

Lesson Eight: The Church

Church is not a place to go, or a building, or something you do. It has no walls. It is organic in the sense that it is made up of the people of God. We “are” the Church. Additionally, a congregation is an assembly of people gathering together to worship, fellowship, and study about God. And “a place of worship” also called a “temple,” is exactly that. A place that people use for worship.

- 1) **Jesus said, “I will build My church” (ecclesia) (Matt. 16:18).** The word “ecclesia” in the New Testament is used to designate any assembly whether it be political (Acts 19:39), Christian (Eph. 1:22, 23), or national (Acts 7:38). It means a called-out assembly or congregation. God called Israel out of Egypt; they congregated in the wilderness; they were, “the church in the wilderness.” Today, God calls the saved out of the world to congregate in worship. This is the church in the world, in it, but not of it.
- 2) **Unlike the church in the wilderness, the Church that Jesus is building will never cease.** He said, “The gates of Hades shall not over power it.” His Church is not synonymous with Christendom. It is in Christendom in the same way in which it is in the world, in it, but not of it. Christendom is made up of those who profess to be Christians, but they know not Christ as a personal Savior (Matt. 7:21 – 23, also, 2 Tim 3:5 and Titus 1:16). Only blood-washed, born again, Spirit-baptized believers constitute the church that Jesus is building. It is called a;
 - a) Mystery – Eph 3:3-10
 - b) Body – 1 Cor. 12:12-31
 - c) Building – Eph. 2:10 – 22
 - d) Bride – 2 Cor. 11:2
- 3) **The Church: Its Foundation** (Matt. 16:13-18) – *Peter’s Confession of Christ* – 13) Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He *began* asking His disciples, saying, “**Who do people say the Son of Man is?**” 14) And they said, “some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.” 15) He said to them, “**But who do you say 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 to him, “**Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.** 18) “**And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and gates of Hades shall not overpower it...**”
 - a) “**Upon this rock I will build My church.**” Leading up to this declaration He asked His disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is? They answered naming some of the prophets. Then He said to them, “But who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). In verse thirteen Jesus spoke of Himself as the “Son of Man.” Now Peter speaks of Him as the “Son of the living God.” Jesus blessed Peter and said that this great truth came from God the Father. Again He said to Peter, “You are Peter, (Petros, a little rock) and upon this rock (Petra, a big rock) I will build My church.” Jesus did not say that He would build His church upon Peter, but upon Himself, the Rock of Ages.
 - b) **Simon Peter called Jesus the “living stone,” the precious “CORNER stone,” a “STONE OF STUMBLING,” and a “ROCK OF OFFENSE.”** He spoke of all believers, including himself, as “living stones.” Christ is the foundation and believers are the building stones (1 Pet. 2:1-10)
 - c) **Paul speaks of Christ as the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets (Eph. 2:19-22).** He also said, “For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” (1 Cor. 3:11) Although the church was a mystery in the Old Testament, yet Isaiah said, “thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, a costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed’” (Is. 28:16). Christ is the sure foundation of His church and all believers are little building stones built into a holy temple in the Lord.

- 4) **The Church: Its Head** (Col. 1:18) 18) He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything.
 - a) **“He is also head of the body, the church.”** Christ is the foundation, cornerstone, and head of His Church. He is head of the local church, and He is head of the church in its all-inclusive sense, including all born again, blood-washed Spirit-baptized believers in heaven and earth.
- 5) **The church is more than a religious organization; it is an organism, with Christ as the living head.** It is alive with the life of Christ made living in each member (1 Cor. 12:1-31). Let us examine briefly the church and observe its role as the body of Christ:
 - a) The members of the body are given spiritual gifts according to the will of the Holy Spirit (verses 1-11).
 - b) The unity of the body is seen in its many members with different operations all related and coordinated under one Head (verse 12).
 - c) All are baptized by one Spirit into one body (verse 13).
 - d) There is one Holy Spirit.
 - e) There is one Holy Spirit baptism.
 - f) There is one body (the church).
- 6) **This is the church in its broadest sense.** You cannot join this church. The only way to become a member of His body is to be spiritually born (John 3:1-7) and baptized into it by the Holy Spirit.
 - a) The members differ one from the other, yet they function as one in the will of God (verses 14-18)
 - b) The least or weakest member is necessary for the proper function of the whole body (verses 22, 23).
 - c) If one member suffers, the whole body suffers; if one is honored, all are honored (verse 26).
 - d) The members are to desire the greater spiritual gifts and minister in love (verse 31).
- 7) **The Lord Jesus Christ has never delegated His authority to anyone, whether he be pope, pastor, deacon, or the majority of the congregation.** He is “head over all things to the church” (Eph. 1:22), the only absolute and final authority.
- 8) **The Church: Its Organization** (Titus 1:4, 5) 4) ... to Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior. 5) For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, ...
 - a) **There is scriptural evidence of some organization in the local church from its inception.** It was a definite and permanent organized congregation, but not as we know it today.
 - b) **Paul left Titus in Crete to organize the believers into local church bodies and to “set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city” (verse 5).**
- 9) **The local New Testament church is a microcosm of the complete body of Christ in heaven and earth.** The word “church” is used over one hundred times in the New Testament, and the great majority of the references refer to the local congregation.
 - a) **Organization in the local church is seen in:**
 - i. **Its Officers:** He gave to the church “apostles” (this refers to the twelve; there are no apostles in the church today), “profits” (we have no prophets and have not had since the last book of the New Testament was written), “evangelists” (the evangelist will serve the church until Jesus comes,), and “pastors and teachers” (Eph. 4:11:11, 12). Pastors and

teachers are local ministers; the apostles, prophets and evangelist are ministers at large.

- ii. **Another officer is the deacon.** His qualifications are set forth in 1 Timothy (Tim. 3:8-13). Deacons are never called a board in the Scriptures. They are not to run the church; they are ordained to assist the pastor by ministering to the saints (Acts 6:1-7).

10) Its Membership records: The church must have kept records of its members. The Book of Acts tells us that there were about 120 in the upper room. The account (Acts 1:15-26) reads like the average local church business meeting. Simon Peter is the pastor; he takes the lead and gives direction in choosing one to take the place of Judas. "And they drew lots," and Matthias was chosen to be an apostle. On the day of Pentecost about 3,000 were added to the body of Christ by Holy Spirit baptism (1 Cor. 12:13) and the local church in Jerusalem by water baptism (Acts 2:41). Again the records show another 5,000 added (Acts 4:4). The Scriptures tell us that "the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47).

11) Its Ordinances:

- a) Baptism (baptize means to immerse). The Lord commands the believer to be baptized. This is the believer's first opportunity to obey his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In the early church no one ever questioned water baptism; they obeyed (Matt. 28:18-20 and Rom. 6:1-4). Baptism does not save. It is a picture of your faith in His death, burial, and resurrection. It is faith in Christ that saves (John 3:36) and the Ordinance of Baptism that identifies the believer with the risen Savior.
- b) The **Lords Supper**. There is no saving power in the Lords Supper. It is a memorial. The bread is symbolical of His broken body and the wine of His shed blood for the remission of our sins. Baptism identifies the believer with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection; and the Lords Supper is a memorial to be observed by the believer to "proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Cor. 11:23-34)

12) The Church: It's Discipline (Matt. 18:15-17) 15) "And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16) "But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. 17) "And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as Gentile and a tax-gatherer.

- a) **This is the most difficult and necessary function of the local assembly and its importance cannot be exaggerated.** "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of *dough*? Clean out the old leaven" (1 Cor. 5:6, 7). Leaven in the Scripture is always a type of evil. The church is to clean out any evil in its membership. The motive for disciplining a brother is love (1 John 4:7-11). The goal is to restore him to fellowship with his Lord and the church.
- b) **"If you brother sins ..."**
 - i. The first step is to be taken by the one sinned against. He is to go to his brother alone, not seeking revenge or self-justification, "if he listens to you, you have won a brother."
 - ii. If he does not repent, the second step is to take one or two believers and go to him again.
 - iii. If he will not hear the two or three, the third step is taking it to the church.
- c) **A good example of church discipline is reported in Paul's letters to the church at Corinth.** He used strong words calling upon the church to discipline a member for fornication. He wrote, "REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES" (1 Cor. 5:1-13). In his second letter to the Corinthian church we learn that the man repented and was restored to the fellowship of God's people. Now Paul writes, "forgive and comfort *him* ... reaffirm *your* love for him" (2 Cor. 2:3-11). The attitude of the church toward a repenting brother should always be that of forgiveness in love.

13) **The Church: Its Worship and Work** (Matt 28:16-20) 16) But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. 17) And when they saw Him, they worshiped *Him*; but some were doubtful. 18) And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19) "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20) teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

- a) First, the church: its worship. "When they say Him they worshiped Him" (verse 17). To worship is to bow down in awe; to pay divine honors to God in humble, reverent homage. There are three essentials in worship, they are
- i. Faith, "the people believed ... then they bowed low and worshiped" (Ex. 4:31).
 - ii. Spirit, "those who worship Him **must worship in spirit** (John 4:23, 24) Spiritual worship is worship directed by the indwelling Holy Spirit (Phil. 3:3).
 - iii. Truth, "those who worship Him **must worship in spirit and truth**" (John 4:24). Jesus Christ is truth, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Therefore, there can be no pretense or hypocrisy in true worship. The parable of the Pharisee and the publican illustrates true worship (Luke 18:9-14). The publican worshiped in truth and he went home justified. The Pharisee worshiped in religious pride and he went home rejected.
- b) **Second, the church: its work.** "For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you" (1 Thess. 1:8). The church in Thessalonica did the work of the Lord so well that the apostles did not have to evangelize Macedonia and Achaia. The church shared its faith with the lost and after all that is the main work of the church. This is how that, "this took place for two years ... all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:8-10). All of Asia did not journey to Ephesus to hear Paul. It is evident that the believers went everywhere sharing the gospel. The work of the church is to go with the gospel because:
- i. The church is commissioned to work (verses 18-20).
 - ii. The church is to work with Christ (2 Cor. 6:1), and the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:32).
 - iii. The church is to work with Christ in His field (the world) (Matt. 13:36-43); and Mark 16:15).
 - iv. The need for the church to work is great (John 4:35).
 - v. The time for the church to work is now (2 Cor. 6:2).
 - vi. The church is to work until Jesus comes to judge the works of the saints (2 Cor. 5:10).
 - vii. The church will be rewarded for its works (1 Cor. 3:9-15). God's program for the local church is, **come and worship, and go and work** (witness) (Acts 8:1-4)
- c) **Third, The Church: Its Power** (Acts 1:8) 8) "...but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."
- i. **On the day of Pentecost the church received power to evangelize the world.** When the hundred and twenty came down from the upper room, they came in the dynamics of the Holy Spirit. It was a spiritual "repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). Some were empowered for special service, but all received power to witness.
 - ii. **The real power of the church is not found in:**
 - a. Modern buildings or unique methods of preaching and teaching.
 - b. Its great wealth or how that wealth is used.
 - c. The church's prominence or popularity. The Laodicean church was the first bragging congregation, (Rev. 3:14-22) but not the last.
 - i. They said, "We are rich." **God said they were poor.**
 - ii. They said, "We are wealthy." **God said they were wretched.**

- iii. They said, "We do not need anything." **God said they need everything.**
- iv. They said, "We are busy in the church." **God said they were miserable.**
- v. They said, "We have a vision." **God said they were blind.**
- vi. They said, "We are clothed in fine garments." **God said they were naked.**
- vii. They said, "We are satisfied." **God said they make Him sick.**

14) **You can always recognize a Holy Spirit-powered church.** The evidence is obvious; they have power to:

- a) **Evangelize:** They share their faith with the lost and souls are saved. Evangelism is the only way to make full proof of your ministry (2 Tim. 4:5). When a church is not involved in winning souls, it grieves the Holy Spirit and is void of power...
- b) **Reproduce:** Souls are born into the family of God by the "imperishable" seed which is the word of God (1 Pet. 1:23). The Spirit-filled believer sows the seed; this is evangelism. The Holy Spirit hovers over the seed, convicting and leading the lost to repentance. This is the spiritual birth.
- c) **Change:** people (Acts 2:37-41); places (Acts 5:28); and things (Matt. 17:20, 21).
- d) Turn the world upside down (Acts 17:6)

This is the power that filled the upper room congregation on the day of Pentecost. That power is with the believer today in the person of the Holy Spirit. He is the power of the church.

15) **The Church: Its Future** (1 Thess. 4:16, 17) 16) for the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with a voice of *the* archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. 17) Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.

The true Church of Jesus Christ has a glorious, victorious future in the world, in the air, in the kingdom and in eternity; it cannot fail. "The gates of Hades shall not overpower it" (Matt. 16:18). The Church of Jesus Christ will emerge triumphant for, "we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us" (Rom.8:35-39). The church cannot fail because Christ is its Head, the Holy Spirit is its power, and the Word of God is its guide.

- a) **The future of the church in the world.** At Pentecost the Holy Spirit set the course for the church as it journeys from the upper room to the Rapture. It is to:
 - i. Wage war (Eph. 6:10).
 - ii. Run a race (Heb. 12:1, 2)
 - iii. Work in love (1 Cor. 3:9)
- b) **The future of the church in the air.** We shall be caught up. Caught up:
 - i. In our imperishable, glorified bodies (1 Cor. 15:42-44)
 - ii. To meet the Lord in the heavens and for the great majority of the church we will see Him in His resurrected body for the first time (1 John 3:2)
 - iii. That our deeds may be judged at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). This is the bema judgment.
 - iv. That we may be rewarded or suffer loss of reward (1 Cor 3:11-15)
- c) **The future of the church in the kingdom.**
 - i. The twelve apostles will sit on thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28).
 - ii. All who overcome the evils of Christendom (Laodicea) will sit with Christ on His Kingdom Throne (Rev. 3:21)
 - iii. We shall reign with Him a thousand years (Rev. 20:4-6).

d) **The future of the church in eternity.** After the kingdom reign of one thousand years there will be “a new heaven and a new earth” Rev.21:1). The earth will be restored to its original, created state (Gen 1:1 OT). God’s earthly people Israel will inherit the new earth (Ex. 32:13 OT).

16) **The Church. His bride will remain in His presence forever.** If in His human form He is in the new heaven or the new earth, we will be with Him, to see Him, to serve Him, and to worship Him. He will continue to bestow upon His bride the riches of His eternal grace (Eph. 2:6, 7). Even in our perfect, glorified bodies it will take eternity (time without end) to begin to comprehend the greatness of His grace.