

## The Church



The word “church” first appears New Testament in Matthew 16:18, “...and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” But, what *is* the church? The Bible employs about one hundred metaphors and phrases to portray “the church.” Chief among these is derived from the Hebrew word *ekklēsia* found in the New Testament over 70 times (with more than 36 times of that being in its plural form). According to the Thayer’s Greek Definitions *ekklēsia* is defined as:

1) a gathering of citizens “called out” from their homes into some public place; an assembly

In a Christian sense:

- an assembly of Christians gathered for worship in a religious meeting
- a company of Christian, or of those who, hoping for eternal salvation through Jesus Christ, observe their own religious rites, hold their own religious meetings, and manage their own affairs, according to regulations prescribed for the body for order’s sake
- those who anywhere, in a city or village, constitute such a company and are united into one body
- the whole body of Christians scattered throughout the earth

Let’s take a look at the how the church is characterized in scripture:

House Church	Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19
Local Church	1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; Galatians 1:2
Regional Church	Acts 9:31
Universal Church	Ephesians 5:25; 1 Corinthians 12:28

In short the church is defined as a group of believers, anywhere in the world. The church is not a building or even a denomination. *We are the church!*

## *The Formation of the Church*

In Acts chapters 1 and 2, we read about a group of 120 disciples who joined together in Jerusalem awaiting the promise of the Holy Ghost as Jesus had commanded. On the day of Pentecost, every one of them were filled with the Holy Ghost. The New Testament church was formed. Yet the church wasn't limited to 120 disciples of Jesus who were tarrying the upper room waiting for Christ's promise. The Bible says that there was three thousand people added to the church on the day of Pentecost and that people continued to be added to the church daily (Acts 2: 41, 47).

## *Who can become part of Church*

In Bible school, we teach our students that it is critical that they pay extra attention to the first mention of a subject in scripture because any other mention of a subject will builds upon, not contradict, the subject's first mention. Since we see over 3000 people being added to the church on the day of Pentecost, let's take a deeper look at what they did. After Peter preached his first message to the Israelites, their hearts were pricked, and they asked, "Brethren, what must we do?" Peter's response was simple, "Repent, be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:37-38).

The church wasn't meant for just the Israelites: God gave a promise to Abraham that, through his seed, all nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 22:18). This came to pass for the first time when God saw the heart of a Gentile man named Cornelius, a man that feared God, and a commandment was given to Peter to go with Cornelius's servants (Acts 10). Peter, confused but obedient, goes, not fully understanding what God is about to do, and begins preaching to Cornelius and his family a message on Christ. While preaching, God fills Cornelius and his family with Holy Ghost. Peter, seeing that the promise (the Holy Ghost) fell on Gentiles also, boldly replies to his Israelite friends, "Can any man forbid water, seeing that they have received the Holy Ghost just like us Israelites? They too can be saved...Christ died for all men!" For this reason Romans states, "For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:12-13 KJV).

## *The design of the Church*

The Bible also gives us another beautiful illustration of the church in comparing it to a body, with Christ functioning as the head and the savior of the body (Ephesians 5:23). In the entire twelfth chapter of 1 Corinthians, Paul paints the picture of Jews and Greeks being baptized into one body(v.14), with many members (v.20), which God perfectly brings together (v.24). As a body composed of many members, we all provide bring a unique and necessary function to the body. Paul alludes to this fact when he asks, "Can everyone be an eye? If they were how would the body hear?" (v.16, 17). As such, "God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." (1 Cor 12:27-28). Ephesians 4:11 says this a little bit different; "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers." Each and every one of these roles is critical as one without the rest would result in a incomplete church body. Let us be

quick to understand our role and do everything we can “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12).

### ***The Church’s Great Commission***

The Bible says that Jesus Christ came to the earth to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10). Since Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone of the Church (Ephesians 2:20), it is essential that the church never lose sight of the heartbeat of God: saving lost souls. After Jesus’ death and resurrection, he spent 40 days on earth teaching and instructing his disciples before ascending into heaven. His primary message, commonly referred to as the “Great Commission,” was that his disciples would go into the whole world and preach the Gospel unto every creature. This command appears five times in the New Testament: Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; John 20:21; and Acts 1:8. The church wasn’t instituted for just the 120 disciples who tarried in Jerusalem, waiting for the Holy Ghost in Acts chapter one, but it was designed to grow and multiply! Never forget that the Holy Ghost is a promise “unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:39 (KJV)) and that in the days of the book of Acts, there were people added to the church daily (Acts 2:47). Both great promises we can cling to today: the Holy Ghost is for every soul that hungers and daily ‘new births’ are possible for every church!