

THE CHURCH

Here is the church. Here is the steeple. Open it up and see all the people. Remember? Our relationship with the church will largely be determined by our understanding of the church. What is the church? It is not a building, though there are church buildings. The church is not a group of pleasure seekers on a boat on Sunday worshipping God "in their own way". It is not even a group of people meeting in a home for Bible study. The word church comes from the word "ecclesia", that means "called out assembly". It is not just a group of Christians. The church is a locally called out assembly of Christians.

Acts 2:41 says: *"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls."*

The local church is made up of saved, baptized believers! The word "church" is mentioned 110 times in Scripture. (See also I Timothy 3:15-16, I Corinthians 1:2, II Corinthians 1:1, Galatians 1:2)

God set up three institutions: THE HOME, GOVERNMENT, and THE CHURCH. To the church He gave two ordinances: BAPTISM and THE LORD'S SUPPER. Jesus Christ is to be the center of our attention in the church.

1. Christ is the head of the church.
Ephesians 5:23: *"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."*
2. The church is to be subject to Christ.
Ephesians 5:24: *"Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing."*
3. Christ builds the church numerically and spiritually.
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."*

So, the church is a group of baptized believers in a community who are bonded together for the purpose of spreading the gospel, observing the ordinances, and building up the members to bring glory to God.

DESCRIPTION OF THE CHURCH

The church is like a **hospital** for the hurting. It is a **college** for Bible education. It is a **boot camp** for the training of Christian soldiers. The church is a **cafeteria** for the spiritually hungry. It is also called the **Bride of Christ**.

I Corinthians 12:12-14 says: *"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. 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. For the body is not one member, but many."*

The church here is referred to as the body of Christ. Its members all have different functions. Every member is important. Every member needs all the other members. That is why it is so important to be a member of a local church. The body needs you and you need the body.

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

C	Compassion
H	Hatred for sin
U	Unction of the Holy Spirit
R	Real people
C	Comfort for the hurting
H	Hunger for revival

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH?

Ephesians 4:11-15 says: *“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:”*

In this passage it is clear that the church is to help perfect (mature) the saints, do the work of the ministry, and edify (build up) Christians. There is to be unity and teaching about Christ. Verse 14 emphasizes that the church will guard Christians from false doctrine and deceit. The church is also to:

1. Bring glory to God (Ephesians 1:6, 12; 3:21)
2. Develop its members spiritually (Acts 20:28-32)
3. Be God's pillar and foundation of the truth (I Timothy 3:15)
4. Evangelize the world (Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:18-20)

EXAMPLE OF THE EARLY CHURCH

The book of Acts is a history of the church Jesus began on the seashore of Galilee. After His ascension and the power of the Holy Spirit came on the disciples, the church literally exploded with growth. Some Bible scholars believe the church could have been as large as 100,000! What kind of church was it? What should our church be like?

1. IT WAS A PRAYING CHURCH

Acts 1:14: *“These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.”*

Acts 2:42: *“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”*

Acts 6:4: *“But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.”*

They did not get too busy to pray. It was a top priority.

2. IT WAS A PASSIONATE CHURCH

Acts 3:6: *“Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.”*

The members cared for the hurting.

3. **IT WAS A PAYING CHURCH**

Acts 4:34-35: "Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need." (See also Malachi 3:10-11)

The people willfully gave tithes and offerings at the church for God's work.

4. **IT WAS A SOULWINNING CHURCH**

Acts 2:47: "Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."

Acts 8:4: "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word."

Acts 8:35: "Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus."

Acts 16:5: "And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily."

Acts 16:32: "And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house."

Every Christian is to be a soulwinner. It is not just the Pastor's responsibility. The growth of the church was phenomenal. (See also Acts 2:41, 4:4, and 6:7)

5. **IT WAS A POWERFUL CHURCH**

Acts 4:33: "And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all."

The disciples were accused of turning the world upside down with their doctrine. They actually were turning the world right side up.

6. **IT WAS A PREACHING CHURCH**

Much of the book of Acts is made up of sermons. God blesses a church that majors on preaching.

I Corinthians 1:18: "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God."

Some examples of preaching from the Book of Acts:

Acts 2	Peter at Jerusalem
Acts 7	Steven before the counsel
Acts 10	Peter at Cornelius' house
Acts 13:5	Paul and Barnabas at Salamis
Acts 13:16	Paul in Antioch
Acts 14:1	Paul and Barnabas in Iconium
Acts 14:7	Paul in Lystra
Acts 16	Paul in Thyatira
Acts 17	Paul in Thessalonica
Acts 17:10	Paul and Silas in Berea
Acts 17:16	Paul in Athens
Acts 18	Paul in Corinth
Acts 19	Paul in Ephesus
Acts 20	Paul in Troas
Acts 28	Paul in Rome

7. IT WAS A PERSECUTED CHURCH

A growing church will be an opposed church! It is evidenced in the Scripture. In Acts 5, the disciples were beaten. In Acts 8, great persecution arose. James was beheaded in Acts 12. Paul was stoned in Acts 14. Paul and Silas were jailed in Acts 16. Peter, Paul, and many others were imprisoned at various times. One preacher said for his members to be ready to “pucker” or “duck” when they told people where they went to church. The early church grew most while under persecution. (See Acts 4:1-4) It brings us closer to God.

8. IT WAS A PERSONABLE CHURCH

Soon after Saul’s conversion (who later became Paul), Ananias came to pray for him, calling him “Brother” Saul. We are encouraged to call church members by name and have an example of calling each other brother or sister. **A church is to be a family.**

Acts 2:42: “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

Fellowship means “communion” or “sharing in common”. Christians need to spend time with other Christians. It encourages and sharpens each other’s Christianity.

THE PASTOR’S ROLE

The Holy Spirit places the man of God to head a local congregation. Acts 20:28 says: *“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.”*

Churches are to be independent of outside control of policy or doctrine. The Word of God, Pastor and congregation all has their roles. The Pastor is not the head of the church. Christ is. The Pastor is more or less the manager, not the owner. He is also called the undershepherd. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. The Pastor is to follow God’s leadership when leading the church. Three New Testament names are given to the Pastor:

1. **ELDER** - This title emphasizes experience and wisdom.

He is to give access to it through his teaching, preaching, and counseling. I Timothy 3 gives the qualifications of the Pastor.

2. **PASTOR** - This title emphasizes being a shepherd who gives protection.

He is to warn the people of harmful things and to stand vigil over them to make sure they are not harmed. The Pastor is like a sheep dog.

3. **BISHOP** - This title means overseer.

The Pastor is to oversee the church to make sure it benefits the members. All must be done properly so the members can have a church where their needs are met and which make them all they can be.

Revelation 1-3 reveals that a church is to have one Pastor. He is to do all the duties any Christian would do plus make his priorities the Word of God and prayer (Acts 6:4). He will be held accountable for the direction and doctrine of the church. That is why everything at a church must go through the Pastor. Music, teachers, activities, etc., are all to be approved by the Pastor.

Be loyal to your Pastor. Follow his leadership.

THE CHURCH MEMBER'S ROLE

It is a privilege and responsibility to be a member of a local biblical church. What does God expect out of every church member?

FAITHFULNESS

Hebrews 10:25 says: *"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."* A church member should be at church every time the doors are open! In John 20:24-29, Thomas missed one service, on a Sunday night, and missed Jesus. He has been labeled as Doubting Thomas ever since. The service you need the most is often the hardest one to attend. When asked why it was so important to be faithful to church, Charles Spurgeon responded by removing a red-hot coal from a fireplace. The coal grew darker and darker until soon he was able to touch it. He said, "That's why!" When removed from the fire, the coal grows cold. When Christians are not around the warmth of the Word, preaching and other Christians, they soon grow cold.

TO USE SPIRITUAL GIFT

God gives every Christian a talent or gift to be used in the local church. It makes the church run smoother and glorifies God. (See Matthew 25; I Corinthians 12)

REMEMBER TO PRAY FOR AND OBEY SPIRITUAL LEADERS

I Timothy 2:1-2 says: *"I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty."*

Hebrews 13:7 says: *"Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation."*

Hebrews 13:17 says: *"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you."*

A church member is to pray daily for his spiritual leader: Pastor, Youth Pastor, Sunday school teacher, Bus Captain, etc. Meditate on the scriptures.

TITHES AND OFFERINGS

Equal sacrifice is what God expects from every church member. **God wants every Christian to give at least 10% to a local congregation.** The leadership determines, following a budget, where funds go. (See Malachi 3:9-11)

SOUL WINNING

The Pastor, Sunday school teachers, Choir, and every member ought to be a soul winner.

UNITY

Acts 2:1 says: *"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place."*

Psalms 133:1 says: *"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"*

God loves unity and being in one accord among God's people. He hates discord (Proverbs 6:19). Be the Christian who smooths out problems not creates them. Do not be easily offended. Do not get sidetracked on trivia. Keep your sights on winning the world to Christ and avoid anything that hinders that purpose. Stay in the Word of God much. Notice that Psalm 119:65 says: *"Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O LORD, according unto thy word."*

ARE YOU:

Currently a faithful member of a local Bible believing, soulwinning, preaching, separate-from-the-world, church? If you are - THANK GOD! Most people in the world do not have that privilege. Many cities, even in America, do not have a great church in them.

Years ago a Christian lady put a sign on her mirror so she could see it daily. It read, "If every member of my church were exactly like me, what kind of church would I have?" What a question for us to ask ourselves!

NAME _____

REVIEW THE CHURCH - STEP 8

1. The word "church" comes from the word _____
Which means _____
2. The local church is made up of whom? _____
3. Name the three institutions God set up:

4. Name the two ordinances:

5. Who is the head of the church? _____
6. Give your definition of what the church is: _____
7. Name two purposes of the church:

8. Name three characteristics of the early church in Jerusalem:

9. Fellowship means: _____
10. Who places the Pastor in a church? _____
11. Elder means: _____
12. Pastor means: _____
13. Bishop means: _____
14. Hebrews 10:25 indicates a church member is to be at church _____

15. How is a church to survive financially? _____
16. Who is supposed to win souls? _____
17. Name one thing God would hate if it were present in a church: _____
18. Are you currently a member of a local church? _____
19. Are you faithful to every service? _____

20. Will you pray daily for your Pastor? _____