

The Church

If you look up the word 'church' in the dictionary, the first definition you find will say something like this: 'a building for public and especially Christian worship'.

Even though many people think of a church as a building, that is not the way God sees the church. The church, according to God's Word, is talking about a specific group (body) of people who assemble together for a very important purpose and mission.

The church has the amazing promise of God's blessing and the incredible responsibility of reaching the world with the gospel. The church, with all its flaws, is something that every Christian ought to love because Christ 'loved the church and gave himself for it.'

In this study, we will look at:

- 1) the origin of the church
- 2) the members of the church
- 3) the mission of the church

KEY VERSE: Matthew 16:18 *'And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.'*

BOOKS TO MEMORISE: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, **Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter**

CHAPTERS TO READ THIS WEEK: John 1-7

1. THE ORIGIN OF THE CHURCH

Christians disagree on when the church began. Some see the church as existing in the Old Testament period before the coming of Christ. Because the word church simply means 'assembly', the word can be used for assemblies other than the New Testament church (see Acts 7:38; 19:32; 19:39).

In this study, we are going to assert the idea that 'the church' described as 'the body of Christ' in the New Testament, made up of believers in Christ, with Christ as the head, is something that Christ started and was birthed into existence on the Day of Pentecost by the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

a. The church was started by Jesus Christ.

Matthew 16:13–20

¹³ When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? ¹⁴ And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. ¹⁵ He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? ¹⁶ And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. ¹⁷ And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. ¹⁸ And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹ And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. ²⁰ Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.

In this passage, we see several important truths related to the church:

1. The church belongs to Jesus - 'my church' (v.18).
2. Jesus promised to build His church - 'I will build' (v.18).
3. The gates of hell will not prevail against the church (v.18).
4. The rock that the church is built on is Christ (v.18).

Ephesians 2:20

And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;

Jesus purchased the church with His blood.

Acts 20:28

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

Jesus loved the church and gave Himself for it.

Ephesians 5:22-27

²² Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. ²⁴ Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; ²⁶ That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷ That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

The church is God's idea. Jesus, God's Son did everything necessary to start the church, build the church, save the church, cleanse the church, and make it beautiful like His bride.

We should follow Christ's lead as the head of the church. We should love the church as His bride. And we should live our lives in the church as members of His body.

b. The church was birthed into existence on the day of Pentecost.

The church is only mentioned twice in the gospels - Matthew 16 and Matthew 18.

The reason for this is because, before Jesus started the church, He came to offer Himself to Israel as their promised Messiah and King (Matthew 4:17; 10:7).

Israel as a nation rejected Christ, which, of course, fell into God's sovereign plan for Him to be crucified and to die for the sins of the whole world (Matthew 12:14-50; Acts 4:27-28).

During the ministry of Christ, as Israel's rejection of Him became clearer, Jesus began to focus His teaching more and more on the disciples and on truths that apply directly to the church (Matthew 13:1-23).

Jesus promised the Disciples that after He left that He would send the Holy Spirit to baptise them and empower them.

Acts 1:1–8

¹ The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, ² Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: ³ To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: ⁴ And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. ⁵ For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. ⁶ When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? ⁷ And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. ⁸ But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came on all the believers who gathered together, empowering them to speak with other languages of God's mighty works.

Acts 2:1–4

¹ And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. ² And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. ³ And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Later on, Peter described Pentecost as the moment when this prophecy of the baptism of the Holy Spirit was fulfilled for him and the other Jewish believers.

Acts 11:15–16

¹⁵ And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. ¹⁶ Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.

In addition to Jewish believers being baptised with the Holy Spirit, Gentile believers were baptised with the Holy Spirit as well as. This is seen at the conversion of Cornelius and those Gentiles with him.

Acts 11:17–18

¹⁷ Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? ¹⁸ When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

Later on, Paul wrote that all believers are baptised into the body of Christ. After those historical first Spirit baptisms at Pentecost and of Cornelius and the other Gentiles with him, Spirit baptism now happens at the moment of salvation.

1 Corinthians 12:12–13

¹² For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. ¹³ For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

Before Pentecost, many of the elements of the church were being put in place: the founder, the theology, some of the members. But the church did not come into existence as one body by the baptism of the Spirit until after Christ's death, burial, resurrection, ascension and sending of the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:11–18

¹¹ Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; ¹² That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; ¹⁵ Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; ¹⁶ And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: ¹⁷ And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

This body of believing Jews and believing Gentiles ('the church') is something that is called a 'mystery' by Paul, meaning it was not taught in the Old Testament. Instead, it was a new revelation in the New Testament taught by the apostles.

Ephesians 3:8–10

⁸ Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; ⁹ And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: ¹⁰ To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God,

2. THE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH

Ephesians 2:11–18

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The members of the church are those who...

realise they are sinners separated from a holy God

realise that Jesus Christ is the one way to be reconciled to God

believe on Jesus Christ

and are united to all other believers (whether Jew or Gentile) in one body

Ephesians 2:19–22

19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; 20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; 21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: 22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

Everyone who believes on Christ becomes part of the great ‘temple’ that Christ is building (His spiritual temple).

Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone upon whom the church is built.

The apostles and prophets laid the foundation. (They wrote the New Testament, revealing church doctrines to us, and they advanced the first-century church.)

Every member is then built together with them as a ‘habitation of God through the Spirit.’

Meaning of the word church (*ekklesia*) = ‘called out assembly’

The Greek word *ekklesia* is a good word for the church because the church is made up of those who have been *called out of this world* and *called unto Christ*.

The church is made of those who are saved through faith in Jesus. These believers should then publically demonstrate their faith in Christ through baptism by immersion after salvation.

Acts 2:41

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

Local church

Notice in Acts 2:41 above that ‘they that gladly received his word...were *added unto them*’.

Those who answer the call to salvation and want to follow Christ then should join up with a local expression of the body of Christ.

Sometimes people talk about ‘the universal church’ vs ‘the local church’. Some might resist membership in a local church because they are ‘members of the universal church’.

The weakness of this argument is seen if we apply that same logic to other ‘bodies’ or groups such as a gym. (‘I’m not a member of any local, specific gym; I’m a member of the universal gym!’)

Though some of the Biblical references do refer to every believer in Christ everywhere, the overwhelming majority of the times the church is talked about in the New Testament it is talking about a local church, an assembly of baptised believers meeting in a specific location.

The importance of the church

The local church is central to everything that God is doing in the world since the cross.

Acts is all about God working in and through the church.

Romans through 2 Thessalonians are 9 letters to churches.

1 & 2 Timothy and Titus are letters written to church leaders.

The church must assemble.

The church is an assembly, so no one member is the church.

The church is what we are when we are together.

If you have believed on Jesus Christ, then you should be baptised and join up with a local church where you can be part of and carry out the mission of the church.

3. THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Over the centuries, the church has often gotten confused about its mission in this world.

Some have treated it merely as a social club.

Some have expected 'the church' to do something about every social ill in society.

Others see the church as completely irrelevant in our modern-day world.

In this section, we will look at the mission of the church as related to 1) the believer, 2) the world, and 3) God.

a. The mission (or ministry) of the church is to build up the believer.

Acts 2:42

42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

The local church provides some great benefits to the believer:

1. Teaching and building believers up in the faith ('apostles' doctrine')

Ephesians 4:11–12

11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

2. Fellowship and encouragement ('fellowship')

Hebrews 10:23–25

23 Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) 24 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: 25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

3. Reminding one another of Christ's death through the Lord's Supper or Communion ('breaking of bread')

1 Corinthians 11:24–26

24 And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. 25 After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. 26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

4. Prayer and corporate worship of God ('prayers')

Ephesians 5:17–21

17 Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. 18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; 19 Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; 20 Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; 21 Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

5. Exercising of spiritual gifts

Romans 12:4–8

4 For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: 5 So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. 6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; 7 Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; 8 Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

NOTE: There are fifty-eight 'one another' commands in Scripture such as 'preferring one another' (Rom 12:10), 'love one another' (Rom 13:8), 'serve one another' (Gal 5:13), etc.

b. The mission of the church is to reach the world with the gospel.

Acts 2:47

Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

The local church is not just a place to be taught and encouraged. The church is to grow and develop every member so that together they can carry out a very important mission.

1. Proclaiming the gospel to everyone

Mark 16:15

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

2. Baptising, discipling and teaching those who believe

Matthew 28:19–20

19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

3. Sending trained disciples out to reach others with the gospel

2 Timothy 2:2

And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.

Acts 13:1–4

¹ Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ² As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. ³ And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. ⁴ So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.

4. Planting churches that will repeat the process

Acts 14:21–23

²¹ And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, ²² Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. ²³ And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

c. The mission of the church is ultimately to glorify God!

Ephesians 3:20–21 KJV 1900

²⁰ Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, ²¹ Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

Ultimately, God's plan for the church is to work in us, save us, change us, bring us into one body, fill us with love for one another, and use us to tell the nations about Jesus so that for all ages Christ will be glorified.

The church is the only 'institution' that will last - all others will eventually cease.

The church is not perfect. God is still forming it and perfecting it. But it does have the amazing promise of Christ 'to build His church' and 'the gates of hell shall not prevail against it'.

Being part of the body of Christ and being an active member of a local church ought to be one of the most amazing privileges we could ever have!

APPLICATION

Are you a member of a local New Testament church?

To join, you must be saved, baptised, and have completed some type of membership training.

Let us know if you have any questions about membership or are interested in joining.

Are you using your gifts in the church?

The church is here to encourage you, and you have a responsibility to encourage others.

You need us and we need you. Let us help you develop and find out how you can use your gift to build up others and further the gospel.

Are you helping your church get the gospel to the nations?

We are not just a club or a social group. We are a spiritual army organised to carry out the marching orders of our Commander and Chief.

We need to be taking the wonderful, life-changing message of the gospel to our Jerusalem, our Judaea, our Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.

Acts 1:8

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.