

The Basics of Christianity

What is the Church?

Acts 2:36-42

INTRODUCTION:

Acts 2:36-42 (NASB95)

BODY:

I. What is the Church?

Acts 2:39-41 (NASB95)

Ephesians 1:22-23 (NASB95)

Ephesians 5:25-27 (NASB95)

John 15:1,5 (NASB95)

II. What is the Purpose of the Church?

Ephesians 1:22-23 (NASB95)

Ephesians 4:14 (NASB95)

Matthew 28:18-20 (NASB95)

James 1:27 (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 12:12-20 (NASB95)

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

Acts 2:36-38 (NASB95)

Romans 3:23 (NASB95)

John 3:16 (NASB95)

1 Peter 2:24 (NASB95)

Acts 2:38 (NASB95) (NASB95)

CONCLUSION:

2 Corinthians 6:2b (NASB95)

Joshua 24:15 (NASB95)

James 4:14 (NASB95)

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INTRODUCTION:

This morning we are continuing with "The Basics of Christianity" series. The purpose of this series is to make us more effective in our witness to those outside the church who still need to know about the Gospel.

This morning I would like to consider What is the Church? When we see a building where people worship God, we refer to it as a church. So Is the church just a building **where** we worship?

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

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 and have the Holy Spirit within them. It also includes those who have physically died and have their names written the Lamb's Book of Life. Remember the sermon on the Purpose of Life? The purpose of life was to find God and become a part of His church.

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

All Stand and Read Scripture

Acts 2:36-42 (NASB95)

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. 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. ⁴² They 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 find Jews from all over the world present on this day.

Jesus had told the Apostles to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to arrive. The Holy Spirit arrived, just as Jesus had promised on the Day of Pentecost and the Apostles started preaching the Gospel of Christ. This was the beginning of the New Testament church.

As Christians we still try to emulate the practices of the early church.

BODY:

I. What is the Church?

Acts 2:39-41 (NASB95)

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 finally understood that they had crucified the prophesied Messiah, the Son of God, and were "pricked in the heart" and repented of their sins and were baptized. Luke tells us that 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 (NASB95)

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.

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 also likened to as a bride of whom Christ is the groom.

Ephesians 5:25-27 (NASB95)

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, ²⁶ so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.

It is also a branch with Christ as the vine.

John 15:1,5 (NASB95)

¹⁵ "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. ... ⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

As well as many other references.

II. What is the Purpose of the Church?

Ephesians 1:22-23 (NASB95)

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.

This verse could be considered a purpose statement for the church. This verse provide four purposes or activities of the church.

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

Ephesians 4:14 (NASB95)

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.

Another purpose given to the church is the **great commission** of proclaiming the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ to those who do not know Him.

Matthew 28:18-20 (NASB95)

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 is also 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.

James 1:27 (NASB95)

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.

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 (NASB95)

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 (NASB95)

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.

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, but would become like God knowing good from evil. So she ate and also gave the fruit to Adam and he ate. Satan's promise was a half truth because even though Adam and Eve did not physically die on the spot, they did die spiritually and because of their sin they eventually died physically as well. 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 (NASB95)

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 (NASB95)

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 (NASB95)

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 (NASB95) (NASB95)

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.

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, He adds only them to His one true church; the church of Christ. How tragic it will be for the many who miss Heaven and end up eternally separated from God because they chose to obey the commandments of men instead of the commandments of God.

The Christian life is a lifelong commitment. You must believe that Jesus was the Messiah, repent of your sins, be baptized, and **live the rest of your life serving 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 (NASB95)

Behold, now is “the acceptable time,” behold, now is “the day of salvation”—

The Bible also says

Joshua 24:15 (NASB95)

¹⁵ If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

Tomorrow may be too late.

James 4:14 (NASB95)

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 or if you are not living a life pleasing to God, please commit yourself to obey the Lord before it is everlastingly too late. Then the Lord will add you to His one true church so you will not be eternally separated from God. Only you can make that decision.

Go Tell it on the Mountain.