

WHEN YOUR CHILDREN ASK: “WHAT IS THE CHURCH?”

Program #1031

Eddie Parrish & Mark Teske

EDDIE: How would you answer your child if he or she asked you about the church and what the Bible says about the church? That's our topic of conversation and Bible study today on *The Truth in Love*.

(Singing)

EDDIE: Welcome to *The Truth in Love*. We're glad to have you with us today as we open up God's word and study. We've been studying from a series of lessons that we've entitled “When Your Children Ask,” and looking at a number of fundamental questions that our children may ask us from time to time. Mark Teske is with me again today. I'm glad to have him on the program as we study another important question that our children may ask us.

MARK: One of the things we talked about before was the fact that ordinary situations in life give the opportunity for children to ask a lot of questions. A typical situation in life is that you can't drive too far down the street without seeing multiple church buildings. There are all kinds of different types of Christianity around in the world. Children would naturally ask, “Why are there so many churches? What's going on? What's the difference?” How would we answer that?

EDDIE: Well, you're right. It doesn't take a lot of lengthy observation to see the existence of many churches and religious bodies and many of them claiming to be Christian. And children, as well as adults, may ask that from time to time. It's interesting that there exists in our culture (and throughout the world), different religious bodies, and denominational churches, that all claim to follow the same Bible, and yet

there are so many differences between them. Differences in things such as: what they call themselves, their worship and how that worship is conducted, the way the church is organized and other things of that nature. And they all claim to be following the same Bible, yet they teach different things. Some of the things that are taught from one group to the next are diametrically opposed to one another.

Now, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that if one individual or one group says X is true, and another individual or group says, no, X is false, that both of them can't be right. So we've got to be able to wade through that. We've got to be able to look at the situation logically (with God's word as our guide) and reach only the conclusions that are warranted by the evidence, as I Thessalonians 5:21 would teach us. We have to decide whether or not some of the statements that we hear these days, for instance, "Attend the church of your choice" is actually what God would have us to do or not.

MARK: We hear that so much, "Attend the church of your choice." Even on the back of semi trucks driving down the road, we see bumper stickers that say we should attend the church of our choice. Isn't that the way we should go? Aren't all these different ways and different methods and different doctrines and different worship styles, designed just to give us more choice?

EDDIE: Well, I don't know what it's for, to be real honest with you. And I don't mean that in an unkind way. I think people like to have choice. They like to have diversity. But if the Bible doesn't teach that diversity or choice, then we really should not want any part of it. You hear things like, "The important thing is whether or not a person is affiliated with Christ and not with any particular group." That would be true if the Bible taught it. But what if the Bible teaches that it is important what group you belong to? I think we'll be able to show in the course of our lesson today that the Bible does address that, and the Bible doesn't teach that a person should not care about what religious body they are a part of.

MARK: As we talk about this, I know that a lot of people have some very strong feelings about where they attend and why they attend there. You're saying that we need to set aside all those feelings and all that tradition and history, and just look in the Bible for the answers to these questions?

EDDIE: Yes, it is. And if a person didn't have strong feelings about

where they attended or what religious group they were a part of, then you'd think something was wrong. People don't go, align and join themselves to a religious group if they don't think that it's a good thing to do. So naturally, people are going to feel strongly about those things. But it's important for us, on this issue and on any issue, for that matter, not to allow our feelings or rely on our feelings to be the final arbiter in matters like this. God's word has to be our sole and only authority on these matters. And God has spoken in His word about the church, about the nature of the church and the singularity of the church. And we'll look at some of those passages as we proceed.

But the concept that one church is just as good as another is a widely-held and widely-believed concept. And, I may not make a whole lot of friends by saying that the concept is an erroneous one, but I firmly believe that the Bible teaches that it is an erroneous concept, and I believe that I can prove that.

MARK: You have a lot of convincing to do today, Eddie, because it is a very emotionally-charged issue and very difficult for us all to put aside our emotions and just look at scripture. It's going to be challenging for us to do that today.

EDDIE: Yes, it is. And I don't want to seem in any way to be unkind or lack any sympathy or feeling toward people with whom I'm going to disagree today and who will disagree with me. I certainly don't enjoy controversy and things of that sort. But whether or not I enjoy or don't enjoy a particular thing is not the important thing. Again, we have to decide what the Bible says and then stand firmly on what the scriptures teach.

MARK: I know from my own personal experience, that there are good, devout, moral, loving people in all these different religious groups, people that I've come to know and love in different religious settings. There are two people that I respect and love very dearly, and their example is one that's good and moral, yet they go to places that teach very different things.

EDDIE: Yes, that's true. The same is true with me. I've got friends and family members that are a part of all different religious groups. And nobody would call into question their sincerity or their desire to do what's right. But again, sometimes people can be extremely sincere, as sincere as possible, and yet still be in error.

I think of Paul who, before he became a Christian, was very sincere in

what he believed and in what he was doing. And he was out killing Christians. He was sincere. He said in Acts 26:9, "I thought that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." That's what he thought, but he thought wrong. He was sincere, but he was sincerely wrong. And sometimes we find people that are in that situation today. They're very devout and very sincere in what they believe, but they've been deceived into believing something that in reality is not true.

MARK: So sincerity isn't the measure. We need to go back to the word of God. And again, we come back to that subject. That's a tough thing for us to do. How do we do that? Where do we find some things that help us understand the singular nature of the church?

EDDIE: The best place to start would be Matthew 16, in my opinion. In Matthew 16, Jesus is addressing His disciples, and He begins by asking them a question about what other people are saying about Him. "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" (Matthew 16:13) And they give Him answers, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." (Matthew 16:14). So people were talking about Him, and saying a lot of things. But then He turned the question on them and made it very personal, and He said, "Who do you say that I am?" And Peter, bless his heart, jumped right out there as he...

MARK: He always did that.

EDDIE: Many times. It was always feast or famine with Peter. But he got this one right. He said, "You are the Christ, the son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). And in response to that, Jesus said that He would build upon that bedrock statement that Peter made (the truthfulness of the fact that Jesus was the Son of God). He said, "Upon this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of hell," (King James version, and Hades in other translations) "will not prevail against it." Now, what we've got to ask ourselves is, how many churches did Jesus promise to build?

MARK: He said "My church."

EDDIE: "My church." Now, that's singular in our English translations. It's also singular in the Greek. Jesus didn't say, "I will build a multiplicity of churches" or "I will build many churches." He said, "I'll build my church." Now, that's singular. There are other passages as well, like from the book of Ephesians, that highlight and illustrate the singular nature of the church.

MARK: There in Ephesians ~ I think you're talking about Ephesians 4:4. Isn't that talking about the body?

EDDIE: Yes. "There is one body," (Ephesians 4:4). Now, if we allow Paul to be his own best commentator, in the very same book, just a couple of chapters previous in chapter 1 in verses 22 and 23, Paul identifies for us what the body is. He said concerning Jesus, "God gave Him to be the head over all things, to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that fills all in all."

MARK: So when we put that together, the one body of Ephesians 4 is one church by Paul's own definition.

EDDIE: Yes, by his own definition. If it's the case that there is one body, Ephesians 4:4, and Paul very clearly says that there is, and if it's also the case that the body is the church...

MARK: Yes.

EDDIE: ...then, again, it doesn't take the wisdom of Solomon to reach the right conclusion about the singular nature of the church. If the body is the church and there's only one body, then there's only one church that God has authorized, which fits perfectly with what Jesus said He'd do. "I'll build my," singular, "church."

MARK: Okay, Eddie, I understand you there. But isn't the nature of the church that one church can't handle everybody? I mean, we have to have a church here, a church there, a church somewhere else. You know, I can't go to a church in New York City because I don't live in New York City.

EDDIE: Right.

MARK: Then I have to have a church here.

EDDIE: Yes. You make a good and valid point. The Bible uses the term church in two different senses. There is that universal usage of the term church, or the body, that would encompass those who are Christians anywhere in the world. So when Jesus said, "I'll build my church," that's a singular body. Now, the church, members of that body, would and could and did even in Bible times meet in different places for their worship. So sometimes you find the word church being used not in a universal sense, but in a local sense, like when Paul wrote to the churches, plural, of Galatia (Galatians 1:1-2). They were different congregations of the one church that were in that region of Galatia.

Now, the difference is in the way the New Testament uses the word church in a local and a universal sense, and the difference in the way most people today think of churches in the plural sense. Because in the

Bible, you didn't have differences in doctrine and teaching like you do in the denominational usage of the word church today. We'll have a chart on that in just a few moments that will help to highlight and explain the difference between our usage of the word church, in our common vernacular, and the concept of the church that we find in the New Testament.

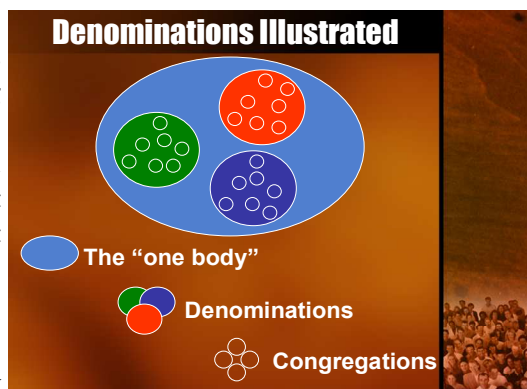
MARK: I've heard about the universal usage of the word church, and I've heard that to encompass all denominations and all groups. And there's the local sense, as well as the universal sense that includes all denominations and all groups. Isn't that the way the Bible lays it out for us?

EDDIE: In reality, the Bible never uses the word church in a denominational sense. In the denominational usage of the term, you find that different churches or denominations have differences in their worship, in their organization, and in their doctrine. But in the New Testament, you don't find that. With this chart, we'll be able to show what the differences are in the way that these terms are used. Now, with this chart, you can see that we're illustrating the denominational concept of the church.

MARK: Right. That's just what I was talking about, you have the universal church, and then you have the different denominations as different parts within that church.

EDDIE: Right. And you see the light blue representing the one body universal, then the green,

red and dark blue representing different denominations with their differences in doctrine, in organization, and in worship. You see the green, blue and red are all different from one another in the things that they teach, believe and practice. The smaller circles within the red, blue and green are different congregations that are a part of those different religious bodies. That's the way that the denominational concept of the church is employed in our language. But with the next chart, we'll see what the real and Biblical idea of the church is.



MARK: Wow. That looks a lot different than the first chart.

EDDIE: It is. These are individual, autonomous (which means self-governing) congregations that are united together in their teaching and in their practice. A denomination is by definition

something that is smaller than the universal church but larger than the individual autonomous congregation. The question we've got to answer is: Where is the concept of a denominational structure taught in the New Testament? I submit that it's not taught anywhere there.

MARK: Wow.

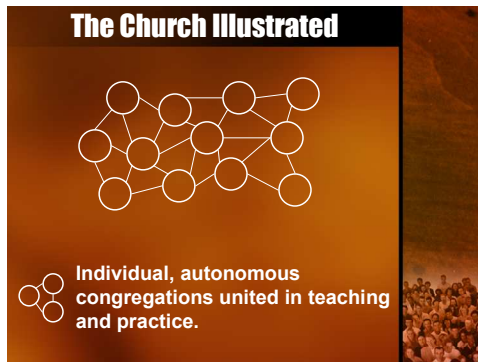
EDDIE: As we proceed now, we want to discuss the idea of there not being differences in teaching and doctrine the way God lays out the plan. You look at a passage like I Corinthians 1:10 and following, where Paul is talking about the kind of unity that needs to be seen in the lives of people that claim to be God's people, and that claim to be Christians. Paul said this to a church that was in the process of dividing up and becoming in a sense denominational. Remember, denomination means a division.

MARK: Yes.

EDDIE: They were being divided based upon different preachers, different personalities. But Paul's statement to them was, "I plead with you" (I Corinthians 1:10) "that you all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." Now, my question is, does that sound like the current structure of religion, the broad Christendom religion today with its denominational structures? Is everybody speaking the same thing today?

MARK: No. The different denominations are speaking different things. Everybody judges things differently, looks at things differently and interprets Scripture differently. So we have all these different churches as a result. And that doesn't sound like what we read here in I Corinthians chapter 1.

EDDIE: It's not. Sometimes people will say that it's impossible for all



people to understand the Bible alike. They say that if you're going to call upon people to be united in their doctrine and teaching, you're asking the impossible.

MARK: Eddie, let me ask you this. Was Paul just dealing with a problem that was specific to that church in Corinth? Because as we read through the Corinthian letters, we see more problems and troubles with that congregation. Could it be that it was just for them? Maybe they had just become too divided. Could it be that some division is allowable, but what they had done was to go overboard with the idea?

EDDIE: Well, you can't be divided and at odds with anything that God says you must adhere to and hold to. So, it doesn't matter if it's at Corinth or Rome or wherever. There are doctrines that we must hold fast to and not change or compromise. Now, some people will say that you're asking the impossible to have people teach the same thing. Was that what Paul was asking? Was Paul asking the impossible? Was he making it imperative upon these people to do something they couldn't do by saying, "I want you to speak the same thing?" Could they or couldn't they? I submit to you they could, or Paul would not have required them to do it. Could they be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment? Absolutely. He wouldn't have asked them to do it if it were otherwise. So, our plea, hopefully, is for everyone to be in agreement and to be unified, and to be brought together into the one body of Christ, as we obey the teachings of the New Testament. That's what our purpose needs to be.

MARK: So we all need to be unified. We all need to be together teaching and following the exact same thing. Everything from the word of God. Can we allow some differences to creep in?

EDDIE: Not differences in Bible teaching. There are some things that are expedients that can change from one place to another. For instance, we have a command in scripture for the church to assemble together. "Don't forsake the assembling of yourselves together" (Hebrews 10:25).

MARK: Yes.

EDDIE: But where a group of Christians assembles is an expedient. I don't have to agree with you if you say that we should assemble in a tent somewhere. Fine. If I want to assemble with the church in another location, that's fine, too. That's an expedient. So we don't have to agree on matters of expedience. But on matters of doctrine and teaching, we

must all speak the same thing.

MARK: So it doesn't matter where we meet, because scripture isn't specific about that. But the fact that we meet, that's where we need to put our emphasis?

EDDIE: That's it.

MARK: Okay.

EDDIE: The idea of being unified in teaching is something that is illustrated, not only in what Paul said in I Corinthians 1, but in several other places where Paul drew the reader's attention to the things that he taught. In I Corinthians 4:17 he said to the church at Corinth, I'm going to send Timothy to you, "and Timothy will remind you of my ways in Christ as I teach everywhere in every church."

MARK: That teaching is the same not just in one location, but through all the locations?

EDDIE: That's right. What Paul taught Corinth, he taught Galatia. He even said that to the church at Corinth in chapter 16 of I Corinthians. "As I gave instruction to Galatia, so give I instruction to you."

MARK: That teaching is the same throughout. And because of that same teaching, the doctrine will be the same throughout. There may be some differences, but those are in things that are not commanded. The way that we put these commands in practice can be different. But the doctrine, what he taught, needs to be the same.

EDDIE: That's right. Paul said in I Corinthians 7:17, "So I ordain in all the churches." You have three different places in the book of I Corinthians where Paul talked about the need to speak the same thing. "Be united together in doctrine, this is what I teach everywhere in every church, this is what I as an inspired apostle ordained in all the churches." The question we have to address in our application of these passages to today is this, if Paul today were going around from religious group to religious group and preaching and speaking, would he be able to say the same thing, that this is what I teach everywhere in every church?

MARK: Well, not if different churches are contradicting another church.

EDDIE: Right. Now, let me quickly add this. I think if Paul were here, he'd preach the same thing no matter where he went. That's the

kind of man he was.

MARK: Yes.

EDDIE: But my point is, would he be able to get away with it? Or would he have to, for the sake of example, teach sprinkling as baptism in one religious group in order to be pleasing to them, and then preach immersion in another place, infant baptism in one place, adult baptism in another, worship with mechanical instruments in one place, worship without mechanical instruments in another place. You see, the structure of religion today is not what it was in the first century. Paul could go to any congregation of the Lord's church in the first century, and he could preach and teach the same thing in each of those because the doctrine was pure and the church was not contaminated and polluted by denominationalism like it is today.

MARK: Eddie, how do we get back to that pure church that you're talking about? I think that in theory, it's a great thing. How do we get there? How do we get to it?

EDDIE: We have to go back to the Bible. We have to do what Paul said to do in I Corinthians 1:10, to speak the same thing. Let the Bible be our only authority. I'm not the authority. There's no reason for anybody to take what I say as doctrine simply because I said it. We've got to go back to the Book, go back to the Bible, and let the Bible be our only authority. That's the only way to do it.

We want to thank you for being with us today. I think our discussion was lively and profitable. But I want to emphasize again what I said earlier. I know that some of what we've said today is not going to be popular with many of you that are watching. It's not our intention, either one of us, to make anybody angry or upset. But if we can stimulate all of us, you and ourselves included, to be better students of the Bible, then that's what we want. We want simply to do only what God has authorized. And the Bible is clear. Jesus said, "I'll build my church," singular. He has but one body (Ephesians 4:4) and that body is the church (Ephesians 1:22-23). It's our plea and desire to see everybody in the entire world a part of that one body, the church.

If you'd like to have a copy of this lesson today, then contact us at P.O. Box 865, Hurst, Texas, 76053.

We'll be glad to send you a copy of the lesson in audiocassette format or CD or a DVD, if you'll just let us know which one of those you want.

We also have an email address if you'd like to use that, Requests@TheTruthInLove.com, or look at our website, TheTruthInLove.com, and you can contact us through that if you desire.

Mark, thank you for being here again this week on our program, and we thank you for watching as well. We invite you to come back and be with us again the next time when we present *The Truth in Love*.

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