

What is the Church?

Acts 2:36-42

INTRODUCTION:

We are continuing in a new sermon series "The Basics of Christianity". Previously, we have learned about "The Purpose of Life", "Christ and Creation", and "Temptation and Sin". This morning we are going to talk about the CHURCH. We will discover what the church is, according to the Bible.

What is the church? Is the church a building? When we see a building where people worship God, we refer to it as a church. So the place where we worship is referred to as a church.

Is church the events that happen during a worship service? We have all said "I am going to church this morning."

These definitions are one of two vast dimensions of the church: the local and visible dimension. Although these are both proper definitions of the word "church" in the English language, there is another Biblical definition of "church". It not just a building where people worship God or the actual worship service. The church is something much more than that.

The second dimension of the church is the universal and invisible dimension. It is the group of true believers in Christ who have been saved, both those who are alive and those who have physically died. Remember the sermon on the Purpose of Life? The purpose of life was to find God, to become a part of His church.

Let us see what the scriptures tell us about the church, it's purpose, and how we can become a part of it.

All Stand and Read Scripture

Acts 2:36-42 (NASB)

³⁶Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.”

³⁷Now when they heard *this*, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” ³⁸Peter *said* to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.” ⁴⁰And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation!” ⁴¹So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. ⁴²They were continually devoting

themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Prayer

We learn from the book of Acts that the New Testament church that exists today began on the Day of Pentecost (which is also called the "Feast of Weeks"). It was a Jewish feast that occurred fifty days after the Feast of the Passover. Since Jesus was crucified during the Passover, the Day of Pentecost occurred fifty days after Jesus' death on the cross.

Pentecost was one of the three annual holy days for which all Jewish males over twenty years of age were required by Jewish law to assemble in Jerusalem. This is why we will find Jews from all over the world present on this day.

All of the apostles were assembled in one place on this day. They had been told by Jesus to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit did arrive that day and the Apostles started preaching the Gospel of Christ.

This was the beginning of the church.

BODY:

I. What is the Church?

Acts 2:39-41 (NASB)

³⁹ For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." ⁴⁰ And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" ⁴¹ So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

Peter preached to the Jews at the temple with the assistance of the Holy Spirit and told them of their sin. They were "pricked in the heart" and repented of their sins and were baptized. About 3000 souls were added to the church.

We don't just go to church in a church building; we who are God's people in Christ Jesus are the church!

The word "church" as rendered in the New Testament comes from the Greek term *ekklesia* which is formed from two Greek words meaning "an assembly" and "called out ones." In other words, the New Testament church is a body of believers who have been called out from the world by God to live as his people under the authority of Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 1:22-23 (NASB)

²² And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

When Christ died on the cross for our sins, He purchased the church with His own blood. In other words, Jesus Christ purchased believers through his sacrificial death to set us free from the slavery of sin and to make us righteous or sinless before God

He we are told that God made Him the head of the church which is His body. When we are saved, we become part of His body. We will talk more about this later.

The church is likened to a bride of whom Christ is the groom (Ephesians 5:25-27), and a branch with Christ as the vine (John 15: 1). It is also pictured as a flock of sheep with Christ as the shepherd (John 10:7-27). It is seen as a temple with Christ as the cornerstone (1 Peter 2:5). It is described as ministering priests with Christ as the high priest (1 Peter 2:5-9). As well as many other references.

II. What is the Purpose of the Church?

Acts 2:42 (NASB)

42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

This verse could be considered a purpose statement for the church. According to this verse, the purposes or activities of the church should be 1) teaching biblical doctrine, 2) providing a place of fellowship for believers, 3) observing the Lord's supper, and 4) praying.

A. The church is to teach biblical doctrine so we can be grounded in our faith.

Ephesians 4:14 (NASB)

14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;

B. The church is to be a place of fellowship, where Christians can be devoted to one another and honor one another, instruct one another, be kind and compassionate to one another, encourage one another, and most importantly, love one another.

C. The church is to be a place where believers can observe the Lord's Supper, remembering Christ's death and shed blood on our behalf

D. The final purpose of the church according to Acts 2:42 is prayer. The church is to be a place that promotes prayer, teaches prayer, and practices prayer.

E. Another purpose given to the church is the **great commission** of proclaiming the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Matthew 28:18-20 (NASB)

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."

The church reaches out (scatters) to spread the love of Christ and the gospel message to unbelievers in the world.

F. Some final purposes of the church are given in

James 1:27(NASB)

²⁷ Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world.

The church is to be about the business of ministering to those in need. This includes not only sharing the gospel, but also providing for physical needs (food, clothing, shelter) as necessary and appropriate.

So, what is the purpose of the church? Paul gave an excellent illustration to the believers in Corinth. The church is God's hands, mouth, and feet in this world—the body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:12-20 (NASB)

¹² For even as the body is one and *yet* has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. ¹³ For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

¹⁴ For the body is not one member, but many. ¹⁵ If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not *a part* of the body," it is not for this reason any the less *a part* of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not *a part* of the body," it is not for this reason any the less *a part* of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. ¹⁹ If they were all one member, where would the body be? ²⁰ But now there are many members, but one body.

Each one of us have different talents that God has given us to carry out His work. It is our responsibility to use those talents as God leads us to serve Him.

We are to be doing the things that Jesus Christ would do if He were here physically on the earth. The church is to be "Christian," "Christ-like," and Christ-following.

The church, both in the universal and local sense, is important because it is one of the main vehicles through which God carries out his purposes on earth. The church is the body of Christ—his heart, his mouth, his hands and feet—reaching out to the world.

III. How Do You Become a Part of the Church?

Acts 2:36-38 (NASB)

³⁶ Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified."

³⁷ Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" ³⁸ Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Remember last week's sermon? We are all sinners. Just as the Jews had physically crucified Christ on the cross, we are also guilty because He had to die on the cross to give us forgiveness of our sin. Our sins had separated us from the righteousness of God. We had no way to get rid of our sin.

Sin came into the world when the serpent, Satan, tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and they disobeyed God by eating of the Tree of Good and Evil in the 3rd chapter of Genesis.

Satan told Eve that by eating of the tree, she would not die, she would instead become like God knowing good from evil. So she ate and also gave the fruit to Adam and he ate. Despite Satan's promises, Adam and Eve DID die, not physically, but spiritually. They were created righteous after the image of God, but now due to sin they had been separated from God, because God cannot tolerate unrighteousness.

As a result of Adam's fall, sin entered the world. Adam, the first man of the human race, caused every man after him to be born into a sinful state or fallen condition. All humans have adopted this sin nature through Adam's original act of disobedience.

We have already established that we are all sinners.

Romans 3:23 (NASB)

²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

SO, if sin separates us from God and condemns us to spiritual death, how do we get free from its curse? **THERE IS GOOD NEWS!** Fortunately, God provided a solution through his Son, Jesus Christ.

John 3:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

God knew the sinful state of man. We were sinners and there was **NOTHING** that we could do to free ourselves of our sin. So He sent Jesus to earth in the form of a man to die on the cross as a perfect sacrifice for our sins.

1 Peter 2:24 (NASB)

²⁴ and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.

Just like the Jews on the Day of Pentecost, we ask the question, "What must I do to be saved?" Christ's answer through Peter is still the same:

Acts 2:38 (NASB)

³⁸ "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION:

The Church of God is not a beautiful and majestic temple or building built by human hands. It is not just a physical assembly of people. It is a spiritual assembly. Remember that the church is the body of Christ, and the head of that body is Christ. Christ's true church is a complete body composed of Christians who are united in the Spirit of God and

Christ which is the head of that body. The church is essential to salvation, not because the church saves, but because all the saved are in the church.

Christ's death on the cross will only benefit you if you allow Him into your life!

When the Lord saves people who have obeyed His word (Mark 16:16), He adds only them to His one true church (Acts 2:47), the church of Christ (Romans 16:16). How tragic it will be for the many who miss Heaven and who end up in the eternal torments of Hell, because they chose to obey the commandments of men instead of the commandments of God.

Please don't wait until eternity to find out you are lost. If you are being convicted this morning to become a part of God's church, God's word says:

2 Corinthians 6:2b (NASB)

Behold now is "THE ACCEPTABLE TIME," behold, now is "THE DAY OF SALVATION"—

The Bible also says

Joshua 24:15 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

choose for yourselves today whom you will serve...but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

Tomorrow may be too late.

James 4:14 (NASB)

¹⁴ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.

This life here on earth is so short, but eternity is forever and ever without end. If you have not accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior, please come out and obey the Lord before it is everlastingly too late. Repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins so you can be saved and then the Lord will add you to His one true church so you won't be eternally separated from God. Only you can make that decision.

I encourage you to allow Christ to make you righteous before God by stepping forward this morning during our invitation hymn.

He Is Lord!

He is Lord, He is Lord. He has risen from the dead and He is Lord.
Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess, That Jesus Christ is Lord.