

# Lesson 9

## *What is the Church and How Important is It?*

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*Nothing is more confusing to the non-Christian or “unchurched” believer than the multiplicity of churches with their vast diversity of beliefs and practices. This confusion often leads individuals to simply avoid church membership altogether. However, the church is at the core of God’s plan for the accomplishment of His purposes through human redemption and the ultimate destruction of sin. The purpose of this lesson is to teach the role and importance of the church in God’s plan and to stress the importance of each disciple’s participation in its life and mission.*

### **The Beginning of the Church**

**Matthew 16:13-20** *Christ is the planner, founder, and builder of the church.*

1. Who does Jesus say is the church’s builder? *Himself.*
2. What is the rock on which the church is built? *Actually, Jesus doesn’t explain himself here. Certainly, Jesus is the foundation of the church—the giant bedrock upon which the church eternally and securely rests (1 Corinthians 3:11 – Jesus is the only foundation). Thus, the rock may refer to Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. However, in that the name Jesus gave Peter (Jesus changed his name from Cephas to Peter) means “rock,” this may refer to Peter and the other apostles. He may use an intended irony in that Peter’s name means “small rock” or “pebble” while the word Jesus used for “rock” refers to a large boulder. Hence, it is likely that Jesus was referring to himself as the rock. However, to see the apostles as foundational in the church would not violate the spirit of the verse (Ephesians 2:20 – “. . . built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets . . .”). Note: Some have viewed this text as Jesus’ appointment of Peter as the first “pope.” Perhaps if scripture further revealed Peter as preeminent this could be argued, but nowhere else in scripture is this indicated.*
3. What does “church” mean? *The Greek word Jesus used is “ekklesia.” This word is made up of two parts, “ek,” meaning “out of,” and “klesis,” meaning “a calling.” This word literally meant “a calling out of.” The Greeks used it to signify a group of citizens called together to discuss state affairs. In the Greek version of the Old Testament (Septuagint), it was used to designate the gathering of Israel for any definite purpose or for a gathering regarded as representative of Israel. Hence, when Jesus said “my church,” the apostles knew he meant a gathering or assembly of people who would be called out to be his to achieve his purposes.*
4. In scripture, the word “church” is used in the following:
  - a. a general gathering of people, an assembly
  - b. the universal church throughout New Testament history until the present
  - c. a congregation in a city
  - d. a group of Christians meeting in a home

*The text reveals which type of assembly is being described.*

5. Does this scripture indicate Jesus planned to build churches which would denominate under names, doctrines, and practices? *No.*
6. What were the “keys” to be given? *The revelation about the church, membership in it, the mission of it, and her ultimate victory over death. This revelation is recorded in scripture.*
7. What does it mean, “the gates of Hades will not overcome it?” *Hades is not Hell as punishment. Hades is the place where the dead go to wait for their eternal fate. Jesus went there (Acts 2:27; Luke 23:43 - Jesus was in Hades (grave) in Paradise). Lazarus went there (Luke 16:19-31 - He went to Paradise and his rich counterpart went there to torment). Before our final resurrection, there is no way out of Hades. Jesus took the keys and passed them on. He is the key! Death no longer prevails!*

### **Ephesians 1:9-12** *The church was predestined by God.*

1. What is the mystery of God’s will He revealed to us? *That God had foreplanned to unite things in heaven and on earth in one kingdom with Christ as its head. The church is the earthly part of this kingdom.*
2. What is our purpose as the church? *To bring praise to God (v.12).*
3. **Ephesians 3:10** - He reveals His manifold wisdom through the church
4. **Ephesians 2:7** - He shows the incomparable riches of His grace in His relationship with the church.

### **Isaiah 2:2-3** *God used Isaiah to predict the church’s establishment.*

1. This is prophetic language and is thus colorful and figurative. However, most Bible students argue this prophecy is about the church. That “all nations” would come to be a part indicates the fulfillment of the “universal blessing” promise given to Abraham.
2. What was to happen in the Lord’s house (the church)? *God will teach us His ways and how to walk with Him. Also, God’s word would go out from it, indicating the church’s evangelistic mission.*

## **What is the Church?**

### **Galatians 3:26-29** *When we are baptized into Christ, God adds us to His spiritual family, the church.*

1. How do we get “in Christ?” *By baptism.*
2. If we belong to Christ, what are we (v.29)? *Abraham’s offspring and heirs of God’s promise.*
3. Thus, we see the church is built by Christ through disciples making disciples.
4. Disciples meet together in assemblies or congregations called churches.

### **Ephesians 1:22-23** *Jesus is the head of His own body, the church.*

1. Who is the head of the church? *Jesus.*
2. What are the implications of the church being Jesus’ body? *He lives in it through the Holy Spirit, it belongs to Him, and it is a living, spiritual organism.*
3. **Ephesians 4:4** - How many bodies (churches) does Jesus have? *One.*

## **Ephesians 2:19-22**      *The church is God's household.*

1. As members of the church, whose household are we now part of? *God's.*
2. What does the scripture mean when it says that Jesus is the chief cornerstone? *Jesus is the reference point for everything in the church, from individual living to organization, name, ministries, and mission. He builds the church from himself.*
3. How are you being "built together" with the church? *The Holy Spirit adds you to the universal body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). This brings a unity we don't create, but we maintain (Ephesians 4:3). We do this by bonding with all who call on his name. As we practice the examples, principles, and commands of Christ, we will find ourselves involved in deeper relationships than we ever imagined. We will also find ourselves in the most meaningful, purposeful fellowship possible.*
4. Compare the church with the temple. It is now God's "dwelling place."

## **Acts 2:41-47**      *Read the example of how Jesus built his church.*

1. How did the first Christians accept the gospel? *They were baptized that day.*
2. When they were baptized, what (who) did they receive (v.38)? *The Holy Spirit. Hence, we see how and why the church is called God's dwelling place.*
3. Who added new members to their number (the church)? *God (v.47).*
4. How were the first Christians described in v.42? *Devoted.*
5. What were they devoted to?
  - a. The apostles' teaching - God was speaking through the apostles (**Acts 2:4**).
  - b. The fellowship - (Gr) "koinonia," means a communion (from commune), a sharing in common, a partnership
  - c. The breaking of bread - the fellowship's communion feast to participate in and proclaim the death of Christ
  - d. Prayer - the fellowship's direct communication with God
6. Describe, from vv.43-47, the first church. *Awe (worship), power-filled, together, shared everything, sacrificial, met daily, were in each other's homes, praised God, their number grew daily.*
7. Compare this to modern churches.

## **What did the Early Church look like?**

### **Acts 4:32-35**      *Note how the disciples sacrificed and cared for each other.*

1. How was their behavior like that of Jesus? *They were unselfish and completely sacrificial.*
2. How often do you see commitment of this magnitude in churches today? *People join churches for lots of reasons, often quite selfish ones. On the other hand, disciples of Jesus imitate Christ in every generation.*
3. Do you love and trust Christ enough to give yourself to the church fellowship as his first followers did?

**Acts 8:4**     *Note the disciples' involvement in spreading the gospel.*

1. When the government began to persecute the church, and Christians were forced to become refugees, what did they do everywhere they went? *They preached God's word.*
2. **Acts 2:41** - How many did Luke say were saved? *3,000.*
3. **Acts 4:4** - How many male disciples were there? *5,000.*
4. **Acts 5:14** - How was their growth going? *More and more added.*
5. **Acts 6:7** - What did the church's growth look like? *Rapid increases. Why did it grow so fast? They preached the word of God to everyone.*
6. **Acts 11:21** - Was the growth still going? *Absolutely.*
7. What do you think is the key to church growth? *Every disciple being involved in spreading the word to everyone everywhere!*
8. Which church were all of these disciples a part of? *Christ's.*

## What is the Church about Today?

Read each verse and apply it to yourself and your ministry.

1. **Romans 12:3-10** - What does this mean for your life?
2. **Hebrews 10:23-25** - Why do we participate in the life of the Body?
3. **Ephesians 4:1-6** - How can we maintain spiritual unity?
4. **Matthew 18:15** - How do Christians handle conflict?

**Matthew 28:18-20**     *The "Great Commission" is to make disciples of all nations through the preaching of the gospel.*

1. How do all nations come to be a part of the church? *Through the church's mission to make disciples of all nations.*
2. To whom was the command given? *Every disciple—"teach them to obey everything I have commanded you . . ." He's just given them this command.*

# Lesson 9

## Homework

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### Reading the Word

1. Why do you suppose denominations have formed?
2. **John 17:20-21; 1 Corinthians 1:10; Ephesians 4:3** - Do you believe Christ wants us separated into denominations?
3. **Acts 5:29; 2 Corinthians 5:9** - What do you believe Christ wants you to do about church membership?
4. When you are baptized, whose church does God add you to?

### Challenging Yourself

Every day this week spend time with another member of the body.

### Looking Ahead

Review the following verses and consider the principle of each command in how we are to treat other disciples. Discuss with your teacher the next time.

**Mark 9:50** "...Be at peace with each other"

**John 13:14** "...Wash one another's feet"

**John 13:34** "...Love one another"

**Romans 12:10** "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love..."

**Romans 12:10** "...Honor one another above yourselves"

**Romans 12:16** "Live in harmony with one another..."

**Romans 15:7** "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you..."

**Romans 15:14** "...Instruct one another"

**Romans 16:16** "Greet one another with a holy kiss..."

**1 Corinthians 12:25** "...Have equal concern for each other"

**Galatians 5:13** "...Serve one another in love"

**Galatians 6:2** "Carry each other's burdens..."

**Ephesians 4:2** "...Be patient, bearing with one another in love"

**Ephesians 4:32** "Be kind and compassionate to one another..."

- Ephesians 5:19** “Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs”
- Ephesians 5:21** “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ”
- Colossians 3:16** “...Teach and admonish one another with all wisdom”
- 1 Thessalonians 3:12** “...Make your love increase and overflow for each other”
- 1 Thessalonians 4:18** “...Encourage each other...”
- 1 Thessalonians 5:11** “...Build each other up...”
- Hebrews 3:13** “Encourage one another daily...”
- Hebrews 10:24** “...Spur one another on toward love and good deeds”
- Hebrews 10:25** “Let us not give up meeting together...”
- James 5:16** “Confess your sins to each other...”
- James 5:16** “...Pray for each other”
- 1 Peter 1:22** “...Love one another deeply, from the heart”
- 1 Peter 3:8** “...Live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.”
- 1 Peter 4:9** “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling”
- 1 Peter 4:10** “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others...”