

# **Ecclesiology**

The Biblical Study and  
Doctrine of the Church



## The Church

(Ecclesiology – The Biblical Study and Doctrine of the Church, which is the Body of Christ)

### Introduction:

We have previously looked at the Doctrine of Salvation, God's rescue mission, and the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit, our helper and comforter as followers of Jesus. Now it is fitting that we look at the Doctrine of the Church, who we are as Jesus' people.

**Today the term "church" is used loosely and broadly.** It can mean a particular *building* where believers meet or *an old building* where believers once met in the past. It can be used to speak of *an organization*, a *denomination* or a current *local gathering* of believers. It is even used by some cults that do not hold to the basic concepts of historic Christianity. Even followers of Satan refer to themselves as the "church" of Satan.

**When we look at the biblical use of the word "church"** we find it is much more specific and precise than the broad use in today's culture. As God's people, we need God's perspective. This is the reason for the Doctrine of Ecclesiology, (ekklesia = church + logo = word). As for all doctrine, God's word, the bible, must be the source and basis of our beliefs. Indeed, if we are willing to search the bible, everything we need to know about the church, (its mystery, its beginnings, its purpose, its practices, its structure, leadership and its future), are all defined and detailed in its pages.

The church is not a man-made organization or a lifeless building. The church is alive with life. It is a living organism. Buildings and organizations are simply tools that we, the church, utilize to help us accomplish our God-given purpose.

In the New Testament the first use of the term "church" is by Jesus in Matthew 16:15-19. Jesus is asking the disciples, "who do you say that I am?" Peter answers, "you are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus responds.

"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." **Matthew 16:17-18**

**So then, what is this "church" that Jesus will build and calls His own?**

## A. What is the Church?

### 1. Terms that Give Meaning

- a. **“Ekklesia”** is the most common Greek word translated church. It’s used around 115 times in the New Testament and means “called out ones” or those “called and gathered,” as those called out of a sinful life to new life in Christ.
  
- b. **“Kyriakos”** is a Greek word which means “belonging to the Lord” and translated “the Lord’s” in 1 Corinthians 11:20 and Revelation 1:10, seems to be the source of our English word “church”. This Greek word was translated by German bible scholars as “kirche” and then into Old English as “cirice and circe” which meant “place of assembling set aside for Christian worship; the body of Christian believers and Christians collectively.” In time the term became “church” in our common English.

### 2. Church is People

Ekklesia (church) always refers to people.

- a. **It can be used in a general sense** like any gathering of people, good or bad. For instance, the mob that Paul dealt with in Ephesus.

“Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly (ekklesia) was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together.” **Acts 19:32**

- b. **Or a large group** (millions) of people together as when Stephen spoke of the children of Israel that had come out of Egypt.

“This is he who was in the congregation (ekklesia) in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us,”  
**Acts 7:38**

- c. **With only two or three exceptions**, ekklesia always refers specifically to those called out of the world by Jesus, to be His people, His Church.

“Then Jesus said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” They immediately left their nets and followed Him.  
**Mark 1:17-18**

“And He (Jesus) went up on the mountain and called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him.” **Mark 3:13**  
“among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints:” **Romans 1:6-7**

- d. The church is a very specific and special people.** Beginning at Pentecost, all those who have been “called out” of this fallen sinful human race to new life in Jesus are His church. This “church” is a new race of people who are Spiritually reborn and have passed from death to life.

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.” **John 5:24**

“God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **1 Corinthians 1:**

“And the Lord added to the church (ekklesia) daily those who were being saved. **Acts 2:47**

### **3. The Church is Something Entirely New**

- a. The church is not a replacement for Judaism.** God is not finished with the Jews. (Romans 9-11) Nor is the church an adaptation of the synagogue worship, but an entirely different and unique work of Jesus for this age and period. We speak of this period of time from the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost to the Rapture, as “The Church Age.” Paul refers to it as the dispensation of grace, which was not understood by those believers in the past; a mystery.

“if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel,” **Ephesians 3:2-6**

- b. The church is a new unique work of God.** The new outpouring of God’s Spirit gets a new container, so to speak. The church is a new wine skin for the new work of God. (Colossians 1:27)

“And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved.” **Luke 5:37-38**

- c. **Unique, in that God**, knowing the Jews would not as a whole accept Jesus as their Messiah, used their blindness and rejection as an opportunity to extend salvation to the gentiles.

“For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.” **Romans 11:25**

- d. **Unique, in that Jesus** makes His church from both Jew and Gentile, forming one new spiritual man (race). (Ephesians 1:10)

“having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, (both Jew and Gentile) thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He (Jesus) came and preached peace to you who were afar off (the Gentiles) and to those who were near (the Jews).” **Ephesians 2:15-16**

“that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel,” **Ephesians 3:6**

- e. **Unique, in that instead** of coming to the temple to find and be near God’s presence as in the past, now God actually dwells in us, a living temple, the church of the living God, by His Spirit.

“I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” **1 Timothy 3:15**

This was new, unexpected and totally foreign to the past Jewish experience. A mystery to what they had expected.”

“the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this

mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” **Colossians 1:27**

“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” **1 Corinthians 3:16 (6:19)**

“And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” **2 Corinthians 6:16** (Exodus 29:45; Leviticus 26:12; Jeremiah 31:33; 32:38)

“in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” **Ephesians 2:22**

“And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”

**John 17:22-23**

#### **4. Other Pictures of the Church**

Not only are we, the church, spoken of as a temple of God, the bible gives us a number of other ideas of the church in pictures, some of which are very real and others in types and metaphors that help us understand more fully the unique identity of the church.

##### **a. As a building**

“having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” **Ephesians 2:19-22** (1 Peter 2:5)

##### **b. As a Body**

“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many.”

“Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.”

**1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 27** (Romans 12:5; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:12; 5:23, 30; Colossians 1:24)

**c. As a Bride**

“Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.”

**Romans 7:4** (Ephesians 5:25-32)

**d. As the Family of God**

“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, **Ephesians**

**2:19** (Galatians 6:10; 1 Peter 2:9-10)

**e. As a Flock**

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.” **John 10:11** (John 10:7-16; 21:15-17)

“For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” **I Peter 2:25** (1 Peter 5:1-4)

**f. As a Vine and Branches**

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.” **John 15:1-4**

**B. How Does One Become Part of the Church?**

**1. You must be born into the church**

Membership in Jesus’ church is by birth alone (specifically, New Birth)

“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.” **Galatians 3:26**

“Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” **John 3:5-6**

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,” **I Peter 1:3**

“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, members of the household of God,” **Ephesians 2:19**



- 2. Whereas any membership** in an earthly institution is ended at death, including marriage, the same cannot be said of the church. Membership in the church is eternal.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

**John 3:16**

“And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life.”

**1 John 2:25**

***The church is every Spirit-born believer since Pentecost until Jesus returns.***

### **C. How is the Church Seen or Understood?**

There are many groups or congregations of Christians that gather as the church in specific locations, in towns and cities worldwide, often giving their group individual names for distinction; but all together they make up what is called the “church universal.” The reality is that all these local assemblies, or congregations, are part of the one church that makes up the body of Christ.

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” **Ephesians 4:4-6**

#### **The Church is Spoken of in this Respect.**

- 1. A specific local assembly** is the most common use of the word *church* in the New Testament. It refers to the gathering of people into a local congregation at a specific location, whether a home or town. As Paul closes his first letter to the Corinthians, he extends a special greeting to a house church that met in the home of Aquila and Priscilla.

“The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.” **1 Corinthians 16:19** (Acts 2:47, 11:28 etc. Romans 16:3-5; Colossians 4:15-26; Philemon 1:2)

- 2. A group of assemblies in a location or region** is often referred to as churches (plural) as in 1 Corinthians 16:19 above, “The churches of Asia greet you.” This as well as many other instances. (Acts 15:41, 15:5; Romans 16:4, 16; 1 Corinthians 16:1, 19; 2 Corinthians 8:1; Galatians 1:2)

“Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.” **Acts 9:31**

**3. The universal church as a whole** speaks of the complete body of Christ, made up of all believers throughout the world and throughout all time. Paul speaks of the universal church when it describes Jesus being the head of the church.

“And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” **Ephesians 1:22-23** (see also Ephesians 5:23-24)

“to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,” **Ephesians 3:10**

Again, it’s important to remember that Jesus said, “I will build my church”, (singular) not churches (plural). (Matthew 16:18)

**The Universal church** that Jesus is building can be defined as: Everyone who responds to God’s call, places their faith and confidence in Jesus, for forgiveness of sin, reconciliation with God and a new spiritual life, from its inception on the day of Pentecost until Jesus calls us to Himself, whether through resurrection from the dead or alive and being caught up to meet Him. That is the Church Universal.

**4. The church is spoken of as both visible and invisible.**

While the local and regional church has an obvious visible manifestation or expression in their individual settings and are more or less clearly seen, the Universal church as described has an unseen, not so obvious invisible element since it encompasses all members from all ages, (including those who have already died) that make up the church in its entirety.

#### **D. How is the Church Organized (Governed)?**

As the church began to grow and organize, for function sake (as seen in Acts 6), form and structure were implemented. In time, well-developed common structures have been recognized and utilized. The three most common are:

**1. Episcopalian (*Episkopos*):** (bishop) Under this structure authority over the church resides in the bishop who is seen as an elder of elders. In simple forms are Methodists and Episcopalians, or Anglican, as well as Eastern

Orthodox. In a more complex form are Roman Catholics, which are headed by a chief Bishop of Bishops in Rome, who is the Pope.

2. **Congregational:** (democratic) This structure stresses the role of individual Christians, making the congregation the final authority in most, if not all, matters. Every member has a vote. (Baptist and Evangelical Free, Bible and many independent churches.)
3. **Presbyterian** (*Presbuteros*): (elders) Authority over the church resides in a group of representatives to whom authority has been granted by the congregation, elders. Seen in Presbyterian, Reformed and some Bible churches.

\*Some assemblies have a combination of these last two. For example: Elder governed with staff who deal with many day to day tasks, while the members vote on certain decisions, such as Elders, Deacons and budgets.

#### **E. Who are the Church's Leaders?**

##### **1. Jesus is the head of the church He is building, and no one else.**

“And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” **Ephesians 1:22** (1 Corinthians 11:3, Ephesians 4:15-16)

“For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. **Ephesians 5:23**

“And He (Christ) is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.” **Colossians 1:18**

##### **2. The bible speaks of two offices, that of Elders and of Deacons.**

(Beyond the foundation gifts for establishing the church in Ephesians 4:11)

###### **a. Elders** as under-shepherds who care for the spiritual needs of the church.

Spiritual leadership is the responsibility of the elders. Their qualifications are found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9, which restricts this office to men. They are responsible to protect the church from doctrinal error and to serve the church as shepherds (pastors) caring for God's flock (Acts 20:17, 28) by:

- 1) **Feeding** them the word of God (John 21:15-17; Act 6:4)
- 2) **Guarding** them from false teachers (Act 20:28-30)

**3) Leading** them spiritually (1 Peter 5:2)

**4) Being spiritual examples** for them (1 Peter 5:3)

**b. Deacons** who serve by caring for the physical needs of the church.

Deacons do the practical work of leadership under the spiritual authority of the elders. They take care of those in the congregation in need. Their qualification is found in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Women can be deacons. (Romans 16; 1 Timothy 3:8-11.)

## **F. What are the Activities or Disciplines of the Church?**

**1. Ordinances** are outward rites commanded by Jesus for the church that have deep and significant meaning. They are observed in obedience to portray outwardly what has already taken place internally in our hearts. Both of these ordinances commemorate the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. It is generally accepted that there are two.

### **a. Water Baptism**

Immersion is the primary meaning of the Greek word “baptize” and best pictures the significance of baptism, which is death to the old life and resurrection to the new.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

**Matthew 28:19-20**

### **b. The Lord’s Supper** (also called Communion or Eucharist)

It is a remembrance and memorial of the life and death of Jesus. In the bible leaven is a type of sin. The unleavened bread represents the sinless life of our Savior that paid the death penalty for our sins on the cross. The juice represents His blood that was shed for the remission of our sins, individually and corporately.

“Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.” **1 Corinthians 11:24-26**

## **2. Practices**

The Bible gives us many examples of what the church should be doing.

- a. **Worshiping God** (Luke 4:8; John 4:23; Revelation 4:10)
- b. **Praying** (Acts 2:42)
- c. **Preaching** (2 Timothy 4:2)
- d. **Studying His word** (2 Timothy 2:15; 1 Corinthians 4:6)
  
- e. **Loving one another** (John 13:35; Philippians 1:1-4; Galatians 6:2)
- f. **Correcting** (2 Timothy 3:16, 4:2-3;
- g. **Learning how to live as godly people** (Titus 2:11-12)
- h. **Showing concern for the poor and needy** (I John 3:17; I Timothy 6:8; James 1:27)
- i. **Baptizing and sharing the “Lord's supper”** (Acts 2:38 & 41; Luke 22:19-20)
- j. **Evangelizing the lost** (Ephesians 4:12; Matthew 28:18-20).
- k. **Sending out ministers and missionaries** (Acts 13:1-3)

**G. What is the Mission and Purpose of the Church?**

**1. Of all the things that we could or should be doing,** ultimately, all should be for the glory of God. God is glorified when we have correct attitudes and proper relationships in three directions.

- a. **Towards God, Glorification:** (giving honor through praise, worship and service with a Godly lifestyle) “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” **1 Corinthians 10:31**  
(1 Peter 4:11)
  
- b. **Towards fellow believers, Edification:** (building up and encouraging members to maturity) “Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.” **Romans 15:2** (1 Corinthians 14:2; Ephesians 4:29)
  
- c. **Towards the lost, Evangelization:** (proclaiming the good news that sin has separated us from God, but Jesus offers forgiveness and reconciliation to God through His life, death and resurrection. “And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” **Mark 16:15**

**2. The purpose and mission of the Church is being accomplished:**

- a. **As we are reaching and winning the lost to Jesus.** As we share the good news in the power of the Spirit in such a way that individuals are moved to acknowledge their sinfulness, repent of their sins, look to Jesus for forgiveness and are born again. (Romans 10:14; 2 Corinthians 5:11; 2 Peter 3:9)

- b. As believers are growing and maturing.** As we encourage believers to read and study God's word and as we teach the bible faithfully and systematically, believers are built up and edified. As we model a life of surrender and service to Jesus and encourage others to do the same, discipleship takes place. (Matthew 28:19-20; 2 Timothy 2:2; Ephesians 4:11-12)
  
- c. As we are giving opportunities for service** within the safety of the local church fellowship as well as opportunities for involvement in existing ministries beyond the local fellowship and possibilities for new ministry development.
  
- d. As we are recognizing, commissioning and sending** for missions and ministry. (Acts 6:2-7; Romans 10:15; Act 13:1-3)

**And finally.....**

**H. What is the Future of the Church?**

This will be looked at and developed in the Doctrine of End Times (Eschatology)

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