

The Church You Can Read about in the Bible

What exactly is the church?

Intro: Today we see thousands of different kinds of religious groups or churches all over the world. It creates lots of difficulty for those who are looking for God's way. They have to ask themselves, "Are all these churches right? Should I just pick the one I like? Or, should I just stay away from them all and just worship God alone?"

There are two things people who are seeking need to know:

**The church is important part of God's plan
It matters what church you become a member of**

In this series of lesson we're going to talk about the church you can read about in the Bible. We'll try to set aside modern denominational concepts of the church and get back behind them to the original church of Christ.

Today we are starting with one of the most fundamental questions, "What exactly is the church?"

The word "church" means different things to different people.

For many the word church immediately evokes the image of a physical structure--a place where people meet.

We hear it all the time in people's language.

Where is your church? (It has a physical address.)

That church was beautiful. It has impressive architectural features, decorations, etc.

For others the word "church" may evoke images of a set of officials and priests who make laws and determine doctrine.

That belief is contrary to the teaching of the "church."

In this case "the church" consists of a hierarchy of officials (clergy) who stand apart from the ordinary members (the laity).

For others the word "church" may evoke the image of an association of congregations that are bound together by some general organization.

Where is the headquarters of your church?

Attend the church of your choice.

The concept here is that the church simply refers to one of many denominations that are considered to make up the body of Christ.

We need to get a good concept of the church.

What did the word "church" originally mean in English?

The word "church" has its origins in the Greek language. Let me explain:

If you wanted to refer to someone as Lord, someone like Jesus, you would use the Greek word "kurios." In fact this is the word in the Greek NT by which Jesus is often described and is translated "lord."

If you wanted to refer to something that belonged to a lord, you would use the word "kuriokos."

Listen to or look at that word. That's the word from which our word "church" originates. If you compare the two words you'll see that they use the same sounds, even if with different letters.

So our first clue as to what the church is may be hidden in the very word church itself. We are talking about something that belongs to the Lord. However, in this case the English word "church" was used to describe the place where worshippers meet, i.e. the house "belonging to the Lord." So it was not the best word translators could have used to describe the thing that the Lord promised to build.

What did the word translated "church" originally mean in Greek?

Since the Bible was not written in English, it might be helpful to get behind the English translation to the word used by Jesus' apostles for the church. That word is "ekklesia."

Originally it referred to the gathering of the citizens of a city to conduct business.

Do you remember when Demetrius stirred up a large mob in Ephesus and they all gathered to the theater in an uproar.

Later the town clerk rebuked the citizens for allowing themselves to be whipped up in mob violence. Instead he said to them:

For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of our goddess. So then, if Demetrius and the craftsmen who are with him have a complaint against any man, the courts are in session and proconsuls are available; let them bring charges against one another. But if you want anything beyond this, it shall be settled in the lawful assembly. (Ac. 19:37-39)

It was an appropriate term to describe the people who followed Jesus.

Just like citizens assemble to conduct business, so Christians assemble to worship God. They are the assembled people.

And it is just a short step to use it also for the assembly itself, as when people say, "I'm going to church, i.e. the assembly of the people."

Who exactly is the "church" identifying?

It is identifying people.

Remember this little rhyme they all used to teach the children, "Here's the church; here's the steeple, open the door and there's the people." Wrong!

Somebody was wise enough to change the poem. "What is the church? A building with a steeple? No! Here's the church; it's the people.

So whenever you read "church" in the Bible, think people. The church is never used in the Bible to refer to a building that people meet in.

The first Christians met in the homes of members wealthy enough to host the group.

Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer greets you, and Quartus, the brother. (Rom. 16:23)

Only in the fourth century do we begin to find churches building facilities for worship.

It is identifying people who have been saved.

NT churches came into existence through the preaching of the gospel. Whenever people heard the gospel and obeyed it, the church came into existence.

For example when the gospel was first preached in Jerusalem, people responded gladly to the message about the forgiveness of sins that comes through Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.

So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:41)

And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:47)

And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number; (Acts 5:14)

Notice that the adding was done by the Lord because He was the one that was doing the saving.

The saved in a particular location then were addressed as the church in that place.

Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours: (1 Cor. 1:1-2)

Notice that these are the people Paul had taught the gospel and had been baptized.

And Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized. (Ac. 18:8)

Notice that they are said to be those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, that is, they have been separated or consecrated for God.

Consider also this statement by Paul to the elders of the church at Ephesus:

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (Ac. 20:28)

And notice that the Corinthians are identified with "all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus." There were many such congregations; and Paul sends their greetings to the church at Rome.

Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you. (Romans 16:16)

And that leads then to another use of the word "church."

All the saved in every place then could be referred to as the church.

Sometimes in the Bible the word church is not describing the people are saved in a particular place; but describing all those are saved all over the world.

And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all. (Eph. 1:22-23)

For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. (Eph. 5:23)

And in that connection it is important to ask how many bodies of the saved are there? And the answer is pretty clear!

There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; (Eph. 4:4)

So then hopefully we have a proper concept of the church you can read about in the bible.

It is not a building.

It is not a group of religious officials.

It is not an associate of congregations organizationally bound together like a denomination.

It is the people who have been saved. They are added by the Lord to His church; and they are the local assembly of those saved people in any particular place.

How important then should the church be to you and me?

If we've understood what the church is, then we have already answered that question. It is very important.

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, (Eph. 3:8-11)

The church was a part of the eternal purpose of God.

The church is the result of Jesus' coming and work.

The church was purchased by the blood of Jesus.

The church is the body of which Jesus is head and savior.

Conclusion: The church is important to God. How important is it to you?

Are you a member of that church you can read about in the Bible?

You can be if you obey that same gospel.