

God planned for His church to exist from before the beginning of time (Ephesians 3:8-11, God's "eternal purpose"), and several ancient prophecies about the kingdom of God (Psalm 2, Isaiah 2, Daniel 2, Joel 2) were fulfilled when the church was first established. (Acts 2) So, we are led to wonder,

## What Is the Church, and What Does It Mean to Me?

### What is the church?

Church is about **identity**. The church is more than a *place* or an *institution*; it's the group of *people who have been saved*.

- Jesus, the Christ, promised to build His **church**. (Matthew 16:13-20) Notice that He built only one church (see Ephesians 4:4-7) which is organized into separate local congregations. (Romans 16:16, "the churches of Christ"; 1 Corinthians 16:1, the "churches" in the region of Galatia; etc.)
- We, "as living stones, are being built up a **spiritual house**," the "**temple of God**" in which the Holy Spirit dwells. (1 Peter 2:5; 1 Corinthians 3:16; also Ephesians 2:19-22)
- He died to **purchase** (redeem) the church **with His own blood** (Acts 20:28), so every saved person **belongs to Him**. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 1 Peter 1:17-21)
- **Baptism** is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16), because "as many of us as were baptized **into Christ Jesus** were baptized **into His death**." (Romans 6:3) Baptism is for **salvation** (Acts 2:40-41; 1 Peter 3:21), and **the Lord adds saved people to the church**. (Acts 2:47; 5:11)

### What does the church mean to me?

Church is about **teaching**. It's not about *what we think*, it's about *what He says*.

- The "church of the living God" is "the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:15)
- The church is the group of Jesus' disciples who teach what to do to follow Him. (Acts 2:42; Matthew 28:18-20)

Church is about **praise**. It's not about *you*, it's about *Him*.

- Prophecy about Jesus mentions Him praising God in the congregation. (Psalm 22:22/Hebrews 2:12)
- As the people of God, we are to proclaim His praises. (1 Peter 2:9-10)

Church is about **relationship**. It's not about *you*, it's about *others*. Many people have the idea that 'church' has little to do with their salvation or their relationship with Jesus Christ, but there's no such thing as a 'maverick Christian.' We are to pursue spiritual things **with others**. (2 Timothy 2:22) For example,

- We need to **encourage** others, something which can only come by assembling with others. (Hebrews 10:24-25) This scripture doesn't tell us exactly *how* to encourage others, but it clearly can't happen if we never get together (if we "forsake the assembling of ourselves together")! Christians look out for each other, so even the **pooling resources** to help needy Christians happened when they gathered together. (1 Corinthians 16:1-2)

- We need to **help each other focus on spiritual things**. Jesus' disciples – His church – in the first century gathered together to **praise** God (Acts 2:46, Acts 5:42) and to do other spiritual activities, namely **pray, teach, and take the Lord's Supper**. (Acts 2:42, Acts 4:23-31, Acts 12:12, Acts 20:7)
- We need to **help each other overcome sin**.
  - We need to **warn** each other daily about the deceitfulness of sin, so we don't become hardened, Hebrews 3:12-13
  - Jesus taught about how to maintain good relationships in spite of sin. (Matthew 18:15-18) Notice the emphasis in that passage on "gaining your brother," and remember its context of child-like humility (verses 1-5), avoiding causing others to sin (verses 6-9), and trying to keep others from perishing (verses 10-14). Even one aspect of **church discipline** (1 Corinthians 5:4) was done when the church was "gathered together."
- We need to **help each other grow**.
  - Everyone has a role to play (Ephesians 4:11-6, "every part does its share, caus[ing] growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love")
  - We need each other, like a body needs all its members. (1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Romans 12:4-5) You are needed and I am needed, no matter how "big" or "small" our part may seem.

## Church is about **forming good habits.**

- **Jesus** regularly assembled with others in the synagogue, the Jewish equivalent of 'going to church,' and He participated. (Luke 4:16) In the same way that He taught His disciples to pray, He taught us **by example** to 'go to church.' So, if we want to be like Jesus, we will make it our custom to 'go to church.'
- **Growing** in faith requires us to add knowledge and self-control and godliness. This requires diligence and perseverance – in other words, good habits – and often involves help from others. (2 Peter 1:5-11)

### **Summary:**

Followers of Jesus *are* the 'church', and 'going to church' is a natural extension of *who we are* as Christians. The church is for our mutual strengthening and our spiritual survival. When you are saved,

1. You become a member of the church of Christ.
2. You then have a relationship with other saved people.
3. You need to 'go to church' and participate in order to follow Jesus' example, encourage and help others, and survive spiritually in a wicked world.

May God bless you to do your part as a member of Christ's church.

# What Is the Church, *and*

# What Does It Mean to Me?