

Should the Body of Christ be Legally Incorporated?

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This document examines the spiritual implications of the legal incorporation of a religious group.

By incorporating a church, there is limited protection from potential lawsuits. However, there is no guarantee of complete vindication for wrongdoing just because a church is incorporated, nor should this be the goal of incorporating a religious group. If a member has committed a crime, that individual should not expect to be protected from the consequences because he/she is a member of an incorporated religious group.

If a member of a religious organization is wrongly sued, that individual should know that God will provide a means of escape, one way or another, based on His promises to that effect (1Cor.10:13; Heb. 11:1 ff.; Jas. 1:2-8). Unfortunately, being a member of an incorporated church can create a false sense of security, which can be very harmful from a spiritual point of view because members can believe that their structure will deliver them from any adversity that may befall them, when in reality their trust for protection should be entirely upon God (2Cor. 1: 9-10; 1Tim. 4:10; Ps. 25:2; 31:6; 55:22-23; 56:3; 143:8-9).

By incorporating a church, there is a form of legitimacy in both the eyes of its members as well as those outside the group because it is recognized by the State, province, or country in which it is incorporated. However, scripture clearly shows that those who seek to serve God should want to be recognized by His son, Jesus Christ, and not any other person or entity (Jn. 5:39-44; 1Cor. 4:9-13). Therefore, Christ and he alone provides legitimacy to his church because he gave up his life in order to bring about its existence (Eph. 5:25-27). Christ did not require recognition from a government of this world in order to create his church, as he has preeminence over such things (Col. 1:16-18).

The act of incorporating a religious group places certain administrative protocols under the control of the State. All other day-to-day administrative decisions are under the control of its board of directors, who in turn are often its senior members, such as elders, deacons, or self-appointed apostles. It is common among Christian denominations to adopt the model of a Levitical priesthood in order to legitimize its hierarchical form of church government, even though the New Testament clearly shows this has changed from the first covenant system (Heb. 7:11-12; 1Pe. 2:5; 9-10; Acts 19:13-16). This hierarchical structure also removes individual responsibility for decision-making from the brethren, whether they have a vote or not, because they can easily be influenced and, hence, controlled by those in authority (Rev. 2:6, 15). In essence, the incorporated church transforms many individual believers into one legal entity through the act of incorporation under the State, rather than many members under Christ's direction, as one spiritual body (1Cor. 12:19 cf. 12:20-25). Therefore, church

incorporation is contrary to scripture.

In addition, the corporate structure allows the board of directors to act as the mediator between the members and the State, as well as the defacto mediator between church members and God when it comes to controlling church doctrine, and its approach to the word of God. This too is contrary to scripture (1Tim. 2:5; Heb. 12:22-24).

In essence, the incorporated structure acts to make God's holy spirit a respecter of persons (Ac. 10:34; Jas. 2:9), as it is perceived to work more effectively through the board of directors rather than the church laity in whom it also dwells (Rev. 2:6, 15). Therefore, God's spirit is quenched to a great degree through this structure because the brethren have been stripped of responsibility and participation in church affairs (1Thes. 5:19). Consequently, the church laity defer most decisions to the governing group in the structure and accept their authority over the collective church (Rev. 2:6, 15).

As a general rule, whoever controls the finances also controls the power in any organization. Therefore, based on the Levitical model mentioned earlier, many religious organizations claim this right to collect funds from their church members when, in fact, each member has the responsibility to collect, manage, and distribute their own finances as we see from many examples in the NT (Mt. 13:45-46; 26:9; Ac. 2:44-45; 5:1-10). Organizations that claim this Levitical right to collect and distribute monies are suspect based on scriptures regarding this subject.

Although it is often believed that church incorporation provides protection, when funds are centralized under an incorporated church structure, it can become a target for litigation because the potential for a greater award is more likely. If, on the other hand, members are responsible for managing their own finances, the target is much less attractive because, even though the cost of litigation would be comparable, the award would be considerably less in most circumstances. The responsibility to mediate conflict is an individual one, as outlined in scripture,

Be favorable to your opponent at law quickly, while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent at law does not deliver you to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and are thrown into prison (Mt. 5:25, RNT).

Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints? ² Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? ³ Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life? ⁴ So if you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church? ⁵ I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren, ⁶ but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers? ⁷ Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? ⁸ On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud. You do this even to your brethren (1Cor. 6:1-8, NASB).

Incorporating a religious group obstructs and impairs the spiritual development of its members by separating them from their God-given responsibilities, and their relationship with Christ, as their only leader, and places them under the control of a human structure.

Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears **My** voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with **Me** (Rev. 3:20, NASB, *emphasis added*).

This document is the collaborative work of individuals who believe God's truth should be given freely (Mt. 10:8; 1Cor. 2:12; 2Cor.11:7; Rom. 10:14-21) and the message of the one true God should be made available to all nations (Mt. 24:14) as a prerequisite to the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings (Mt. 17:10; 19:17; Mk. 9:11; Lk. 1:17; Rev. 19:11-16).

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