarnate” comes from two Latin words meaning “in flesh.” It means that God took on a human body in the person of Jesus Christ. And since Jesus ascended into heaven, we now, as His body continue His presence on earth until He returns. Since the eternal destiny of every person on earth depends on his or her being rightly related to Jesus the coming King and Judge of all the earth, nothing could be more crucial than the church!

David Watson wrote, “It is the church that is willing to die to worldly standards that will know the power of Christ’s resurrection. It may be envied for its depths of loving relationships or for its spontaneous joy; it may be hated and persecuted for its revolutionary lifestyle exposing the hollow values and destructive selfishness of the society it seeks to serve; but it certainly cannot be ignored. When God reigns among His people, they become a city set on a hill and cannot be hid” (*I Believe in the Church* [Eerdmans], p. 61).

“THE CHURCH OF THE LIVING GOD”

Apostle Paul does not simply say, “the church of God,” but rather, “the church of the *living* God.” That is, the church is the place where the living God actually dwells and is at work. Just as the phrase “the household of God” focuses on our relationships with one another, so the phrase “the church of the living God” focuses on our relationship with God (Rom. 9:25-26). The word “church” means “called-out-ones.” We have been called out of this sinful world to be a holy people, set apart unto the living God who dwells within us and among us.

There’s a serious danger which both individuals and churches must guard against—institutional religion. It’s so easy to fall into routine Christianity, where you run through your programs and activities, but you don’t live in close touch with the living God. You even can have a personal quiet time, but not meet with God. You can go to church and go through the worship service, be a member of CYM, or Worship Team but you haven’t made contact with the living God.

One day several years ago the phone rang in the Sekhukhuneland URCSA Church Office, where the President the then President His Majesty Dr. Nelson Mandela was expected to pay a visit. An eager voice said, “Do you expect the President to be therethis Sunday?” The Secretary Madam Tease replied, “That I cannot promise. But we do expect God, and we fancy it will be incentive enough for a reasonably large attendance if the president could pitch.”

Not a bad answer! We need to expect the living God to meet with us, not someone else. The church is of vital importance in the world today because we are called out of this sinful world as a holy people, in close relationship with the living God who dwells in our midst. The world should sense that the living God is here.

May the good Lord bless you and reveal to you that you are the temple of the living God and thus you are expected to be an example at all times

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