



## Whose Church Is It, Anyway?

Who hasn't heard of a church identified by the name of a well-known pastor? For example, "I am a member of Pastor Smith's church" or "I visited Charles Spurgeon's church when I visited London." This identification is understood but, biblically speaking, is misleading and actually erroneous. Not realizing this error, those who identify a "church" as a "possession" of a pastor are demeaning Jesus. The error of mistaken identity is evidenced by reviewing Matthew 16:13-18, the passage in which the word "church" is first mentioned in the New Testament:

Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock **I will build my church** [*emphasis added*], and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Jesus said the church is His possession, and He will build it. He accomplishes this, because He is the Head of the Church, as Colossians 1:18 proclaims:

And **he is the head of the body, the church** [*emphasis added*]. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

Jesus will not relinquish possession or position with regard to His church, whether the Church is defined as a global entity or simply as a group of 2-3 believers meeting together in His Name. In addition, because of His great love for His Church, Jesus cares for its members like a Good Shepherd, as John 10:11 states:

"I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep."

Jesus not only cares for His Church in this life, but He promised to return for its members so they can be with Him forever, as 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 explains:

For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

The next time you hear of a church that is identified by the name of a pastor, offer this alternative, "That pastor may teach there, but it is not his church. Jesus Christ founded it, cares for it, and will someday come back for it. That church is His."