

What Is The Church?

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Matt. 16:18

Matt. 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.*”

There is probably no other religious term more commonly used, and concerning which a greater amount of confusion exists among men today, than the term “*church.*”

We hear so much today about “my church”, “my wife’s church”, “your church”, that such expressions have caused people to regard the church with no more sanctity, no more reverence, and no more importance than a club or a lodge.

But, why should men misunderstand and misuse the name and mission of the Lord’s church?

The Bible freely uses the term; it occurs more than 100 times in the New Testament.

It is used with such clearness and simplicity that there is really no reason for misunderstanding among those who have proper respect for God’s Word.

The church of the Bible is not:

A denomination.

Because it existed several hundred years before any denomination was formed.

- 1 Cor. 1:10-13, “*Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?*”
- 1 Cor. 3:4-10, “*For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but*

ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon."

- 1 Cor. 3:22-23, "Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's."

A material house or building.

Acts 17:24, "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;"

It is a spiritual house. 1 Pet. 2:5, "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

What is the church?

The called out. ("Ekklesia")

We are called by the gospel.

2 Thess. 2:14, "Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

We are called out of the world, out of darkness, into light.

- Acts 26:18, "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me."
- Col. 1:13-14, "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins."

The saved.

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."

Salvation is in Christ. 2 Tim. 2:10, *“Therefore I endure all things for the elect’s sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.”*

But one cannot be in Christ without being in His church.

We are baptized into Christ. Gal. 3:27, *“For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”*

We are also baptized into His body. 1 Cor. 12:13, *“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.”*

The body is the church.

- Col. 1:18, *“And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.”*
- Eph. 1:22-23, *“And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.”*

Hence, to be in Christ is the same as to be in His body, or His church.

There is no such thing as one being saved and later becoming a member of the church.

Those who say that one can be saved out of the church, just do not know what the church is.

The sanctified.

1 Cor. 1:2, *“Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:”*

To be sanctified simply means to be set apart.

Every Christian is sanctified, or set apart, when He obeys the gospel of Christ.

- John 17:17, *“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.”*
- Heb. 2:11, *“For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren,”*

The Corinthians were sanctified, or set apart.

1 Cor. 6:9-11, *“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall*

inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.”

There are various terms found in the New Testament depicting the church

The body of Christ. 1 Cor. 12:27, *“Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.”*

The church of Christ. Rom. 16:16, *“... The churches of Christ salute you.”*

The church of God.

- 1 Cor. 1:2, *“Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.”*
- 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.”*

The bride of Christ.

The church is the bride of Christ. *“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. 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. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, 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. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”* (Eph. 5:22-32).

Is it seemly to you that in a marriage between a man and a wife that she should wear the name of another? Any man would be upset if his wife wore the name of another. Were you aware that the practice of the wife

taking the name of the husband goes back to Adam and Eve? *“Male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created.”* (Gen. 5:2). Individually, God called them Adam and Eve, but as a married couple, God called them Adam.

The church of the firstborn. Heb. 12:23, *“To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,”*

We can use no other name.

Acts 4:10-12, *“Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”*

The term “church” is used in the New Testament in two senses:

In the universal sense.

Matt. 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.”*

In a local sense.

- 1 Cor. 1:2, *“Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.”*
- 1 Thess. 1:1, *“Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

The word “congregation” is from two Latin words, “con”, which means “with” or “together”, and “grex”, which means “a flock”.

Conclusion

What is the church? Surely we have been able to see that the church is made up of the saved; in a universal sense, it includes all the saved of the earth, and in a local sense, it includes all Christians in a congregation.

How can a person become a member of Christ's church? One must become a Christian. The following are the steps necessary to make that happen:

- **Faith.** Heb. 11:6, *“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”* When I was in high school (I was about 17 years old), a neighbor boy my same age told me he was an atheist. Since I had been baptized, I took the opportunity to talk to him about the scriptures. He told me that he could see that living the life of a Christian was good, but he wasn't sure if he believed there was a God. But to be on the safe side, maybe he should go to church, and when he dies and stands before God (if there is a God) on the day of Judgment (if there is a Judgment), maybe if God sees that he has gone to church and lived a good life that God would send him to heaven (if there is a heaven), and not to hell (if there is a hell). I told him, “It doesn't work that way. You have to believe in Him with all your heart or you cannot please Him.”
- **Repentance.** Acts 2:38, *“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”* Acts 11:18, *“... Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.”* If while you were sleeping, you heard a noise in the other room, and you think to yourself, “There's a burglar in my house!” So you reach for your cell phone, and as quietly as you can, you call the police, tell them there is a burglar in your house, and you give them your address. Soon, you heard them arrive and capture the thief. He yells, “I'm sorry; I'm sorry!” What is he sorry for? He is sorry that he got caught; not that he stole. In true repentance the thief would be sorry that he ever stole and wants to change his life so that he would never steal again. That is true repentance. It is a change of mind that brings about a change of action. That is what we have to do before we can become a Christian.

- **Confession.** Rom. 10:9-10, *“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”* What do we confess? That we believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Note that in the above scriptures that faith (believing), repentance, and confession are **“UNTO”** righteousness, life, or salvation. “Unto” means toward something; not that one has already attained.

- **Baptism.** It is baptism where righteousness, life, and salvation are attained. Jesus, himself, was baptized to fulfill all righteousness, *“But John forbade him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”* (Matt. 3:14-17). Jesus was baptized because God said it was the right thing to do. Did you see how pleased God was about Jesus being baptized? Jesus also said *“it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness.”* We are baptized because it fulfills His righteousness, not because it is of our righteousness.

In fact, if we are not baptized, we are still in our sins. *“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”* (Acts 2:38). Peter, what did you say the reason of baptism is? *“for the remission of sins”*. Why would anyone want to leave out the step that removes our sins?

Jesus commanded that to reach salvation we must be baptized. *“And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”* (Mark 16:15-16).

Ananias told Saul (before he was renamed Paul) the very same thing, *“And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”* (Acts 22:16). Baptism is a requirement given by God.

Baptism is called a burial. *“Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead*

by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” (Rom. 6:4). Our old man is to be dead to us. “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.” (Rom. 6:3-6). Baptism is God’s blueprint for applying the blood of Christ in our lives by baptism. We are free from our old sins only when we are baptized.

This doesn’t mean “sprinkling. The scripture above says baptism is a burial. We don’t take a dead body to the cemetery and sprinkle a little dirt over it; we bury the body.

If you have not yet become a Christian, won't you consider it today

