

A Study of the Church in the New Testament

Lesson 3: The Identity of the Lord's Church

I. Introduction

A. Review

1. The word "church" (Greek word *"ekklesia"*) means:
 - a. "Called out" see ***Acts 26:16-16; Colossians 1:13***
 - b. "Group of citizens" see ***Philippians 3:20, 21; 1Peter 2:9, 10***
2. It is the Lord who places people in His church (***Acts 2:41, 47; Colossians 1:13***)
- B. The "church" of the Lord is a particular group of PEOPLE (***Acts 5:11; 11:22***)
- C. In the New Testament, the "church" is used in three senses:
 1. The UNIVERSAL church – God's people all over the world (***Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 1:22, 23; Colossians 1:18, 24***)
 2. The church in a PROVINCIAL sense – congregations and members in a certain large area (***Acts 9:31***)
 3. The church in a CONGREGATIONAL sense – congregations meeting in a certain local area who are independent and self-governing (***1Corinthians 1:2; 1Thessalonians 1:1; Acts 14:23; Romans 16:3-5***)

II. From a Negative Standpoint, the Church is NOT:

- A. The church is NOT a physical building, NOT a "chapel" (*please see ***Acts 5:11; 11:22; 9:31*** – the church had "great fear," news reached "the ears of the church," the church "enjoyed peace," etc.)*)

Note: The church is PEOPLE who are "living stones" in God's spiritual house (*1Peter 2:5-10***)**

- B. The church is NOT a denomination or sect (***Galatians 5:20***)
 1. The word "heresis," "parties," or "factions" means "a body of men separating themselves from others and following their own tenets" or teachings (a sect or party).
 2. The Pharisees were this kind of "sect" or religious "party" (***Acts 15:5; 26:5***)
 3. The Sadducees were a "sect" (***Acts 5:17***)
 4. God's people are NOT to separate and form "sects" or "parties" (***Galatians 5:20; See also Acts 24:14***)

- C. The church is NOT some kind of “central headquarters” or hierarchy that controls the universal church – each congregation is independent
(Acts 14:23; 20:17, 18; 1Peter 5:1-5)

III. Who Are These People? The Church is Identified As:

- A. Those whom God has FORGIVEN! The “saved!”
1. Jesus came to “save the lost” *(Matthew 1:21; Luke 19:10)*
 2. The church after the day of Pentecost was composed of:
 - a. The “forgiven” *(Acts 2:38)*
 - b. The “saved” *(Acts 2:47)*
 - c. Jesus is the “Savior” of the “body,” the “church” *(Ephesians 5:23)*
 3. In the New Testament, “salvation” is past, present, AND future!
 - a. Forgiveness of sins in the PAST when we are baptized according to the Scriptures *(Mark 16:15; Titus 3:5; 2Timothy 1:9)*
 - b. A continual PRESENT “cleansing” by the blood of Christ *(1John 1:7; 1Corinthians 1:18)*. This latter verse means “are BEING saved.”
 - c. The FUTURE “salvation” in heaven *(Romans 13:11)*
 4. Therefore, the church IS the saved, and the “saved ones” ARE the church. These cannot be separated!
- B. Those who have OBEYED Christ, whom God has forgiven!
1. Those who do not obey the gospel will be lost. This is very sad! *(2Thessalonians 1:7-9)*
 2. Our Lord MUST be obeyed! *(Luke 6:46)*
 3. The church that began on Pentecost had:
 - a. Heard the Gospel of the resurrected Jesus *(Acts 2:22-35)*
 - b. Heard of Jesus’ Messiahship and His Lordship *(Acts 2:36)*
 - c. Had been “cut” to the heart showing sorrow and faith *(Acts 2:37)*
 - d. Had been commanded to REPENT of their sins and turn to Christ *(Acts 2:38)*. Their loyalty was given to Christ as they turned from sin
 - e. Had been commanded to “be baptized in the name of Jesus for forgiveness” and the “gift of the Holy Spirit” *(Acts 2:38)*
 - f. About 3,000 obeyed these commands of Jesus *(Acts 2:41)*
 - g. These obedient people were the church, for the Lord “placed” them in the church! *(Acts 2:41, 47)*
- C. Those who are REDEEMED! They are the church.

1. "Redeem" means to "deliver," "liberate," or "free." Another related word is "ransom." (*Matthew 20:28*)
 2. It means to "release on the receipt of a ransom."
 3. The church is "purchased" with Jesus' blood, and Christians, members of the body of Christ, are "redeemed" people. (*1Peter 1:18, 19; 1Corinthians 6:19, 20; Ephesians 5:25; Acts 20:28*)
- D. The church is the spiritual "BODY" of Christ. (*Colossians 1:24; Ephesians 5:23*)
1. Christ is the "HEAD" of His "BODY." (*Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22, 23*)
 2. There are many members in the "body." (*Romans 12:4; 1Corinthians 12:12, 14, 27*)
- E. The church is people "ENROLLED IN HEAVEN." (*Hebrews 12:22, 23*)
1. "Church of the firstborn" means the church composed of God's "firstborn" ones. The word "firstborn" is plural. God's special people!
 2. Those who are in the church have their names in the "book of life." (*Philippians 4:3; Revelation 20:12, 15; Luke 10:20; Revelation 3:5*)
- F. The church is that group of people who are "IN CHRIST."
1. Note: The church of the Thessalonians "IN GOD," and "IN CHRIST." (*1Thessalonians 1:1; 2Thessalonians 1:1*)
 2. Blessings that are "in Christ," in a saved relationship with Him:
 - a. Every spiritual blessing (*Ephesians 1:3*)
 - b. Chosen of God (*Ephesians 1:4*)
 - c. Forgiveness and redemption (*Ephesians 1:7*)
 - d. New Creatures (*2Corinthians 5:17*)
 - e. Salvation (*2Timothy 2:10*)
 - f. Eternal Life (*1John 5:11, 12*)
 3. We will study later how one gets "into Christ" (*Romans 6:1-5; Galatians 3:26, 27*)
- G. The church is that group of "CITIZENS" who are the KINGDOM.
1. "Kingdom" of Christ means the "RULE" of Christ! (*Colossians 1:13*)
 2. Note that the following are "purchased" by Jesus' blood:
 - a. The CHURCH purchased with Jesus' blood (*Acts 20:28*)
 - b. The KINGDOM purchased with Jesus' blood (*Revelation 5:9, 10*)
- H. The Bible teaches that the church is also the RECONCILED (*Ephesians 2:16*) and the JUSTIFIED people (*1Corinthians 6:9-11*).

Important Study Questions

1. Did Jesus use the word “church” and the word “kingdom” to refer to the same people in *Matthew 16:18, 19*?
2. Was the church at Colossae really in the “kingdom?” (*Colossians 1:12, 13, 18*)
3. From our identification of the church above, is it possible to separate our salvation from the church? When are we added to the church?
4. What does “Upon this rock...” really mean? (*Matthew 16:18*)