

What Church In My House?

Are you trying to say that you didn't know you had one? Well, Philemon has one! Paul says so right in his letter to Phil, at the end of verse 2...."and to the church in thy house:". OK? So why don't you think you have one? Maybe that's why things around the ole homestead aren't quite as pleasant as they might be. It's difficult to get or keep things running as they should when nobody realizes their position or responsibilities within that framework.

To begin with let's understand the meanings of some of the terms and see where that takes us. The word translated as 'church' in that verse is **ekklesia** (ek-klay-see'-ah), a Greek word that Strong's Greek Dictionary defines as " a calling out, i.e. (concretely) a popular meeting, especially a religious congregation (Jewish synagogue, or Christian community of members on earth or saints in heaven or both):--assembly, church." and Thayer's Greek Definitions adds a little clarity to it saying in part: "those who anywhere, in a city, village, constitute such a company and are united into one". The important concept common in both definitions indicates a unified group, separate from the whole. It's a little cold sounding, but still a functionally acceptable definition for a family or household, or church.

Thayer's also adds an interesting wrinkle in defining **oikos** (oy'-kos), the word translated as house. Not only does it give the more traditional meaning of a physical structure or dwelling, but it goes on as follows: "(2) the inmates of a house, all the persons forming one family, a household; 2a) the family of God, of the Christian Church, of the church of the Old and New Testaments"

Assuming that we are indeed talking about a Christian household, what we have is a small group of people separated twice from the general populace. The initial parting is the 'ekklesia' separating Christians from 'the world' or unbelievers as stated in 2Co 6:17 "Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord,..." (ASV). When you got married, you again separated yourselves by creating a family unit or household. Ephesians 5:31 "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; ..." (ASV) If you discount size or numbers, a church and a family aren't all that different in their make up. You're looking a little skeptical. Let me show you what I mean.

In all cases God is the ultimate head, since he set up all of creation to begin with. Next in line is Jesus and he's the Master Pastor or head shepherd over the entire world. We're all to try to emulate him in our continuing renewal and transformative processes. Romans 12:2 "And be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, and ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (ASV). Now we get to the church level with Pastors of varying degrees, such as bishops who pastor other pastors in their area, who in turn tend to their flocks in the local congregations or churches. And that includes you and I and our respective households. The only thing that has changed is the size of the flock or household. The basic responsibilities or duties are the same at all levels. What are those duties? I'm glad you asked!!

First and foremost I believe a good Pastor walks the talk! He must first live and do all that he is believing and teaching to the best of his ability. I'm not saying perfection is required, only honesty, humility, genuine persistence and a decent amount of success. It's rather difficult to believe that smoking isn't good for you when the lecturer is puffing on one - know what I mean!?! From there we find ourselves right back to the paragraph above - striving to be Christ-like. There is only one single quality I don't remember being attributed to Him that is absolutely essential for Pastors and everyone else to have too... ready... the ability to say "I don't know" when the situation warrants it. Our connection with the Father is not yet as perfected as the Lord's was, so from time to time there is a gap in our own knowledge or experiential base.

Believe it or not - ignorance is not a sin!! It is merely a lack of knowledge of a specific topic, and is easily overcome with a bit of education. Stupidity however is an entirely different matter. Stupid means you have the knowledge, but actively choose to turn from it and proceed in a contrary manner.

At any given moment you are faced with a stream of choices from differing directions, so what do you do?

The quick easy answer is 'be Christ-like', but what does that really mean for the type lives we lead today? Christ never had car payments, a mortgage, squalling little kids, dinner boiling over, the dog lifting his leg on the new couch, etc., etc. a thousand times over! All that is so very true, but the Lord DOES have something that still applies to the here and now - character!

I believe that the most important character traits Christ demonstrated are:

- humility - even though he really was 'all that', he never put himself forward as such
- selflessness - he was a servant before all else
- edifying or exhortatory - he strove to build up those around him by his example, his teachings, and his continued encouragement and support for their efforts
- patience - although he did express a little frustration with his disciples toward the end, he was never denigrating, or belittling, or demeaning, or abusive toward anyone... except maybe the Pharisees when they were trying to entrap him
- awareness - he knew what/who he was and what boundaries he had and stayed within them; he also knew the limitations of each of his disciples and didn't push them beyond so they'd fail, he helped them build on and expand them in success

So gentlemen, if we can incorporate these concepts into ourselves first and then turn around and use them when ministering to our households, changes aren't far off. As you become a more thoughtful and considerate leader, your whole household will change in a similar manner. Interpersonal strife will diminish and cooperation will increase. Even God, who can speak things into and out of existence, wants to be involved and mutually solve problems. In the first part of Isaiah 1:18 "Come now, and let us reason together, saith Jehovah:..." (ASV). He is trying to get Judah back in line and is willing to go over things and get things straightened out. I would think that if the Almighty is willing to take time to mutually resolve things, it might be a worthy plan for husbands and leaders too.

This doesn't mean you turn into mush or can't make decisions. Just the opposite is true. Firm leadership is always a good thing, but being totally unilateral in your decision making rarely is. In most any solution finding process there are parts that are required, and then there are areas that aren't necessarily required but only strongly wanted. Take for example the household budget. If the rent/mortgage, car payment, insurances, utilities and food take up 78% of the wages coming in, those are required to avoid unpleasant consequences. The other 22% of the income might have some negotiating room as to how it's used.

Just because you are drooling over that new 72" HDTV you spotted in an advertisement, and it will only cost 20.75% of the 22% leftover income for the next 4 years to pay for, doesn't mean you should just get it because you really really really really want it. Your wife may have a strong need to save a goodly portion to feel secure 'just in case', or one of the kids might need something and have been waiting for 'the right time' to bring it up, or any number of other scenarios that happen all the time. Unless you're genuinely involved and concerned for and with your household you'll never know these things and begin the slide back to being a despot. And that really isn't worth too much at all.

Ultimately, it's all up to you as head of the household. Are you willing to be a pastor to your home flock? Will you choose to follow God's tenets and precepts, and enact Jesus' mannerisms and character demonstrations? Or will you follow your own worldly counsel and risk a kind of personal Gomorrah-like fate at some point down the road? That's really the first choice every single time you need to make, or refuse to make, a decision for yourself or your family.....