

Answering Questions About The Church

“...and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body...”

– Ephesians 1:22-23

Many Popular, Contradicting Views:

- What is the church: a place, an assembly, or something else altogether?
 - Is the church made up of individual saved persons or denominations with their own creeds?
 - Who built the church(es), Jesus Christ or individual people with their own philosophies, teachings?
 - Is there a Bible pattern for church organization, or can Christians choose whatever structure they want?
 - What is the mission and function of the church?
- **Great place to start learning – Matt 16:16-18**

Jesus Teaches About The Church

Four answers about the church from Matthew 16:

- ***Jesus Christ built the church*** – He is the only foundation and the only builder of the church!
- ***Jesus Christ has only one church*** – Jesus speaks of “My church” not “My churches”!
- ***Jesus Christ is the only Head of the church*** – “My church”: the church belongs to Him as highest authority
- ***The church is founded upon the truth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God*** – “upon this rock” speaks of the truth Peter confessed, and not to Peter himself!

Jesus Teaches About The Church

1. Jesus Christ built the church

- **Eph 1:19b-23** – Christ died and was raised from the dead to establish the church (cf. Acts 2; Eph 3:10f, 5:25)
 - When the New Testament speaks of the **spiritual body of Christ**, it speaks of the church Jesus built!
- **Eph 2:19-20** – Jesus Christ is the foundation of everything the church is and does
 - When the New Testament speaks of the **household, family, temple of God**, it speaks of the church Jesus built!
- **I Cor 3:11** – “**For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.**”

Jesus Teaches About The Church

1. Jesus Christ built the church

▪ Necessary Conclusions:

- Churches founded by some other person than Christ based on some other creed than the gospel cannot possibly be the true church Jesus built!
- The church is not a *place* at all, but a people, saved by Christ (cf. I Pet 2:4ff)!
- For the church to function as it should, it must follow no other teaching than Christ's – the church belongs to HIM!

Jesus Teaches About The Church

2. Jesus Christ has only one church

- “I will build my **church**” – notice that Christ indicates that He will build only **one** church
- **Remember Eph 1:22-23, 2:19-22** – just as Christ has only one body, the church is the one spiritual family, household, temple of the living God
- Eph 4:4-6 – Just as there is only one God, Lord, Spirit, faith, and gospel (i.e. “calling”), so there is only **one body**
 - “...head over all things to the church, which is His body...” (Eph 1:22)

Jesus Teaches About The Church

2. Jesus Christ has only one church

▪ **Necessary Conclusions:**

- The church Jesus built is not divided into many denominational churches: He only built one church!
- All of the verses considered previously speak of individual saved persons composing the church:
- **I Cor 12:1-27** – it is true that the body (church) of Christ is composed of many members
 - These members are individual Christians, not individual denominational churches!
 - “Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually” (vs. 27) – who was this written to?

Jesus Teaches About The Church

3. Jesus Christ is the only Head of the church

- “I will build my church” – the church, the body of the saved, belongs to Christ as the highest authority
- **Matt 28:18-20** – “All authority has been given to me...”
– “...obey all things **I have commanded...**”
- **John 8:31,15:5-10** – Abide in the will of Christ
- **II John 9-11** – Leaving the doctrine of Christ breaks fellowship with God!
- **Eph 1:22-23** – All things to the church are under the authority of Christ!
- **No man or group of men has the power to change the will of Christ for the church!**

Jesus Teaches About The Church

4. The church is founded upon the truth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God

- “Upon this rock I will build my church” – does “this rock” refer to Peter or to the truth of his confession?
- **Bible answer:** Jesus Christ is the only foundation of the church (see point 1)
 - Matt 28, I Cor 3:11, Eph 1, Col 1:18 – ALL authority belongs to Christ
 - “Whatever you bind on earth...” was also said to ALL the apostles in Matt 18:18!
 - 2 Cor 11:5, 12:13 – The message of all the apostles was equal because the word came directly from Christ!
 - **Acts 10:26 – Peter claimed no primacy whatsoever!**

Jesus Teaches About The Church

4. **The church is founded upon the truth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God**
 - “Upon this rock I will build my church” – does “this rock” refer to Peter or to the truth of his confession?
 - **Language answer:** “Peter” is not the “rock” of Matt 16:18
 - Thou art “*Petros*” – *masculine singular* noun: rock or stone, a fragment or piece of the whole mass
 - Upon this “*petra*” – *feminine collective* noun: a mass, ledge, cliff or foundation of rock
 - **Christ’s statement was not ambiguous: Peter is not the rock, but rather the truth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God!**
 - See Acts 2:22ff, 4:10-12, 8:37, 9:20; I Cor 2:1-5; etc.!

Jesus Teaches About The Church

4. **The church is founded upon the truth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God**
 - Throughout the New Testament, no preacher ever pointed to Peter as the authority and foundation of the church!
 - Every preacher of the truth simply preached that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God!
 - **Gal 1:11-2:10** – Paul received the gospel from God, not from any man (including Peter), and was chosen by God to preach to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 9:15, 22:21, 26:17)
 - **Just like** Peter was chosen to preach to the Jews (Gal 2:8)
 - **Not one verse in Scripture indicates any primacy in position or authority of Peter whatsoever compared to the rest of the inspired apostles (cf. Matt 18:18; Eph 2:20; II Pet 3:2)!**

What Is The Church Jesus Built?

Many popular and contradicting views: which view comes from God in the Bible?

- *Location view*: the church is just a place, usually with ornate religious symbols and architecture, etc.
 - e.g. a couple might get married in a church
- *Institutional view*: the church is an institution built by Christ apart from the people – become a Christian to get in.
 - Be faithful to this institution to be saved.
- *Denominational view*: the church is a group of denominations, each with their own creeds, missions, etc.
 - Choose a denomination to be part of the church
- **Does Scripture support any of these views, or does God define the church differently?**

The Church is the People of God

A. All the saved of all time, citizens of Heaven

- Eph 1:19-23 – God raised Christ from physical death and made Him King in the heavenly places
 - Eph 2:1-7 – God raised us (i.e. Christians) from spiritual death and made us a place to sit with Christ in heaven
 - Phil 3:20-21 – Our true citizenship is in heaven
 - **Heb 11:13-16 (w. 9:15) – Not just us, but all the saved of all time!**
- Imagine a great assembly, that is ever growing, of all the saved of all time (alive and dead, but all making our way toward heaven): **that is the church; these souls, these people are the church.**

The Church is the People of God

B. Those purchased by Christ's blood

- Acts 20:28 – The church, purchased by the blood of Christ
 - Eph 1:7-9 – We have forgiveness and redemption from our sins committed as individuals, not as a group
 - Eph 1:13-14 – By hearing the gospel and obeying the truth, we become God's own possession
 - See Titus 2:14 NASU with Rev 5:9-10
- Who can deny the importance of the church? Christ died and gave His own blood that we might be forgiven and redeemed to God as His own special possession!

The Church is the People of God

C. The kingdom of God

- Matt 16:18-19 – Christ sometimes uses *kingdom* and *church* interchangeably, depending on context
- John 18:35 – This is a spiritual kingdom, transcending nation, race, language, gender, etc.
- Acts 2:30 – Jesus Christ was raised from the dead to sit on the eternal throne of David
 - He is King of those who hear and submit to His truth:
 - *Those added by God to the church (vs. 47)!*
- Col 1:13 – Christians have become citizens of the kingdom (also Rev 1:9)
- *Kingdom* does not always mean *church* in the Bible, but if speaking of all the saved, the church is the kingdom of God!

The Church is the People of God

D. The holy nation of God

- I Pet 1:22-2:5,9,10 – written to Christians scattered throughout the world:
 - You are the children of God; you are God’s holy nation!

E. The spiritual body of Christ

- Eph 1:22-23, Col 1:18 – the one church is the spiritual body of Jesus Christ, with Him as the Head.
- **I Cor 12:12-14,27 – the one body is made up of individual Christians, and NOT individual churches!**

F. The household or family of God

- II Cor 6:16-18 with I Tim 3:15 – we are the family of God
- **Eph 2:19-22 – And God dwells in us as His holy temple!**

How is “church” used in the NT?

The previous slides present only one way that the New Testament uses the word *church*:

- **Universal sense** – all the saved of all the world of all time, whose names are registered in heaven.
 - **Heb 12:22-24** – “the general assembly and church of the firstborn”
- **“firstborn”** – Jam 1:18 w. I Pet 1:22-23, born of the truth to be God’s special possession (cf. Ex 13:2; Num 3:11ff; etc.)
 - Sharing the inheritance, the blessings of the firstborn, because of our equal fellowship in Christ (Rom 8:16f,29; Gal 3:23-29)
- **“registered”** – in the Book of Life, Luke 10:20; Phil 4:2-3; Rev 20:12-25, 21:22-27

How is “church” used in the NT?

■ *How does one come into the universal church?*

- **I Cor 12:12-14,24** – Saved people (cf. I Cor 1:2) have been baptized into the church (i.e. the body, Eph 1:22-23), **added to it by God!**
- See also Mark 16:15-16 with Acts 2:47 – all the saved are added by God to this one body!
- **Saved = added by God to the church = name written in the Book of Life!**

■ *Can one be taken out of the universal church?*

- **Rev 3:1-6** – Membership in the church of Christ is *conditional*:
- God put you in and, **if you are unfaithful**, He will take you out! See Jam 5:19-20; Gal 5:1-4; Heb 10:26-31, etc.

How is “church” used in the NT?

There is a second and more limited sense in which the New Testament uses the word *church*:

- **Local sense** – a specific group of saved people who assemble and work together as a local church.
 - **Acts 8:1, 9:31, 11:22; Rom 16:5,16; Gal 1:2** – all the saved meeting in a particular place
 - **Acts 11:26** – Christians who assemble together with the purpose of worship and study (cf. I Cor 11:18,20)
 - **Acts 14:23, 20:17; I Pet 5:1-3** – Totally autonomous local churches:
 - No higher authority on earth than elders; no higher organization on earth than the local church!
 - Unified only in salvation and doctrine (Acts 2:42; I Cor 4:17; I Thes 2:13-14)!

How is “church” used in the NT?

- ***How does one come into a local church?***
 - Rom 6:3, I Cor 12:13, Gal 3:26f – **NO ONE** is baptized into **ANY** local church, only into the **body of Christ!**
 - Acts 9:26-28, 18:27 – To some extent, we choose what church to join, and who to accept into the local church
 - III John 9-10; Gal 2:3-5 – It’s possible for the local church to make mistakes, refusing a faithful person, or being deceived to accept an unfaithful person

- ***Can one be taken out of the local church?***
 - Matt 18:15-17; I Cor 5:1-8; I Tim 1:18-20 – unrepentant, unresponsive Christians living in immorality should be excommunicated by the local church ...
 - ...and the faithful should warn other churches (Acts 9:27, 18:27)!

How is “church” used in the NT?

- *Do you have to be a member of the church to be saved?*
 - *Do men have the ability to accept into or cast out from the church?*
 - *Are there hypocrites in the church?*
 - *Were the churches of the New Testament various denominations with their own doctrines, creeds?*
 - *Should local churches band together to form councils, synods, conferences?*
- **Understanding the difference between the local church and the universal church is the key to answering these questions Scripturally!**

How is “church” used in the NT?

With a Scriptural understanding of what it means to be a member of the universal church and contrastingly what it means to be a faithful member of a local congregation, the believer in Christ must necessarily ask two questions:

- **FIRST** – *Am I a saved member of the body of Christ?*
- **THEN** – *What local church should I join?
How do I choose?*

How does one come become part of a local church?

- The only answer from Scripture is given by example:
 1. A Christian seeks to join a local church
 - More than just *meeting* them (see TLB)
 - “*epeirazen kollasthai*” means “endeavored to glue himself”
 - “tried to join” (NKJV) and “trying to associate with” (NASU)
 - Saul wanted to be accepted and recognized as part of the body of disciples in Jerusalem
 - That is exactly the definition of *membership*!
 - Saul took the initiative to make his wishes known to the disciples that he wanted to be part of their number.

How does one come become part of a local church?

- **The only answer from Scripture is given by example:**
 - 2. The church judges whether to receive him or not**
 - cf. Acts 18:27, the local church has the authority to decide whether or not to receive any Christian
 - Based at least upon reputation (cf. 9:13,27; Gal 1:23)
 - Based also faithfulness to the gospel, in word and in deed (cf. II John 9-11; 2 Thes 3:6,14; Titus 2:8-11)
 - Acts 9 and 18 give us examples of Christians notifying the disciples in different place about the faithfulness of a prospective member...see also III John 9-12; etc.
- **Though human judgment is fallible, the local church must decide whether to accept a new member or not!**

How does one come become part of a local church?

- The only answer from Scripture is given by example:
 3. The accepted Christian joins in work and worship
 - “*coming in and going out*” (NKJV, vs. 28-29)
 - Does this only mean “moving about freely in Jerusalem” (NASU, NIV) or something more?
 - Acts 1:21 – Same phrase denotes the constant companionship Christ shared with the apostles
 - “Freely conversing and associating with them” (Clarke, c. 1831)
 - *Note:* “conversing” here means “maintaining a familiar association”
- ***Not a spectator sport:*** Saul was associating with the disciples in their work and worship (cf. Acts 2:42ff)!

Church Membership: Conclusions

1. Passages like Rom 12:4 and I Cor 12:27 speak of membership in the *universal church*
 - “the unity is not due to external organization but to common and vital union in Christ” (Vine, *member*)
2. Acts 9:26ff, 18:27, etc. *necessarily imply* recognized membership or association in the local church
 - Also, passages that speak of elders having a specific and defined flock (e.g. Acts 20:28; I Pet 5:2, etc.)
 - Also, passages that use *church* to refer to a specific group of people (e.g. Rom 16:5, 23, etc.)

Church Membership: Conclusions

- 3. Membership in the local church does not necessarily mean a person is faithful, even saved**
 - Think of Diotrephes (III John 9f) and those lost souls that were members of the churches in Pergamos (Rev 2:15), Thyatira (Rev 2:20,24ff), and Sardis (Rev 3:1-6)
- 4. Christ desires ALL Christians to be definite members of some local church**
 - EVERY Christian in the New Testament is associated with an established church or an effort to establish a church!
 - The Lord's Supper (I Cor 11:17-34) and the contribution of the saints (I Cor 16:1-2) require assembling and membership with a local church!
 - Encouragement and discipline from other members is a necessity to remain faithful to Christ!
 - cf. Gal 6:1-2; Heb 10:23-25; Jam 5:19-20; Acts 20:28-31

“...to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; 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, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord...”

Eph 3:9-11 NKJV

“...from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”

Eph 4:16 NKJV

How Do We Choose A Church To Join?

As seen in the previous slides, Christ expects all Christians to be part of a sound local church.

- Each individual has the right to choose which church to join with in work and worship.
- **The New Testament pattern gives us the information we need to identify sound, faithful local churches.**
 - “sound” meaning healthy and wholesome, as in “sound doctrine” (Titus 1:9, 2:1; I Tim 6:3)
 - “faithful” meaning full of faith and loyalty to Jesus Christ our Lord and King (Eph 1:1; Col 1:2; Rev 2:10)
- **Of all the “churches” that fill the communities of the world today, how does a faithful Christian choose a sound local church?**

How Do We Choose A Church To Join?

You cannot identify the soundness of a church by its name alone!

- Having a name on a sign at all is not required by Scripture, but generally authorized by Christ's commands:
 - Assemble (e.g. Heb 10:25; I Cor 11:18; Acts 20:7)
 - Search out and find faithful Christians (e.g. Acts 18:2, 19:1, 21:4, 28:14)
 - Receive unbelievers (e.g. I Cor 14:23)
- **If a church chooses to have a sign, the New Testament calls the church by many names:**
 - Rom 16:16, I Cor 1:2, 11:16, 16:1; Col 4:16; I Thes 1:1; I Tim 3:15; Heb 12:23, etc.
 - **Not even official titles:** describe the members, who they belong to, and/or where they happen to meet!

How Do We Choose A Church To Join?

You cannot identify the soundness of a church by the location of its assemblies:

- Faithful Christians in the New Testament met in many places depending on their size and abilities:
 - Acts 2:46; Rom 16:5; I Cor 16:19; Acts 16:13,20:7

You cannot identify the soundness of a church by counting its problems or members with troubles:

- Find one faithful church in the New Testament that had absolutely no problems at all or members needing to grow:
 - Remember, the church is a body! All churches need growth, maturation, etc.
 - See Eph 4:14-16

How Do We Choose A Church To Join?

So what are the Scriptural indicators that a church is sound in the faith and loyal to Jesus Christ?

A. Do They Follow The Apostles' Doctrine?

- Acts 2:42; I Cor 4:17, 7:17, 11:16, 16:1

B. Do They Follow The New Testament Pattern Of Organization?

- Phil 1:1, Acts 14:23, I Tim 3:1, Titus 1:5

C. Do They Emphasize Assembling Together?

- Heb 10:25; esp. on the Lord's Day, Acts 20:7, I Cor 11:18ff

D. Do They Emphasize Sound Teaching From The Word Of God?

- Acts 20:7; Tit 1:3,9; II Tim 2:2,14-26, 4:1-5

How Do We Choose A Church To Join?

- E. Do They Call Themselves By No Other Name Than The Name Of Christ?
 - Acts 4:12, 11:26, 26:28-29; I Cor 1:10-13; Jam 2:7; I Pet 4:16
- F. Do They Pray Together To God Through Christ?
 - Acts 12:5, I Cor 14:5, I Tim 2: 1-8
- G. Do They Sing From The Heart In Worship?
 - Eph 5:19, Col 3:16
- H. Do They Partake Of The Lord's Supper On The First Day Of The Week?
 - Acts 20:7, I Cor 11:20
- I. Do They Also Give Of Their Possessions On The First Day?
 - I Cor 16: 1-2, Acts 2:44-45, Acts 5: 1-11

How Do We Choose A Church To Join?

J. Do They Teach That A Person Must Believe And Be Baptized To Be Saved?

- Mark 16:15f; Acts 2:38; Gal 3:26f; Rom 6:1-4; I Pet 3:21

K. Do They Relieve Needy Saints?

- Acts 4:34, 11:29; I Cor 16:1

L. Do They Support Preachers of The Truth?

- I Cor 9:3-12; II Cor 11:8; Gal 6:6-7; Phil 4:15-16

M. Do They Discipline Unruly Members?

- Matt 18:15-17; I Cor 5:1-5; II Thes 3:6; Tit 3: 10-11

N. Is The Church Full Of Christians With Sound Faith?

- Not perfect people, but striving to walk in the light of Christ while doing His work - I John 1:7, 2:2; Rev 2:1-10 (compare Ephesus vs. Smyrna)

Is The “Church of Christ” a Denomination?

Remember: you can’t tell everything about a church by the name on its sign!

- Some churches band together under names similar to “Church of Christ” to form a denomination, often with:
 - Self-identification as a denomination
 - Centralized headquarters and leadership
 - Creeds and doctrines outside the Bible
 - Communal support of institutions, e.g. charitable organizations, missionary societies, colleges, etc.
- **What is the pattern of the New Testament concerning denominationalism?**
- **Is the church Jesus built divided along these lines?**

Is The “Church of Christ” a Denomination?

1. Jesus prayed that His followers would be unified as one
 - Read John 17:15-23 – **by adhering to the truth!**
 - See also John 8:31-32, 15:9-14; Matt 28:18-20; etc.
 - “One” meaning, not the same person, but unified in mind, judgment, will, etc.
2. The apostles taught that all Christians should be unified in doctrine, mind and judgment
 - I Cor 1:10-13, 4:16; Phil 3:16-17; etc.
3. The New Testament pattern shows no higher organization on earth than the local church
 - Acts 14:23, 20:25-32; I Pet 5:1-4; etc.

Is The “Church of Christ” a Denomination?

4. New Testament churches sometimes worked together, but never *through* a separate organization or local church
 - In helping other churches in need – Acts 11:27-30
 - In helping just one church in need – Rom 15:25-28; I Cor 16:1-4 (w. II Cor 8,9)
- **In these cooperations, individual churches sent funds directly to the elders of the church in need!**
 - In spreading the gospel – Phil 2:25, 4:15-17 w. II Cor 11:8-9
- **In these cooperations, individual churches sent funds directly to the preacher for his livelihood!**
- **There was never an institution in between the church and the work, overseeing its actions...**

Is The “Church of Christ” a Denomination?

Bottom line: The churches of the New Testament were totally independent congregations of Christians with their own leadership. They sometimes worked together in efforts to relieve needy Christians and to spread the gospel, but only by sending funds directly to the elders of the churches in need or directly to a preacher of the gospel. They were totally unified in belief and doctrine – NOT because they developed their own denominational creed, but because they followed nothing but the words of Jesus Christ, spoken through His apostles.

Is The “Church of Christ” a Denomination?

- **Just because many faithful, independent churches meet under similar names, such as “churches of Christ” (Rom 16:16), that in no way unifies them into a denomination!**
- **If we will follow the New Testament pattern, and be a church faithful to the doctrine of Christ as taught BEFORE divisions and denominations ever arose, we too can be a faithful and non-denominational church of Christ!**

Can The Church Do Anything An Individual Christian Has Authority To Do?

This is really a questions about authority: some people wonder if the church has authority to do anything the individual Christian is told to do in the gospel.

- Without study, we might answer yes or no:
- If it is fitting for a Christian to do any particular good work in serving Christ, isn't it also a good work for the church?
- On the other hand, the Christian is also a member of the government, the home, and perhaps a job:
 - With God-given responsibilities to each (cf. Rom 13:6-7; I Tim 5:8; I Pet 2:18-26)
 - The church is not part of the government, the home, or the job...

Can The Church Do Anything An Individual Christian Has Authority To Do?

In fact the Scriptural answer is NO: there is a difference between the individual Christian and the church.

- The church is a body, and not the same as any one member (cf. Eph 4:16) – whatever the church does is the responsibility of every member!
- One member is not the whole body (I Cor 12:27), one stone is not the whole building (I Pet 2:5), and one sheep is not the whole flock (I Pet 5:2)
- **Thus, it cannot be validly argued that individual action is the same as church action:** when the church acts, it involves the whole body, not just one particular person.

Can The Church Do Anything An Individual Christian Has Authority To Do?

- I Cor 5:1-5 – The guilt of one individual does not necessarily bring guilt upon the whole church (see also Rev 2:18-29)
- Rev 3:1-6 – The guilt of the church does not necessarily make every individual guilty, either
- Several passages draw a specific line between the work of the individual and the work of the church:
 - I Cor 11:33-34 – see also Acts 2:46, it is not that socialization between brethren over a meal was not important, but it did not belong as an action of the church
 - Matt 18:15-17 – the church and the individual hold different responsibilities in discipline of unruly Christians
 - I Tim 5:16 – the church and the individual hold different responsibilities in regards to benevolent action

Can The Church Do Anything An Individual Christian Has Authority To Do?

A closer look at I Timothy 5 – individual vs. church:

INDIVIDUAL action

- vs. 4 – caring for parents
- vs. 8 – providing for own family
- vs. 14 – marry, bear children, manage the house
- vs. 16 – care for widows in one's own family

CHURCH action:

- vs. 9-10 – care for qualified widows continually
- Vs. 11 – refuse certain widows based on their qualifications
- Vs. 16 – provide for continual relief of those whose families cannot do so

Can The Church Do Anything An Individual Christian Has Authority To Do?

- When it comes to deciding on the work of the local church, we still our bound as Christians to follow the authority of Christ (cf. Matt 28:18-20)
- It is not good enough to say that “the church is authorized to do anything that the individual Christians is authorized to do”
 - The New Testament makes it clear that the work of the individual and the work of the local church are not always, even often, the same!
 - To follow Christ in faith and truth, each local church must search the Scriptures for commands, examples, and necessary conclusions that define the work and worship responsibilities of the church