

D. WE Believe in the Church

Scripture: Matthew 16:13-20, etc.

1. Introductory Note:

We identify the church as a "called out company." When saying we "believe in the church" what we mean is that we believe God is calling out a company to himself...a people for his honor and glory. This process he has worked on through the ages and when Christ says: "I will build my church" we believe he is informing us that he will continue this divinely appointed task until the group claimed by God is complete.

In this sense all believers are part of the church and Christ is telling us that he will continue to save men and bring them to himself until in a time at the Father's will all these purposes will be consummated and the age will close. We do not understand the phrase to describe an organization like the Roman church...or even like our own local fellowship. We believe God is calling a people and that calling is beyond our limited definitions of time and locale.

But in our basic Christian belief we do not stop with this larger definition. When we say we believe in the church we are also stating that we believe in a fellowship of persons for spiritual intention. And it is in this line we are thinking in this message. We believe in the church: 1) that God is gathering a body and 2) that the Lord has appointed individual bodies to meet and execute his will. This is often called the matter of the church visible as opposed to the church invisible. But whatever terms are used, the two functions are distinct. We believe in the gathering of Christians...as a group intended for God's glory in totality and through eternity, and as member units to carry out his will in this life. The latter gain their strength from the form. Together they comprise the church in heaven and on earth.