

Volunteers or a Living Call?



Think about the meaning of the word “church”.

“Are you going to church today?”

“What time is church?”

“What kind of church do you belong to?”

“You mean you still go to church?”

In our culture the word church means a volunteer organization of people who believe in Jesus Christ to a greater or lesser degree.

They have a preacher or a priest.

They sing.

They worship.

They get together and eat.

Maybe they reach out into the community with acts of mercy.

But apart from the preacher who gets paid and perhaps a small staff, it’s all volunteer -- meaning you’re free to come when you want to and go when you want to.

Nobody can make you go to church.

Nobody can make you tithe your income.

Nobody can make you serve.

And if the preacher gets too high-handed, and starts putting pressure on you to do this or that, all you have to do is quit and go somewhere else. It’s all volunteer.

It’s a concept that everyone seems to accept these days whether you’re inside the church or outside looking in. But this vision of the church is totally foreign to what the word “church” means in the Bible.

When Jesus says, ***“On this rock I will build my church”***,

Or when Paul says, ***“To the church of God in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus”***...

They’re not talking about a bunch of people who volunteered.

**In the real church -- God’s church....
....there are no volunteers.**

In Christ's church you don't volunteer to be a member and you don't volunteer to serve.

**You are a member and you serve,
because you were called into this thing by God.**



God put his hand on you and said,

*“You're mine, and these people are your family for now.
Get in there and serve with them.”*

Or as Jesus puts it:

***“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you
that you should go and bear much fruit and that your fruit should abide;
so whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.
This I command you, to love one another.”***

John 15:16-17

That's the church.

Now, if you've been chosen and ordained by Christ himself, it's not as easy to back out when things don't suit or when your feelings get hurt. And if the King commands us to love one another, what choice do we have?

Andrew and Peter didn't know it yet, but that day when Andrew brought Peter to meet Jesus they were walking right into a trap. “So you're Simon, the son of John, I'm going to call you the Rock”, says Jesus. It was days, maybe weeks before they realized it, but Jesus put his call on those men that day. Their lives were not their own any more.

Paul didn't believe in a volunteer church either. Listen again to how he starts out his letter to the Corinthians:

***“Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes, to
the church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints
together with all those who in every place who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both
their Lord and ours...”*** (1 Corinthians 1:1-2)

Paul didn't volunteer to be a part of the Body of Christ. He was yanked into it. And those Corinthian believers, every one of them was called into it by the Spirit of God.

Here's the point – As long as any church thinks of itself and functions as a church of volunteers, it's not going to go very far. Even if it grows in numbers, as long as we're a bunch of volunteers, the Spirit of God has very little to work with. Before the Spirit of God can move with power, we have to see ourselves as a church on God's terms. To be the kind of church Jesus means when he says, "On this rock I will build my church"...A change has to take place both in our personal faith and in our life together as a body of believers. So that in our personal faith we are no longer volunteers for God but people who are living under a call from God.



We didn't choose Jesus to be Lord. He chose us to be his disciples.

And in our life together we have to see that we have come into the flock...

Not because we chose to come together

But because God chose to put us together.

We have to see this thing as a work of God that we've been called to fit into.

Not only that. Each one of us here has been called into a ministry.

You're not a volunteer.

You're a minister called by God.

You were brought here to be given strength for your ministry.



And your ministry and my ministry takes place, not in church, but out there.

In church....

We get renewed and empowered as we worship together, and pray together, and break bread together.

Out there....

We bring the power of Christ to bear on hurting lives.

We speak words of life from the mouth of God.

We bring back the lost.

We bind up the wounded ones.

We pray.

And we do these things not for pay or for ego satisfaction, But simply because this is our calling, our vocation.

Sometimes when you're at the supermarket you push the cart around and pick up what you need and you don't see a soul you know. Fine, get your groceries and go home. But sometimes you see someone who wants to talk. Sometimes a perfect stranger asks you where the "Jell-o" is, you tell them aisle 6 and silently pray a blessing over them after they head for aisle 6.

It's a ministry that goes on all the time....

in the neighborhood,
at work.
in Tim Horton's,
at your kitchen table.

You're God's servant.

You're under a call.

The concept of "a call" has commonly been reserved for preachers and missionaries.

"Frank was called to the ministry."

"After seven years of fighting it, Michael gave in to the call. He's entering the priesthood."

Whereas the only significant call that Frank got or Michael got was the call to follow Jesus and fit into his body on earth. Without that, "the ministry" or "the priesthood" is just another man-made career.

Of course, most of us start out as volunteers. Whether we volunteered to go to church or go to seminary. But there comes a point where our volunteer days come to an end.

We discover we have nothing to volunteer.

We've been taken over by the call of God.

When Peter came with Andrew that day to meet Jesus he thought he was volunteering to go along, *"Yeah, I'll come and get to meet the guy. I'll look him over and decide whether I want to find out more."*

But from the moment he met Jesus, Peter was no longer a volunteer. It took him a while to figure it out -- but he didn't belong to himself anymore.

And most of us didn't hear a voice in the middle of the night saying, "I'm Jesus, follow me." We didn't meet an angel downtown, "Go over there to Grace Church."



We began as volunteers -- we chose to come.

But then one day we woke up and realized that God had been at work in this process all along. This was his idea not ours. It begins to dawn on us as it dawned on Peter that we walked into a trap. And Jesus says to us,

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear much fruit and that your fruit should abide; so whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. This I command you, to love one another.”



The church is not Lutheran, or Baptist, or Catholic, or Pentecostal. And it's not volunteer.

It's followers of Jesus who know they have been called.

Their lives belong no longer to themselves, but to him.

They're out there serving.

They're out there praising God

They know that Jesus' command to love one another is not an option but a command.

God help us to see the difference between a church of volunteers

....and a church of the called.

God help us to be clear about who we are under his call and where we fit.



“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear much fruit and that your fruit should abide; so whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. This I command you, to love one another.”

Prayer: Yes Lord, help us to know with everything we have that you have called us. That we aren't just volunteers, church goers, and do-gooders. Help us to hear your sacred call, to be your devoted servants, to rise up to the appointment you have given us to bring your redemption to the hurting lives around us, to bring them healing, to love them and to love one another. Oh may we wake each morning knowing we belong to you and are ready to heed your calling in whatever form it takes.