

509 What Is the Church?

God's Answers to Life's Questions

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When you mention "church," some people think of a building down the street. Others think of an institution with a headquarters and officials. Others think of the denomination they grew up attending. Most Americans think you can be a good Christian and not be a member of any church. We're asking, "What does the Bible say? What is the church?"

The English word "church" comes from the Greek term *ekklesia*, which refers to an assembly of people who have been called together for a reason. In ancient Greece, a herald would call the privileged citizens of that town to come together to discuss and vote on an important matter. The book of Acts records such a meeting in Acts 19:32. But the New Testament usually means more than merely an assembly when it speaks of the church. The church is more than merely a group of citizens coming to together to vote on some matter. The church is made up of God's people, called together as a family, to worship and to serve the Lord.

The church is pictured in Scripture as a household or **family**.

1 Tim. 3:15 but in case I am delayed, *I write* so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. Each member of the church is a child of God, precious to God. Gal. 3:26-27 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

The church is pictured in organization as a spiritual **kingdom**. Col. 1:13-14 "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." If the church is a kingdom, Jesus is the king; it is not a democracy.

The church is pictured as a **temple** in 1 Cor. 3:16, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you?" If the church is a temple, it is holy, set apart, sanctified for God's use.

The church is also pictured as an organism, a body with parts and Jesus as head. Rom. 12:4-5 "For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." Each member of Christ's body is important and has a place and function. Though we may differ in talents, we can still belong to the same body. Ephesians 4:4 points out that there is "one" body, that is "one" church in God's mind.

The church as the Bible describes it is *not* a collection of denominations with differing doctrines, practices, names, organizations, creeds, worship, and requirements for entrance. It is not interdenominational (uniting several all under one umbrella). It is not nondenominational (not aligned with any particular one but having members in several). The New Testament church is *UNdenominational*. The New Testament knows nothing of the whole concept of denominations. The church of the NT is before there ever was any denomination.

What Undenominational Christianity means:

If we were to see the first car, we wouldn't ask what kind it is; for there were no "brands" of car; there was just a car. The church of the New Testament was merely the church! It is absurd to ask what kind of church it was because there were no kinds; there was just the church! It was never the intention of Jesus that His church be broken up into many groups with different names, doctrines, practices, and organizations. The Bible, in fact, condemns the idea of sectarian names, division, and various doctrines.

Jesus said in John 17:20-21, "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me." Jesus wanted all of His followers to be one, to be united in following Him. Today there are more than 300 major denominations and many independent churches, each with their own doctrines, names and practices. No wonder Christianity is confusing to many people, and they don't believe or attend any church.

Paul said in 1 Cor. 1:10-15, "Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's *people*, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one would say you were baptized in my name." In just one congregation, the members started forming groups around prominent preachers. Some of Paul, some of Apollos, some of Cephas (Peter). Paul rebuked them. The only person around whom the church is to gather is Jesus Christ. Christ is the one who was crucified for us. We are baptized into His name. For Paul the idea that the church would be divided was appalling. To divide the church is to divide Christ himself. The church uniquely belongs to Christ. It does not belong to any man or any group of men. It belongs only to the Lord.

Jesus and the Church

Jesus is the one who built the church. Matt. 16:18 says, "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it."

Jesus is the one who purchased the church. Acts 20:28 "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

Jesus is the Head of the church. Eph. 1:22-23 says, "And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." (Bodies only have one head.)

Jesus is the Savior of and groom to the church. Eph. 5:23 says, "For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ

also is the head of the church, He Himself *being* the Savior of the body.” The church is the saved. Jesus loves his church as a groom loves his bride.

More than 80 percent of Americans think you can be a “good” Christian and not be a member of any church. But Jesus shed His blood to purchase the church, which He regards as His bride and His body. While the church may not seem important to many people, it is of utmost importance to Jesus Christ. Being a church member is being a member of the body of Christ; it is being one of the saved, being one of those Jesus purchased with His blood shed on the cross. If Jesus thought it was that important, so should we.

The Lord wants His people to follow Him and not follow man-made religion. He said in Matthew 7:24-27, “Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.”

Jesus said in Matthew 15:8-9, ‘This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me. ‘But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.’ Jesus spoke about the Pharisees and their man-made religion. He said in Matt. 15:13-14: “Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.” This means that every creed, every tradition, every practice that men bring into the church but not found in the New Testament will one day be uprooted by God. The Lord wants us to listen to Him and to practice and believe what He teaches, not what men teach. So we must ask ourselves: Are the teachings we believe or the things we practice from God or from men? If they are from God, we should continue them; but if they are from men, we ought to forsake them. Let’s do what we know God asks of us.

Jesus said, “If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” (John 8:31-32) True disciples go to the Word of Jesus to find out what He desires. They want to please Him and do His will. It just makes sense to be what Jesus wants us to be, if we are going to be His church.

We become members of the church today the same way they did it in the beginning at Pentecost. Peter preached a sermon that Jesus was Christ and Lord to the people in Jerusalem who were responsible for crucifying Him. Guilty, they cried out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Acts 2:38 Peter *said* to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

Added to what? Acts 2:47 “And the Lord was adding to their number [the church] day by day those who were being

saved.” In 2:41, the penitent people who were being baptized were added to the Lord. Here in 2:47 the saved are added. You see the purpose of their repentance and baptism was to forgive their sins, that is to save them. Baptism, then, is the time when a person is saved and added to the church. We hope and pray you will consider your life. If you have not been baptized, perhaps today is the day to be saved from sin and be added to the church.

I have attended church all of my adult life. When Jackie and I married more than thirty years ago and our children came along, church was such an important part of our lives. The Lord was so wise in building the church, because He knew His people would need each other. There is a value to people of like faith being together to keep each other strong. Heb. 10:24-25 “let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”

The dearest friends I’ve ever had were fellow members of the church. Jesus intended it that way. He designed His church to be a family who loves Him and each other. John 13:34-35 says, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” Churches are in the business of trying to help people and one another go to heaven. They teach and practice love and good works and good morals. They are the Lord’s people.

Prov. 27:17 Iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another. Church is the place to find people who take their faith, their souls, and their morals seriously. They are interested in being spiritually correct not politically correct. Of course, not every church member is perfect; but members have each other to help them fight against the moral, spiritual, and worldly challenges of our time. The Lord invites every person to be a member of His church. I pray that you will begin thinking of your life and your soul. Obey the Lord, so that He will add you too to His church.

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