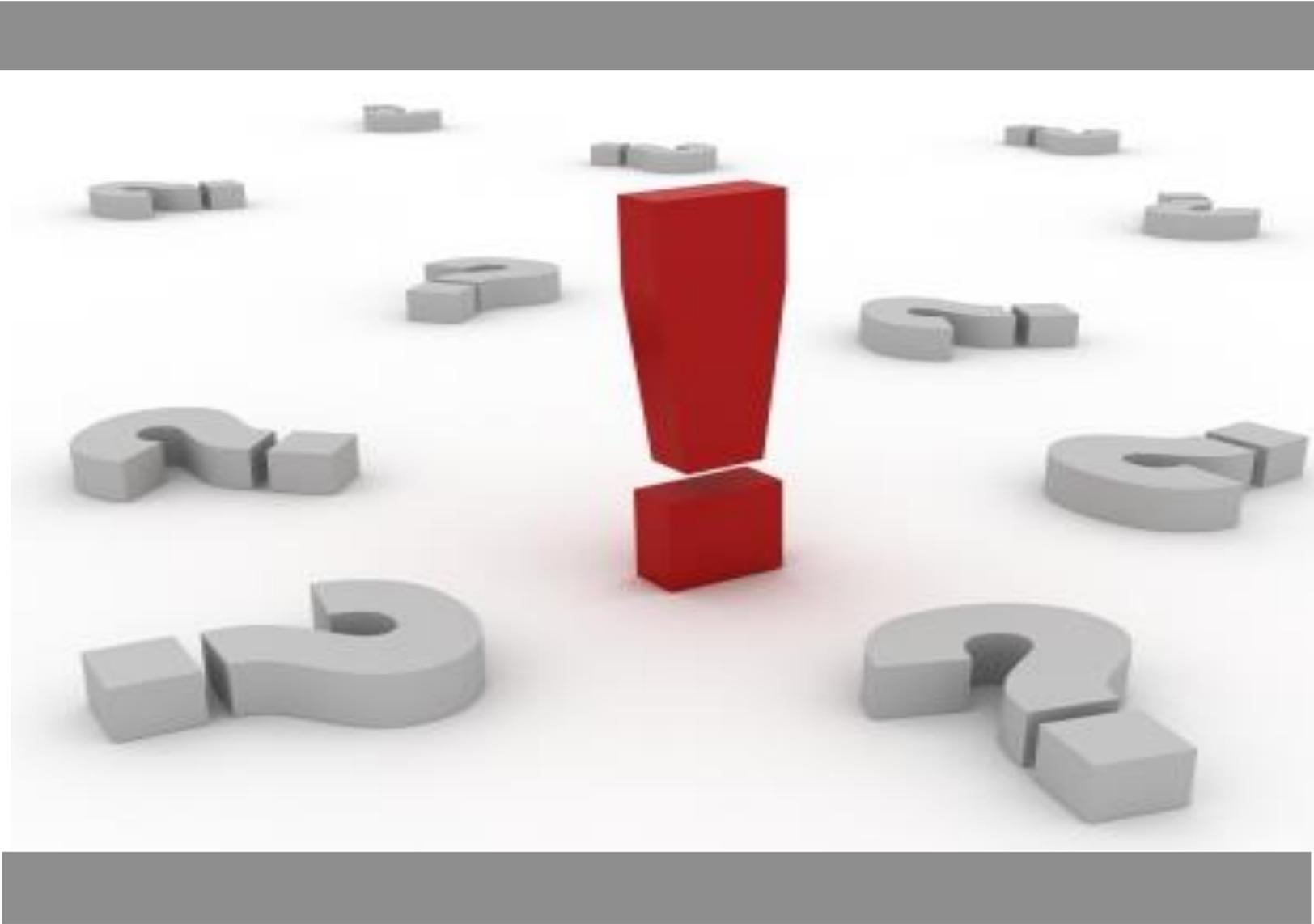


Answers To Life's Most Essential Questions

Lesson 7: What Is The Church?



Discovering God's Word

Bible Study Series

Answers To Life's Most Essential Questions

Lesson 7: What Is The Church?

Learn the true identification of Jesus' church and why it is important to be part of it

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Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series

Study Number: DGW50

Written by Eric Krieg

About the author: My name is Eric Krieg. I am a disciple of Jesus, a Bible student, a truth seeker, and an evangelist. My interest is in using the Bible as my only guide in my faith. My desire is to help others understand the message of the Bible and pursue true, New Testament Christianity.

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My plea: It is my hope and prayer that you are searching for the truth that is contained in God's word, the Bible. My desire is to help you understand and obey these truths God has revealed in the pages of His word. It is to that end that I write this material. Please observe all of the Scripture references and evaluate whether the conclusions I have drawn are in harmony with God's word. If they are, I ask that you make honest application of those truths to your life and obey God's instructions.

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Questions **Lesson 7:**

What Is The Church?

There are tens of thousands of different churches in the world today, all with different doctrinal beliefs and involved in different works. Typically, it is suggested that God approves of this kind of arrangement. Yet, we have to allow God's word to challenge our thinking on this point and see whether such an arrangement is according to the Bible and pleasing to God.

As we seek the answers to life's most essential questions, we must seek the right answer to the question: "What is the church?" Is it important to join a church? Does God approve of all the different churches that exist today? How do I know what church to join?

The Bible is clear in teaching that Jesus has only established one church. For instance, before the church was established, Jesus said, "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (Matthew 16:18). Based on the truth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, Jesus would build His *church* (singular) – not His *churches*. Then, when the church was established in Acts chapter 2, only one church was established. Whenever some of the people obeyed the command to repent and be baptized (as we saw in lesson six from Acts 2:38), they were "added to them" (Acts 2:41). Then, God continued adding the saved "to their number" (Acts 2:47; note that some Greek manuscripts say they

were added to the church). Regardless whether the word "church" appears in the text, that is clearly what they were added to. This was the *church* (singular) that had now been established by Jesus Christ. And, there was only one church in existence.

Since Jesus has only established one church, you must understand what is involved in being part of that church. Many people have been deceived into being part of churches that have been created by people rather than the one church established by Jesus Christ. However, you need to live as a member of Christ's church – and only Christ's church! Therefore, in this seventh lesson, we will seek the answer to the question, "What is the church?"

What The Church Is Not

Most people have heard of "church." And, because the word is commonly misused, you should recognize that it is quite possible that you have developed an incorrect view of the church. For, the reality is that there are many false views of the church today that are not at all supported by the Bible. Therefore, let's spend the first part of our study eliminating these false ideas from our minds so that we can build the right understanding of what the church is.

Many false views of the church

There are thousands of different churches in the world today. But, can they all be right in God's sight? There are Catholic churches, Baptist churches, Methodist churches, Pentecostal churches, Lutheran churches, Episcopal churches, "non-denominational" churches, etc. Each one of these different churches have different beliefs, teach different doctrines, and practice different forms of "Christianity." So, how can they all be right if they all teach and practice different things?

The simple truth is: Everyone can't be right! There is only one Way! In John 14:6, Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Then, in 1 Corinthians 1:13, Paul asked the rhetorical question, "Is Christ divided?" The obvious answer is "No!" So,

since Jesus Christ is the only way to the Father and Jesus Christ is not divided, how can it be okay for churches to be divided in their beliefs, teachings, and practices? How can they all be following the one Way of Jesus Christ? They simply cannot be! In fact, God commanded, “Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, that there be no divisions among you, and that you be united with the same understanding and the same conviction” (1 Corinthians 1:10).

Paul also wrote and said that there is only “one faith.” This is the faith of the gospel (Philippians 1:27), meaning that there is only one system of religious belief, teaching, and practice that is acceptable to God. Notice the language in Ephesians 4:4-6: “There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope at your calling – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.” So, since there is only one system of acceptable religious belief, teaching, and practice, God simply cannot approve of the religious division that exists in the world today.

In addition to there being only “one faith,” also notice that Paul says there is only “one body.” Other passages help us understand that the body is the church (see Ephesians 1:22-23 and Colossians 1:18). So, there is only one church. This is precisely the number of churches Jesus promised to build and actually built (as we saw from Matthew 16:18 and Acts 2:41, 47).

Yet, despite the fact that God has only established one church and provided only one faith, many people have introduced false ideas as to what the church is and have greatly distorted the church in the process, making it become something God never intended for it to become! Let’s briefly discuss some of these false ideas about the church.

An earthly organization

Some people view the church as being nothing more than an earthly organization. Just like many who lived during Jesus’ lifetime were looking for Jesus to establish an earthly kingdom, many people today have not improved in their concept of

this kingdom (church). People often still see the church only through a physical lens – making it into nothing more than an earthly organization that accomplishes physical work to make this world a better place. However, the Bible never teaches that the church Christ established is an earthly organization!

Consider some characteristics of an earthly organization – as churches today often have been made to resemble these. (1) They have hierarchical systems that have put some people above others. In these systems, there is often a division made between the “clergy” (or, spiritual professionals) and “laity” (“common” Christians). And, those in the greatest positions of authority make changes to the rules and regulations. In business, this is good and proper. However, regarding the church, there must not be central governing bodies, counsels, or human heads of any kind (like the Pope) who make “policies” regarding the doctrines of the church! The Bible is the church’s only guide and Christ is the church’s only Head! (2) They have business-oriented goals. Businesses *should* think about customers and finances. However, churches cannot be driven by financial ramifications or be engaged in “people pleasing.” Both will lead to a distortion of God’s plan! Instead, the church must be concerned about souls! (3) They focus on fundraising. As businesses and secular organizations seek to increase their “bottom lines” they will try to do as much as they can to accomplish this. The church that is viewed as an earthly organization will also likely be engaged in fundraising activities that are unauthorized by the Scriptures (i.e. bake sales, rummage sales, etc.).

A social club

Some people view the church as being a social club. This may be due to the misguided views many people have about the subject of fellowship. To many, fellowship is primarily concerned with physical things. While fellowship between Christians is certainly important, the fellowship discussed in the Bible is a spiritual fellowship that is based on a mutual relationship with God (see 1 John 1:7). Then, due to this spiritual fellowship, Christians should want to be close to each other on a physical level. However, it is not the role of the church to

provide for and organize such social gatherings/events – as there is *no authority* in the Bible for such as the work of the church!

Consider some characteristics of the church that views itself as a social club. (1) It will often have assemblies that “water down” God’s word (since the primary focus often becomes physical socialization rather than spiritual instruction and encouragement). (2) It will often be involved in putting on plays, field trips, singles’ nights, movie nights, athletic leagues, and other entertaining activities. (3) It will often build, maintain, and use gymnasiums, kitchens, and theaters for social and recreational activities.

A political machine

Some churches have stopped speaking God’s word and have exchanged it for the “social gospel.” They begin focusing on social issues and reforms. So, they become political activists. Now, please understand that individuals *do* have the opportunity to be involved in politics and social issues. But, this is not the God-given role of the church (except as it may influence individuals and societies through the teaching of God’s word)!

Consider some characteristics of the church that views itself as a political machine. (1) They often stop preaching God’s word. (2) They will often present “sermons” that are focused on “culturally-relevant” matters. (3) They will often present “sermons” concerned with being “politically correct” (i.e. no longer speaking out against homosexuality, abortion, divorce for any cause, women preachers/elders/deacons, etc.).

A building where religious people meet together

Some people act and talk as if the church is nothing more than a building where religious people come together. However, when Saul was persecuting the church (see Acts 8:1-3), what was he doing? Was he destroying a physical structure by using demolition tools and setting fires to buildings? Or, was he harming the people who belonged to Jesus Christ? The answer is obvious that the church was *not* a physical structure! Yet, many people today talk

of “going to church” as if the church is a physical place.

Consider some characteristics of a church that becomes nothing but a meeting place. (1) Members of that “church” will probably view their responsibilities lightly (if they recognize any responsibilities at all). And, this is only reasonable. After all, if you are someone who “attends church,” it carries far less responsibility than being part of the church! (2) Members who have this view of the church will be less likely to become involved in one another’s lives. They will only view each another as attending the same church (building) every once in a while. They will not be devoted to helping one another live in the way God wants His people to be living. (3) It often develops the “see you next week” mentality. This mentality is demonstrated when people gather together “at church,” leave “church” (the building), and have minimal contact or interaction with one another until the next “meeting.”

Christ

Some people view the church as possessing the role that only belongs to Christ. So, some churches have reversed their role with Christ’s role. These churches see themselves as being the head of the body, rather than giving Christ that exalted position (as Colossians 1:18 describes). Christ is the only Head of the body (which is the church). Yet, *churches* are often seen as the giver and interpreter of the law. The Pope, bishops, priests, counsels, central governing bodies, “church creeds,” etc. are all proof of this. Furthermore, the church can be viewed as the savior, rather than Christ! Some believe that as long as they are on some church’s “membership role” that they will go to Heaven. However, as we will observe, the church is composed of the saved. So, if an individual is not living right before God, he/she will not be saved (no matter what church’s membership role he/she is on)!

Consider some characteristics of the church that exalts itself to the role of Christ. (1) It dictates and changes the law rather than simply upholding the law God has revealed in the Bible. (2) It becomes a human organization that submits to men and women rather than a spiritual kingdom that is only subject to

Jesus Christ. (3) It may teach salvation through a church rather than salvation through Jesus Christ.

A group of denominations

Finally, the church is often believed to be a collection of all the “Christians” from all of the various churches. So, the “Church of Christ” is viewed as a big umbrella. And, under that umbrella are all the different “Christian” denominational and non-denominational churches. So, the church is often believed to consist of “Christians” from the Catholic Church, “Christians” from the Baptist Church, “Christians” from the Methodist Church, “Christians” from the Lutheran Church, “Christians” from the Pentecostal Church, “Christians” from the Nazarene Church, etc., etc., etc.

Consider some characteristics of the church that views itself as a group of denominations. (1) It accepts what is called “unity in diversity” (or, ecumenism). That is, folks believe we can all believe and follow the Bible differently – but all still be acceptable to God and be part of the one church of Christ. However, this is *not* the true unity that is described and commanded within the pages of the Bible (see 1 Corinthians 1:10 again). (2) It considers people to be “Christians” who have never really been obedient to God’s plan of salvation (as we discussed in lesson six). Instead, the majority of people who have joined these churches have obeyed some man-made “plan of salvation” that involves such things as “faith only” teaching, the “Sinner’s Prayer” in which people are taught to pray for Jesus to enter their hearts, false teaching that says baptism is something to be done *after* you have already been saved, infant baptism, baptism by sprinkling or pouring, etc. (3) It considers the church to be made up of religious bodies instead of people. Yet, we will see that the church is composed of people. (4) It accepts churches that believe, teach, and practice false teachings that are contrary to the Bible. In reality, the false teaching about salvation is only a small part of the false teaching that exists in churches today. And, God has told us that we must not tolerate any false teaching (see 2 John 1:9-11 and Galatians 1:6-9)!

The “Universal” Church

Certainly, there are many false ideas about the church. I am sure the ones we’ve considered only represent a few of the false ideas that exist. I am also certain that additional points could be made about each of the things we’ve just discussed. However, my intention has simply been to draw some contrasts between these false ideas and the truth about the church that is taught in God’s word. Having eliminated the false ideas about the church from our minds, let’s now focus on what God teaches the church is. As we do, let’s begin by focusing on the “universal” church.

“Ekklesia”

The Greek word that is translated “church” is the word “ekklesia.” In addition to the translation of “church,” this word can also be translated “congregation” and “assembly” – all referencing a group of people. Consider a couple Bible references to this word in order to develop a better understanding of what the church is.

First, it has an ordinary use with reference to a gathering of people. This can be seen when a riot had formed in the city of Ephesus in Acts 19. Three times in Acts 19 (verses 32, 39, and 41), the Bible refers to this “assembly” by using the Greek word “ekklesia.” So, this word has a general use that refers to any assembly/group of people.

Second, it is primarily used in a religious sense in the New Testament. Jesus used the word in this way when He said that He would build His church (Matthew 16:18). The word is also used in this way in Acts 8:3, when the Scriptures talk about Saul ravaging the church. When it is used in this way, it denotes the congregation/community of those who have been obedient to the gospel of Jesus Christ and have given their lives to the Lord. Therefore, the word denotes a “called out” people. To such disciples of Christ, Peter wrote, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). So, this is a collection

of people who have been separated from sin and are now living for the Lord!

The collection of God's people

Sometimes, the word “church” is used in a “universal” sense. This is seen in Matthew 16:18. Again, Jesus said, “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.” There is only *one* church in this “universal” sense. This term (“universal church”) refers to the collection of God’s people – all those who are in a saved condition. So, only those who are part of this one church are in a saved condition.

As you can see, when this word is used in reference to God’s people, this is a very special designation – as Christ only established *one* church. That is, He only has one collection of saved people who belong to Him (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 4:4). And, it is only this church that belongs to Him who have access to all the spiritual blessings Christ provides! Notice that “every spiritual blessing” is “in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3). These spiritual blessings include such things as being adopted as children of God (Ephesians 1:5), the forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:7), and eternal salvation (2 Timothy 2:10). No other church has access to these blessings!

Then, as you recognize the significance of being part of Christ’s church, please be reminded how you become part of Christ’s “universal” church. The Bible clearly teaches that God only adds those who are obedient to His plan of salvation to His church (hear, believe, repent, confess Christ, and be baptized – as we studied in lesson six). Notice the events of Acts 2 to clearly see this. In Acts 2, Peter preached the message of the gospel. When many of the people heard this message, they wanted to know what they needed to do to be saved (verse 37). Then, Peter instructed them to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins (verse 38). After Peter continued preaching to them, about 3,000 people obeyed the gospel. And, God added them to the church (verses 41 and 47).

Furthermore, there is no earthly organizational structure over this “universal” church (as Jesus Christ is the one and only Head of the

church). There is no collective earthly work this “universal” church is engaged in wherein all members of the church must send money to a headquarters of some sort (though every member of the church does have an individual work to accomplish). And, there is no collective worship of the “universal” church wherein members must travel to a certain location at a certain time (though every member of the church must be committed to worshipping God individually).

Other terms used to refer to the church

Let’s observe some other terms that are used to reference this same group of people (Christ’s church). Through an observance of these things, we will be able to gain a better understanding of what the church really is!

First, the church is the kingdom of God. Throughout Jesus’ earthly ministry, He announced the coming of His kingdom. And, please note that this kingdom was to be established during the lifetime of some who heard Jesus preach. In Luke 9:27, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.”

Today, Jesus’ followers are part of that kingdom – which is the church. Notice how the terms “church” and “kingdom” are used interchangeably in Matthew 16:18-19: “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven.” Also notice how Colossians 1:13 identifies the kingdom of God as being in existence: “He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.” So, we are not still waiting for Jesus’ kingdom to be established. Instead, Christ’s kingdom is His church that is composed of kingdom citizens who are devoted to their King, Jesus Christ (who has all authority)!

Second, the church is the body of Christ. Colossians 1:18 says that the church is the body of Christ and Christ is its Head: “He is also the head of

the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.” Similarly, Ephesians 1:22-23 says, “And he subjected everything under his feet and appointed him as head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.”

This comparison is also found in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31. In this passage, we discover that Christians are like individual members of a body – each one performing an important function that contributes to the overall growth and strength of the body. This passage also forbids division within the body of Christ! Therefore, we learn that the church must take its direction from the Head, Jesus Christ (as a body takes direction from its head). We also learn that each member of the body is important and has something to contribute.

Third, the church is the household of God. 1 Timothy 3:15 says, “But if I should be delayed, I have written so that you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.” Ephesians 2:19-22 says, “So then you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole building, being put together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you are also being built together for God’s dwelling in the Spirit.”

The church enjoys a special relationship with God and with one another. It is a spiritual family. Christians are God’s children and He is their Father. And, Christians are brothers and sisters within God’s household. Because of this, Christians are heirs of God – and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ! Consider the language of Romans 8:14-17: “For all those led by God’s Spirit are God’s sons. You did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Instead, you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father!’ The Spirit himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God’s children, and if children, also heirs – heirs of God and coheirs with Christ – if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.”

Fourth, the church is the temple of God. 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 identifies the church as the temple of God: “Don’t you yourselves know that you are God’s temple and that the Spirit of God lives in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is holy, and that is what you are.” The church, therefore, constitutes “God’s dwelling in the Spirit” (as Ephesians 2:19-22 also demonstrated) and its members are expected to be holy!

Today, God dwells in Christians and the church through His word (directing and changing their lives through it). And, as the temple of God, God’s people (His church) are expected to honor and glorify Him in all areas of their lives by keeping His commandments and being faithful to Him! Listen to 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. “Don’t you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought at a price. So glorify God with your body.”

Fifth, the church is the church of Christ. The church is the people belonging to Jesus Christ, having been purchased by His blood. Acts 20:28 says (in the context of Paul speaking to the elders of a local church), “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood.” We could just as easily say that the church is Christ’s (or God’s) church.

Romans 16:16 then identifies local churches as “churches of Christ.” It says, “Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send you greetings.” If local churches are “churches of Christ,” the one “universal” church could accurately be called the church of Christ! The church, then, is composed of those who have been separated from the world to accomplish the mission of God on this earth and be rewarded eternally! These people are happy to wear the name of Jesus Christ – the one who died to save them. Therefore, they will reject being identified in any other way besides the names that are identified in Scripture! This church belongs to Jesus Christ – and they will refused to be called by human names such as “Catholic,” “Baptist,” “Methodist,” “Lutheran,” “Wesleyan,” etc.!

The “Local” Church

Having now considered what the church is from a “universal” perspective (i.e. the one collection of all the saved), we also need to consider that the word “church” is used in a “local” sense in the Bible. Therefore, not only do we need to understand the “universal” church, but also have the right understanding of “local” churches as God designed them. For, like the “universal” church, the “local” church has also been designed by God!

A local collection of God’s people

Sometimes, the word “church” is used in a local sense. This refers to a collection of God’s people (Christians who are members of the one “universal” church, having obeyed God’s plan of salvation) in a local geographic area who have joined themselves together to work for and worship God. For example, the New Testament discusses such local churches in places like Philippi, Thessalonica, Ephesus, Rome, Corinth, Antioch, and many others.

While there are many churches in this “local” sense (in many different geographic areas), these are *not* different denominations that hold to different beliefs and practices! Rather, the local churches that you can read about in the Bible were expected to be united and to all believe, teach, and practice the same things (as revealed by the one faith of the gospel of Christ)! So, please understand: The Catholic church, Baptist church, Methodist church, Christian church, Presbyterian church, Lutheran church, etc. are *not* all branches of Christ’s church! For, they do not accurately teach and practice what the Bible teaches (they may teach *some*, but, not all of Christ’s doctrine). For instance, many of these churches change God’s teachings about the plan of salvation. Instead, true local churches are composed of those who have been obedient to the commands of God and hold on to God’s pattern!

Furthermore, the Bible does teach that you should join a local church. Throughout the New Testament, the approved example goes as follows: People become Christians (as discussed in our previous study), are added by God to His one

“universal” church, and then join themselves to Christians in their local geographic areas who have done the same (thereby, forming local churches). Acts 9:26 shows the example of Saul doing this after he became a Christian and came to Jerusalem: “When he arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples....” You see, God does not want His people to be alone. Therefore, He has created the local church to be a base of fellowship and strength that is greater than the individual. However, you should not attempt to join just any local church (as there are many local churches that do not follow the New Testament pattern for local churches). Instead, if there is no faithful local church (one that adheres to the teachings of the New Testament) in your area, you should endeavor to start one as you teach the gospel in your community or move to an area where you *can* associate yourself with faithful Christians. For, you do not want to be guilty of participating in anything that goes against Christ’s teaching in the New Testament (see 2 John 1:9-11)!

The pattern for local churches

You see, God has given a clear blueprint (pattern) for local churches to follow (as revealed in the New Testament). Remember (as we discussed in lesson three), Colossians 3:17 demands that everything you do and say be done “in the name of the Lord Jesus.” This equally applies to what is done by a local church. 2 Timothy 1:13 simply instructs, “Hold on to the pattern of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.” Consider a few brief points about the pattern God has given the local church.

First, God has given a pattern for the organizational structure of the local church. Unlike what we have observed regarding the universal church (which had no God-given earthly organizational structure), God has given local churches an organizational structure. Philippians 1:1 summarizes this organizational structure. Paul addressed his letter to the local church at Philippi by saying, “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus: To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons.” Within a local congregation, God wants there to be “overseers” (also called “elders,” “shepherds,” “pastors,”

“bishops,” and “presbyters” in the Scriptures) who must meet specific qualifications in order to serve in this capacity and have been given the oversight of the congregation. “Deacons” also must meet specific qualifications to fill the role of special servants of the congregation. Finally, the “saints” refer to all those who are Christians. Although local churches are authorized to exist without elders and deacons, God’s plan is for every local church to be organized in this way.

Second, God has given a pattern for the work of the local church. Unlike what we observed regarding the universal church (which had no collective work), God has given the local church a specific work to accomplish (collectively). The authorization God has given local churches in the New Testament regarding their work is to proclaim His word (1 Thessalonians 1:8), edify/build up the saved (1 Corinthians 14:26), and show benevolence/generosity toward needy Christians (1 Corinthians 16:1-4). While individual Christians have been given many different works and responsibilities in the pages of God’s word, God has limited the collective work of local churches to these three areas.

Third, God has given a pattern for the worship of the local church. Unlike what we observed regarding the universal church (which had no collective earthly assembly or worship), God has authorized the local church to assemble and worship together (1 Corinthians 14:23). When a local church does assemble to worship, God has authorized five activities. These are: Praying (1 Corinthians 14:15), singing (1 Corinthians 14:15), preaching (Acts 20:7), partaking of the Lord’s Supper on the first day of every week (Acts 20:7), and taking up the collection on the first day of every week (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). While individuals can and should be worshiping God outside the assemblies of the local church any time they have opportunity to do so (see John 4:23-24), there is a specific God-given responsibility for local churches to engage in these five specific acts of worship. And, when the local church does assemble together, members of the church have the responsibility to attend (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Conclusion

Christ has only established one church that is composed of all those who have been saved by Him (in obedience to His word). Then, God desires all Christians to join themselves to a local church that follows His pattern in all things. So, what should you take from this study? (1) An understanding that there are many false ideas about what “church” is and that not all churches are the same or right in God’s sight. (2) An understanding of your need to be part of Christ’s one true church, which is His collection of the saved. (3) A basic understanding that the word “church” is used in the Bible with reference to the “universal” and “local” church. (4) A basic understanding that God has a pattern for local churches to follow and that you should be part of a local church that follows this pattern! While we could discuss more, I hope that this lesson has helped you understand what the church is!

Study Questions

Why is it essential to know the answer to this question?

1. What The Church Is Not

Can all the different churches in existence today be right in the sight of God?

Is the church an earthly organization? List some characteristics of the church that views itself as an earthly organization.

Is the church a social club? List some characteristics of the church that views itself as a social club.

Is the church a political machine? List some characteristics of the church that views itself as a political machine.

Is the church a building where religious people meet together? List some characteristics of the church that views itself as a building where religious people meet together.

Does the church have the same role as Jesus Christ? List some characteristics of the church that views itself in the role of Christ.

Is the church a group of denominations? List some characteristics of the church that views itself as a group of denominations.

2. The “Universal” Church

What does the Greek word “ekklesia” mean?

What is the “universal” church of Christ? Who is part of this church?

What is the significance of the following terms used in connection with the church?

1. The kingdom of God –

2. The body of Christ –

3. The household of God –

4. The temple of God –

5. The church of Christ –

3. The “Local” Church

What is a “local” church of Christ? Should you join a local church of Christ?

What is the pattern for local churches in each of the following areas?

1. The organizational structure of the local church –

2. The work of the local church –

3. The worship of the local church –