

2. Discussion:

a. We believe in the church as a gathering of believers.

This seems to be the best sense of Matthew 18:15-21, Acts 20 and 1 Corinthians 14. In all of these passages the company is "gathered". By gathering we mean the voluntary association of those persons to whom spiritual life is real. Now, in the invisible sense, believers in Christ are part of the heavenly company no matter where their feet may lead them on earth. But in the practical realm, those who are part of the heavenly company will find their best help and expression with others part of that company in the world as we know it. Hebrews 10 warns us against the failure to assemble ourselves and we find no realistic expression of the church when there are no believers present/

Of course we enjoy and are thankful for our buildings. But they are not the "church". At best they "house" the church occasionally. Hence when the people are gone the building loses its sanctity...it may someday be sold for a garage, a library or some similar purpose. But the church is the group of believers who come to that place. It should be obvious that those who believe it to be a gathering will find themselves in that number who gather. To believe in the church with any sense of conviction is to fellowship in the church.

b. We believe in the church as an expression of the truth.

Certainly the Lord implies this in Matthew 16 and in his presence with the company in Matthew 18. More emphatic Scriptures are in 1 Timothy 3:15, 2 Cor. 11:2 and 1 Corinthians 3. This is why (among other things) we are concerned with the lives of those in the fellowship. It is to be an expression of the truth but its character is seen in the lives of its people. If they are unholy, what does it say for the fellowship at large? And for the Lord?