

Whose Church Is She?

Brother Rick:

There is something that bothers me where I worship. Our preacher is always referring to the church as "our church." Should I be making such a big issue out of this?

Brother Richard:

I am not sure what you mean by your making "a big issue out of this." That is, I don't know if it is a "big issue" with you personally and you are keeping this matter to yourself or if your objection to your preacher's comments is leading you to be contentious among the brethren over this "issue". I agree with you that this matter is "a big issue" but I would counsel you to address this matter in such a way that would not divide or create unnecessary havoc in the congregation of which you are a member. Certainly, if you have not already done so, I would advise you to go to your preacher and share with him your concerns and if necessary discuss this concern with the elders.

The reason this is "a big issue" with you and, as I have already admitted, with me as well is because referring to a local congregation as "our church" is so obviously inaccurate and, at least linguistically, strips the ownership of the church from Christ. I would add that it is also always inaccurate to speak of the church as "my church" such as in the statement, "My church is a friendly church." I hear this kind of speech frequently within the body of Christ and I too cringe when I am subjected to it.

The church is not "mine," "ours," "yours," or "theirs." She is Christ's church and to suggest, even in carelessly chosen words, that she is someone else's is simply wrong. Let me answer your question in three ways.

First, and perhaps the clearest and most irrefutable reason for rejecting the idea that the church is "our" or "my" church is the statement of Jesus in *Matthew 16:18* in which He told Peter, "...on this rock I will build my church..." He did not state that He would build "a" church that would belong to "us." Of the more than one hundred appearances of the word "church" or "churches" in the New Testament, not once are either of these words used in a way that even suggests that she belongs to anyone but her builder, Jesus. The church to which we have been "*added*" (*Acts 2:47*) is His church and no one else has a right to claim ownership of her. Not even the Apostle Paul who established more congregations than any other person in the New Testament referred to the church as "his," "your," or "our." In *II Corinthians 11:28* he expressed his "*concern for all the* [not his] *churches.*"

Second, it is stated in *Acts 20:28* that the church was "*purchased with His own blood,*" referring to Christ, of course. Christ "*purchased*" or "*bought*" (*I Corinthians 6:20, 7:23*) the church, not your preacher or you or me. He, Christ, is the sole owner of the church. The church is His possession. To refer to the church as "our church" or "my church" minimizes the cost of her purchase, strips Jesus of His ownership of her, and

places her into our possession. If we did this with anything else in life we would be considered as a thief. (For example, "my" house is not "your" house. I own it. You do not.) Can you imagine standing before the judgment seat of Christ as a thief having attempted to rob the church from her rightful owner? It is horrifying to consider.

Third, consider the various terms used in the Word of God that refer to or describe the church and then substitute that term for the word "church." For example, the church is called a "*bride*" in *Revelation 18:23, 21:9, and 22:17*. She is the "*bride*" of Christ. If it is acceptable to refer to the church as "our" church or "my" church why would it not be acceptable to refer to her as "our" bride or "my" bride? Throughout the books of *I Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians* (and elsewhere) the church is also referred to as a "*body*." She is the "*body*" of Christ. Who would dare to claim that the church is "our" body or "my" body? Christ is referred to as the "*head*" of the church in *Ephesians 1:22 and 5:23* and *Colossians 1:18*. Is He the "head" of "our" body, collectively, or "my" body, individually? No, He is the "*head*" of *His* body, the church. The Word of God refers to the church as Christ's "*flock*." (See *Matthew 26:31, Luke 12:32, Acts 20:28-29, and I Peter 5:2-3*.) Who would think of addressing the assembly on Sunday morning by saying, "Welcome to 'our' flock" or "Welcome to 'my' flock," unless that person was ignorant of the Word? (And, this is, in fact, the case with many people who use the language to which you are objecting. In several places (too many to cite here) the church is referred to as a "*kingdom*." Of course, the church is the spiritual "*kingdom*" of God on earth

with Christ being her King. But if it is admissible to refer to the church as "our" church or "my" church, why would it not also be admissible to refer to her as "our" kingdom or "my" kingdom. Would that not make the person who believes such a preposterous thing the King? Do you not think this borders on blasphemy? The same is true of the word "*vineyard*" describing the church. (Again, the citations for this are too many to include here.) Whose "vineyard" is she? God's? Ours? Yours? Mine?

I am an absolute believer that Christians should be accurate or Biblical in their spiritual speech as much as possible. *II Timothy 1:13* says that Christians are to use "*sound words*" in reference to Biblical doctrine. The word from which "*sound*" is translated is the Greek word from which we derive our English word "hygiene." The idea is that Christian doctrine should be spoken with words that are spiritually pure or "healthy." "Our" church or "my" church is neither pure nor healthy but is diseased and corrupt. *I Peter 4:11* says that Christians are to "*speak as the oracles of God*," i.e., the utterances of God. Referring to the church of Christ as "our" or "my" church is not speaking "*as the oracles of God*."

It seems to me that one who refers to the church in the way you have described is not "sensitive" to the holy nature of the church and fails to understand Christ's absolute sovereignty over her. Speaking in this way does not enhance the edification of the body of Christ but, on the contrary, diminishes the strength of the church. This kind of speech suggests that the local congregation has the authority to do whatever she wishes to

do with or in the church. In my opinion, this is denominational thinking and ultimately leads to all sorts of error.

Finally, I would not divide or split the church over this issue, as distasteful and erroneous as it is. I would do what I could do in correcting those who speak in these terms. Perhaps you can even use my response to your question to help in this matter. But do not be surprised if you are told that you are making a mountain out of a mole hill or that you are splitting hairs over an issue that does not warrant such concern. Many in the body of Christ are very “sloppy” with their language in this and other matters. Once upon a time the so-called “Restoration Movement” had this slogan: “Bible names for Bible things.” That is a good principle to follow. But, alas!, the “movement” to restore the church of the first century has slowed to a crawl, if not to a complete halt, in most places. The language of Ashdod (*Nehemiah 13:24*) can be heard in most assemblies these days. I would encourage you to continue to *“test the spirits. Whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (I John 4:1)* – nay!, they have entered His church!

Thank you, brother, for your question. It certainly has reassured me that there are others who have some of the same concerns that I have for our Lord’s precious body, His church.
