

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

“The Church is composed of all true disciples of Jesus Christ, who according to His commandment, are to associate together in local churches for worship, fellowship and outreach. The Lord Jesus, as the Head of the Church, calls each local church into existence and gives the leaders of each local fellowship the necessary authority for carrying out His work in this world.” – *Holland Church Statement of Faith*

The English word *church*, as is true of the Scottish *kirk* and the German *Kirche*, is derived from the Greek word *kyriakos* which means “belonging to the Lord”. The Greek phrase *kyriakon*, came to be used to designate the place where Christians met to worship and in time was transferred also to the people themselves as the “spiritual building” of the Lord. As a result of this transfer, the word church has come to be used in our English Bibles as a translation, not of the Greek word from which it was derived, [but] rather the Greek word *ekklesia* (“assembly”). – Robert L. Reymond in *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*

“The word church derives from the Greek word *ekklesia*, which really is a combination of two words together. It comes from *ek* a preposition, which refers to “out of” and *kaleo*, which means, “to call.” So the *ekklesia* is the “called out people.” That is really a marvelous way to think of the church. We have been called out of darkness into light. We have been called out of the dominion of Satan to the kingdom of his beloved Son. We have been called out really to be citizens of another age and yet we are still in this age in order to make a difference and penetrate it.” – Bruce Ware

LOCAL AND UNIVERSAL – Romans 16:5, 1 Corinthians 16:19, 1 Corinthians 1:2, 1 Thessalonians 1:1, Acts 9:31, Acts 11:26, Galatians 1:13, 1 Corinthians 10:32, 1 Corinthians 15:9, Ephesians 3:10

“Two righteous persons congregated together in Christ’s name constitute, with Christ as the head, a particular holy church. But the holy catholic, that is, universal Church, is a totality of all the predestinate present, past, and future.” – John Huss

VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE – 2 Timothy 2:16-21, Matthew 7:15-16, Acts 20:29-30, 1 John 2:19, Matthew 13:24-30

“The invisible church is the church as God sees it...The visible church is the church as Christians on earth see it... [The] visible church includes all who profess faith in Christ and give evidence of that faith in their lives.” – Wayne Grudem in *Systematic Theology*

“I have observed that the Scriptures speak of the Church in two ways. Sometimes when they speak of the Church they mean the Church as it really is before God - the Church into which none are admitted but those who by the gift of adoption are sons of God, and by the sanctification of the Spirit true members of Christ. In this case it not only comprehends the saints who dwell on the earth, but all the elect who have existed from the beginning of the world. Often, too, by the name of Church is designated the whole body of mankind scattered throughout the world, who profess to worship one God and Christ, who by baptism are initiated into the faith; by partaking of the Lord's Supper profess unity in true doctrine and charity, agree in holding the word of the Lord, and observe the ministry which Christ has appointed for the preaching of it. In this Church there is a very large mixture of hypocrites, who have nothing of Christ but the name and outward appearance: of ambitious avaricious, envious, evil-speaking men, some also of impure lives, who are tolerated for a time, either because their guilt cannot be legally established, or because due strictness of discipline is not always observed. Hence, as it is necessary to believe the invisible Church, which is manifest to the eye of God only, so we are also enjoined to regard this Church which is so called with reference to man, and to cultivate its communion.” – Calvin, *Institutes IV-1-7*

BIBLICAL METAPHORS FOR THE CHURCH

The family of God – 1 Peter 1:22, 1 Peter 2:9, Mark 3:31-35, Matthew 19:29, Romans 12:10, 1 Timothy 5:1-2, Galatians 3:28-29, Acts 20:28, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18

The building of Christ – 1 Peter 2:4-10, Matthew 16:13-20, Matthew 21:42-4, Ephesians 2:19-22, 2 Corinthians 6:16, Hebrews 3:3-6, 1 Timothy 3:15

The body of Christ – Ephesians 1:17-23, Ephesians 4:15-16, Colossians 1:18, Colossians 2:18-19, Ephesians 5:23, 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

The bride of Christ – Ephesians 5:25-32, 2 Corinthians 11:2-4, Revelation 19:7-9, Revelation 21:1-4

“How much does Christ love the Church? According to this passage, He loves us so much that He gave Himself up for us. He laid down His very life to redeem us. And now He is continually at work to cleanse and prepare us for eternity. Christ’s love for His Church is not flighty – He is tender and patient. His love isn’t fickle- he is committed. He intercedes on our behalf constantly before the Father. He nourishes, cherishes, sustains, protects. Christ’s love for us is so deep and His identification with us so real that He views us as His own body. In our union with Him, His life extends to us. That means that when we are rejected, He is rejected. When we are persecuted, He is persecuted. When we rejoice, He does too...God invented romance and pursuit and the promise of undying love between a man and a woman so that throughout our lives we could catch a faint glimmer of the intense love Christ has for those He died to save. What passion He has for His Church!” - Joshua Harris in *Stop Dating the Church*

“On earth she is often in rags and tatters, stained and ugly, despised and persecuted. But one day she will be seen for what she is, nothing less than the bride of Christ, “free from spots, wrinkles or any other disfigurement,” holy and without blemish, beautiful and glorious. It is to this constructive end that Christ has been working and is continuing to work. The bride does not make herself presentable; it is the bridegroom who labours to beautify her in order to present her to himself.” – John Stott

A field of crops – 1 Corinthians 3:6-9, Matthew 13:1-30, John 15:1-5

“The wide range of metaphors used for the church in the New Testament should remind us not to focus exclusively on anyone. For example, while it is true that the church is the body of Christ, we must remember that this is only one metaphor among many. If we focus exclusively on that metaphor we will be likely to forget that Christ is our Lord reigning in heaven as well as the one who dwells among us...Each of the metaphors use for the church can help us to appreciate more of the richness of privilege that God has given us by incorporating us into the church. The fact that the church is like a family should increase our love and fellowship with one another. The thought that the church is like the bride of Christ should stimulate us to strive for greater purity and holiness, and also greater love for Christ and submission to him. The image of the church as the branches in a vine should cause us to rest in him more fully. The idea of an agricultural crop should encourage us to continue growing in the Christian life and obtaining for ourselves and others the proper spiritual nutrients to grow. The picture of the church as God’s new temple should increase our awareness of God’s very presence dwelling in our midst as we meet. The concept of the church as a priesthood should help us to see more clearly the delight god has in the sacrifices of praise and good deeds that we offer him. The metaphor of the church as the body of Christ should increase our interdependence on one another and our appreciation of the diversity of gifts within the body. Many other applications could be drawn from these and other metaphors for the church listed in Scripture. “– Grudem

WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH?

WHY STUDY THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH?

THE APOSTOLIC AGE (33-95 AD)

"You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." - Acts 1:8

Matthew 16:18, Ephesians 2:19-21, Matthew 28:16-20, Acts 1:8-9, Acts 8:4-8,26-27, Acts 9:18-19, Acts 11:1,18-22

- **Pentecost** (33) – Acts 2:5-13,42-47
- **Jerusalem Council** (46) – Galatians 2:7-10
- **Paul's Missionary Journeys** (46-57)
- **Destruction of the Jerusalem** (70)
- **Completion of the New Testament writings** (95)

ANTE-NICENE PERIOD (95 – 313 AD)

- **Persecution** – Varied in nature, scope and degree with policies of each Roman emperor.
- **Church Fathers** – Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyons, Clement of Alexandria, Origen of Alexandria, Cyprian of Carthage, Tertullian of Carthage
- **Ante-Nicene Sects and Heresies** – Ebionism, Gnosticism, Docetism, Marcionism, Montanism, Novatianism

NICENE PERIOD (313-476 AD)

- **Councils** – Finalized Canon, Confronted Trinitarian, Christological and other heresies and controversies
- **Development of Episcopacy**
- **Missions to "Barbarians"** – Goths, Irish, Franks, Scots, Angles, Saxons

MEDIEVAL CHURCH (476-1517 AD)

- **Increased intermingling of Church and State**
- **Rise of Rome** – East/West Split (1054)
- **Muslim Conquest** (633-732) and the **Crusades** (1095-1291)
- **Increase of Papal Domination** (1059-1216)
- **Major Movements** – Monasticism (3rd – 10th centuries), Scholasticism (11th-14th centuries), Mysticism (14th-15th centuries)
- **Pre-reformers** (1350-1500) – Wycliffe (English), Huss (Bohemian), Erasmus (Dutch)

REFORMATION (1517 – 1648 AD)

CHRISTIANITY IN AMERICA (1607 – PRESENT)

- **First Great Awakening** (1730s-1750s) – Edwards & Whitefield, Preaching of reformed doctrine in churches
- **Second Great Awakening** (1800s-1830s) – Asbury & Finney, Camp meetings & Revivals
- **Social reform movements** – American Revolution, Abolition of Slavery, Prohibition, Women's Suffrage
- **Rise of parachurch organization** (1940s – present) – YMCA, YWCA, Navigators, IVCF, FGBMFI

WHY BELONG TO A LOCAL CHURCH?

WHY GO TO CHURCH?

It is by the grace of God that a congregation is permitted to gather visibly in the world to share God's Word and sacrament. Not all Christians receive this blessing. The imprisoned, the sick, the scattered lonely, the proclaimers of the Gospel in heathen lands stand alone. They know that visible fellowship is a blessing. They remember, as the Psalmist did, how they went "with the multitude...to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday" (Psalm 42:4)...Therefore, let him who until now has had the privilege of living in common Christian life with other Christians praise God's grace from the bottom of his heart. Let him thank God on his knees and declare. It is grace, nothing but grace that we are allowed to live in community with Christian brethren." – Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *Life Together*

From *Spiritual Disciplines within the Church* by Donald Whitney

- Going to church is a biblical requirement for all Christians – Hebrews 10:19-25
- Going to church brings spiritual fellowship and encouragement – Romans 15:4-5
- Going to church helps prevent backsliding and apostasy – James 5:19-20
- Going to church follows Jesus' example – Luke 4:16
- Going to church enables you to hear the preaching of God's Word – 2 Timothy 4:1-4, Acts 2:42
- Going to church allows you to take the Lord's Supper – 1 Corinthians 11:17-26
- Going to church enables you to experience spiritual blessing from God – 1 Corinthians 14:26
- Going to church helps prevent an unbalanced Christian life – Ephesians 4:11-16
- Not going to church is self-centered and foolish – Proverbs 18:1-2, Philippians 2:1-4
- Not going to church is one indication of not being in God's family – 1 John 2:19

WHERE IS THE CONCEPT OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP FOUND IN THE BIBLE?

- **Church leadership** – Titus 1:5-11, 1 Timothy 3:1-13, Acts 6:1-6, Acts 20:17,28-30, Philippians 1:1, 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13
- **Church discipline** – 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, Matthew 18:15-17
- **Keeping lists and voting** – 1 Timothy 5:9-12, 2 Corinthians 2:5-11, Acts 2:42-47, 1 Corinthians 14:23

WHY JOIN A PARTICULAR LOCAL CHURCH?

"Of course every believer is part of the universal church, but for any Christian who has a choice in the matter, failure to cleave to a particular church is failure to obey Christ." – Chuck Colson

"People who are not members of a church should be treated like unbelievers, because they are treating themselves like unbelievers." – Jay Adams

From *Life in the Father's House* by Wayne Mack & Dave Swavely

- Membership is essential to an orderly administration of the church –1 Corinthians 14:40
- Membership [better] clarifies the difference between the church and the world – 2 Corinthians 6:14, 1 Corinthians 7:15, Matthew 18:15-17, 1 Corinthians 5, Genesis 17:9-27
- Membership causes the visible church to better reflect the invisible church – John 17:22-23
- Membership promotes involvement from those on the “fringes” of the church. – Matthew 6:19-21
- Membership provides an opportunity to educate people about the nature and distinctives of the church. – Colossians 1:28

From *Spiritual Disciplines within the Church* by Donald Whitney

- You prove that you're not ashamed to identify with Christ of His people – Mark 8:38
- You stop being an independent Christian – Matthew 18:15-17, Hebrews 13:17, 1 Corinthians 5:12-13
- You have a greater opportunity to use your spiritual gifts. – 1 Corinthians 12:4-11
- You openly demonstrate the reality of the body of Christ. – 1 Corinthians 12:21-27
- You participate in more balanced ministry. – Ephesians 4:11-16

“Church membership is not only a commitment on the member’s part to the church, but it is a commitment on the church’s part to the member. Both the church as a body and its leaders vow to care for the member by providing...ministry opportunities... helpful services...[and] loving accountability.” – Mack and Swavely

“I know there are some who say, “Well, I have given myself to the Lord, but I do not intend to give myself to the church.” Now why not? “Because I can be a Christian without it.” Are you quite clear about that? You can be as good a Christian by disobedience to your Lord’s commands as by being obedient? What is a brick made for? To help build a house. It is of no use for that brick to tell you that it is just as good a brick while it is kicking about on the ground as it would be in the house. It is a good-for-nothing brick. So you rolling-stone Christians, I do not believe that you are answering your purpose. You are living contrary to the life which Christ would have you live, and you are much to blame for the injury you do.” – Charles Spurgeon

“Think globally, love locally. All of us should concern ourselves with the challenges that face all people everywhere, but that concern cannot be expressed everywhere. We demonstrate our concern by acting and living when we are.” – Brian Habig and Les Newsom in *The Enduring Community*

This church is a fellowship of believers made up of individuals who are persuaded God has brought them together to worship and serve Him here in this local body of believers. This church, as a local manifestation of the universal bride and body of Christ, shall seek to place itself under the headship of Christ and the authority of God’s Word. – *Holland Church By Laws*

WHAT DOES A BIBLICAL CHURCH LOOK LIKE?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did you choose this church? What was important to you when you made your choice and what was not so important? What are some unbiblical criteria for choosing a church?
2. Let's imagine that it was announced that our church would be closing its doors. How would you find a new church? What would be important?

THREE MARKS OF A TRUE CHURCH

1. **The True Proclamation of the Word of God** – John 8:31,47, John 14:23, Galatians 1:8-9, 2 Thessalonians 2:15, 2 Timothy 3:16-4:4, 1 John 4:1-3
2. **The Right Administration of the Sacraments** – Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34
3. **The Faithful Exercise of Church Discipline** – Matthew 18:15-17, Acts 20:28-31, Romans 16:17-18, 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, 1 Corinthians 14:33,40, Galatians 6:1, Ephesians 6:1, Ephesians 5:6,11, 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15, 1 Timothy 1:20, 1 Timothy 5:19-20, Titus 1:10-11, Titus 3:10, Revelation 2:14-16, Revelation 2:20

ONE HOLY CATHOLIC AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH

“We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.” – *Nicene Creed*, First Council of Constantinople

- **Unity** – John 10:14-16, John 17:20-23, Romans 15:5-6, Galatians 3:28, 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, Ephesians 2:14-16, Ephesians 4:3-13, Philippians 2:2, Colossians 3:12-14, Ephesians 4:1-16, 1 Corinthians 10:17, 12:12-26, Romans 16:17-18, John 13:34-35, 1 John 4:7
- **Sanctity** – John 17:15-19, 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1, Ephesians 4:24, Ephesians 5:25-27, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, 1 Peter 1:15-16, 2:9
- **Catholicity** – Matthew 28:19, Galatians 3:26-28, Colossians 3:11, Revelation 5:9-10, Revelation 7:9
- **Apostolicity** – Matthew 10:40, Luke 10:16, John 13:20, John 17:20, Acts 2:42, Galatians 1:6-12, Ephesians 2:20, Revelation 21:14

How should each of these marks of the universal church be reflected in the local church?

GREAT COMMISSION

- Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16, Genesis 1:28
- Missions, Evangelism, Discipleship, Baptism, Teaching

EARLY CHURCH – Acts 2:42-47

Devotion to the Apostles Teaching

- Acts 2:14-36 – Biblical and expository, Christ-centered, relevant, specific and personal in application, authoritative, purposeful in intent
- Devotion – 1 John 4:1-6, Ephesians 2:19-20, 2 Timothy 4:1-5, James 1:22-25
- Christ-centered – 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, 2 Corinthians 4:5, Colossians 1:28-29
- Scripture vs. Man – Psalm 1:1-3, Colossians 2:8, 2 Peter 1:3, 1 Corinthians 2:1-5
- “Whole counsel of God” – Acts 20:27, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Timothy 4:3-4

“The reason we put so much emphasis on preaching and teaching is that they help everything else to happen. We have to know what the Bible says about something before we know how to act. We won’t know how to worship, pray, evangelize, discipline, shepherd, train or serve unless we know what the Word of God says.” – John MacArthur

Care for those in need – Acts 4:32-35, Romans 15:26, Galatians 2:10

Other – Fellowship, Prayer, Fear of God, Praising God, Evangelism

SOME GOOD BOOKS ON THE CHURCH

- *Stop Dating the Church* by Joshua Harris, Multnomah, 2004.
- *What is a Healthy Church Member?* by Thabiti M. Anyabwile, Crossway, 2008.
- *Spiritual Disciplines within the Church* by Donald S. Whitney, Moody, 1996.
- *Life in the Father’s House: A Member’s Guide to the Local Church* by Wayne A. Mack and Dave Swavely, P&R, 2006.
- *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Harper, 1978.
- *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* by Mark Dever, Crossway, 2004 (See also: www.9marks.org)

SOME GOOD BOOKS ON CHURCH HISTORY

- *The Story of Christianity* by Justo L. Gonzalez, Prince Press, 1994.
- *Jesus, Made In America: A Cultural History from the Puritans to the Passion of the Christ* by Stephen J. Nichols, IVP Academic, 2008.