

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

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What Is The Church?

Table of Contents

Preface	1
Introduction	2
3 Dimensions of the Church	2
Purpose of the Church	8
The Establishment and Building of the Church	12
The Kingdom of God	15
The Body of Christ	16
Functioning of the Body of Christ	17
Other Depictions of the Church in Scripture	19
The House of God	19
The Temple of God	20
The Candlestick of God	20
The Vineyard of God	21
7 Spiritual Gifts in the Church	23
4 Gifts of the Gospel Ministry	28
2 Ordained Offices in the Church	32
2 Ordinances Administered by the Church	34
3 Components of Worship in the Church	36
4 Activities of the Original Church	40
7 Results of the Original Church's Steadfast Devotion	45
The Church's Responsibility to Each Other	48
The Church's Final Destination	58

What Is The Church?

Preface

I have recently been burdened that in the church we oftentimes just go through the motions of “church”. In our busy, fast-paced lives, once or twice a week church attendance is just one more time allotment on our schedule. We give the Lord our attention during that time frame when we “go to church”, but then, we don’t think about church again until we “go back” again next week. If that is our idea of church, it is no different than Rotary, Kiwanis Club, or a Football Boosters Club meeting. Church is not just an event we attend, but for the child of God, church is truly our lives. We are one body with Jesus Christ, and His church is a 24/7/365 living organism. We don’t just “go to” church. We “are” the church. I hope this discussion can be thought provoking and challenging for God’s people as we attempt to consider from scripture what God requires and expects from his church, the body of Christ.

This entire work on the church is available online along with sermons that give additional teaching on each topic. The free PDF of this work and applicable sermons are available online at: clearspringspbcc.com/what-is-the-church/

We will never be able to fully understand the mystery of the church here in our lives, but we hope what we consider together can give us a glimpse into what the Lord designed in his church. I hope this work, and the corresponding sermons as well that are now publicly available online, will help us better understand our responsibility as the church to work together in unity to glorify Jesus Christ who is the Head of the church.

For His Glory,
David Wise, December 2021

What Is The Church?

Introduction

What is the church? We sometimes talk about “the church” in vague terms, but I’ve questioned myself recently if we really understand what the church actually is, what it’s supposed to be, and what the Lord intends from his elect, called out people. What does the church actually look like? How is it supposed to function? What are we supposed to be doing when we meet together publicly as a church, and then what are we supposed to be doing as the church throughout our daily lives? We hope to consider some these aspects of the church together from the word of God.

In America, I’m afraid that church has become an event we attend once a week, instead of who we are. When you are asked what you do on Sunday mornings, your answer is probably similar to mine: “We go to church.” There’s not anything wrong with this answer; it’s somewhat correct. We assemble as the church in our church building and facility, and we engage in public worship on Sunday mornings. However, the church is so much more dynamic and life-encompassing than just something we “go to” once a week. The church is not an event on our schedule that we attend for a few hours each week and then get on with all the rest of our busy daily schedules. Church is not merely something “we do” once a week, but rather the church is “who we are.” We are the body of Christ. Church is not simply a weekly event we attend, but church is a life we live.

The church is not the location of our public worship meeting house. When we say we are “going to church,” we mean that we are going to our designated building for public worship. I’m thankful that many of our local church congregations have a nice, climate-controlled facility in which to attend for public worship. However, that is just the building that the church assembles in for public worship. The church building does have a postal address and location, but the true church cannot be found on Google Maps; the church is not limited to the four walls of our church building. Instead, the church is wherever the people of God are and wherever we assemble to fellowship or worship. The church is not the building in which we worship; instead, the church is the people – the called-out assembly of God. The church met for many centuries without a designated building for public worship. Due to persecution, God’s people in centuries past have met in caves, in secret, and primarily in people’s homes to fellowship and worship together. A nice building or facility for public worship is not a pre-cursor to the church. The church is not identified based on the location of our public worship building; it’s not identified by the brick, lumber, sheet rock, nails, and paint of a physical building; but the church is the people of God, the called-out assembly of God’s children who have devoted their life together in service to the Lord.

Therefore, we want to look at the identifying marks of “the church” – the people of God, the called-out elect assembly of Jesus Christ. What is the church in scripture? How does the church function properly as the body of Christ in this world? How do we conduct ourselves in our daily lives as the church? How do we observe the ordinances and worship of the church? These are all very valid questions that we hope to consider together from the word of God.

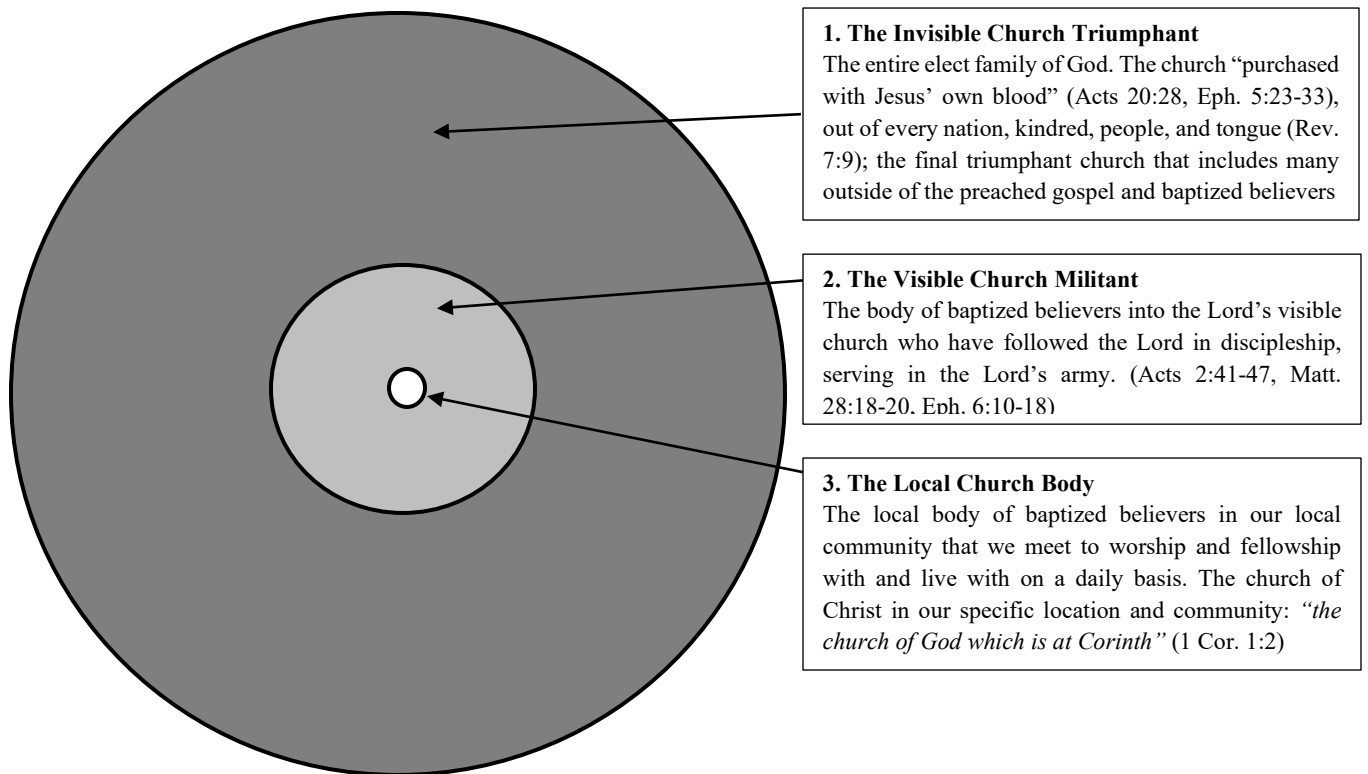
3 Dimensions of the Church

First of all, we always need to define our terms. In the New Testament of the King James Bible, the Greek word “*ekklesia*” is found 113 times – this is translated “church/churches” 110 times and translated

What Is The Church?

“assembly” 3 times. Essentially, this Greek word – and in turn “the church” in the New Testament – means “a called-out assembly.” Surprisingly, “ekklesia” is only found 2 times in the gospels, in Matthew 16:18 and Matthew 18:17, both declared by Jesus.

There are multiple dimensions of “the church” in scripture. In other words, every time we see the word “church” in scripture, it is not always referring to the exact same thing. We will consider 3 specific dimensions of the church: 1) the invisible church triumphant, 2) the visible church militant, 3) the local church body. Notice this distinction in 1 Cor. 1:2 – *“Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both their's and our's:”* The church of God here is identified as *“them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be saints.”* This is the universal group of all the elect children of God that have been chosen, sanctified in Christ, and called in the new birth – #1, the invisible church triumphant. Within that group of born-again children of God, there are those who have professed a belief in Jesus Christ, been baptized, and have joined churches in every place across the known world. This is describing every child of God in “every place” (not just in the local body of Corinth), but every child of God who has been baptized into the “visible church” to take up their cross and follow Christ in discipleship: #2, the church militant: *“with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both their's and our's.”* Some of the invisible church triumphant is visible here in the local church but not all. God’s elect invisible church is broader than just the visible group of baptized believers in the church. Then, as yet another subset of the collective visible, militant church, there is also #3, the local church body. Paul wrote this epistle to the *“church of God, which is at Corinth.”* There are people all over this world that have professed a belief in Jesus Christ and have been baptized into the visible militant church, but most of our interactions are applicable to the “local church body or assembly” of which we are a member.



What Is The Church?

1. The Invisible Church Triumphant

The church is “a called-out assembly.” The first calling-out of the church came before the world began when the elect were chosen, set apart and sanctified in Jesus Christ. Then, all of those who have been elected are born again and “called” in their lives (Rom. 8:29-30), called out of darkness into God’s marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9), and called from dead in sins to life in Christ by the voice of the Son of God (John 5:25, Eph. 2:1-3). Therefore, in the broadest, most inclusive sense, the church is all the elect family of God that has been called out and sanctified for God’s honor and glory. *“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”* (Acts 20:28) Here, the church is identified as everyone that has been purchased with the blood of Jesus on the cross. The elect that Jesus died for on the cross is a broader group than all the children of God who have believed in Jesus and been baptized into the visible, local church. *“(22) But ye are come unto mount Sion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, (23) To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven...”* (Heb. 12:22-23) This “church of the firstborn” are all the elect who are “written in heaven”. That is describing all the elect children of God who are written in the Lamb’s book of life, not just only the believers in the visible, local church.

In Eph. 5:23-33, the church is described as *“the body of Christ”* and *“Christ loved the church and gave himself for it”* (v.25) and ultimately would present the church *“to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.”* (v.27) It was all the elect family of God that Jesus gave himself for on the cross, and it will be all the elect, without the loss of one, who Jesus will present holy, perfect, and glorified before God at the end of time. That is why we call the collective assembly of all the elect children of God “the church triumphant.” Not every elect, born-again child of God will hear and believe the gospel and press into the visible church here in this world, but they are still part of the elect, triumphant church that will be with the Lord at the end of time. Every child of God of the church will ultimately be “triumphant” in heaven with Jesus at the end of time.

While every child of God will be born again and “called out” in the new birth, it’s an unfortunate reality that not all the elect will be privileged to hear the gospel of the finished work of salvation in Christ and be baptized into the Lord’s visible, militant church. God’s elect are *“a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues.”* (Rev. 7:9 & 5:9) The gospel has not and will not reach every nation, kindred, people, and tongue in this world, but yet, there are still members of the elect church among those groups that can’t be baptized into the visible church. There are many outside the preached gospel who display evidences of the “calling-out” of the new birth – babies in the womb and infants such as John the Baptist (Luke 1:15,44), Jeremiah (Jer. 1:5), David (Ps. 22:9), babies killed in Herod’s day (Jer. 31:15-17); those who are enemies of the gospel, but still elect children of God (Rom. 11:28); Jews with judicial blindness from God to not believe on Jesus as the Christ (Matt. 11:25-26, 13:11-17); people who would have repented if they heard preaching but they didn’t (Ezek. 3:6, Matt. 11:21); those who believe not and have their faith overthrown, but Jesus cannot deny his elect (2 Tim. 2:13-19); and many other examples could be given as well for called-out, born again children of God who will not hear and believe the gospel and be baptized into the Lord’s church.

What Is The Church?

This triumphant dimension of the church is also sometimes called “the invisible church” because there are members of this eternal, elect church that will not be “visible” to our eyes here in this life on the roll books of baptized believers in the local church. Praise God all the elect church of God will be triumphant with Jesus at the end of time. The only way that anyone can believe to be baptized into the Lord’s church is that they are already a member of the elect, triumphant church. Therefore, understand that these dimensions are not mutually exclusive but rather are more detailed subsets of the overall invisible, triumphant church. One must be born again to believe on Jesus. Therefore, they can only be a member of the visible, local church if they are already a member of the elect church by God’s sovereign choice before the world began. All of those in the church militant and local church are already members of the Lord’s triumphant church, but there are people who will be in heaven with Jesus as a member of the church triumphant, who will live outside the visible church here in this world.

2. The Visible Church Militant

All the elect children of God will be triumphant with Jesus at the end of time. As a smaller subset of that elect church, those children of God who have already been “called out” in the new birth profess a belief in Jesus Christ and are baptized into the local body of the visible church. These are children of God that have decided to take up the cross of Jesus and fight in the Lord’s army here in this life – see Eph. 6:10-18 for the armour of God and the necessity of our warfare of faith in this life. They are “militant” in their discipleship, fighting diligently in the Lord’s army. *“3) Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. 4) No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.”* (2 Tim. 2:3-4) We take up the armour of God and engage in spiritual military conflict every day in service to the Lord.

As we see in Matt. 16:16-18, the entrance point into the “visible church,” the local church assembly, is publicly confessing that Jesus is the Son of God (Acts 8:36-38). When one professes that belief in Jesus Christ to the local assembly of the church, they are baptized into the church (Matt. 28:18-20). There were already about 120 disciples in the church in Acts 1:15. When 3,000 people repented and were baptized on the Day of Pentecost, they were “added unto them” (Acts 2:41); they were added unto the Jerusalem church. This further clarifies that the church was already established prior to the Day of Pentecost because these 3,000 baptized believers were “added unto” the church, not creating it. Then, God continued to bless them in a special way where people were joining the Jerusalem church literally every day – *“And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”* (Acts 2:47) When these people believed and were baptized, is that what added them to “the elect church” that will be finally in heaven? No, of course not. It is evident these believers were added to the “visible church”. People could now see from their belief they were already a child of God, already a member of the elect church. They chose to join “the militant church”, to take up the armour of God and serve Jesus Christ in the army of the church.

The church is a “called out assembly”, and Jesus Christ “calls out” his children to follow him in discipleship. The apostles were called out to a special ministry, but their calling is also indicative of every child of God’s calling to drop our natural pursuits for a greater calling to serve God in his visible church kingdom. Jesus “calls us out” to follow him in discipleship, just like the original apostles. Jesus called Simon Peter and Andrew to follow him and become fishers of men, and they straightway left their nets and followed him (Matt. 4:18-20, John 1:40-42). Jesus called on James and John to leave their family fishing business and

What Is The Church?

their father, and they immediately left the ship and their father and followed Jesus (Matt. 4:21-22). Jesus called Philip and he followed him (John 1:43-44). Jesus called Matthew in the middle of his workday at the receipt of custom as a tax collector, and Matthew immediately left that money and job behind and followed the calling of the Lord (Matt. 9:9). God calls us to “come out from among” this world and to be separate (2 Cor. 6:17). The child of God is “called out” by Jesus Christ to unite himself in discipleship with the visible church, to be baptized, and serve the Lord in the local assembly of the church.

The visible, militant church is a smaller subset of the whole elect church of God; yet another smaller subset of the visible church is the local church body or assembly. Our day-to-day interactions are not primarily with the total body of baptized believers in the militant church. There are Primitive Baptist churches and baptized believers all over this world, on at least five continents. Therefore, there are many in the visible church that are not visible to me. There are many in the militant church who I am not fighting in unison with every day. There are many in the visible, militant church who I will never meet in this world, until the entire elect church is delivered triumphant up to heaven. Therefore, the majority of our lives and our discipleship is not lived out in the broader visible, church militant but is lived out in the local body of the church in our individual communities.

3. The Local Church Body

As a smaller subset of both the invisible, church triumphant and the visible, church militant, we find a local body of believers that we fellowship with and serve God with on a daily basis. There are many in the church – both triumphant and militant – that we will never meet here in this world, but we live life with the members of the local church in our communities. Many of the admonitions in the New Testament for how the church is to operate, is not for the overall visible, militant church, but for how the local church assembly should operate and function as the local chapter of the body of Christ.

We are a member of the church of Jesus Christ in our specific local community. Paul wrote to “*the church of God which is at Corinth.*” (1 Cor. 1:2) These were people who were already included in those “*sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be saints*” (church triumphant). They had already “*called upon the name of Jesus Christ*” and been baptized into the visible church (church militant). Specifically, this particular part and local chapter of the Lord’s church lived and met together and assembled “*at Corinth*” (the local church assembly). That is really what we are today: I am a member of “*the church of God which is at Ackerman, Mississippi.*” We are members of the church triumphant and militant, but we live the church out in our local assembly in our communities. Notice this description of the local churches in the New Testament: “*the church which was at Jerusalem*” (Acts 8:1); “*the church which is at Cenchrea*” (Rom. 16:1); “*the church of God which is at Corinth*” (1 Cor. 1:2); the 7 individual churches “*in Smyrna*”, “*in Pergamos*”, “*in Thyatira*”, etc, (Rev. 2-3). Then, sometimes, the term church is not just describing one singular church, but all the sister churches in a particular region: “*the seven churches which are in Asia*” (Rev. 1:11); “*the churches of Galatia*” (Gal. 1:2); “*the churches of Macedonia*” (2 Cor. 8:1).

There are people all over this world that have professed a belief in Jesus Christ and have been baptized into the visible, militant church, but our church life is primarily applicable to the “local church assembly” that we are a member of. The local assembly of the church is a group of believers who have covenanted together to help one another and to serve Jesus Christ together in their local communities. Therefore, for the rest of

What Is The Church?

this discussion, we will mainly address how we are to conduct ourselves in the local church assembly with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

Autonomy of the Local Church

The local church is autonomous from other churches or organizations in its governance, only answering to Jesus Christ as the Head of the church. The word “autonomy” essentially means “self-ruling” or having the authority to govern itself or control its own affairs. Autonomy means that each local church congregation selects its own pastor and deacons, handles church discipline, decides its own financial matters, and directs other church-related affairs without outside control or supervision. In scripture, we see no reference to the local church answering to any other church congregation or oversight organization. There is no scriptural authority for any regional, state, or national organization which oversees the local church. Jesus Christ is the Head of the church (Eph. 1:22), and each local church body answers to Jesus alone as its authority. In Revelation, we see that each of the seven churches in Asia existed as a unique, separate entity and received judgment and instruction directly from Jesus Christ (Rev. 2-3).

Pastors are called by the local church and appointed by the Holy Spirit to feed the flock of God in a local community (Acts 20:28, Heb. 13:17). They are called to feed the flock of God “which is among you” and serve as overseers of the local congregation (1 Pet. 5:1-3). There is no scriptural basis for one man to be an overseer of more than one church or a region or a state. The local church had the authority to ordain Paul and Barnabas to their ministerial work to which they were called (Acts 13:1-3). The apostles went and “ordained elders in every church.” (Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5) There were local elders in Jerusalem (Acts 15:4), in Ephesus (Acts 20:17), and in Philippi (Phil. 1:1). God’s pattern is for there to be local authority of elders in each church and in each city. There is no regional, state, or national authority over the local church in the New Testament scriptures.

The local church has the authority to ordain deacons among them to provide for the business of the church (Acts 6:1-7). Also, it is the local church (not a para-church organization) who is called to minister to the needs of the disadvantaged in their local community (Acts 6:1-7, James 1:27). The local church handles matters of church discipline among its members, not an outside authority (Matt. 18:15-17, 1 Cor. 5:1-13, 2 Cor. 2:5-7). The church is even given authority to settle legal disputes among its members instead of going to secular courts for judgment (1 Cor. 6:1-6). The local church collects and manages its own finances and directs the use of those funds themselves (1 Cor. 16:1-4, Phil. 4:14-16). There is no scriptural authority for a local church paying dues or fees to another higher-level organization. The local church is “congregational” in its governance. The local church congregation decides together how to handle ordinations, ministry, finances, discipline, and other pertinent matters and is not controlled or answerable to any other church or authority outside of Jesus Christ.

What Is The Church?

Purpose of the Church

The Glory of God

Why did God see fit to “call out” the assembly of the church? Ultimately, God called out and created the church for his glory, honor, and praise. Why did God see fit to choose (to elect) and predestinate a people to save (Eph. 1:4-5)? Out of all the sinful race of man, God chose a people to save “*To the praise of the glory of his grace...*” (Eph. 1:6). God saved the church to praise and glorify his unmerited, free grace that has been bestowed upon us. We have been created and chosen and called out for the glory of God. “*Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.*” (Isaiah 43:7) We were formed by the Lord to praise God. “*This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise.*” (Isaiah 43:21). We were created for God’s pleasure that we would give the Lord glory, honor, and power. “*Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*” (Rev. 4:11) God called the church out as a chosen generation, holy nation, and peculiar people to praise God who saved us from eternal darkness and “hath called you” into his marvelous light. “*But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light;*” (1 Pet. 2:9, see also Jer. 13:11; Rom. 9:23; 1 Cor. 11:7) Then, finally at the end of time, all of creation – both the elect church and the non-elect as well – every man without exception, will bow down and confess that Jesus is Lord to glorify God the Father. “*And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*” (Phil. 2:11)

The theme in heaven is worship and the glory of God. The 4 beasts and 24 elders in Revelation in some way represent the elect family of God because Christ “*hast redeemed us out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.*” (Rev. 5:8-9) Notice the full-time job of the 4 beasts in heaven. What is the full-time job of the beasts who rest not day or night? The eternal job of the church in heaven is to give glory to the Lamb without ceasing. “*8) And the four beasts...rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. 9) And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever.*” (Rev. 4:8-9) Therefore, that is also the church’s job in time as well, to give glory, honor, and thanks to our God day and night, without ceasing. Then, in addition to the beasts, the 24 elders also fall down before God and worship him that lives forever and cast their crowns down before the Lamb crying, “*Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*” (Rev. 4:11) Then, in Revelation chapters 5 and 7, we again see the worship scenes of the beasts and elders in heaven, worshipping and glorifying the Lamb for our eternal salvation. The theme of the eternal church triumphant in heaven will be the glory, honor, and praise of our God. Heaven will be one never-ending church worship service in glorifying the Lamb. We will never cease; we will never rest for eternity in praise and glory of our loving Lamb. The final destination of the church in heaven is the glory of God, and we should have the same goal and motive in the church here in our lives as well, to glorify the King of kings and Lord of lords.

The church is God’s chosen place to be glorified in this earth, to be glorified among his chosen, called out people. “*Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.*” (Eph. 3:21) This verse emphasizes that the church is where God has chosen to be glorified in this world

What Is The Church?

throughout all ages. Also, the final triumphant church will be glorifying God in heaven for all eternity. God has chosen and called out the church for his glory. Since we are the church, the Lord receives glory “in the church” when we glorify the Lord as God’s called out people. Therefore, every single thing we do in our lives should be to the glory of God. *“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”* (1 Cor. 10:31) We live as salt and light in this world and do good works, for one purpose – that men would see our sanctified life as the church and glorify God. That they may see the good works we do and glorify God because of it. *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”* (Matt. 5:16) Our life is intended to deflect any glory away from us and to direct all the glory in our life to Jesus Christ. God created and called out the church for his glory in this world and his glory finally in heaven.

Love God and Love Others

The church has been called out to glorify God. How then are we to glorify God in our lives? Primarily we glorify God by loving God and loving others. *“36) Master, which is the great commandment in the law? 37) Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. 38) This is the first and great commandment. 39) And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 40) On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”* (Matt. 22:36-40) The church’s first and primary responsibility in this world is to love God with all our being, with all our heart, soul, and mind. We only love God because he first loved us (1 John 4:19). We have to see and understand the radical love that God had for us, if we are to follow Christ’s example to love others in the same way. God showed his “great love” to us, not when we were his friends and acting godly, but God loved us when we were enemies towards him (Eph. 2:4-9, Rom. 5:8-10). It was in that sinful, dead, enemy state that God loved the church enough to send his only begotten Son to die for our sins (John 3:16). The love of God that saved sinners is really too amazing to even comprehend or understand. God’s love towards us is so vast, so deep, so high, so immense that we cannot comprehend or fathom the fullness of his love in this world (Eph. 3:17-20). We could not do anything to earn or merit God’s love. God loved us by nothing more than his own free and sovereign grace and love. Therefore, the church is called upon to show that same radical, free, gracious love to others. The church cannot only do good and only love those who love us; that is no different than the world (Matt. 5:43-48). We are also called to love those who don’t show love to us. When we see God’s amazing, free, radical love towards us, then we can strive in our lives to love others in the same way that Christ loved us.

God is identified by his attribute of love – *“God is love.”* (1 John 4:8) Therefore, love is the first fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). Love is the expression of God and the Spirit in our lives. We are never acting more like God than when we love others, especially those who treat us poorly or are not worthy of our love. We show our love to God by loving others in the same way that Christ loved us. The new commandment of Jesus was to love one another, for us to love one another to the same radical, self-sacrificial degree that Jesus Christ loved us. *“34) A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. 35) By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”* (John 13:34-35) It is by our love one for another – and especially the radical love for our enemies (Matt. 5:44) – that the disciples of Christ are identified in this world. The church is not identified in this world by solely doctrinal knowledge or worship, but the church is primarily identified in this world by showing Christ’s radical, free, gracious love to others. It is by our love to others that the disciples of

What Is The Church?

Christ, that the church, is identified in this world. We stand out in a crowd, we let our light shine, we are a city set on a hill when we show the love of Christ freely, graciously, and liberally to others in our lives.

What does God's love look like in action? The whole chapter of 1st Corinthians 13 expresses the attributes of "charity" – "agape" love, or "the willing sacrificial giving of one's self for the benefit of another without the thought of return". Actually, this "charity chapter" is presented in the context of spiritual gifts from 1st Corinthians 12-14, which is especially relevant in our discussion of the church. It doesn't matter what spiritual gift we have or what we supposedly do for the church, if the motive and basis behind that action is not "charity agape love", then it is vain and empty (1 Cor. 13:1-3). What are the attributes of God's agape love to us? What are the attributes of God's agape love that we are called to show to others? In 1 Cor. 13:4-8, we are given 16 attributes of what charity looks like in action. Charity: 1) *suffereth long*, 2) *is kind*; 3) *envieth not*; 4) *vaunteth not itself*, 5) *is not puffed up*, 6) *doth not behave itself unseemly*, 7) *seeketh not her own*, 8) *is not easily provoked*, 9) *thinketh no evil*; 10) *rejoiceth not in iniquity*, 11) *rejoiceth in the truth*; 12) *beareth all things*, 13) *believeth all things*, 14) *hopeth all things*, 15) *endureth all things*. 16) *never faileth*. These attributes of love are too deep to cover properly in this short section. We show the love of Christ to others when we are longsuffering, kind, not jealous or prideful, humble, seeking the good of others, not soon angry, assuming the best not the worst, happy about good and burdened over evil, bearing, believing, hoping, and enduring all things. Ultimately, God's love never fails us, and our love to others should never cease or burn out either. We can't throw in the towel or give up or write people off when they get hard to love. No, we suffer long and refuse to let our love for others fail, showing the unfailing love of Christ to others in our life.

It is by showing love to others that we exhibit how we are saved, born-again members of the Lord's church. The disciples of Christ are identified by their love to others in this world. "*We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.*" (1 John 3:14) When we show love unto the brethren, we manifest that we are regenerated disciples in the Lord's church. Love is the first fruit of the Spirit listed in Gal. 5:22-23. God is glorified when we bring forth much fruit, and the primary fruit of the Spirit for disciples of Christ is love. "*8) Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. 9) As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.*" (John 15:8-9) The church was created to glorify God, and the main way we glorify God is by showing love to others. Men see our good works of love and glorify God our Father in heaven (Matt. 5:16). Ultimately, we show love to God by doing actions of love to others in this world. The closest we can come in our lives to giving Jesus a meal when he's hungry, or a drink when he's thirsty, or visiting Jesus in prison or while sick is by loving others – "*inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye done it unto me.*" (Matt. 25:40) The church glorifies God and shows love to God by loving others in the same radical, self-sacrificial, free and gracious way that Jesus Christ loves us.

Custodian of the Truth

God appointed the church to be the custodian of his truth in this world. "*But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*" (1 Tim. 3:15) God has called out the church to maintain, uphold, and defend his truth in this world. The church is "the pillar" and "the ground (foundation)" of the truth. Notice the singular pronoun "the" describing these words. There are not multiple sources of truth in this world; the

What Is The Church?

church is “the” pillar and “the” foundation and “the” defender of truth in this world. The world in general will not defend God’s truth; instead this world will reject and try to overthrow God’s truth. Therefore, the church has been called to be the stabilizing influence for the truth in this world. Both pillars and foundations are sure, stable, reliable structures that do not sway from side to side with the wind (consider Eph. 4:14 and broader context as well). God expects his church to be steadfast and unmovable in defending God’s truth in this world.

Jesus Christ is “the truth” (John 14:6), and the scriptures, the word of God, are “the truth” (John 17:17). Therefore, we defend Jesus when we defend the word of God in this world. There is only one source of truth in this world and that is God. The wicked, foolish, scoffers of this world want to reject God and his word as the sole authority for absolute truth. It is therefore up to the church to defend the truth of God’s word to a scoffing world. It is the church – *“to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called”* (Jude 1) – who have been called upon to *“earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”* (Jude 3) If the church doesn’t defend and earnestly contend for the truth of God’s word in this world, then who will? The church has been called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5:13-16). God intends for his church to be a *“city that is set on a hill [that] cannot be hid.”* God’s church is the beacon, the lighthouse that shines on a hill in this world to uphold and defend God’s truth. The church is salt – both a sweetening and preserving agent and influence – in this world. It is up to us as the church to be a proper preserving agent in this world to stem the moral decay in the culture around us. God has called his church to defend, uphold, and preserve his truth, and let the truth of God’s word shine out to the dark world around us.

Teach and Make Disciples

God has called his church to proclaim the good news of the gospel, to teach the word of God, and to make disciples. One of the final charges to the church before Jesus’ ascension was to teach, baptize, and continue to teach disciples of Christ to build his church to his glory. *“19) Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20) Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”* (Matt. 28:19-20) The word for “teach” here literally means “to make disciples”. God has called his disciples to teach others and make new disciples for the perpetuity of his church until Jesus’ second coming. The original church was commanded to teach and preach the apostles’ doctrine (Acts 2:42) to all nations (Matt. 28:20). The original apostles were commanded by Jesus to preach the gospel in their local region and then ultimately to the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8). God has a people out of every kindred, tongue, people, and nation (Rev. 5:9; 7:9), and the church is God’s ordained means to teach his elect people the truth of God’s word. The entire church is called to preach and teach the gospel, not only ordained ministers in the church.

After severe persecution in Jerusalem and the surrounding regions, the church was scattered. *“Therefore, they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the gospel.”* (Acts 8:4) The scattered church went “everywhere preaching the gospel”. However, notice the apostles remained in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1). Who was it that went everywhere preaching the gospel then? It was the rank-and-file members of the church who simply loved Jesus and the message of the gospel enough to tell those around them. If the church is to grow and thrive, it doesn’t happen by only ordained preachers sharing the word of God. It is by all the

What Is The Church?

members of the body of Christ sharing the good news of Jesus to their family, friends, and neighbors. It was regular church members, Aquila and Priscilla, who heard the preaching of Apollos, saw he needed more teaching, and brought him into their home to *“expound unto him the way of God more perfectly.”* (Acts 18:26) God has called certain men and given them the gift of the gospel ministry to preach and teach with authority to baptize in the church. However, I believe the church has developed a very myopic view of who is called to teach and make disciples. God has called every single child of God to teach and make disciples to the best of their ability.

You might be like many and say, “I can’t teach or preach. I don’t feel adequate. I don’t know how.” You can teach and preach the gospel by simply relaying your testimony for how God has worked in your life. After healing the wild Gadarene, Jesus told him to, *“Go home and tell your friends what great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.”* (Mark 5:19) The blind man healed by Jesus didn’t know anything about doctrine, but he relayed this testimony to everyone who asked, *“One thing I know, whereas I was blind, now I see.”* (John 9:25) The Samaritan woman left her waterpots to tell everyone in the city, *“Come see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?”* (John 4:29) Paul relayed his personal testimony of Christ’s power in saving him in almost every message he preached in the book of Acts. Also, our manner of life preaches a sermon to the people around us. Noah was a preacher of righteousness by simply being faithful to God to build an ark in the midst of a wicked generation (2 Pet. 2:5). Noah preached to the world by his actions of faith. We all have a story to tell, and we all have an audience to preach to. We can go home and tell our friends and family what great things the Lord has done for us. Then, after we teach them, they believe and are baptized, we continue to teach them more perfectly the word of God. The church’s commission is to teach, baptize, and then keep on teaching the disciples of Christ so the church continues to grow in grace and in knowledge of the truth.

The Establishment and Building of the Church

Of the 113 times the Greek word *“ekklesia”* is found in the New Testament, surprisingly, the “church” is only found 2 times in the gospels, in Matthew 16:18 and Matthew 18:17, both declared by Jesus. Jesus describes the building and establishment of his church to Peter and the apostles in Matt. 16. *“17) And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. 18) And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”* (Matt. 16:17-18) Jesus begins this lesson in verse 13 as he asks the apostles *“Who do men say that I am?”* They answered, *“Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some Elias, and other Jeremias, or one of the prophets.”* Then, Jesus makes this question more personal in verse 15, *“But whom say ye that I am?”* Peter, the self-appointed spokesman of the apostles, answers in verse 16, *“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”* Jesus then responds to Peter with these verses in Matt. 16:17-18. Peter was a blessed individual because God the Father had revealed Himself in the new birth to Simon. Peter did not have the knowledge that Jesus was the Christ (the Anointed Messiah) by himself. Peter did not learn or believe this fact by some man telling him about Jesus; it was not revealed to him by flesh and blood. Peter knew and believed and confessed that Jesus was the Son of God solely because God the Father revealed that knowledge unto him in the new birth.

What Is The Church?

This is the first principle of the church. It is God that “calls out his assembly”. It is God that reveals that Jesus is the Son of God to his children, and those are the only people who are and can be part of his church. We cannot know the Father in our nature, and the only way we can know the Father is by the Son of God revealing him to us. “25) *At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.* 26) *Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.* 27) *All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.*” (Matt. 11:25-27) Notice this revelation is not caused by an action we perform – not by “whomsoever will believe” or another work – but rather it is revealed by the sovereignty of God choosing whom to reveal the Father unto – concealed from the wise and prudent and revealed to babes; based on Jesus Christ’s choice, not your choice, “whomsoever the Son will reveal him”. This revelation of God by Jesus Christ in our heart does not occur by our will, but only because it seemed good in the sight of God.

Men cannot sign up voluntarily to be in the church – “*No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.*” (John 6:44) It is only God that can “call out” and draw an elect child of God to his church and “reveal” Jesus Christ in their heart in the new birth for them to believe in Jesus as the Son of God. This is the first dimension of the “calling out” of the church. One must be “called out” in the new birth by the voice of Jesus Christ before they can believe in the Lord (see John 5:24-25, Rom. 8:29-30, 2 Tim. 1:9, 1 Pet. 5:10, Acts 2:39, Jude 1, Gal. 1:15, John 10:16,27 for verses on the “calling” of the new birth). Once a child of God has been “called” in the new birth and given spiritual life, they now have spiritual eyes and faith to be able to believe on Jesus Christ when they hear the gospel. Jesus Christ had previously “called out” Peter in discipleship, and he left his secular job and fishing nets to follow Jesus and be a fisher of men (Matt. 4:18-20). Peter had most likely already been born again prior to that moment, but then Jesus called him out to follow him in discipleship and preach the gospel. Then, after following Jesus in discipleship, he gained knowledge to be able to make a public confession in Matt. 16:16 that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God.

Jesus then tells Peter, upon “this rock” I will build my church. What rock is the foundation of the church that Jesus would build upon? The Catholics would contend this rock that the church was built upon was Peter. Jesus says, “Thou art Peter” – the Greek word for “Peter” here is “Petros”, which means “a stone” but particularly a small stone or pebble. Jesus himself gave Peter this name – “*And [Andrew] brought [Peter] to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone.*” (John 1:44) Peter’s name means a stone, a small rock or pebble. However, Jesus said upon “this rock” I will build my church – the Greek word for “this rock” here is “Petra”, which literally means “a large rock”, a boulder or a mountain. Notice, Jesus also distinguishes between “Peter” and “this rock”, clearly indicating this rock is separate and distinct from Peter. I can just envision Jesus pointing at Peter saying, “Thou art Peter”, and then Jesus pointing to Himself and saying, “and upon this rock I will build my church.” Jesus Christ is the foundation, the chief cornerstone, of the church, not Peter.

Jesus Christ is the “*foundation, stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation*” that is laid in Zion (Isaiah 28:16). Jesus is the “*living stone*” which is the foundation of the spiritual house of the church; then, the church are “*lively stones*” building upon the chief corner stone (1 Pet. 2:4-7). See also

What Is The Church?

Luke 20:17, Eph. 2:20, Ps. 118:22, 1 Cor. 3:11, Dan. 2:34-35,45 and Acts 4:11 for other references to Jesus as the chief corner stone. If you were going to build a house, would you lay a foundation of pebbles or gravel or small rocks? No, a foundation of small, loose rocks will not stand the test of time and is not a suitable foundation. Peter proved to be a very vacillating man in service to Jesus – ready to die for the Lord one minute and forsaking him the next. Would such an inconsistent, unreliable small rock be the proper foundation for the Lord’s church? No, of course not. The proper foundation of the church would not be Peter, but the boulder, mountain, and bedrock foundation of Jesus Christ. When Solomon was preparing the foundation for the temple, he used large, bedrock stones that were hewn out of the mountain (1 Kings 5:15-18). The foundation of the church is not a small pebble of flesh and blood like Peter, but the rock the church is built upon is the Rock, the mountain, the chief corner stone of Jesus Christ.

Then, specifically, the bedrock, cornerstone, foundational principle of the Lord’s church is the revelation of God in the new birth and a confession of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Peter had just confessed publicly to Jesus and before witnesses his belief in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. That public confession of Jesus as the Son of God is the entry point into the visible manifestation of the church, and the foundational rock that membership in the church is built upon. The one requirement for baptism – the entrance way into the Lord’s local assembly of the church – is a public belief and confession of Jesus as the Son of God (Acts 8:36-38; see also Acts 16:30-33, Rom. 10:9, John 20:31; Acts 2:37-41, 8:12). Belief in Jesus as the Son of God is the basic building block of the local church. Those who have confessed Jesus as their Savior, as the Christ, as the Son of God are baptized into the local body of the church to serve the Lord with other called-out, likeminded believers.

Notice in Matt. 16:18, Jesus will build his own church; he does not need our help. The sovereign God of this universe is not dependent upon man to save his children to heaven or build his church; he is not dependent upon flesh and blood to preach the gospel to build his church. No, Jesus builds his own church. Jesus calls out his children in the new birth. The Lord does burden men to preach the gospel to inform them of what Jesus Christ has already done for them. Those who hear the gospel, believe it, and confess Jesus before men are added to the local assembly of the Lord’s church. Let us never forget, Jesus builds the church; ultimately, it is “his church”. We sometimes cavalierly say “my church”, but the local assembly is not my church, I am just a member of it. No, it is actually “Jesus Christ’s church”. He’s the head of the body; He bought the church of God with his own blood (Acts 20:28); We are bought with a price, and we truly are Jesus Christ’s church (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Therefore, the gates of hell will never prevail against the Lord’s church. If it was up to flesh and blood men to build the church, then it would also be up to flesh and blood men to protect the church. Instead, because it is Jesus’ church, the gates of hell and all the assaults of Satan, will never conquer, defeat, or diminish the church of Christ, but the kingdom of God will stand forever (Dan. 2:34-45).

Jesus also addressed the church for a second time in the gospels two chapters later in Matt. 18. *“And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.”* (Matt. 18:17) Jesus here is giving a lesson on how to deal with personal offenses in the church. If you are offended, go and discuss it with the person that offended you first. If he won’t listen to you individually, go and discuss it with him along with two or three brethren as witnesses. If he still won’t listen to you and your two or three witnesses, then “tell it unto the church”. Some people surmise that the church was only created on the Day of Pentecost. While that was a special day for the

What Is The Church?

church here on earth, like a ship setting sail out of the harbor to the glory of God, the church was already established prior to the Day of Pentecost, and there were already 120 members of the church in Acts 1:15. Jesus said he was going to build his church in Matt. 16, and by Matt. 18, the church is already built and established. The church was already in place for those who have offenses to bring before the church and the church hear their matter to reconcile interpersonal disputes. The local assembly of the church is a group of believers who have covenanted together to help one another and even to help reconcile personal offenses as described in the context.

The Kingdom of God

Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords. As the sovereign Creator King, Jesus has all power both in heaven and earth and rules as King over all this world and has since the original creation. However, there was a special establishment of the kingdom of God in the church here in this world during the ministry of Jesus, during the days of the Roman empire. In Dan. 2:34-45, we are told that in the days of these kings (v.44, in the days of the Roman empire) that the God of heaven would set up a kingdom that would never be destroyed. This kingdom would not be left to other people (the King is eternal, so he will not die and pass authority to a successor). This kingdom would break into pieces all other worldwide kingdoms. Ultimately, this kingdom would stand forever. Just as prophesied in Daniel, it was during the reign of the Roman empire that Jesus' ministry was established, and his very first message after his baptism was "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" (Matt. 4:17) The kingdom of heaven had been established in a visible, manifest, and powerful way by Jesus and now this kingdom was "at hand" – easily accessible, right within reach, able to reach out and take hold of it with our hands. Therefore, the church that Jesus established is addressed frequently in scripture as the "kingdom of God".

There are many aspects of the kingdom of God in scripture – eternal final heavenly kingdom (Matt. 25:34), visible church kingdom of baptized believers (Matt. 4:17), internal kingdom in the heart of the believer (Luke 17:21, Rom. 14:17), and quite a few other applications in between. Primarily, the kingdom of God is wherever the King has authority over his subjects, wherever the King is reigning. The King reigns in heaven, in the church, in the lives of the church, and in our hearts. Jesus truly told Pilate that his kingdom was "not of this world" (John 18:36); it is a spiritual kingdom, not a natural kingdom. This kingdom is not defended by fighting with swords and natural warfare, but it is a spiritual warfare defended by prayer and the armor of God and the power of our King. We have to be born again (born from above) to be able to see or enter into the kingdom of God (John 3:3-8). Once we are born again, we have a God given desire to seek God and press into and enter into the kingdom of God in the church. Entering the visible part of the kingdom of God in the church is not easy. We have to "press into" the kingdom (Luke 16:16); we have to "take it by force" (Matt. 11:12); we have to be forcible, committed, devoted, and tenacious to withstand all the temptations of this world trying to distract us from serving God acceptably and pressing into God's kingdom in the church. At the same time that we must be tough and tenacious to forcibly press into the kingdom, we must also have the humility and gentleness of a little child to be converted and enter into the kingdom of God (Matt. 18:3).

The kingdom of God must take primary precedence and be "first" in our lives. "*But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*" (Matt. 6:33) In our prayers,

What Is The Church?

after we get done praising the name of God, the very first thing we ought to pray for (even before our daily bread or our forgiveness) is that “[God’s] kingdom would come” (Matt. 6:10). We have to be “sold out” for the kingdom of God, for the church. It might be necessary for us to forsake houses, brethren, sisters, father, mother, wife, children and lands for the King’s sake to press into the kingdom (Mark 10:29-31). There are most likely things that will be a hinderance to our discipleship of single-heartedly following Christ that we must forsake to press into the kingdom. Sometimes, that might even be natural relationships or possessions or a career, but we press into the church to serve the King and the sacrifice we make is rewarded with the great treasure in the kingdom of God. In Matt. 13:44-46, we see that there is a man who is seeking for a treasure in a field. He’s seeking a treasure (he’s already born again with a desire to seek godly things), but he’s not satisfied with what he’s found elsewhere in the world. The treasure of the kingdom of heaven is hidden in a field; it’s not out in the open where anyone can see or partake of it. It takes diligent searching to find the treasure; it takes some digging in the field to possess the treasure. When he finally finds that treasure, because of his joy, he’s willing to sell everything he has to buy that field and possess the treasure. Then, a merchant man is seeking goodly pearls; he’s seeking for that once in a lifetime pearl that is priceless. When he finally finds that one pearl of great price, he immediately goes and sells all that he has to possess that pearl. This is the type of “all-in sacrifice” to our King that is required to press into the kingdom of God and possess the treasure of the kingdom. We forsake ourselves, submit to the authority of our King, and follow his command to press into the kingdom of God. It’s in the Lord’s kingdom and the church that we find this treasure – righteousness, joy, and peace in the Holy Ghost – and sweet fellowship and communion with our King in his kingdom.

The Body of Christ

One of the most important depictions of the church in scripture is “the body of Christ”. I want us to remember that church is not merely something that “we do” once a week, but church is “who we are”. This identity of the church as “who we are” is most emphasized when we realize that we are truly the body of Christ. A body cannot function for 2 hours once or twice a week (when we meet for worship services) and be healthy, or even truly be a body. A body that is only “alive” or “functioning” a few hours each week is either severely dysfunctional and diseased at best or even practically dead at worst. Is it any real surprise that our churches are unhealthy when we really only function together as a body for a few hours a week? The church is not a light switch where you just flip a switch and fire up the church for 2 hours a week on a Sunday and then turn it off when you leave. Church is not just another event you attend once a week for a few hours. No, church is our life. The body of the church is a 24/7/365, all the time, living, breathing organism that has to be functioning all the time to be healthy. Therefore, as the body of Christ, our churches – particularly the individual members of our churches – need to be interacting and functioning together all the time, not just for a few hours each week, to be healthy. For the body of the church to be a thriving, strong, robust, healthy body, we must be actively engaging in communication, fellowship, and worship with other members of the body on a perpetual basis.

It is absolutely amazing to think that as the church we are truly one with Jesus Christ, members of his body. We are truly “one flesh” with God, one flesh with Jesus Christ; we are literally his body. *“30) For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. 31) For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. 32) This is a great mystery: but*

What Is The Church?

I speak concerning Christ and the church.” (Eph. 5:30-32) In that body, Jesus Christ is the Head of the church, the Head of the body which controls all the actions of the rest of the body. *“For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.”* (Eph. 5:23, see also Col. 1:18; 2:19, Eph. 1:22; 4:15) In our natural bodies, our individual members (our hands, feet, etc.) receive commands from our brain (from our head) telling them what actions to perform. In the same way in the body of the church, the individual members of the church should be following the commands of our Head, Jesus Christ. It would be a severe sign of a dysfunctional body if a member of that body did not perform the command given to it by the head. In like manner, we must be unified together in the body of Christ to where we are all in unity, following the commands of our singular Head, Jesus Christ.

Functioning of the Body of Christ

When we discuss the functioning of the body of Christ, we are primarily describing how the local church operates together. While the entire elect family of God is certainly the body of Christ and needs to function in unity, the most direct application of this body of Christ is in our local church body that we are a physical member of in our local communities. Even though every member of the church body is individually unique and different, we are still molded together as one body in Christ as the church. *“4) For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: 5) So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.”* (Rom. 12:4-5) Each member of the body of Christ is vitally important, and later we will consider the different spiritual gifts in the body of Christ and how they are to function, both individually and collectively. Every member has a spiritual gift they have been given to edify the church as a whole. It is then up to us to exhibit those spiritual gifts, to be a fully functioning part of the church as each member should. In 1 Corinthians 12 and also in Romans 12, we have a very detailed description of the proper functioning of a healthy church, of a healthy body of Christ. First, we must establish that every single child of God has a spiritual gift and is a vital member of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:6,7,11,18, etc.). Therefore, the body cannot function properly and won't be healthy unless every member of the body is healthy and working properly.

We know from our natural bodies that if one part of our body is hurting, our entire body knows about it and hurts along with that one individual member. In the body of the church, we *“rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.”* (Rom. 12:15, see also 1 Cor. 12:26) We cannot say an issue is just another member's problem but does not affect me. That shows disunity and disharmony in the body. There is no problem in the church that is isolated to just one member. The body of the church should not be divided into individual parts, *“no schism (division) in the body”* (1 Cor. 12:25). There should not be rival factions in the church (even though this was a problem in the Corinth church, 1 Cor. 1:11-13) nor members warring against one another. That will clearly only injure the health of the church body. Instead, we need to display unity to be functioning as one healthy body. We should feel both the pain and the joy of other members, just like our natural body feels the good and bad of every part of our body. We are knit together in the church, for better or worse. We need to be so unified with other members of the body that we *“experience life”* together with them, both in joy and in sorrow.

We have *“diversity but still unity”* in the body of Christ when it is functioning properly. We need diversity in the body because we need individual members to do different things, to fulfill their bodily function (to use their unique spiritual gift). However, the actions that they perform do not make one member of the body

What Is The Church?

more important than other members of the body. No, we know from our natural bodies that every single member of our bodies is vitally important. Two differing bad attitudes among members of the body are addressed in 1 Cor. 12: A) I'm not important (because I'm not the hand, I'm not important at all, 1 Cor. 12:15-18); B) I'm too important, I do everything and don't need anyone else (The eye can't say to the hand, I don't need you, 1 Cor. 12:19-25). Both extremes are equally incorrect and toxic to the health of the body. Every member of the body is individually important and vital. No one single member is "irreplaceable" but rather every single member of the body is "irreplaceable". We know from our natural bodies that every single member of the body is vitally important. Very bad things happen if any one part of our body stops functioning, even for just a few minutes. The body is handicapped when one of our members is injured, or worse yet, a body part needs to be amputated. That person's body is literally "handicapped". In like manner, our church body will be handicapped if even one of our members is not fulfilling their divine responsibility of their spiritual gift. We will only have a healthy body in the church when we are unified in following the Holy Spirit and submitting to the directions that the Holy Spirit sends to every member, telling them what to do from the direction of the Head, Jesus Christ.

If you will grant me a little bit of liberty, I want to consider a few aspects of our natural bodies and make an application to the spiritual body of the church. This is the definition of the nervous system: "The nervous system is the highway along which your brain sends and receives information about what is happening in the body and around it. This system detects environmental changes that impact the body and works with other systems in the body to respond to such events." We could maybe liken the nervous system of the body of Christ to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the highway that the head (Jesus Christ) uses to send messages all throughout the members of the body (the church) notifying them of "environmental changes" and telling them how to respond to these changes and events. Have you ever felt burdened about a member of your church to pray for them or visit them, not knowing anything was wrong and later found out they were in need when you felt that burden? That is the nervous system of the Holy Spirit working to notify all the members of one body part that is in need. If the nervous system is not functioning correctly, the body cannot feel any pain or respond to members that are in need. That is what happens when our churches are not in tune with the Holy Spirit, our nervous system; we cannot feel or respond properly when other members are in need.

Next, let's consider the definition of the circulatory (or cardiovascular) system: "The circulatory system is an organ system that permits blood to circulate and transport nutrients and oxygen to and from the cells of the body to provide nourishment and help in fighting disease and stabilizing temperature, etc". We can maybe think of the circulatory system as the means of pumping the sustaining nutrients and blood to all members of the body. Charity (agape self-sacrificial love) in 1 Cor. 12:31 and continuing on to 1 Cor. 13 is described as the best gift in the body, the "more excellent way". Love and charity could be considered the blood that is vital for every organ to maintain good health and function properly. This system pumps love through the whole body (also powered by the Holy Spirit) and that love (the blood) is vital for that member to perform its intended function. It is also fitting that love in the church, in the body, could be depicted as blood since the love of the head (the love of Christ) was manifest by shedding his precious blood for us. Any member of the body that is deprived of blood (that is deprived of love) for very long will die very quickly. Also, truly doesn't love "transport nutrients and provide nourishment and help in fighting disease and maintaining body temperature" in the members of the body of the church. When our bodies run a temperature, it's a sign that something is wrong (we get to running a little hot; maybe someone is a little

What Is The Church?

more angry than they should be in the church). Then the whole body responds to regulate that elevated temperature and return to health. That is how the body of our church should operate as well, to do everything in the body of Christ in love.

Essentially, the rest of our discussion on the church should be viewed through the lens of “the body of Christ”. The rest of our discussion will essentially be an “Anatomy and Physiology” lesson on the body of Christ – what are the components and members of the body of Christ, what are the spiritual gifts in the body and how do they function, what activities should the body be engaging in, how do the members of the body work together in unity for one common goal, and what does the functioning of a healthy body of the church look like in action in our daily lives? Hopefully, we can consider together what a healthy, thriving, strong body of the church looks like in action.

Other Depictions of the Church in Scripture

The House of God

The church is also presented in scripture as the Lord’s house. *“But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”* (1 Tim. 3:15) Jesus Christ is the foundation of this house, the chief cornerstone, the rock that the church is built upon. The house of the church has been built and constructed upon the foundation of Jesus Christ. Just as we inhabit our own homes, the house of the church is the habitation of God here in his world. *“20) And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; 21) In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: 22) In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.”* (Eph. 2:20-22) God is the one who builds the house of the church. We cannot build the church ourselves, but we are dependent upon and submissive unto God to place people in his house as he sees fit, to build his church. *“Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it.”* (Ps. 127:1) As God builds his house, the Lord places each of his children as lively stones in the appropriate place to be ultimately built up unto a spiritual house. *“Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.”* (1 Pet. 2:5) We use our spiritual gifts to serve the Lord in his house as lively, living stones in the Lord’s spiritual house.

We are both a house individually in ourselves, and we are also vessels in the house of God in the church. Our bodies individually are the house or tabernacle or dwelling place of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 5:1-2), and then collectively we are also the house of God when we meet and assemble together in person. As vessels in the house of God, we are each fulfilling a specific purpose and vital function in the house (1 Cor. 3:9-14, 2 Tim. 2:20-21). In a house you have different vessels that perform different functions, and each are very important (plates, glasses, pitchers, utensils, vases, pictures, etc.). All vessels in the house are important to a properly functioning house. You cannot drink out of a fork or eat with a drinking glass. When you put all those vessels together that is what makes your house a home. We see that same diversity in the house of God in the church too. We each have spiritual gifts that are manifest in diverse and unique ways, but each vessel in the house is vital and important to the house as a whole. God uses his children to build up and strengthen the house of God. Therefore, we have to take heed how we build upon the foundation of Jesus

What Is The Church?

Christ. If we use reliable, steadfast materials such as gold, silver, and precious stones, the building will be secure and strong, and the house will withstand any storm (Matt. 7:24-27). However, if we use perishable materials such as wood, hay, and stubble, those substances will not stand the test of time and will perish when tested by the fires of this life (see 1 Cor. 3:9-15 for context). It is great to see the diversity in the house of God working together as lively stones, serving God in his spiritual house.

The Temple of God

The individual members of the church are called the temple of God. Our bodies are the temple of God. *“16) Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? 17) If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.”* (1 Cor. 3:16-17) Jesus even described his own body as a temple (John 2:19-21). In the Old Testament the physical temple in Jerusalem was the designated place for the worship of God. It was in the temple that God dwelt and communed with his people, and the Shekinah glory of God was manifested to God’s people. In like manner now in the New Testament spiritual kingdom, God dwells in the spiritual temples of our bodies, and the temple of our bodies are God’s chosen residence for his glory. In the Old Testament, God dwelt manifestly in a physical temple made with man’s hands, but now God does not dwell in temples made with hands (Acts 17:24). The temple is a place of sacrifice and now our bodies are to be a living sacrifice unto God (Rom. 12:1). The spiritual temple of our bodies is God’s chosen place for the worship and glory of God in this world. *“19) What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? 20) For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.”* (1 Cor. 6:19-20)

Therefore, when we consider that God dwells in our bodies, that should dictate and change the way we conduct ourselves on a daily basis. We should be vigilant to act in a way that will glorify God in our bodily temples and forsake sin that would dishonor our God. In 1 Cor. 3, 1 Cor. 6, and 2 Cor. 6, we have a long discussion on controlling our actions in our bodies to where God is glorified in our temples instead of being dishonored. That is why we “flee fornication”, are not unequally yoked with unbelievers, and forsake sexual sin because we want God to be honored in the temple of our bodies. *“16) And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”* (2 Cor. 6:16, see also Eph. 2:21) We are the temple of the living God; God dwells in us; God walks in us; God is our Lord and thankfully we are his people. Our bodies are the place where God has chosen to reside in this world. Therefore, our actions should honor and glorify the God of our temple. We are required (we are bought with a price; we are no longer our own) to use our bodies as the place of worship and honor and glory of our God in this world.

The Candlestick of God

The church is also presented in scripture as a candlestick. When John sees seven golden candlesticks in Rev. 1, Jesus explains to him that those candlesticks are the seven churches of Asia. *“The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.”* (Rev. 1:20) These candlesticks are describing the local church body as one individual candlestick, but then the

What Is The Church?

church as a whole being many candlesticks which shine forth as the light of the world (Matt. 5:14). This candlestick imagery goes back to the Israelite tabernacle where God commanded a golden candlestick to be made and placed in the tabernacle (Exod. 25:31-40) and then finally in the temple. Now, we, as the temple of God in the church, are God's candlestick to shine forth to his glory. Jesus calls his church as his candlestick to shine forth as light to a world in darkness. We cannot put our light under a bushel to cover up its light shining forth to others. Instead, we put our light on a candlestick, and it gives light to all in the house and then ultimately gives light to the world. *"14) Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. 15) Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. 16) Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."* (Matt. 5:14-16) We let our light shine out to the world as God's candlestick so others can see our good works and glorify God in heaven.

Jesus Christ gives the sober warning to the candlestick of the Ephesus church, that if they do not repent of their cold-hearted, loveless service to God, that *"else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."* (Rev. 2:5) When churches close their doors, God has removed the candlestick from the church at that local community. Because of their disobedience, there is no longer any light of the candlestick of God's church shining in that community, which will only descend that community into a darker state. That is a sobering warning to us as local candlesticks of the church as well. If we squander God's blessings in our life and put our candlestick under a bushel, then God will simply take away our candlestick that we are not using and the blessing of the church. As Christ's church, let us shine forth our light to this world to the glory of God.

The Vineyard of God

The church is also depicted as the vineyard of God. *"1) I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman... 5) I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."* (John 15:1-5) Jesus Christ is the true vine, and God the Father is the husbandman, the caretaker of the vine and the vineyard. The church are the branches that stem off from the vine, and collectively we are the vineyard of God. Jesus describes in John 15:1-10 that God expects fruit from his branches in his vineyard. God is glorified when the branches bring forth much fruit (15:8). We must abide in the vine to bring forth fruit to the glory of God (15:4-7). A branch cannot bear fruit apart from the vine; if a branch is removed from the vine, it is dead. Furthermore, if our branches do not bear fruit, then God will take away the unfruitful branch (15:2; compare Rom. 11 discussion of the Jewish branches being removed and wild olive branches being grafted in). For branches that are bringing forth much fruit, God will also purge those branches to where they will ultimately bring forth even more fruit (15:2). As the church, we must abide in Jesus Christ our true vine, and then our vineyard will be fruitful, bringing forth fruit to the glory of God.

Jesus used agricultural analogies and parables very often in his ministry – parable of the sower and parable of the wheat and tares and parable of the mustard seed (Matt. 13), laborers in a vineyard (Matt. 20 & 21), parable of the fig tree (Matt. 24:32-35), good and bad fruit from a tree (Matt. 7:15-23), etc. Most people in Bible times were farmers, at least to some degree, raising their own food, so they really could identify with the agricultural lessons of Jesus. Similar to the analogy of a body that is a living breathing organism, a vineyard is made up of living plants. There is also great diversity in a vineyard, just like in a body. To make

What Is The Church?

up a vineyard, there will be many different kinds of plants, vines, trees, and flowers. We again celebrate the diversity but still unity in the church, in the Lord's vineyard. Therefore, for the church to be a lively, fruitful, healthy vineyard, we have to be actively bringing forth fruit to the glory of God.

The romance of Solomon and the Shulamite maid was set in a vineyard (Song of Sol. 1:6,14; 8:11-12). Solomon comes to inspect his vineyards to see if the vines are flourishing with fruit (Song of Sol. 7:12). We also see a beautiful picture of the church garden from the eyes of our Beloved, our Husband, Jesus Christ. "4:12) *A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. 13) Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard, 14) Spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices: 15) A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon. 16) Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits. 5:1) I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk: eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.*" (Song of Sol. 4:12-5:1) We see the diversity of the Lord's church garden from Jesus' perspective: spring, fountain, plants, sweet spices and odors, the wind of the Holy Spirit blowing upon this garden. Our Beloved, Jesus Christ, walks through his garden, enjoying the sweet odors of our sacrifices and the beauty of his garden in the church.

In Isaiah 5, we have a lesson of God's people as the vineyard of the Lord. "1) *Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: 2) And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. 3) And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard... 7) For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry.*" (Isaiah 5:1-7) Jesus Christ planted this vineyard in the church; he put a fence around the church to protect it; he took the stones out; he built a tower in the middle of the vineyard. However, the natural nation of Israel did not bring forth the proper good fruit, but they brought forth wild grapes. God concludes here that the natural nation of Israel will be judged for their lack of proper fruit, and the Lord took away the blessing of their natural vineyard. In like manner in the church, if we do not bring forth proper fruit (if we bring forth wild grapes), the vineyard of the church can be judged with a dry season of unfruitfulness in the vineyard as well.

The church is also God's husbandry (literally God's farm). "For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building." (1 Cor. 3:9) The Lord describes the planting and growth of the Lord's husbandry further in 1 Cor. 3:4-9. Paul "planted" and was instrumental in establishing the church at Corinth; Apollos faithfully "watered" the church and promoted growth in his ministry there too. Ultimately, though it was still "God that gave the increase" and growth in the vineyard. The person who planted or watered the church is not really that important, but it's God that gives the increase and it is still God's vineyard. It takes great diligence and hard work to cultivate a fruitful and productive farm. Not just planting the crops, but then watering and fertilizing and removing weeds and stones. Therefore, in the church we need to be diligent and commit to cultivating the proper environment in the vineyard of the church for us to be abundantly fruitful to the glory of God.

What Is The Church?

Now we need to examine the individual members of the body, the individual components that build the Lord's house and temple, the vine and branches in the Lord's husbandry. We want to see not just what the members of the church are, but especially what does the church look like in action in our daily lives? We want to consider all those components and functioning of the Lord's church from the word of God and how we function together properly in the Lord's church to the glory of God.

7 Spiritual Gifts in the Church

For the church to function properly and healthily, we need to understand that every single member of the body of Christ has been given a spiritual gift to profit the body as a whole. *"7) But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal... 11) But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will."* (1 Cor. 12:7-11) The Holy Spirit at regeneration has given to "every man" (and every woman) gifts to edify the body of Christ as a whole. While every single child of God has been given a spiritual gift, there is a tremendous amount of "diversity" in the "administration" and "operation" of each gift. Not every person's gifts will operate and be administered in the same way. *"4) Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5) And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. 6) And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all."* (1 Cor. 12:4-6) How a gift is "administered" or "operates" in one person's life will most likely be different and unique from even how that same gift operates in another person's life. Therefore, we cannot put these spiritual gifts into a cookie-cutter box or assume they always look the same in their administration.

God has distributed spiritual gifts unto every member of his church as it hath pleased him. These gifts are given to strengthen and edify the entire body. If one portion of our bodies does not work correctly, the entire church body is handicapped. It is vitally important for every member of the church, for every member of the body of Christ, to be fully functioning for the health of the overall body. Our spiritual gifts are manifest in a diversity of different ways in our lives. Some gifts – such as the four gifts given in the gospel ministry – are displayed in a more public way in the church. However, that does not diminish the absolute necessity for every child of God to be fully manifesting their spiritual gift to the edification of the entire body of Christ. No spiritual gift or individual member of the body of the Lord's church can function alone. We are all dependent upon each other in the church, dependent upon every other member of the body. We cannot think some members are not vital. Even those that have not necessarily been given a very public or prominent gift in the church are still absolutely vital for the healthy functioning of the entire body (See Functioning of the Body section above and 1 Cor. 12:14-27 for more discussion on the necessity of every member and every spiritual gift for a healthy body).

We see in the New Testament there was a "miraculous" administration and operation of certain spiritual gifts in the early church. We see the "miraculous spiritual gifts" of speaking in tongues, healing of diseases, prophesying of future events, and a few others manifested in the early church. However, the miraculous administration and operation of these spiritual gifts was only given for a short time in the establishment of the early church. We are told after this special period of the outpouring of miraculous spiritual gifts that prophecies would cease, tongues would fail, and divine knowledge would vanish away. *"Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away."* (1 Cor. 13:8) Therefore, when we discuss spiritual gifts, we will

What Is The Church?

consider the ordinary spiritual gifts that are prevalent in the church today, not the miraculous spiritual gifts that were manifested in a special way in the establishment of the early church.

It is important to remember there is diversity in both the administration and operation of these spiritual gifts. These spiritual gifts are manifested by every member of the body, not just by the ordained offices of elder and deacon in the church. Both men and women can have each of these spiritual gifts, but they will most likely be administered in a different way. A man with the gift of prophecy will most likely be given a gift to preach in a public way, but women with the gift of prophecy (Acts 2:17; 21:9; 1 Cor. 11:5) will be administered in a private way, instead of a public way, giving wise counsel to other members of the church. An ordained male preacher must be apt to teach, displaying the gift of teaching in public worship in the church. Women are restricted from teaching authoritatively in a public way in the church (1 Tim. 2:11-12, 1 Cor. 14:34-35), but yet mothers and grandmothers must teach their children (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15) and older women should teach younger women (Titus 2:3-5). The same is also true with each of these other spiritual gifts of ministry, exhortation, giving, ruling, and showing mercy. They may be administered personally in a more private way instead of visible to public view. Spiritual gifts are not limited by age either. Young children can certainly have a gift of exhortation, ministry, and mercy to encourage others in the church as well. Each of these spiritual gifts can be administered in a multitude of ways, both in public and private, and no two gifts will operate in exactly the same way.

God gave additional spiritual gifts to the church for the edification of the rest of the body. Some of the most prevalent gifts that are still prominent in the Lord's church are given in the Romans 12 description of the body of Christ. *"4) For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: 5) So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. 6) Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; 7) Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; 8) Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness."* (Rom. 12:4-8) Some people in the church may have more than one spiritual gift or more or less of some gifts to different degrees. Remember, there are many different administrations and operations of these gifts for how they are exhibited in the lives of the church, and they are not one-size-fits-all spiritual gifts.

1. Prophecy

Those who have the gift of prophecy are instructed to "prophesy according to the proportion of faith". Prophecy in the Old Testament and in most of the New Testament was administered by the foretelling of future events or delivering a message from God to the Lord's people. The foretelling of future events is no longer necessary in the church after the inspiration of scripture – that specific administration of prophecy has failed (1 Cor. 13:8). However, today the gift of "prophecy" as described in 1 Cor. 14 relates to "preaching" in the church for the edification of the body. That operation of prophecy of bringing God's message to God's people through preaching is certainly active and alive in the church today. There are also some in the church that have a unique gift of wisdom and spiritual discernment to give counsel for how certain events might occur in the future. Others can display a private gift of prophecy in giving godly, wise counsel from the word of God to others in the church, particularly wise advice to younger people in the formative decisions of their lives.

What Is The Church?

2. Ministry

Those who minister (or simply “serve others”) are exhorted to “*let us wait on our ministering.*” It takes a great deal of patience to wait and serve other people in the church, and there are some who have been given a great gift of service. We should all serve one another in the church, minister to those in need and the body as a whole. There are still some though that have a unique attentiveness and touch to patiently wait on helping others in the church. Just like the original deacons ordained in Acts 6 who took over the “daily ministrations”, the gift of ministry waits upon the needs of others, as the waiter waits tables at a restaurant. Onesiphorus “ministered” to Paul and “oft refreshed me”, even while he was in prison (2 Tim. 1:16-18). Epaphroditus “ministered to” Paul’s needs and was sick and almost died in his service to his beloved brother Paul (Phil. 2:25-30). The house of Stephanus (all the family – husband, wife, and children) had “addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints” (1 Cor. 16:15). We all have a responsibility to serve others in the church, but there are certainly those in our churches, just like these disciples in the scripture, who have a special gift of service and ministry.

3. Teaching

Those who have been called to the ministry have displayed the gift of teaching in public worship, having been proven to be “apt to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2). In addition to that, there is supposed to be a more dynamic teaching atmosphere in the church than just the “pastor and teacher” preaching on Sunday morning. Parents teach their children in the home (Eph. 6:4); older men and women teach younger men and women (Titus 2:1-6), and we should all instruct and encourage others in the church as we have opportunity. We should all be growing and maturing in our discipleship and knowledge of the scriptures to where we are equipped to teach others in the church (Heb. 5:12-14). Both Aquila and Priscilla (both husband and wife together, as a godly teaching tag-team) took Apollos aside and expounded unto him more perfectly the word of God (Acts 18:24-26). We should “teach and admonish” one another in the song service as we sing hymns in public worship and in our homes (Col. 3:16). There are some mothers and aged women who have a special gift to teach their children in their homes and also to teach younger women in fellowship together. There are older men who have a gift to impart their wisdom to younger men and teach them how they should lead their families. There are also some men who are not called to preach that can teach a good lesson from the scriptures to the church in public worship from time to time as well.

4. Exhortation

Those blessed with the gift of exhortation can encourage others in their discipleship. Exhortation means “to call near to one’s side”. It gives the word picture of someone calling a discouraged member to one’s side and putting your arm around them, and telling them positive, encouraging words to strengthen their walk of discipleship. Barnabas – called the “son of consolation” (Acts 4:36) – greatly displays the spiritual gift of exhortation. Barnabas came to Antioch and “exhorted them all” (Acts 11:23), but maybe the most important thing he did was standing up and vouching for Paul to the Jerusalem church when everyone else doubted his motives (Acts 9:26-27). He called Paul to his side, put his arm around him, and then vouched for him to the skeptical church. Then, Barnabas displayed the gift of exhortation by standing up for John Mark and comforting, consoling, and exhorting him, even though this caused a division between him and his dear friend, Paul (Acts 15:35-41). When John Mark was discouraged and Paul was ready to write him

What Is The Church?

off, Barnabas exhorted John Mark, put his arm around him, and he was later profitable for the ministry because of Barnabas' gift of exhortation (2 Tim. 4:11). Paul even counted John Mark as a fellow worker in the kingdom and John Mark was a "comfort" (exhortation, encouragement) to Paul in the ministry (Col. 4:11-12). When some members of the church get discouraged or need comfort, the exhorter comes to encourage them and stimulate their faith. The gift of exhortation can be a great spiritual cheerleader for those who are weak and need a spiritual boost. When we need an encouragement and boost to our spiritual walk, the exhorter will comfort, encourage, and refresh your strength to continue in service to the Lord.

5. Giving

The members with a gift of giving should "*do it with simplicity.*" Everyone in the church is commanded to give freely to the church and to help others, but it is evident there are some that have a unique gift of giving. They give freely and liberally of their money and of their time. There are some in our churches who have been very blessed financially, and those with the gift of giving believe "to whom much is given, to him is much required" (Luke 12:48). They believe they have a responsibility to bless others with God's blessing to them of their finances. Those with this gift of giving help others freely, not drawing attention to their generosity but giving discretely, quietly, to where they do not receive any credit for it. Giving is about sacrifice and they are willing to sacrifice their money, goods, wisdom, and time to give freely to others who stand in need. They do not give to obligate others to have to repay them, but they give with "simplicity". They do not draw attention to their ability to give, but they give freely and simply to honor the Lord and help others that are in need.

6. Ruling

Those who have the gift of ruling should rule "*with diligence.*" This is a gift of leadership. The pastor and deacons of a church must display some degree of this ruling gift of leadership to guide the church in the appropriate pathway. The elders that rule well should be counted worthy of double honor (1 Tim. 5:17). This gift can also be manifest in our sisters in the lunchroom or a cleaning project, organizing who needs to fix what dish for lunch or who needs to come clean and when before the annual meeting. It appears that Sister Phebe had some administration of the gift of ruling as Paul instructed the Roman church to "assist her in whatever business she hath need of you" (Rom. 16:1-2). The gift of ruling will probably be manifest in skillful organization and supervising different projects in the church. They will often have a close attention to detail and are willing to make difficult decisions when other members cannot reach a conclusion. This gift will often manifest itself in the office of deacon, to help with the organization and administration of the needs of the church, just like the original deacons in Acts 6 as they dispensed the daily ministrations in the Jerusalem church.

7. Showing Mercy

Some members may also manifest the gift of showing mercy. We should all be merciful and kind to others, but it is evident some have a great gift of showing mercy. The parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 shows a man with the spiritual gift of showing mercy. He took time out of his busy schedule to show mercy and help his neighbor that was in need. He did not just help this injured man out of the ditch, but he took him for medical attention and took financial responsibility for his current and future medical bills. This

What Is The Church?

anonymous Samaritan displayed a great gift of showing mercy to his neighbor. The gift of showing mercy should be administered “*with cheerfulness.*” Sometimes we might not want to show mercy to others, but we still might help them begrudgingly out of necessity. Instead, the merciful shows their mercy “with cheerfulness”, with a joyful and kind spirit in their helping of others.

Spiritual Gifts in Action

At the conclusion of this discussion of 7 spiritual gifts in the church in Romans 12, we then are given short practical admonitions for how the body and those spiritual gifts should function together in the church. God gives us 21 consecutive short admonitions for how the church as a whole, and each member of the church, is to function as a body in Rom. 12:9-18. We need to consider and practice these admonitions for how we are to work together in unity as the body of Christ.

- 1) Let love be without dissimulation.
- 2) Abhor that which is evil;
- 3) Cleave to that which is good.
- 4) Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love;
- 5) In honour preferring one another;
- 6) Not slothful in business;
- 7) Fervent in spirit;
- 8) Serving the Lord;
- 9) Rejoicing in hope;
- 10) Patient in tribulation;
- 11) Continuing instant in prayer;
- 12) Distributing to the necessity of saints;
- 13) Given to hospitality.
- 14) Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.
- 15) Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.
- 16) Be of the same mind one toward another.
- 17) Mind not high things but condescend to men of low estate.
- 18) Be not wise in your own conceits.
- 19) Recompense to no man evil for evil.
- 20) Provide things honest in the sight of all men.
- 21) If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

What these spiritual gifts in the church look like in action is very well described in Elder Michael Ivey’s article “Seven Gifts in the Church”. In the conclusion to that article, showing how these spiritual gifts work together in the community of the church, Elder Ivey writes:

Sister Show Mercy makes it her business to know when a brother or sister is in need. She always has a positive attitude, a kind word, and healing methods. She is the member who brings get well cards to church for everyone to sign. She visits the sick. If they need special care, she volunteers to help. Brother Exhorter comes by with a few encouraging words. Sister Prophecy offers suggestions about a careful convalescence. Brother and Sister Minister are there mowing the lawns and cleaning the house. Brother Giver will bring by a bill of groceries. Sister Rule is scheduling meals and house cleaning so that

What Is The Church?

necessary tasks are distributed among the entire membership. Sister Show Mercy is there caring for Sister Afflicted. She is seeing that pills are taken and that Sister Afflicted is eating plenty of chicken soup, getting enough rest, and doesn't get too excited about the fact that almost every member of the church has been by to see her in the last week. Sister Show Mercy is right there. With a smile on her face and cheerful demeanor, she is comforting and caring for sister Afflicted.

Charity – The Most Excellent Way

After his long, in-depth discussion of spiritual gifts in 1 Cor. 12, Paul summarizes this lesson with this verse: *“But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.”* (1 Cor. 12:31) There is something even more important than the activities of these spiritual gifts, and that is the love and charity that we exhibit to others in the body of the church. There is not only a tendency to think our gift is not important, but also a tendency in the church for us to get prideful and think that I don't actually need the other members of the body; I can do it all myself (1 Cor. 12:21-25). Therefore, Paul brings it back home in conclusion to the most important attribute of the body – charity, the more excellent way. If we are following the commands of Jesus Christ as our Head, we know that Jesus is Love (1 John 4:8). Therefore, all the directions from our Head will be commands bathed in love. Our head will never direct the members to act in an unloving way. If we are exhibiting our spiritual gift in a prideful way and not in love, then we will be destructive and not edifying to the body of Christ and furthermore rebelling against our Head of Love.

It doesn't matter what great spiritual gifts we have been given, or what actions we perform through those gifts, if we are not doing them in love and charity, then we are nothing, vain, and empty. *“1) Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. 2) And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. 3) And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.”* (1 Cor. 13:1-3) Then in 1 Cor. 13:4-8, we are given 16 attributes of what charity (agape self-sacrificial love) looks like in action. This is what love looks like in the body of Christ. *“4) Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, 5) Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; 6) Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; 7) Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. 8) Charity never faileth.”* Everything we do in the church is motivated and undergirded by love. Charity is the blood that flows into every member of the body of Christ and brings us into unity under Christ as our Head of Love. Let us use our spiritual gifts to the edification of the body of Christ to show self-sacrificial charity to our fellow members in the church.

4 Gifts of the Gospel Ministry

Among the spiritual gifts in the church is a special calling and gift to preach the gospel. In Ephesians 4, we see four gifts of the gospel ministry that were given to men in the church to edify the body of Christ and the church as a whole. *“8) Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men... 11) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and*

What Is The Church?

some, pastors and teachers; 12) For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” (Eph. 4:8-12) Men are not called to preach to exalt themselves or their gift, but they are only called to preach to bless the church as a whole. Each of these four gifts are given to men that are called into the ministry to preach the gospel. Men who are given these gifts are called of God the same as every minister, but the extent of the authority given and the administration of each gift does somewhat vary among each one.

Apostles

For one to be an apostle, they had to be an eyewitness of the resurrected Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 9:1). When seeking God’s will for a replacement apostle for Judas, the disciples sought someone who was in company with them from the baptism of John to the ascension of Jesus and had seen the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:21-22). Apostles performed special signs and miracles that validated the authenticity of their apostleship (2 Cor. 12:12, Heb. 2:3-4). Apostles were given a special authority in the early church to bind and loose and establish church practice under the direction of Christ and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 16:19) and to set forth the ordinances authoritatively to the church (1 Cor. 11:2,23). They spoke on behalf of God to the church and were used by divine inspiration to deliver the word of God to the church (1 Thess. 2:13). Both apostles and prophets were given a special revelation by the Spirit (Eph. 3:5), and both were the foundational cornerstones used by God in establishing the church in the first century (Eph. 2:20).

The identifying mark of the apostles is that they were eyewitnesses of the resurrected Jesus Christ (Acts 1:22, 1 Cor. 9:1). Therefore, this gift in the gospel ministry is vacant today because no one can meet that qualification of having seen with their own eyes the resurrected Christ. Apostles were given special authority and revelation to establish God’s word and ordinances and truth to the original church. Now that the canon of scripture has been closed and the practices of the church established in the word of God, there is no further need for this special gift in the church. Thus, this gift in the ministry has been vacant since the passing away of the original apostles in the first century after the death of the Apostle John.

Prophets

Prophets were given, along with apostles, a special revelation to the early church in the inspiration of God’s word and were used to lay the foundation of God’s church (Eph. 2:20, 3:5). Prophets were not required to have seen the resurrected Christ like apostles but were still given a great degree of authority in the early church. These prophets typically manifested their gift by the foretelling of future events (Acts 11:28, 21:11). However, there would come a time when these miraculous prophesying of events would fail and cease (1 Cor. 13:8). While there is still a gift of “prophecy” in the church today (Rom. 12:6, 1 Cor. 14), that gift has a different administration now in simply “preaching” to the edification of the body instead of the foretelling of future events or revelation from God. Now that God has inspired all his scripture and ceased divine revelation of his word, there is no further need for this special gift in the ministry. God’s people don’t have to rely upon a prophet to receive a message from God like during the early church and Old Testament. Now we can read the inspired word of God and the Holy Spirit can convict and direct his people in a manner that God had previously used prophets to deliver that message in the early church.

What Is The Church?

Evangelists

An evangelist is a preacher who will typically travel and preach the gospel in an area or to a people that had previously never heard the gospel. Philip is the only minister in scripture who is specifically denoted as an “evangelist” (Acts 21:8). Philip went and preached in previously unevangelized Samaria where many were converted to the truth (Acts 8:5-25). Then, in the middle of that revival in Samaria, Philip was called to leave and go preach to one Ethiopian eunuch in the middle of the Gaza desert (Acts 8:26-39). After baptizing the eunuch and being caught up by the Spirit, he then preached in all the cities from Azotus to Caesarea (Acts 8:40). Philip appears to have settled in Caesarea and used that city as a base for his evangelism, as he is found still in Caesarea in Acts 21:8. Here Philip shows that an evangelist is not solely a traveling preacher to foreign countries. In fact, he evangelized for most of his ministry in one local area and evangelized his family. Paul encouraged Timothy to “*do the work of an evangelist.*” (2 Tim. 4:5) A pastor and teacher typically will serve God in a local church setting, edifying and ministering to the local church over an extended period of time. An evangelist is called to a broader ministry, to bring the gospel to those who are not already established in the faith, and to travel more extensively to preach the gospel to those often still in gospel ignorance.

Pastors and Teachers

The gift of “pastors and teachers” is typically considered to be one gift in the church. Every ordained preacher must be proven to be “apt to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2, 2 Tim. 2:24), and they are called to preach and teach the church without ceasing (Acts 5:42). Therefore, any man that has been ordained to the ministry should have displayed a gift to teach, and therefore is a “teacher” to the church. The specific qualifications for the ordination of an elder are addressed more in depth in the next section. The word “pastor” means “shepherd”. Sheep are vulnerable animals and need great guidance and direction. Jesus Christ is the Great Shepherd of the sheep (Heb. 13:20), and he has called pastors to be his “undershepherds” to feed and care for his flock, the church. Jesus taught the remedy for God’s children, having no direction and being scattered as sheep with no shepherd, was to pray for God to send forth laborers into his harvest (Matt. 9:36-38). God calls men to shepherd and guide his flock in the word of God. Since all of God’s ministers are called to “feed the lambs” and “feed the sheep” (John 21:15-17), there is a sense that all of God’s preachers “shepherd” the Lord’s sheep together in the church. However, the God-appointed “pastor” of the local church is called to a greater responsibility than just an ordained elder called to preach the gospel.

There is a special “appointment” by the Lord for a man to be a “pastor” of the local church, to be an overseer to feed, guide, and protect the sheep of a local church assembly. It is the Holy Spirit which appoints a man as an overseer of the local church (Acts 20:28), and we trust the church shall follow the burden of the Holy Spirit in choosing their pastor. As pastor of the local church, this man is entrusted with the spiritual care of these sheep in the church, and he must give an account before God for the souls of the sheep that have been entrusted to his care (Heb. 13:17). Pastors are called to feed the flock of God willingly and with a ready mind, not for filthy lucre or monetary gain (1 Pet. 5:2). God harshly condemned the shepherds of Israel who only fed themselves and neglected the needs of the Lord’s sheep (Ezek. 34). Therefore, God has now called “*pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.*” (Jer. 3:15) A pastor is not called to be a ruler or lord over God’s heritage but to lead the sheep and lead the local church flock by example (1 Pet. 5:3, 1 Tim. 4:12). History has proven that not every man that has been

What Is The Church?

called to teach and preach has been given a “gift” to pastor and shepherd sheep in an effective way in the local church. Despite some of the limitations these men might have, God gave the gift of teaching the word of God to these men to feed the Lord’s sheep, to guide them in the paths of righteousness, and strengthen the flock. This is a grave responsibility to be stewards of the souls and spiritual care of God’s children, and pastors must give an account unto the Lord for their diligence in caring for the Lord’s sheep.

Since the gift of “pastors and teachers” is the most prevalent and applicable to the church today, I believe the purpose of God giving these ministerial gifts are directly applicable to this preaching gift in particular. Why did God give the gift of pastors and teachers to the church? What is the role of a pastor in shepherding the local church? The pastor is called: To teach the church to promote maturity (perfection) of the saints in their spiritual walk and edify (build up) the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12); To promote unity in the faith by increasing knowledge of the Son of God through the scriptures (Eph. 4:13); To stand for the truth of God’s word and stabilize the church to not be tossed about by every wind of doctrine or deceived by false teachers (Eph. 4:14); To speak the truth in love to grow and build up the body and glorify the Head of the body, Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:15); To promote the unity and working together of every member of the body, so that the body will increase unto the edifying of itself in love (Eph. 4:16). In addition to these, there are many more roles and responsibilities of pastors that we don’t have time to discuss here. Pastors are called and appointed by God to strengthen the body of Christ and feed the sheep. Pastors are called for you, the church.

God gives the pastor a special love and connection for the church he is called to pastor. The apostle Paul established many churches and did not necessarily serve as a long-term pastor of those churches. However, we see from Paul the depth of the love that the ministry, and especially pastors, have for the sheep they are called to shepherd. The love of the pastor for the church is very similar to the love of mothers and fathers for their children. Paul was gentle with the church as a nursing mother cherishes her infant children (1 Thess. 2:7). He describes himself as a mother in labor for the church (Gal. 4:19). He comforted and charged the church as a father would his children; he loved the church the same way a father loves his children (1 Thess. 2:11). He was willing to spend and be spent for the church, the same way a parent will sacrifice for their children (2 Cor. 12:14-15). He was willing to impart his own soul unto the church (1 Thess. 2:8). The church was in his heart to live and die with them (2 Cor. 7:3). The church was his hope, joy, glory and crown (1 Thess. 2:19-20, Phil. 4:1). The pastor’s greatest joy is to see the church, his spiritual children, walking in truth and serving the Lord (3 John 4). We need to know the depth of love that God has placed in a pastor’s heart for the church and for the sheep they are called to shepherd. God called and gifted pastors for your benefit, that the church would be built up in service for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Of these four gifts in the ministry that God has given unto men, two gifts are vacant, and two gifts are active in the church. The apostle and prophet gifts were special revelations and authority that was given to the original church to inspire the canon of scripture and to establish the ordinances of the church in the word of God. Now that we have the fully inspired scriptures, there is no further need for those special gifts in the church. God still grants the gifts of “evangelists” and “pastors and teachers” to his ministers in the church today. While evangelists might travel more extensively and pastors and teachers will be more centralized strengthening the local church body, all these gifts of the ministry have been given one commission: to “preach the word” and to “edify the body of Christ”.

What Is The Church?

2 Ordained Offices in the Church

Elder/Bishop

There are two ordained offices that God has appointed in his church: the elder and the deacon. When a man has demonstrated that he has been called of God by exercising his gift and preaching the gospel, the church will call for the man to be “ordained to the full work of the gospel ministry” as an elder. Ordained means “appointed” and is the appropriate biblical terminology for the designation of a man to the gospel ministry. This ordination service is performed with the candidate being questioned to ensure he meets the scriptural moral and ministerial qualifications of an elder, proving to be sound in doctrine. Then, the ministerial candidate receives the laying on of hands by the presbytery (a group of “elders”), and prayer is offered ordaining him to the work of the ministry in accordance with the pattern of Acts 13:1-3. Then, the man will receive a charge from the presbytery to faithfully administer his office as an elder in the church. The apostles were chosen and “ordained” by Jesus Christ. “13) *And he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom he would: and they came unto him. 14) And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach,*” (Mark 3:13-14) “*Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit...*” (John 15:16) The apostles were then to commission faithful men to be entrusted with the ministry, and we believe the “genealogy” of laying on of hands of our elders goes back all the way to the first apostles. “*And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.*” (2 Tim. 2:2) Elders were “ordained” by the apostles and then by the successive apostolic ministry (Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5, 1 Cor. 7:17, 1 Tim. 2:7). Scripture presents the method of ordination is by the laying on of hands by a presbytery, a group of elders. (Acts 13:1-3, 1 Tim. 4:14, 2 Tim. 1:6, 1 Tim. 5:22, Heb. 6:1-2).

The qualifications for one to be considered for ordination as a “bishop” (or “elder”) are given multiple times in the New Testament – 1 Tim. 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9, 2 Tim. 2:24-26, Titus 2:7-8, 1 Pet. 5:1-4. There are moral qualifications for the type of character a man should exhibit before being ordained as an elder. He must have manifested to be: *blameless, have a good report of them which are without, husband of one wife, rules well his own house, lover of hospitality, lover of good men, of good behavior, patient, temperate, not soon angry, not a brawler, no striker, not striving, vigilant, sober, meek, just, holy, not self-willed, not covetous, not greedy of filthy lucre, and not given to wine.* The man must also exhibit a maturity in the scriptures, an ability to teach and edify the flock, and to stand up for the truth for those without the church as well. He must have proven to be: *apt to teach, able by sound doctrine to exhort and to convince the gainsayers, holding fast the faithful word, sound speech that cannot be condemned, not a novice, displaying wisdom, faithful to sound doctrine, commitment to the “one faith” and “true gospel”, and willingly and eagerly accept the responsibility of an elder.*

Of those who have been ordained as elders, a church will call an elder as a pastor of the church. As we have already discussed under the pastor/teacher section, there is a special “appointment” by the Lord for a man to be a pastor of the local church; to be an overseer to feed, guide, and protect the sheep of a local church assembly. It is the Holy Spirit that appoints a man as an overseer of the local church (Acts 20:28), and we trust the church shall follow the burden of the Holy Spirit in choosing their pastor. This man as pastor is entrusted with the spiritual care of these sheep in the church. He is called to feed the flock of God and to be an example to the flock (1 Pet. 5:1-3). As pastor of this local church, he must give an account before

What Is The Church?

God for the souls of the sheep that have been entrusted to his care (Heb. 13:17). Elders are called to “*preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine.*” (2 Tim. 4:1-2) Preachers are called to preach and preach they must. God uses pastors to protect and to guide the flock and to promote the strength and unity of the church.

Deacon

The second official ordained (appointed) office in the church is a deacon. In 1 Tim. 3:7-13, we have a description of the qualifications of a deacon. Deacons must be: *grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre, holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience, proved, blameless, good report of them without the church, having godly wives (grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things), husband of one wife, and ruling their children and their own houses well.* We see the original appointment of deacons of the church in Acts 6:1-7. There was a need in the church in the daily ministration to widows, and the elders and apostles told the church to look among them and choose out “*men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom*” that would be appointed to oversee the daily needs of the church congregation. Deacons handle the daily “business” of the church (Acts 6:3). The church then chose out seven men who displayed a heart of service and ministry to the church (*diakoneo* – to serve and wait tables). Then, these seven men were ordained as servants (deacons) to the church by the laying on of hands of the apostles (Acts 6:7). Deacons should be reliable in the church to listen to the concerns and needs of the church body and even to mediate interpersonal conflict, if necessary (Exod. 18:13-27). Deacons are a vitally important aid to the pastor and in caring for the needs of the entire church body.

Each body part is vitally important to do its proper role, otherwise it places undue strain on another member of the body to compensate. When you have a sore left knee, your body automatically compensates, and then puts undue strain on your right knee to where it will hurt too. If one body part is weak, not functioning properly, or not there at all, then another body part has to compensate. Then, that compensating body part is most likely overexerted and is diminished in its ability to perform its intended function properly. In Acts 6, we see the ministry being overexerted and taking the roles of other members upon themselves in caring for the daily ministration (that does not mean they are excused from this work, but it should primarily be carried out by another body part, or member). Because the ministry is being overexerted to compensate for weak or non-existent members, then they were not able to properly fulfill their function in the church. Deacons were appointed to handle the “business” of the church, so the ministry could “*give themselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.*” (Acts 6:4) Then, once the church appointed deacons to fulfill this business and this need in the body, the ministry was not being overexerted and could focus on just fulfilling their God-called function. What happened when each body part was able to just fulfill their proper role in the body without having to subsidize other members? “*And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.*” (Acts 6:7) Our churches grow and thrive when each member properly fulfills the function of their part of the body. That constitutes a healthy body, and a growing, thriving church like in Acts 6. Godly, devoted deacons are an integral part to that healthy church body environment.

What Is The Church?

2 Ordinances Administered by the Church

In the Lord's church, Christ established two ordinances for the church to observe perpetually until his second coming: A) the baptism of believers and B) the Lord's supper or the communion service. The word "ordinance" comes from the Greek word, "paradosis" and is defined as "transmission that is concretely a precept; specifically, the Jewish traditional law; ordinance, tradition." Most of the time in the New Testament this Greek word is translated "tradition". An ordinance is a tradition. The ordinances of the church are traditions handed down to us from God. A number of times the traditions of men used in place of the commandments of God are condemned by the Lord. There is a difference from the traditions of men and the traditions given to us by God. We should never follow the traditions of men to the exclusion of the traditions of God. These two ordinances are traditions not instituted by men, but instituted by Jesus Christ in the establishment of his church.

Baptism

For those who believe in Jesus Christ, God calls upon those children of God to "Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ". The King James Bible translators could not find a word in English that accurately conveyed the meaning of "to baptize" from the Greek text, so therefore they left the Greek word in its original form, even in the English translation; "*baptize*" (the verb form) – and all the applicable variations of that word – is the English transliteration of the Greek word "*baptizo*" which means "to make whelmed (i.e. fully wet)" (Strong's# 907), and a more detailed definition: "1) to dip repeatedly, to immerse, to submerge (of vessels sunk); 2) to cleanse by dipping or submerging, to wash, to make clean with water; 3) to overwhelm" (Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon). Any person who submits to a mode of baptism other than full immersion totally subverts even the definition of the word which literally means "to immerse" or "to submerge". When a ship is submerged at the bottom of the sea, it is fully immersed and overwhelmed by the water; it's certainly not sprinkled with just a little bit of water on top of the ship.

Baptism is not the means of salvation or regeneration, but it produces a soothing of the child of God's conscience and heart from their submission to God's command. "*The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:*" (1 Pet. 3:21) Jesus Christ submitted to baptism himself (Matt. 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-23, John 1:29-34) as he set the example to submit to this ordinance. Baptism did not make Jesus the Son of God, and baptism is not the means that makes a believer God's child or son. Baptism just expresses in an external way to public view a validation of our sonship, just like with Jesus Christ. If Jesus was baptized, that should be a good enough reason to follow his example in baptism. Believers are commanded to be "disciples" – or "followers of Jesus". A disciple should therefore follow the example of Jesus in submission to baptism. Baptism signifies the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Baptism symbolizes that Jesus Christ was fully immersed in the grave by death ("buried", Rom. 6:4, Col. 2:12), and we are professing a belief in Jesus' resurrection, identifying with his resurrection, and committing to put to death our former life to serve Christ.

Baptism is performed based on the authority of all three persons of the Trinity. "*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:*" (Matt. 28:19) Scripture teaches there is only "one baptism", not multiple forms or variations of an acceptable baptism.

What Is The Church?

There is only “*one baptism*” which shows submission to “*one Lord*” in accordance with “*one faith*”. “4) *There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;* 5) *One Lord, one faith, one baptism,* 6) *One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*” (Eph. 4:4-6). There has been a great deal of contention over the proper manner of baptism in Christianity over the centuries. We believe scripture affirms that four elements identify the proper “one baptism” in the church: a) proper subject, b) proper belief and doctrine, c) proper mode, d) proper administrator.

A proper subject for baptism is one who has confessed their sins (Mark 1:5) and professed a belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God (Acts 8:36-38, etc.). That subject for baptism needs to display a proper belief in Jesus Christ, not just as the Son of God but of his finished work of salvation on the cross as the only means for saving sinners (1 Cor. 15:3-4, John 19:30). The only proper mode for baptism is full immersion in water, not sprinkling or some other form. Only full immersion baptism even meets the definition of the word “baptize”, to fully submerge (Matt. 3:16, Acts 8:38-39, Rom. 6:3-4). Then finally, baptism must be administered by a proper administrator, an ordained elder in the church. Only the apostles and those in their ordained ministerial succession are given authority to baptize in the church (Matt. 28:16-20). Those who believe in Jesus Christ should submit to believer’s baptism. Then after being baptized, they have the right to participate in the second ordinance of the church – the observance of the Lord’s Supper.

The Lord’s Supper/Communion

Jesus instituted the observance of “the Lord’s Supper” on the evening before his crucifixion (the name “*the Lord’s supper*” comes from 1 Cor. 11:20) “26) *And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.* 27) *And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it;* 28) *For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.* 29) *But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.* 30) *And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.*” (Matt. 26:26-30)

Jesus commanded his church to observe this ordinance to remember his death for our sins – this do in remembrance of me – until the Lord returns the second time. “...23) *For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread:* 24) *And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.* 25) *After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.* 26) *For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come...*” (1 Cor. 11:17-34) We have no prescribed pattern for how often we should observe the Lord’s supper and communion. Just that “as oft as ye do it”, to observe the service in remembrance of Jesus Christ’s death.

In the observance of the Lord’s Supper, just as the original church, we partake of unleavened bread, just as they partook of it in the Passover supper. This unleavened bread is a depiction of Jesus’ body that was sinless but was broken for us (Luke 22:19). His body, as the Lamb of God, was perfect and without blemish as an offering unto God for our sins (1 Pet. 1:19). We also partake of fermented wine in the Lord’s Supper, not grape juice. Jesus and the apostles used fermented wine in the Passover feast and then in the original Lord’s supper, and we follow his pattern in drinking wine (Matt. 26:27-28). The early church certainly used

What Is The Church?

fermented wine in the communion service because the Corinthian church abused the ordinance and became drunken (1 Cor. 11:21).

Observance of the Lord's Supper and the washing of the saints' feet are administered and observed together by the church and are referred to as the "communion service". Reference to the "communion" service comes from the implications of this text: "*The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?*" (1 Cor. 10:16) These two activities are administered together because just after Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper was when he bowed down and set the example to wash the feet of the saints; since they were established or commanded together, we attempt to observe them together. "2) *And supper being ended...4) He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. 5) After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.*" (John 13:2-5)

Jesus bowed down and washed the feet of the disciples as an example for the church to follow. "*For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.*" (John 13:15) The word "should" here is used in the New Testament as an equivalent of "shall", which denotes a required command to observe. Jesus commanded that the disciples observe this practice of feet washing; it was not a suggestion for them to follow. "*If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.*" (John 13:14). The word "ought" denotes a legally required obligation that one must perform, a legal debt that is required to be repaid (not a suggested action that we should perform, as it's used in American English). Therefore, Jesus is not just setting a good example for his people to follow, but he established a binding commandment for his church to observe this practice of washing the saints' feet. Furthermore, the early New Testament church observed the washing of feet because this was one of the qualifications for a "widow indeed" – "*if she have washed the saints' feet.*" (1 Tim. 5:10) Jesus promised joy and happiness ("*happy are ye*") to the person who has heard this command ("*if ye know these things*") and observes it according to the example of Jesus ("*if ye do them*") in John 13:17. If Jesus has promised happiness from observing his command and following his example to wash the saints' feet, why would we not eagerly observe this practice?

3 Components of Worship in the Church

The church has been called out and appointed for the glory of God. (See the Purpose of the Church section earlier.) One primary way that we glorify God in the church is by "worshipping God". The word "worship" comes from the combination of two words "worth" and "ship", meaning we are "ascribing worth" to the object of our praise and worship. God is the only one that is truly worthy of our praise, honor, and worship. The Lord is "*worthy to be praised*" (Ps. 18:3). God commands that "*Thou shalt worship no other god; for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.*" (Exod. 34:14) God will not allow other false gods to be worshipped because only Jehovah God and Jesus Christ is truly worthy to be praised. God will not give his glory to another (Isaiah 48:11). Worship is our ascribing God's "worthiness" to be praised. The "worthiness" of the Lamb is exalted in heaven, and the Lamb's worship should also be exalted in the church here in this world as well (Rev. 5:11-14).

What Is The Church?

We don't have the right to worship God any way we please in this world. Worship belongs to God; therefore, it is God (not us) that has prescribed the proper manner for how God desires to be worshipped. The church is called upon to worship God "in Spirit and in truth". *"23) But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. 24) God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."* (John 4:23-24) God's word sets the standard for worship in Spirit and in truth, and we attempt to worship in accordance with the prescribed pattern of worship in the truth of the scriptures. Every action of our entire lives should be acts of worship, ascribing worth to our great King. However, in this context, we will primarily consider the proper manner of public worship when the church assembles together for worship. Our public worship in the church consists of three primary components: singing, praying, and preaching.

Singing

God prescribed for the church to sing praise unto him in the assembly of worship. Actually, Jesus himself promised to sing with us in the midst of the assembly of the church. *"Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee."* (Heb. 2:12) That is an amazing blessing to think about that Jesus sings along with us in the assembly of the church! Also, particularly notice the setting where Jesus sings with his people – in the midst of the church. In heaven, the 4 beasts and 24 elders in some way represent God's chosen people out of every kindred, tongue, people, and nation. They sing perpetually a new song, singing *"Worthy is the Lamb! Blessing, honor, glory and power unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever!"* (Rev. 5:8-14) In heaven the church is singing praise to God eternally, and we have the great honor of singing praise to God in worship here in the church as well.

The pattern of singing we see in the New Testament scriptures for public worship in the assembly of the church is singing by the voice of the saints with no scriptural mention of the addition of any auxiliary accompaniment, such as musical instruments. *"Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."* (Eph. 5:19) When we sing with our voices, we are not just "spectators" watching a performance of others, but we are "participants" in worshipping God together. The singing in the church is also intended "teach and admonish" each other by the word of God. *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."* (Col. 3:16) It is very difficult to teach and admonish each other by the words of the hymns when the attention is on the musical instruments, or worse yet, when you can't even hear the words due to the volume of the praise band. We also see the example of Jesus and the disciples singing a hymn with just their voices after they had completed the institution of the Lord's Supper and communion service. *"And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives."* (Matt. 26:30) We use the God-given instrument of our voices to sing praise to God in public worship in the church, not musical instruments that are made by man.

Praying

Prayer is an act of worship. Unfortunately, we oftentimes treat prayer as just our "wish list" or "get out of jail free card" when we make a mistake. However, prayer is primarily an action of worship by which we come before God in praise and glory. We are taught by Jesus in the Model Prayer to begin our prayers by

What Is The Church?

hallowing and extolling the name of God – *“Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed by thy name.”* (Matt. 6:9) Then, we ought to close our prayers by praising God and seeking his glory forever – *“For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.”* (Matt. 6:13) God ordained for his people in his church to pray collectively in a public worship assembly and privately during our individual devotions. God’s house (the church) is to be called “the house of prayer”. *“And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.”* (Matt. 21:13) If the church is going to properly be the house of prayer, that means the individual members of the church must be devoted to our prayers in our daily lives as well. Both public and private prayer were an integral part of the life of the early church. *“These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.”* (Acts 1:14) *“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”* (Acts 2:42) The church ought to be characterized by obeying the Biblical command to pray always and without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17, Eph. 6:18).

Jesus set the example for public prayer in the church as he delivered his final extended prayer to God in the presence of the disciples after they partook of communion. *“These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee:”* (John 17:1) Jesus prayed unto God in the whole chapter of John 17 in the presence of the assembly of the church. As we attempt to worship God in Spirit and in truth, praying with the Spirit in the church is necessary for us to fulfill that mandate. *“What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.”* (1 Cor. 14:15) In the body of Christ, we need to be intimately connected to pray for others in the church who are in need. We pray for those in the church who are afflicted and sick and stand in need, knowing that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. *“13) Is any among you afflicted? let him pray... 14) Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: 15) And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. 16)...* *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”* (James 5:13-16) The church assembled together to pray without ceasing unto God for Peter when he was in prison (Acts 12:5,12). We must pray together for our fellow brothers and sisters during times of need. When the church assembles in the house of God for public worship, it must be identified as a “house of prayer”. Also, the individual members of the church need to be worshipping God in prayer on a daily basis, not just only reserving prayers for public worship.

Preaching

God has ordained for the men he has called into the ministry to preach and teach in the church, exhorting and edifying the saints according to the word of God. *“And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.”* (Acts 5:42) *“Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.”* (Acts 15:35) Paul preached in the public assembly of worship until midnight at Troas (Acts 20:6-11). There are many instances in the early church in the book of Acts where we see not only the ministry preaching in public worship but preaching and teaching daily from house to house, preaching the whole counsel of God. *“20) And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house... 25) And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of*

What Is The Church?

God, shall see my face no more... 27) For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God... 31) Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn you every one night and day with tears...” (Acts 20:18-35) Jesus taught and preached the gospel in his ministry, setting the example for the ministry that he has called to preach as well. *“From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* (Matt. 4:17) *“And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities.”* (Matt. 11:1). We see the dynamic teaching environment that God ordained in the church with the ministry that ought to give themselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4).

When we assemble for public worship, a man who has been called by God delivers a message from the word of God to the church. He does not come before the church with enticing words of man’s wisdom to impress with a fancy speech, but he comes with a commitment to faithfully deliver a message from God to God’s people under the direction of the Holy Spirit. *“17) For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. 21) For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.”* (1 Cor. 1:17-21) We need to understand the importance that God has placed on the preaching of the gospel. It is God’s ordained means to gospel salvation and deliverance for his church by the preaching of the word – *“to save them that believe”*. In recent times, most churches have diminished the power and importance of the preaching of the gospel, reducing preaching to just a short 15-30 minute motivational message. Rather, scripture emphasizes the necessity of robust teaching and preaching in *“demonstration of the Spirit and power.”* (1 Cor. 2:4) It requires a special application of the Holy Spirit to apply the message of the preacher to the heart of the child of God, to feed their soul through the preaching of the gospel in the church. God has given preaching gifts in the ministry to strengthen the church, to perfect the saints, to edify the body of Christ, and to bring the whole body into unity of the edifying of itself in love (Eph. 4:8-16).

Jesus in Worship in the Church

It is exciting to think about the fact that Jesus Christ is involved with us in all aspects of our public worship in the church. *“I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee.”* (Ps. 22:22) Psalm 22 is primarily a first-person Messianic chapter where Jesus is describing his ministry and death from the first-person perspective. Here we see Jesus affirming that He will praise God the Father in the midst of the congregation. Jesus is involved in all 3 components of our public worship in the church. How does Jesus declare God’s name to his brethren in the church (Ps. 22:22)? Jesus declares the name of God to his church by blessing a man to preach in the power and demonstration of the Spirit, delivering a message from our Lord. Jesus also “praises God” with us “in the midst of the congregation” by singing unto God the Father (Heb. 2:12). Jesus prays with us in the church as he ever liveth to make intercession for us (Heb. 7:25), and as our Great High Priest is perpetually making intercession for us unto God the Father (Heb. 4:14-16).

Jesus has promised to dwell and commune with his church in the midst of “the congregation” (Ps. 22:22) and in the midst of the “the church” (Heb. 2:12). Jesus is truly with us in public worship, which is a very exciting thing to consider! Jesus has promised that where two or three are gathered together in my name (that sounds like [among other things] the assembly of the church meeting together to worship God’s name) that He will dwell there in the midst of them (Matt. 18:20). This perspective of Jesus “worshipping with

What Is The Church?

us” – singing with us, speaking to us through preaching, interceding for us to the Father – adds an entirely new dimension to how we approach public worship. Jesus has promised to be there in the midst with us when we assemble to worship God. Let us approach our public worship with both an excitement and a reverence for the presence of Jesus in the assembly of the saints for worshipping the Lamb!

4 Activities of the Original Church

The original church was thriving and growing exponentially after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost; 3,000 people added to the church on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41); the Lord added daily to the church (Acts 2:47); 5,000 men added to the church (Acts 4:4); multitudes of men and women added (Acts 5:14); disciples were multiplied greatly and a great company of the priests were converted to the church (Acts 6:7). What was the environment among the disciples where the Lord was blessing with this amazing growth in the original church? What were the activities of the original church where people were being added to the church by thousands and having new converts every day? Well, the daily activities of the early church are much more simple than what we see in Christianity today. *“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”* (Acts 2:42) The church focused on just 4 core activities that defined this amazing period of growth in the establishment of the church, and those 4 core activities are what the church today should be actively engaging in as well.

Christianity today has made church so complicated and complex. Most churches have multitudes of various programs, events, Sunday schools, small groups, rallies, sporting events, seminars, etc. all designed with the intention of growing the church and adding disciples. The original church did not have the budget or the time for all the programs and events that are assumed to be so integral in Christian churches today, despite their lack of scriptural basis. No, the original church was too busy with these 4 core activities every day and didn't have time to set up all these other programs and events. We get so confused, distracted, and bogged down when we have too much to focus on. God knows that sheep are pretty dumb and easily distracted creatures. Therefore, God made church very simple for his sheep. The original church was united in the simplicity of the church, focusing on just these 4 core activities. They spent time and fellowshiped together with *“singleness (simplicity) of heart.”* (Acts 2:46) Paul warned the Corinth church to beware of the deception of Satan lest they be corrupted from *“the simplicity that is in Christ.”* (2 Cor. 11:3-4)

The original church might look very “simple” to the world, and it should. This world is very complex, complicated, and confusing. In contrast, the church should be a place where we are refreshed by the simplicity that is in Christ and simplicity that is in the Lord's church. A refuge from the complexity of this world. The Primitive original church looks very simple to the world, and thus the original disciples were viewed as pretty “simple” and unimpressive to the leaders in the religious world at that time. The Jewish religious elite in the Sanhedrin thought the original apostles were unlearned and ignorant, but they took knowledge of the apostles that they had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13). That is a great commendation of the original disciples. They looked very simple, uneducated, unlearned, and not impressive to the world, but the world around them took knowledge of their communion with Jesus Christ. The world will not understand the simplicity of the church, but we must live in such a way that others see our manner of life and take knowledge that we have been with Jesus. That should be the same disposition of Christ's church to the world today. We should look odd to the world. Church should not look like the world. Too many

What Is The Church?

churches today have tried to attract new people by bringing the world into the church with rock bands, laser shows, and softball for Jesus, and have corrupted the simplicity in Christ. Our churches don't grow by comprising and replicating the world. Christ's church should be in direct opposition to the world. No, our churches grow and thrive by focusing on these 4 core activities of the original church.

And they continued steadfastly in

First of all, we must understand that these were not one-time events or occasional occurrences in the early church. No, the original church "continued steadfastly" in all these 4 core activities. They "*continued daily*" (Acts 2:46) with one accord in the temple and in fellowship with each other. They spent time with one another and engaged in these 4 core activities every single day. What was the effect of their "daily" steadfast continuance in these activities? The Lord added to the church "daily" such as should be saved (Acts 2:47). What a simple, yet profound, formula! They performed these activities every single day, and the Lord was adding to the church every single day! Remember, the church is a 24/7/365 living organism. Thus, the members of that body should be engaging with one another on a daily basis. When the church commits to that "daily" devotion and interaction, God blesses the church with "daily growth". If our churches are not growing or are stagnant, we must evaluate how steadfastly we are continuing in these 4 core activities of the original church. Is the church interacting and fellowshiping together daily? If not, then why should we expect the Lord to grow our church if we are not following the pattern of the original church?

We must be wholly devoted to these activities each day, and not just have a passing, occasional observance to them. It really is a full-time job for the church to remain steadfast and diligent in these 4 core activities. We must be "steadfastly continuing" in these activities perpetually because the body needs daily movement and growth. We must be "*steadfast and unmovable*" in our discipleship, always abounding in the work of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58). We should be "abounding" in our work in the Lord, not just doing the bare minimum. Also, we ought to be "unmovable" in service to God in the church. The church cannot compromise with the world. There are way too many churches that have tried to make their churches look indistinguishable from the world just to be attractive to new visitors. No, the church is called to earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3). The church is to be unmovable in defending the truth of God's word to a dark world and not compromise truth for numbers. We must maintain steadfast continuance in the authority of God's word and these 4 activities of the original church. We will now consider each of these 4 activities individually together.

Apostles' Doctrine

The original church continued steadfastly in "the apostles' doctrine". The apostles were given special authority to establish the teachings of the original church because they received these teachings directly from Jesus. Therefore, the apostles' doctrine was actually "Jesus' doctrine" because they learned it directly from Jesus. Jesus Christ received his doctrine from God the Father. "*Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.*" (John 7:16) What was the doctrine of Jesus that he taught in his ministry? Particular redemption (Matt. 1:21); Election (John 17:2,6); Unconditional love (John 13:34-35); Irresistible calling (John 6:37); Immediate Holy Spirit regeneration (John 3:3-8); Total Depravity (John 8:44); Resurrection of the Dead (John 5:28-29). Many other doctrines could be highlighted, but the doctrine

What Is The Church?

of Jesus and the apostles is recorded for us thoroughly in the word of God. Therefore, the original church remained steadfast to uphold the teachings of Jesus Christ preached by the apostles.

We want to highlight a particular aspect of the apostles' doctrine that the church vehemently upheld and defended: salvation by Christ alone and by grace alone. The apostles' unapologetically taught salvation by Christ alone. "*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*" (Acts 4:12) There are not multiple ways to heaven, but eternal salvation to heaven is only by Jesus Christ's name and his blood on the cross. The apostles also fervently defended salvation by grace alone. However, there were some converted Jews who were trying to add works, circumcision, and prerequisite conditions to eternal life. This false teaching was brought before the original apostles, and they not only rejected the bondage of works salvation, but affirmed salvation by grace alone. "*But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.*" (Acts 15:11) The Apostle Paul preached and testified of "*the gospel of the grace of God.*" (Acts 20:24) It is so prevalent in Christianity today to put a requirement on the sinner to do something to go to heaven – pray, accept, believe, live a good enough life, etc. That is salvation by works. In that doctrine, you are saved by something you did, not solely by the unmerited favor of Jesus Christ. Any works salvation that places a condition upon gaining eternal life is abjectly contrary to the plain teaching of the original apostles' doctrine of salvation by grace alone.

Fellowship

The early church continued steadfastly in "fellowship". In the King James Bible, the apostles' doctrine and fellowship are included in the same phrase together before a comma separates the next thought. While fellowship is a separate activity in the church, it is intricately linked with the apostles' doctrine. We cannot have true, deep, Biblical church fellowship without an agreement on the apostles' doctrine in the word of God. We can only have true "*fellowship in the gospel*" (Phil. 1:5) with those who believe in the same gospel of grace alone as we do. We can have a degree of Christian fellowship with those who love the Lord, and I am thankful for that. However, the closest fellowship we should have in this world are with those who wholeheartedly embrace the same apostles' doctrine that was taught by the early church, which we see upheld in the scriptures of salvation by Christ alone and by grace alone.

The Greek word for "fellowship" here – "*koinonia*" – means "a partnership, joint participation, community, or communion". This word is translated quite a few other times as "communion". The original church was in amazing unity, communion, and fellowship with one another. They lived with all things common together (Acts 2:44-45); they were in "*one accord*" in unity; they met together daily in the temple; they loved spending time together and ate their meat together with one "*singleness of heart*" (2:46); they were together with "*one heart and one soul*" (4:32). We ought to have a desire to spend time with our brothers and sisters in the church. We truly are a family, adopted sons and daughters in the family of God (Eph. 1:5). Those who do the will of God are the brethren and sisters of Jesus (Matt. 12:48-49), and that makes them our brothers and sisters as well. We love our family because family are who loves us and are loyal to us no matter what. We should have that same degree and fervency of love and commitment to our spiritual family in the church as we have towards our natural family.

What Is The Church?

If we properly follow the greatest commandment to love Christ with all our heart, soul, and mind (Matt. 22:37-39), then we ought to crave spending time with those who love Jesus Christ the same way we do. Love and fellowship with our church brethren and sisters is the mark of a regenerated heart and changed life – *“We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.”* (1 John 3:14) Christians should not seek more fellowship with the world than with fellow brothers and sisters in the church. If we do seek more fellowship with the world than with the church that is a symptom of a major problem because friendship with the world is enmity against God (James 4:4) How can a member of the body of Christ not have fellowship together with another member? If the body of Christ is not fellowshiping together, then it is a severe symptom of disfunction and sickness in the body of the church. Worse yet, if we do not want to fellowship with our brothers and sisters in the church, that is evidence we don’t love them (nor the Lord) in the manner that we are called to love.

When we do not desire to fellowship with other members of the church, what we are actually saying is we don’t desire fellowship with Jesus Christ. Fellowship with the body of Christ is fellowship with Jesus. *“That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.”* (1 John 1:3) What makes fellowship so special is that when we fellowship with fellow believers, then truly our fellowship is actually with Jesus Christ. Jesus has promised to be in the midst of the assembly of 2-3 believers met together in his name (Matt. 18:20). Also, when we love others and fellowship and serve other members, we are showing love to Christ because *“inasmuch as ye have done it unto the one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”* (Matt. 25:40) Jesus comes to commune with us when we commune and fellowship with other members of the body of Christ. Fellowship is an encompassing activity that includes the other activities as well. The church had fellowship in the gospel of the apostles’ doctrine. The church had fellowship in eating meals and communion together. The church had fellowship in prayer as well. We cannot have a lively, thriving, healthy church without fellowship with each other because if we do not fellowship with each other, we are not communing with Jesus Christ.

Breaking of Bread

The early church continued steadfastly in “the breaking of bread”. The church most likely observed this breaking of bread in two primary ways: 1) the observance of the Lord’s Supper, and 2) eating meals and fellowshiping together from house to house. It was the custom of the early church to come together on the first day of the week to break bread (Acts 20:7). When they met for public worship on the Lord’s day, it appears they may have observed the Lord’s Supper each week. Even if they did not observe the Lord’s supper each week, they did at a minimum eat and break bread together, sharing a meal and fellowship. It also appears they “broke bread from house to house” on a “daily basis” (Acts 2:46), which I believe is in addition to the possibly weekly observance of the Lord’s Supper. Jesus called himself *“the bread of life.”* (John 6:35) We figuratively partake of Jesus’ body as bread when we partake of the Lord’s Supper (John 6:53-58) and “communion” (which means fellowship). We are commanded to partake of the breaking of bread in the Lord’s Supper “in remembrance” of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 11:24-25). Therefore, we have very intimate communion with Jesus Christ during the observance of the Lord’s Supper which the early church apparently partook of quite often.

What Is The Church?

This breaking of bread together is a direct extension of fellowship in the church. Fellowship is synonymous with communion, and the root word for communion is “community”. Those in a community ought to “communicate”. Communication in the first century was only in person or writing letters. There were no text messages, phone calls, emails, or social media to another person in that time. Fellowship in the original church was in person. How then did the church fellowship together? They observed the Lord’s Supper publicly, but they also invited their fellow church members over to their house to break bread with them. The members of the church loved inviting other people over to their house to break bread and fellowship together. It was not a chore or a begrudging task, but it gave them gladness and joy in their heart to fellowship together over bread. The church was “daily breaking bread from house to house”, and they ate their meat with gladness and singleness of heart (Acts 2:46). They loved spending time with the other members of the church. The original church had “*feasts of charity.*” (Jude 12) They exhibited their charity and love towards the church by spending time with them over meals in their homes.

We naturally invite those we love over to our house for a meal, don’t we? We already naturally invite family and our close friends over to our house because we love them and want to spend time with them. If we truly love the body of Christ, we should desire to spend time with them and bring them into our home. The very first thing Matthew did after leaving the receipt of custom and committing to follow Jesus was to invite Jesus and all his friends into his home for a meal. Jesus broke bread in Matthew’s house with publicans and sinners (Matt. 9:9-13). We have the opportunity to invite Jesus Christ into our home by inviting his sons and daughters into our home because if we do this unto the least of God’s children, we have done it unto Christ himself (Matt. 25:40). Jesus Christ desired fellowship with his children in the Laodicean church. He told them if any would hear his voice and open the door, then he would go and “sup” (to dine) with him and he with Christ (Rev. 3:20). Jesus describes fellowship and communion with him by having “supper” with him. We can fellowship with Christ when we fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ, breaking bread together from house to house as the original church.

Prayers

The early church continued steadfastly in “prayers”. Fellowship is an encompassing activity that includes these other core activities as well. The church had fellowship in the gospel of the apostles’ doctrine. The church had fellowship in eating meals and communion together. The church also had fellowship in prayer as well. Notice the focus on not just personal prayers, but the collective prayers of the assembly in the early church. The very first thing the church did after the ascension of Jesus into heaven was to have a prayer meeting, “*These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication.*” (Acts 1:14) These 120 disciples in the original church had a lot to pray about. They needed the Lord’s special direction for them in choosing another apostle to replace Judas. They also were told to wait for the Holy Ghost, but they didn’t know what that meant or how long to wait. They needed wisdom and direction from the Lord, so they prayed. They met together for prayer, but not just one time; they “continued” in prayer, just as the church “continued steadfastly in prayers” after the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:42).

When the church first encountered some persecution as the apostles were cast in prison and threatened, what was their response? “*They lifted up their voice to God with one accord*” and prayed for boldness to preach the gospel (Acts 4:24-30). God answered their prayer with an earthquake, and they were filled with the Holy Ghost; God answered their prayer and filled them with boldness in preaching the gospel (Acts

What Is The Church?

4:31). We also see here how praying together collectively as a church builds unity in the church. After this collective prayer, *“the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul.”* This unity of mind, thinking of others rather than themselves, burdened them to give freely of their possessions to help the poor and have all things common together (Acts 4:32). Furthermore, *“great grace was upon them all”* (Acts 4:33). No doubt, we all desire for “great grace” to be upon the church and upon our individual lives. God will manifest that great grace upon us when we continue steadfastly in prayers in the church.

The apostles appointed 7 deacons to handle the daily ministration for the widows so they could *“give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”* (Acts 6:4) The apostles were wholly committing themselves “continually” (we see that steadfast “continuance” word again) to praying for the church and God’s people and to studying the word of God. When Peter was in prison, the church presumed that Herod was going to kill Peter just like he had recently killed the Apostle James. Therefore, the church met together to pray, and *“prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.”* (Acts 12:5) When those prayers were answered and Peter was miraculously released from prison, he went to Mary’s house where the church was *“gathered together praying”* for him (Acts 12:12). Unfortunately, the early church, just like we do most of the time, were not truly praying in faith with an expectation that God would answer their prayer. They thought Rhoda was mad when she told them Peter was at the front door and were “astonished” that God actually answered their prayer. This example of Peter in a severe need shows the necessity of special prayer meetings during times of special needs in the church, especially for those that are sick (James 5:14-18) or are in prison for righteousness’ sake.

It was through the prayers of Cornelius (Acts 10:2-4) and Peter (Acts 10:9-16) that God opened the gospel door to the Gentiles. Cornelius was praying, seeking God’s will and guidance. Then, on the other end, the Lord burdened Peter to go to him through an answer by prayer. The church ordained Paul and Barnabas for their preaching work after *“fasting and prayer.”* (Acts 13:1-3) When Paul arrived in Philippi, he found Lydia and a group of women having a prayer meeting together on the side of the river *“where prayer was wont to be made.”* (Acts 16:12-15) When Paul delivered his message to the Ephesian elders at Miletus, after he finished *“he kneeled down and prayed with them all.”* (Acts 20:36) Through these accounts and many others in the New Testament scriptures, we see the original church’s commitment to prayers. Remember, when the apostles prayed for boldness and growth (Acts 4:31), in answer to the church’s prayer, soon after there were “multitudes of believers” added to the church (Acts 5:14). That’s what happens when we pray for boldness and growth together in the church, God answers our prayer with boldness and growth! When we pray collectively as a church in unity with one accord, one heart, and one soul, God answers our prayers! That’s the simplicity of the church! Truly, so many times we have not because we ask not (James 4:2). Let us not neglect to ask God in prayer, but pray in faith for boldness, growth, and revival in the church!

7 Results of the Original Church’s Steadfast Devotion

There were amazing results when the church committed to steadfastly observe these simple 4 core activities. Before we consider those results, let us first notice a few prerequisites that preceded this amazing outpouring of growth for the church. God-called preachers boldly preached the gospel publicly (Acts 2:1-36); Men were pricked in their hearts by preaching (Acts 2:37); the preaching of the gospel doesn’t mean

What Is The Church?

anything until God tenders the hearts of the hearers. Those convicted believers gladly received the word and were baptized (Acts 2:41). Those new converts who were baptized followed the pattern of the original 120 disciples to continue steadfast in the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers (Acts 2:42). Therefore, where does this kind of growth and revival in the church begin with? Preachers boldly preaching the gospel in public to those who don't know the truth. If preachers only ever preach to current believers during Sunday worship, how will anyone ever be added to the church? Let us not forget where this all began, by bold preaching of the gospel in public through demonstration of the Spirit and power. Then, God moved in a mighty way by his Holy Spirit to grow his church daily and add his blessing to the preaching of his word.

What were the results when the original church focused on these simple 4 core activities and boldly preached the gospel publicly? The scriptures tell us of the amazing environment in the early church which occurred when the church continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers. From Acts 2:43-47, there were 7 primary results of the church's steadfast commitment for these core activities: 1) *And fear came upon every soul*, 2) *and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles*. 3) *And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need*. 4) *And they continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart*, 5) *Praising God*, 6) *and having favour with all the people*. 7) *And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved*." Let us consider together each of these results individually.

And fear came upon every soul

When the Holy Spirit was moving in a very powerful way among the church, it caused a great reverence of the Lord to descend on the church. There was a great solemn respect and fear of the Lord that came upon all the members of the church. This has been a characteristic of all great revivals in the church, here in the original church and particularly in the First and Second Great Awakening. People began to take God seriously. I believe there is very little deep, solemn reverence for God in American Christianity today. Even Christians refer to God as "the man upstairs" or other cavalier names, and even unapologetically take the Lord's name in vain. The early church revered and exalted God Almighty as the King of kings and Lord of lords and displayed great reverence and solemn respect for the Lord.

and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles

The apostles performed many miracles in Jerusalem during this period, and there are multiple accounts of many miracles in the early chapters of Acts. While the miraculous manifestations of these signs and wonders are dormant and not applicable today, there are many great "providential" blessings that will be manifested in the church when in this vibrant environment. God does many mighty, uncommon, and many times unnatural things among his people for his glory when his people follow his pattern for the church and are continuing steadfast in his service.

What Is The Church?

And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need

The Holy Spirit was being poured out on the original church in such a special way that members of the church were burdened to sell their possessions and give to those in need. This was a very unique situation in the early church where they gave their goods and laid them at the apostles' feet, and the apostles distributed to those who had need (see further description of this environment in Acts 4:32-37 & 5:1-10). The church was truly living out pure religion and undefiled in helping the widows and fatherless in their affliction (James 1:27). While we are not necessarily called to sell everything we own and give to the poor today, a healthy church will be a giving church to those in need because Jesus said it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).

And they continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart

The original church loved to spend time together in worship, in fellowship, in breaking of bread, and had great gladness and joy from their service to God and each other. The church was worshipping "daily" in the temple. Why did the Lord add to the church daily? (Acts 2:47) Because they were worshipping and fellowshiping together daily. If the church today was more committed to worshipping and fellowshiping more frequently, we might see people being added to our assembly more frequently. Why was the church meeting in the temple daily? They knew God had instituted a new manner of worship, and they weren't trying to hang on to Jewish worship. Instead, they were daily in the temple because they were evangelizing their fellow Jews. They went to the place where they knew God fearing men would be, and they preached the gospel to those godly men in that locale. The church was committed to preaching the gospel and making disciples of their fellow Jews.

The original church was in perfect unity; they were together in "one accord". The church was of one mind and one soul in perfect unity. Since the church was in unity, they desired to spend time together. The church members were fellowshiping, eating, and breaking bread from house to house every single day. They desired to spend time together in each other's home, particularly they enjoyed eating together from house to house. The early church saw each other every single day. While in our present day it may not be feasible to see or communicate with the entire church every day, we still need to be in constant interaction and fellowship together, to the best of our ability, to maintain the appropriate unity in the body of Christ. Finally, the original church was very happy, glad, and joyful to be together. Their constant fellowship gave them "gladness and singleness of heart". Again, the church was in unity, with a "single heart" in serving and worshipping God.

Praising God

The church was joyful, glad, and praising God for his great grace and love that had been bestowed upon them. The original church's worship was very spirited, fervent, and vibrant. Worship will always be very fervent during times of revival and growth, as we see here first exhibited by the fervent worship of the original church. That has been evident during all times of spiritual renewal and revival. We have a tendency

What Is The Church?

to just go through the motions in stale worship. However, when the Lord is pouring out the Spirit in a special way in revival, we see an increased zeal and fervor for worshipping and praising God in the church.

and having favour with all the people

Even though the religious leaders of the Pharisees and Sanhedrin hated the church and the apostles, the rest of the community actually favored the members of the early church. The church had favor with all the people in Jerusalem. When we are serving God as we ought, the members of the church will have favor and a good reputation in the community. If the church is the proper salt and light to our communities, even those who do not like us, still will hold us in honorable esteem. *“When a man’s ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.”* (Prov. 16:7) That does not mean everyone will like us, but even our enemies should be able to say, “I don’t agree with him, but he is an upright and good man”. We will have a good reputation and favor in our local communities when we serve God acceptably in the church.

And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved

The Lord will add to a healthy church who is committed to the apostles’ doctrine, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayers. The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. This is not a fatalistic determination that allows for the church to stay, “The Lord will add them when he gets ready”. Rather, this is a Bible promise that if the church does what it is supposed to, if it does everything in v.42-46, the Lord will honor their faithfulness and add to the church. *“And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap if we faint not.”* (Gal. 6:10) The Lord blessed them to be added to the church “daily” because these people were spending time together and worshipping together “daily”. The Lord honored this by blessing people to be added to their assembly.

Jesus promised that he “will build his church” (present tense; Matt. 16:18), and here the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. God always gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:6), and he desires to bless his church in the future as well. It is only after following this scriptural pattern for church growth and revival that we see the ingathering of thousands of people joining the church, and the Lord adding daily to the church. The Lord will not bless with revival randomly. No, God blesses those who are faithful to the pattern of the early church with growth and revival. If we follow God’s prescribed pattern as we ought, then God might see fit to bless us with revival and ingathering too.

The Church’s Responsibility to Each Other

We have considered in depth the different aspects of the church, both individually and collectively. Now, let us consider the church’s responsibility to every other member of the church. When we present ourselves to the church for baptism, we are not just solely publicly professing a belief in Jesus Christ. Along with baptism and church membership comes a covenant to love, exhort, encourage, and minister to all the members of that local assembly of which you are joining yourself. When we join the church, we covenant together with these brethren and sisters of like faith and order to serve the Lord and to serve each other. As a member of the church, you are not an individual silo by yourself to do as you please. Rather, the member of the church now has a covenant commitment to every other member of that church to love and serve them

What Is The Church?

the way Christ served his bride. There are multitudes of admonitions in the scriptures for how we are to love and serve one another in the church, and we will only be able to consider a few of them together. We have a responsibility to serve our brothers and sisters in the church, and when we do, we serve Jesus Christ by serving and loving the church.

Love one another

The pinnacle attribute of the Lord's church is the way we love one another. The depth of our love for the church is a reflection of the depth of our love for God. The greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind. Then, the second commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves is a natural extension of obedience to the greatest commandment to love God fully (Matt. 22:37-40). God is love (1 John 4:8), and therefore, we cannot truly love God without loving God's people. There is also no way we can truly love Christ without loving his church. The church is the body of Christ. If we don't love Christ's church, then we can't love Jesus Christ properly. If we have a deficiency in our love for the individual members of the church, then that is evidence we actually have a deficiency in our obedience to the greatest commandment to love God totally with all our heart, soul, and mind. The more we love Christ, naturally by extension, the more we will love his church and the members of Christ's body. If we love God, we must love his church and his people passionately as well.

When Jesus commanded his disciples to "love one another", remember he was giving that admonition to the church. It is true we need to show kindness and love to our enemies. However, the church is not identified by how we love the world, but it is identified by how we love "one another". *"12) This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. 13) Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. 14) Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. 17) These things I command you, that ye love one another."* (John 15:12-17) What a blessing it is to be the friends of Jesus Christ by simply obeying his commandments! Who are the people who obey God's commands in this world? The church, our friends, our kindred, our spiritual family. Therefore, we ought to be willing to lay down our lives for our friends in the church. That is not necessarily speaking of being a martyr for your fellow church members. Rather, it is describing living a life of love and sacrifice, putting the needs of others in the church ahead of your own needs. When we love the church in that radical, self-sacrificial way, it is evident to others around us that we are the disciples of Christ. *"34) A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. 35) By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."* (John 13:34-35) How can we claim to be a disciple of Christ without loving those who Christ loved in the church? Again, notice we are not identified as the church by how we treat the world, but we are identified as the disciples of Christ by the way we love "one another", our brothers and sisters in Christ.

This is why the love of the brethren is an identifying mark of a regenerated heart, having passed from death to life (1 John 3:14). God is love (1 John 4:8), and if we are one with Christ and our brethren in the church, how can we hate our own body? If we hate our brethren, we are showing hatred to Jesus Christ and even to ourselves. The church are our adopted brothers and sisters into Christ's family. We have all been chosen and predestinated unto the adoption by Jesus Christ to himself (Eph. 1:5). We are all one body in the church. We are all truly family, adopted brothers and sisters into God's family. Therefore, are we going to hate our own family? No, of course not. We love our family. We would do anything for our family. We would even

What Is The Church?

give up our lives for our family because we love them so much. Likewise, we should love and be willing to do anything for our spiritual family in the church. There ought to be a passionate love for our family in the church. The Spirit teaches us to exhibit unfeigned love of the brethren, *“loving one another with a pure heart fervently.”* (1 Pet. 1:22) We are called to love each other in the same way Christ loved his bride, the church. Jesus did not just verbally profess his love, but he proved his love by giving up his life for the church. We ought to follow Jesus’ example and give up our lives, serving the church in love.

When we love God with all our being and love one another the way Christ loved the church, it is not a challenge, struggle, or burden to love each individual member of the church as we should. It is not hard to pray, minister, exhort, give, teach, forgive, and all these actions we are considering when we love each other properly. All of these other actions come naturally when we love God and love each other properly. Charity, love in action, is the pinnacle attribute of the elect of God. Charity is the bond of perfectness for the body of Christ. *“(12) Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; 14) And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.”* (Col. 3:12-14) Love is the bond that ties together God’s people, church, and family. If we are loving God properly, then we will be filled with love because God is love and love is the first fruit of the Spirit. Jesus Christ as our Head in the body is love, and thus the entire body should be filled with love. The unifying bond that we have in the church is the love of Jesus Christ. Let us show that love to our brothers and sisters in the church the same way that God loved his bride, the church.

Minister to the saints

We show love to one another in the church by ministering to and serving one another. To minister in the New Testament primarily means “to serve”. We serve God by serving others. We don’t just love others by saying the right things. We don’t love others by only word and tongue, but we prove our love by deed and truth (1 John 3:18). We exhibit love by serving one another. What does the labor of love look like in action? It is ministering to the saints. *“For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.”* (Heb. 6:10) Their work and labor of love was “showed towards Jesus’ name”. Their work of love was showed towards the name of Jesus Christ by ministering to the saints, both in the past and in the present. Jesus affirmed that the greatest in the church will be the “greatest servant” of others in the body (Matt. 23:11). Jesus took upon himself the form of a servant and became obedient to the will of God the Father (Phil. 2:7). Jesus set the example in his life that he did not come to be “ministered unto” but he came to “minister” to others (Mark 10:45). We must follow Jesus’ example to minister to others in the body of Christ.

We see that the entire family of Stephanus were consumed and addicted to the ministry of the saints. *“I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,)”* (1 Cor. 16:15) This was a family that loved serving God, but even better, they loved serving the saints together. We certainly need that type of family devotion of service in our churches today. We also see the great example of Epaphroditus in serving Paul in prison, even to the point of almost losing his own life. *“(25) Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants. 30) Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me.”* (Phil. 2:25-30) He fulfilled the “work of Christ” by ministering to Paul’s needs.

What Is The Church?

Epaphroditus gave of himself so freely and completely that he was even nigh unto death to serve Paul. He did not regard his own life, but was willing to give up his own life to minister to the needs of his beloved brother, Paul.

We show our love to Jesus Christ by showing love and serving the brethren. We serve and love Jesus by serving others. At the last day, Jesus commends the elect for feeding him when he was hungry, providing drink when he was thirsty, bringing him as a stranger into their home, clothing him when he was naked, visiting him when he was sick, and coming unto him in prison (Matt. 25:34-39). Then, the elect question when they had actually ministered to Jesus directly in this way. Jesus answers, *“Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”* (Matt. 25:40) We serve God and serve Jesus Christ directly by serving his body in the church. The church is truly one flesh with Jesus. Therefore, we serve Jesus when we minister to the needs of his church. One act of love in serving our brother in the church is the equivalent of serving Jesus Christ directly. Let us serve Jesus Christ by serving the other members of Christ’s body in the church.

Provoke one another unto love and good works

We have considered the spiritual gift of exhortation which is a great encourager to others in the church. While some have a great gift of encouragement, we all have a responsibly to provoke other members of the church unto greater love and good works. *“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:”* (Heb. 10:24) First, we are to consider closely the needs of the church. The word “consider” here means “to observe fully, to consider attentively, to fix one’s eyes or mind upon”. This shows the necessity of not forsaking the assembly of the saints together in public worship because we must be around one another to consider attentively and then provoke each other unto love and good works. We must also be around one another to assess when something might be wrong with our brother or sister. We should not just attend public worship services, and then go our separate ways with no interactions between the other church members. No, we must observe them fully and attentively. We must discuss intimate matters with our church members and know what’s going on in their lives, not just talk about general topics like the weather, politics, and sports. You can talk about that stuff with anyone, but you should have a closer, more intimate relationship with your church members to earnestly “consider” their lives. When we spend time with our brethren and know them well, we will know when something is wrong and when they need us to help bear their burdens.

After we have properly considered each other, then we must also provoke one another unto love and good works. The word “provoke” here means “to stir up, to incite even unto anger”. We ought to be challenging one another in our discipleship. We should not be content with complacency in our discipleship, and we should not accept complacency and lukewarmness in our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ either. We need to be actively engaging other church members to be “stirred up” unto greater love and good works. We need to be constantly sharpening our friends in the church, as iron sharpens iron (Prov. 27:17). We need to be actively discussing God’s word and provoking each other to greater devotion to God and his word. We need to stir up one another to love God more fully and perfectly. We need to stir up one another to show love to God by showing good works to other members of the church. Also, notice the good works in immediate context is not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together (Heb. 10:25). We need to especially stir up the lukewarm and wayward member, to not dishonor God by forsaking the assembly of the saints in

What Is The Church?

the church. Let us consider closely our brothers and sisters in the church and stir them up to greater love of God and more zealous good works in serving others.

Confess your faults one to another

As we earnestly consider each other in the church, there will come times when we notice others are not acting like themselves. We need to show love to them in such a way that they trust us enough to share their burdens, struggles, and prayer needs. *“Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”* (James 5:14-16) There should be an openness to “confess our faults” one to another. That doesn’t mean on Sundays we have every member confessing their sins in public worship. Instead, in private, there should be an intimacy of connection among the members of the church where we confess our faults one with another and request prayers from our kindred in Christ for God’s grace and strength to do better. We have to get over our pride or hesitancy to not be open and honest with our fellow members of the church, and we need to request their prayers in times of need. We don’t need to put on a pretense and pretend everything is great in our lives all the time. While I am still blessed beyond measure, much more than I deserve, everything is not perfect in my life. I have struggles; I have besetting sins; I have doubts and fears and discouragement. I don’t need to put on a façade with my brothers and sisters in the church because I know they have those same struggles too. We need an openness and intimacy in the church to discuss our faults, fears, and failures and to request prayer from those we love for God to help us with these struggles.

Labor in prayers for one another

One of the most important attributes of a healthy church body is an openness to share our struggles with others and request them to pray for us. The church is supposed to be a “house of prayer”. The church is not a house of prayer simply because we pray publicly during worship, but because the individual members of the church pray for one another on a perpetual basis. *“14) Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: 15) And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. 16) Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”* (James 5:14-16) When we are in great need, we need to request the prayers of those we love to beseech the throne of grace on our behalf. Especially when facing something as challenging as a severe medical problem, we don’t need to try to get through it solely by ourselves. God did not design his sheep to go through the challenges of this life by themselves, but to be strengthened by the church, particularly the prayers of the saints. We need to effectually and fervently pray for every other member of the church every single day. Then, during times of great need, we need to especially pray even harder for our fellow members of the body of Christ.

Our prayers for other members of the church should not be casual and haphazard. We should labor fervently in prayer for the members of the church. *“Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”* (Col. 4:12) Epaphras here sets the standard for our fervent prayers in the church. This shows the intensity with which we are to pray for one another in the church. We “labor” (meaning “in agony”) for others in the church. Our souls are agonized and hurt by their pain and struggles because of our love one

What Is The Church?

for another. We weep with those that weep in the church. Therefore, when others request our prayers, we must not casually say, "Of course, I will pray for you." We need to take our prayers for the saints seriously. We need to "labor fervently" continually in prayers for every single member of the body of Christ because we all need the enabling strength and grace of God every single day.

Bear burdens of other saints

God has given his people the community of the church to strengthen one another during our times of need and when we are weak, to help bear one another's burdens. "*Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.*" (Gal. 6:2) As we have considered, one of the primary ways we can help bear their burdens and strengthen those who are weak is by laboring fervently in prayer for them. There are times in the body of Christ that I am weak and need the strength and encouragement of my other brothers and sisters. Then, inevitably, the time will come when I am stronger but that other member is now struggling. Our roles are reversed, and I can now help them in their time of affliction as well. When we are weak, even a normally light load can overwhelm us. Therefore, God ordained his church to help bear the burdens and infirmities of the weak members. "*1) We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. 2) Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.*" (Rom. 15:1-3) This is an important point to consider, to not please ourselves but to please our neighbor for his good and for his edification. We can become very selfish in our natures and not want to help bear the burdens of others. We need to change that attitude and seek to ease others' burdens instead of only easing our own burdens. We need to see how we can help make the spiritual walk of other disciples easier instead of harder. If you see someone really weak, really burdened down, then you need to help them bear their burden.

We need to keep the attitude of putting the needs of other church members over our own wants and desires. We must seek other men's wealth and not our own comfort or convenience. "*24) Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth. 33) Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.*" (1 Cor. 10:24,33) We must seek to be humble and loving toward those bearing heavy burdens. That is when they need our encouragement more than ever. We need to esteem our brothers and sisters in Christ of higher value than even ourselves. "*2) Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. 3) Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. 4) Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.*" (Phil. 2:2-4) In the church, let our minds be continually on how we can help encourage others during their times of need instead of only looking to our own comfort, convenience, or ease.

Instruct the wayward member

One way that we bear one another's burdens is by helping them when they are struggling with a besetting sin. "*1) Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. 2) Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.*" (Gal. 6:1-2) Overcoming sin is a great burden to bear. If we see a brother succumbing to sin, we need to come to them in love and encourage them to repent and be restored. We need to help bear this burden with them, but we also must remain vigilant to not be enticed by the same sin ourself. "*19) Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; 20) Let him know, that he which*

What Is The Church?

converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.” (James 5:19-20) We have to be involved enough in one another’s life that we can help convert a sinner from the error of his ways as soon as we see them going astray. If we are not involved, not confessing our faults, and not praying for one another as we should, when someone removes themselves from the assembly of the saints, by the time they begin erring from the truth, it may be too late to convert them.

God calls on his church to hold the church members accountable to godly living. Paul condemned the Corinthian church because they were tolerating, even prideful over their toleration, of egregious unrepentant sin in their church (1 Cor. 5:1-3). He instructed the church to remove that unrepentant church member from their fellowship, not only to try to encourage him to repent, but also to protect the health of the overall church body. They are told to purge out the leaven of sin to prevent that sin from spreading and infecting the rest of the church (1 Cor. 5:4-9). During certain circumstances, after repeated counsel from the church, if a member is unwilling to repent of his sin, the church needs to remove that member from the fellowship of the church to protect the overall health of the church body. The hope is that the restriction from partaking of communion and removal of close fellowship will convict that member to repent of their sin before the church and request restoration. This is a drastic last step for an unrepentant church member in hopes that removing fellowship can ultimately bring them to repentance and restoration. We need to encourage those who are straying from the flock and even erring from the truth in hopes God will bless them to repent and their soul be saved from much death and sorrow from their sin.

Forgive one another

When a brother or sister strays from or forsakes the flock, we need to be loving and forgiving to them when they repent and return. Forgiveness is one of the most important attributes among the members of the body of Christ. Jesus confirmed that offenses are inevitable in this world and offenses among the body of Christ in inevitable as well (Luke 17:1). Since it is inevitable that we will offend each other in the church, we must be very skillful at forgiving one another. Why do we forgive others in church? Because God has forgiven us for Christ’s sake. *“Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.”* (Colossians 3:13) We are commanded to forgive others in the same way that God has freely forgiven us. We need to “forbear” with one another. Some people will inevitably get on our nerves and do things that annoy us in the church. We need to show the fruit of the Spirit in being “longsuffering” with them. We need to be longsuffering and forbearing with those we might disagree with in the church. Then, if that minor disagreement or annoyance turns into a legitimate offense, we think of Christ’s love for us and forgive them for Christ’s sake.

We need to be “kind” and “tenderhearted” towards each other in the church. *“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”* (Eph. 4:32) There is never a place to be harsh or legalistic with our brothers and sisters in Christ. If we choose to be harsh and unforgiving towards others in the church, then we are putting ourselves in very dangerous territory. We are told to pray for God to forgive us in the same way that we forgive others (Matt. 6:12,14-15). If we are harsh and unforgiving towards another member of Christ’s body, then Christ will be harsh and condemning in our experiential forgiveness too. Jesus teaches us the proper pattern to reconcile legitimate offenses in the church (Matt. 18:15-20). If you have an offense, go to him in person and reconcile the offense. If that doesn’t work take a few more people with you to help reconcile. If that doesn’t work bring the matter before

What Is The Church?

the church, and if he still won't repent, then remove close personal fellowship from that brother or sister. On the heels of that lesson, the apostles ask how many times they really have to forgive their brother. Jesus tells them we ought to forgive indefinitely and gave us a parable to teach that lesson (Matt. 18:21-35). Essentially, we need to keep in mind the magnitude of debt we have been forgiven and should extend that same radical forgiveness to others, particularly in the church. How do you think Jesus feels about one of his children not forgiving another member of Christ's body for which he shed his blood? Remember, when we don't forgive in the church, we are holding a debt against a blood-bought child of God, and Jesus is not happy about you treating a member of his body in that harsh, unforgiving manner. Let us freely forgive one another as Christ has freely forgiven us.

Lead and teach others

We have a responsibility to other members of the church to teach and lead them to greater maturity in serving Jesus Christ. Paul condemned the church because they were not maturing themselves to progress to teaching others. These Christians were remaining spiritual babes in Christ and thereby hindering the overall growth of the body of Christ. *"For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat."* (Heb. 5:12) Paul sets the standard for every member of the church to grow and become teachers of others. Later, he encourages the up-and-coming members to follow the faithful example of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises of God. *"That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises."* (Heb. 6:20) The babes who are being instructed to mature (Heb. 5:12-6:2) are told to be "followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises". There has to be "leaders" in the church who are paving the way and setting the example for the babes in Christ to follow.

Aged, more mature, sisters are called to teach the younger sisters. Likewise, the aged, mature, seasoned brethren are called to teach the younger brothers in the church (Titus 2:1-6). Brothers who have children have the responsibility to teach their children and raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4, Col. 3:21, Deut. 6:7-9). We teach and admonish one another through singing together in the church (Col. 3:16). There ought to be a dynamic teaching environment in the church with the more seasoned disciples teaching and setting the example for the younger to follow. Then, the minister and pastor of the church is called to show himself a *"pattern of good works."* (Titus 2:7) The pastor is called to be an example of the believers in word, conversation, charity, spirit, faith, purity, and studying and preaching God's word (1 Tim. 4:12-16). *"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."* (1 Cor. 11:1) We don't need to remain children (babes) in our understanding of the truth. We need to mature into strong "men" in understanding. *"Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men."* (1 Cor. 14:20) Every member of the church needs to be maturing in our knowledge of God and his word, growing in our spiritual strength and discipleship, leading, and teaching others in the church.

Giving to others

Another important function of the body of Christ is a giving attitude. As a member of the local church, we have a responsibility to help support the financial needs of the church. Our money is not ours, but we are

What Is The Church?

only stewards of God's riches he has given us for a short period of time. In addition to giving to the local church, we also have a responsibility to give to others in need, especially unto those who are of the household of faith. As we have opportunity, we need to do good and communicate to all men, but we have a special responsibility to help those in the church in a financial way (Gal. 6:6-10). There are multiple examples in the New Testament of collections for the poor saints of God in the church who were in dire straits (Rom. 15:26, Acts 11:29, 1 Cor. 16:1-2). Particularly, the Philippian church gave beyond their ability to support Paul in his ministerial work. *"1) Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; 2) How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. 3) For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; 5) And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God."* (2 Cor. 8:1-5) The Macedonian (Philippian) church gave beyond their natural and physical abilities, giving to the detriment of their own selves "gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God".

Notice the Philippian church gave themselves first to the Lord, and then gave their goods to others according to the will of God. When we give to members of Christ's body, we give to God himself. Jesus Christ is greatly honored when we use the goods that God has granted unto us as stewards to help his children that are in need. *"34) Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. 35) I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."* (Acts 20:34-35) Jesus taught his disciples that it is more blessed to give than to receive. That is a message that is diametrically opposed to the world. This world teaches that it is much better to get than to give. Jesus' kingdom is not of this world. Jesus commands that one of greatest blessings we can experience in this world is to give up our own goods and convenience to help a struggling member of the body of Christ during their time of need. Let us give freely unto others as Christ has freely given unto us.

Daily interactions

We see from the New Testament scriptures that the original church was interacting with each other "daily". They continued daily together in the temple, and thus the Lord added to the church daily as well (Acts 2:46-47). The apostles preached daily in the temple and in every house, ceasing not to teach and preach Jesus Christ (Acts 5:42). The church helped the widows daily in ministering food each day for those who couldn't provide for themselves (Acts 6:1). Paul was preaching and disputing in the synagogues daily (Acts 17:17, 19:9), and thus, the churches were blessed to grow daily (Acts 16:5). The church is called to "exhort one another daily". *"But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."* (Heb. 3:13) Each day we need to be exhorting and encouraging one another. While the church in the 21st century admittedly looks a lot different than the 1st century church, and we might not be able to physically see one another each day, there needs to be frequent, preferably daily, interactions among the church today as well. We need to exhort and encourage one another daily because rarely does one day go by that we do not need some form of encouragement from our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Notice, the early church was growing daily because the church members were interacting and fellowshiping together daily. The preachers were preaching daily, both publicly and from house to house. The church was daily ministering to the disadvantaged in their community. When the hands of the apostles

What Is The Church?

were freed from the daily business, then they were able to give themselves “*continually to prayer and ministry of the word.*” (Acts 6:4) The results were that the church immediately grew. “*And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.*” (Acts 6:7) If we really want to see our churches grow, we should, to the best of our ability, free the hands of the ministry to be able to preach the gospel in our communities each day. There has to be much more frequent and intimate interactions with the church than just sitting in the same room together once a week. A body can’t be healthy if the members of that body only function and work together for a few hours a week. A body is a 24/7 living organism, and the church has to be functioning together perpetually to be a healthy and strong body of Christ.

Discuss the word of God together

As the church fellowships together, hopefully daily, the principal topic of discussion should not be worldly topics of politics, sports, or the weather. The principal topic among God’s people should be the Lord and the word of God. God takes special notice when his children who fear him meet together to discuss God’s word and think on his name. “*16) Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. 17) And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.*” (Mal. 3:16-17) Each member of the church should be reading the word of God each day. Parents should be teaching their children the word of God each day (Deut. 6:7-9). Aged and young men and women should be discussing the word of God together (Titus 2:1-6). The word of God should be the principal topic of conversation for God’s people because it is what we have the most in common. God takes special care and views this as precious jewelry when we fellowship together and discuss God’s word. Let us honor the Lord by thinking on the Lord’s name together with the church.

Comfort and Edify one another

There are many other verses we can consider with exhortations for how we are to interact with each other in the church. Let’s consider one more passage of scripture together in closing this section. “*11) Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do. 12) And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; 13) And to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. And be at peace among yourselves. 14) Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. 15) See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.*” (1 Thess. 5:11-15) This describes the outward focus of the church member to be looking on the good things of others and not be focused on ourselves. Comfort yourselves together. Edify one another. Know them which labor among you. Be at peace among yourselves. Warn them that are unruly. Comfort the feeble-minded. Support the weak. Be patient toward all men. Follow that which is good, both among yourselves and to all men.

What Is The Church?

Perfect unity in the church

When we follow Jesus' pattern for interacting with one another in the church, what will be the result? Unity. God has designed his church to function in unity together, just as a body will function together in perfect unity. The original church had *"one accord"* and *"singleness of heart"* (2:46); they were of *"one heart and one soul"* (4:32). God is not the author of confusion but is the author of peace in all the churches (1 Cor. 14:33). How do we keep unity and peace in the church? By following the direction of our Head, Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. Jesus and the Holy Spirit will always direct his church together in love and peace. *"And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful."* (Col. 3:15) When God is ruling properly in the church as our Head, we will be in unity and in peace. We must let the peace of God rule and reign in our hearts and guide us to peace with our brothers and sisters in the church.

The Lord is not divided in his body. There is one Lord, one Spirit, one body, one hope of your calling, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all. That same God is in the hearts of all of his children by the new birth. Therefore, let us let God reign in our actions as he rules in our hearts. If we allow the Head to reign in the church, what will be the result? We will walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called. We will exhibit lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance, and love to one another. That is how we keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, by following the direction of our Head, Jesus Christ, who is in us all in the church. *"1) I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, 2) With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; 3) Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4) There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; 5) One Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6) One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."* (Eph. 4:1-6)

The Church's Final Destination

God chose out the church ultimately to be with him in heaven. The entire body of Christ was "predestinated" to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29). Before the world began, God predetermined for his bride, the church, to be with him in heaven for all eternity. God predestinated us to be finally conformed perfectly to the image and body of Jesus Christ. The body of Christ in the church today is not perfect in this world. We make many mistakes and do not serve the Lord as we ought to in this world. However, one day the body of Christ will be perfectly conformed to the image of Jesus Christ in glorification. Every single child of God that makes up the church triumphant will be in heaven with the Lord without the loss of a single one. God's plan from eternity past has been for his church to live with him in heaven. Then, at the final day, God's eternal plan of salvation will be completed as his church arrives in heaven to worship God for all eternity.

The final "assembly" of the church will be when all the elect children of God are "assembled" in heaven before God the Father at Jesus' second coming. Jesus will announce this assembly of the church before God, *"Behold I and the children which God hath given me"* (Heb. 2:13). There will be no member of the church triumphant missing in this final, eternal assembly of God's called out people. The church was chosen out for the glory of God, and the church's purpose will be lived out eternally in heaven for all eternity in

What Is The Church?

glorifying God, proclaiming "*Worthy is the Lamb!*" The church is called to glorify God here in time in this world, and the church will finally perfectly glorify God in heaven for all eternity!