

What Is the Church?

Excerpts from a sermon by Rev. Patrick A. Rose

What is the Church? As little children many of us may have thought of the church as being primarily a building, a place in which we worshiped the Lord. As our minds grew older, we came to believe that the church was the people who belong to it, a group who joined together in a common belief to worship of the Lord. Only in adulthood can we come to see that this idea is also limited. The church is more than the people who belong to it. It is the Lord alone who makes the church.

The Lord's presence and conjunction with people is the church, not the people themselves. It is vital to realize that the church does not belong to us, that it is the Lord's. For if a person feels that he has part ownership in the church, or that his relationship with the church is primarily so that it can serve him, he makes a tragic mistake. He appropriates to himself what is the Lord's. It is so easy to forget that the church really is the Lord's alone, yet, if the people of the church do not make the effort to recognize that the church is the Lord's, then the church with them will die.

The church transcends its people. This does not mean that they are to be uninvolved. Though it might at first seem contradictory, the Lord's church (which belongs to no person) has its specific existence only in the individual mind. A member of the church must himself *be* a church, or there would be no church in general. This is the very nature of the Lord's church or kingdom. ***The Lord alone builds His kingdom, but He builds it within human minds.***

The church is the Lord's presence, and though no person makes the Lord's presence, this presence exists specifically in the human mind alone. ***People who wish to be of the church must therefore be deeply involved.*** Not only must they dedicate time and energy to the Lord's work, but they must also offer their minds as dwelling-places in which the Lord can be present. They must make it possible for the Lord to establish His kingdom or church within their very thoughts and affections.

This may seem like a far and almost unreachable goal to us, with all our weaknesses and failings. Yet to regard the Lord's entrance into our minds as an almost impossible dream of the distant future is to ignore the reality that this can begin to happen now. ***Even now, we can make the effort to make room for the Lord in our minds and lives.*** Every day we can read the Word, so that our knowledge of the Lord may increase and so that our thoughts may regularly be turned toward spiritual things. And every day we can strive, little by little, to rid ourselves of impure thoughts and evil actions. As we do this, we are performing a use for the Lord's church.

Providing a spiritual dwelling-place for the Lord within our own minds requires dedication and effort. But it is by no means an impossible sacrifice. ***We lose nothing by rejecting the things of self and inviting the Lord into our minds.*** On the contrary, we receive countless, unimaginable heavenly blessings. The task of regeneration, which is what this is, is not as difficult as we might imagine. For in our temptations, the Lord fights for us.

The church is the Lord's. He governs it, and if He does not, then it is not truly the church. And if the Lord is to govern the church, then each individual must allow the Lord to govern him. Without this, the church, or the Lord's presence with humankind, will begin to fail. The church is indeed great, and it truly transcends individual men and women. ***It is not our church, but the Lord's. Yet, for its existence among us, the church depends upon those of us who will rise above ourselves to welcome the King of heaven into our minds and hearts.***