

SOME THOUGHTS CONCERNING THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

by Robert J. Dunzweiler

What Is The Church?

In its broadest sense the Church may be defined as follows:

- the people of God of all ages, from Adam to the last person who will be savingly united to Christ and the benefits of His redemption;
- all those saved by grace through faith on the ground of Christ's atoning work;
- all those whom God has foreknown, predestinated, called, justified, and sanctified;
- all those who have been born of God, who have become members of God's redemptive family, who are indwelt by the Spirit of God;
- the whole body of professing believers in God's salvation, manifested in local gatherings with their officers and ministers, and carrying out the functions of ministry of the Word, right administration of the ordinances, and proper exercise of discipline.

Is The Church an Exclusively New Testament Phenomenon?

The definitions given above apply to the saints of the Old Testament as well as those of the New Testament.

However, there are clear distinctions between the Old Testament body and the New Testament body of believers. In what do these distinctions lie?

Negatively

The distinction does not lie in the concept that New Testament believers are savingly united to Christ and the benefits of His redemption, whereas Old Testament believers were not.

The distinction does not lie in the concept that New Testament believers are saved by divine grace through faith on the basis of Christ's atonement, whereas Old Testament believers were saved by divine indebtedness on the basis of fulfillment of the Law.

The distinction does not lie in the concept that New Testament believers are foreknown, predestinated, called, justified, and glorified, whereas Old Testament believers were not.

The distinction does not lie in the concept that New Testament believers are born of God, members of God's family, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, whereas Old Testament believers were not.

The distinction does not lie in the concept that the New Testament body is made up only of true believers, whereas the Old Testament body was made up of a mixture of unbelievers and believers. The New Testament body in its external expression is made up of professing believers (those merely professing) and those who are true believers, just as the Old Testament body in its external expression was made up of professing believers and those who were true believers.

The distinction does not lie in the concept that the New Testament body in its external expression has officers and ministers, and carries out the functions of the preaching of the Word, the administration of the ordinances, and the exercise of responsible discipline, whereas the Old Testament body in its external expression did not.

Then where do the distinctions between the Old Testament body and the New Testament body lie? In what do these distinctions consist?