

What is the Church?

Introduction.

- A. Major divisions of the Church.
 - 1. Roman Catholic.
 - 2. Eastern Orthodox (1054).
 - 3. Protestantism (1517).
- B. Many sub-groups within these categories.
 - 1. Denominations.
 - 2. Cults.

I. Definition.

- A. Modern 20th Century view.
 - 1. A product of the culture.
 - 2. Look at the behavior of the people to determine the essence.
- B. Evangelical view.
 - 1. Must define it in terms of its history and essence.
 - 2. Its essence is outside of culture, rooted in God.
 - a. The body of believers.
 - b. The people called out by God.
 - c. Those who are “in Christ.”
 - d. A chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God. (1 Pe.2:9).
- C. Given the evangelical definition of the Church, why do we see such sordid behavior both historically and in the present?
 - 1. The Church is both a historical and an essential reality.
 - 2. Christianity does not romanticize the relationship between God and his people.
 - a. Christianity is God dealing with sinful people.
 - b. We should expect to find a history of contradiction.

II. The Church and culture.

- A. Different views.
 - 1. Separate from culture.
 - 2. In the culture.
 - 3. In the culture but not of it.
- B. Early years.
 - 1. Christianity and Judaism.
 - 2. Christianity and the Empire.

C. Cultural setting.

1. ANE: religion and culture inseparable (Egypt, Judaism).
2. Greece.
 - a. Humanism, abstract thought, philosophy.
 - b. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle.
 - c. Aristotle was Alexander's teacher – Greek thought spread throughout the Grecian empire.
3. Rome.
 - a. No great intellectual sophistication.
 - b. Dealt in concrete thought: military, architecture, roads, laws, politics.
 - c. Conquered Greece militarily but was conquered by Greece culturally.
 - d. Pax Romana – 500 years.
 - 1) Began with Augustus.
 - 2) Western empire lasted 500 years; Eastern an additional 1000 years.
 - e. The death of Christ combined the greatest legal and political system in history (Greco-Roman) with the greatest development of religion in history (Judaism) to commit the greatest crime in history.
4. Into this world came the Church (Gal. 4:4).

III. Approaches to church history.

- A. Liberal: the Church is the product of the culture.
 1. As long as the Church doesn't disturb the culture too much, it is free to do what it does.
 2. There is no sure knowledge of the spiritual.
 3. Most mainline denominations.
- B. Evangelical.
 1. Separates the cultural and the spiritual.
 2. Fundamentalism.
 - a. Focuses on the spiritual.
 - b. The culture is worldly and must be avoided.
 3. Evangelicalism: spirituality must be related to everyday life.

IV. Together we will watch "his story" unfold.

