

The Church Was Not an Afterthought

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Many anti-Scriptural concepts of the church exist (e.g., denominationalism, that one can serve Jesus apart from His church [*Jesus, yes – the church, no*], that the church's principal work is to supply the physical and/or social needs of mankind, etc.).

Another egregious misconception depicts Jesus' church as a mere afterthought in the mind of God. This error is part of the premillennial theological system. It alleges that Jesus will return before (thus *pre*) He establishes an earthly kingdom that will exist for 1,000 years (thus *millennial*). Premillennialists argue that Jesus intended to establish an earthly kingdom at His first advent, but His fellow Jews prevented Him from doing so by rejecting and crucifying Him.

Amazingly, they say that God did not expect this rejection, and in scrambling for a back-up plan for this emergency, He came up with the church to suffice until Christ could return and establish His kingdom. This doctrine makes of the church a mere afterthought to God, a substitute for the kingdom of the prophets. This concept denies at least the following:

- **God's omniscience and foreknowledge:** If God was "surprised" by Jesus' rejection, He is hardly omniscient and foreknowing as the Bible consistently declares Him to be. No, God was not surprised; He had Isaiah prophesy seven centuries before Jesus' birth that He would be "despised and rejected" (53:3).
- **Jesus' veracity:** He repeatedly told the apostles that the Jewish leaders would crucify Him (Luke 9:22. et al.). Yet He stated forcefully that His **kingdom** would be established in the lifetime of His contemporaries (Mark. 9:1). Did He fail?
- **The kingdom's nature:** When John and Jesus came preaching, "the kingdom of heaven is at hand," the Jews inferred a glorious and powerful earthly kingdom, such as David's and Solomon's. The people sought to force such a crown upon Jesus, but He refused it (John 6:15). He plainly told Pontius Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world" (18:36).
- **The kingdom-church identity:** When Jesus promised to build His church, He immediately called it "the kingdom of heaven" (Mat. 16:18-19; cf. Heb. 12:23, 28). The kingdom existed in the first century (Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:9). The church is no **substitute** for the kingdom – it **is** the spiritual kingdom of Christ on earth, which He came to build, and over which He **now** reigns.
- **God's eternal purpose:** Paul stated that the church is part of God's "eternal purpose" through His Son (Eph. 3:10-11).

Those who aver that the church is some secondary, spur-of-the-moment entity err grievously, fundamentally – and fatally.

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