

The Church

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In theological terms, the study of the Church is known as **ecclesiology**. The word ‘ecclesiology’ comes from the Greek word *ekklesia*, which means ‘a body of called out people’. Therefore, when we talk about ecclesiology, we are discussing the called out ones. Actually, we have been called out of sin, and called into fellowship with Jesus Christ. I Peter 2:9 says that we have been called *out of* darkness and *into* His marvelous light. Verse 10 tells us that before this happened we were not a people, but now we are the people of God.

This means that those who have been washed in the blood of Jesus and have turned away from sin are members of the universal Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Hebrews 12:23 speaks of the “general assembly and church of the firstborn” which are written in heaven. This speaks of all believers whose names are written in the Book of Life as born of God! Jesus told Nicodemus that in order to get into the kingdom of heaven, he must be born again (John 3:3).

Since we are born of God, we belong to Him. Another word for church in the New Testament is *kuriakos* which means ‘belonging to the Lord.’ I Corinthians 6:19,20 tells

us that we are not our own because we are bought with the price. The price is the blood of Jesus which purchased our salvation. In summary, the word *ekklesia* shows us that we are called out of sin and into Christ, and the word *kuriakos* shows us that we are Christ's possession.

II. The Beginning of the Church

Let us now look into the matters pertaining to the founding of the Church. When Christ began His Galilean ministry, He called the disciples to Himself (Mark 1:16). In this we begin to see the foundational stages of the Church in that some are called. Further revelation concerning the Church comes in Matthew 16:13-20 where Jesus said, "On this rock (referring to Himself) I will build My church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18b).

The day of Pentecost marks the empowering and coronation of the Church. After Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and ascension, the disciples and many others made up 120 individuals who were waiting for "the promise of the Father" in the upper room. Jesus said that we would receive power after the Holy Spirit comes upon us (Acts 1:8), and we would be witnesses (martyrs) of Him. This shows us

that the Church not only belongs to Christ, but it is a powerful and active church with purpose and mission.

When we look back into the Old Testament, we see positive preparation for the Church through a study of the covenants and the nation of Israel. God has always desired a people for His own. We see this in Israel and later in the new Israel, which is the Church (Galatians 6:16). The words spoken to Israel in Deuteronomy are practically the same words used in connection to the Church. Compare Deuteronomy 7:6,7; 14:2; and 26:19 with I Peter 2:9,10.

III. The Nature of the Church

The Church is not a spiritual organism or entity that exists separate, over and above, or independent of people. The Church is not a sociological unity or collection of people, nor is the Church Christ Himself. The Church takes form when Christ exists in a mode of indwelling people or when people become indwelt by Christ. In other words, the Church is not just people nor is the Church Christ by Himself. The Church is Christ in you (plural), the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27).

In the four Gospels, Jesus used various images to describe the nature of the Church.

- “The Kingdom” shows Christ as the King and believers as the subjects.
- “The plant” gives the idea of growth, and “the vine” shows our dependence upon Christ.
- Christ also used the image of “the building” to show the process of building or constructing.
- “The Bride” is used to show Christ’s love for the Church and the relationship of commitment that exists between them. This also suggest the Church’s submission to Christ.

The Apostle Paul wrote of the nature of the Church using two images. First, he used “the Temple” to show individuals as the habitation of God’s presence (I Corinthians 6:14). Secondly, he used the human body to show the Church as a complete, individual unit. “The human body” also describes the Church as a unit in growth and a unit of life (Read I Corinthians 12:12-27).

The Church is universal as is seen in the previous concepts, but it is also local in that there are groups of believers in different locations. We see this in the various

churches which met in different cities (Jerusalem, Ephesus, Corinth) in the New Testament.

IV. The Mission of the Church

The mission of the Church can be found in Ephesians 4:12-13, which is to present every person mature in Christ. Therefore, the Church is to present the gospel, nurture one another, and live lives that are examples of Christ everywhere the members of the body are. Jesus said we are the light of the world and the salt of the earth. The Church is also responsible for the Great Commission as indicated in Matthew 28:19-20.

V. Privileges and Gifts of the Church

Since the Church consists of those who believe and the believers are sons and daughters of the Heavenly Father (Romans 8:15-17), He graciously imparts to us gifts of value worth much more than any temporal gift (Matthew 7:7-11).

The following are gifts God has given to the Church and the scriptural basis for these gifts:

1. Gifts of Leadership in the Body. (The five-fold ministry)
Ephesians 4:7-16.

(Pay special attention to verses 8 and 11)

2. Spiritual Gifts for Edification and Exhortation.
(I Corinthians 12 – especially verses 8-10).
3. Love. (sacrificial) *Agape* love which says “I love you because choose to love you, regardless of how you react toward that love.” Ephesians 5:25-27; I John 4:10.
4. Christ’s Presence in Power when the Church is Gathered.
Matthew 18:20; 28:20. Example: Acts 2:1-4; 4:24-31, and I Corinthians 5:4.
5. Abundant Life. John 10:10 (This is living life to the full, regardless of circumstances).
6. Victory and Promise of Overcoming. II Corinthians 2:14; John 16:33; Revelation 2:7, 11, 17; 3:12, 21; 21:7.
7. Eternal Life and the Promise of Reigning with Christ.
John 3:16 – eternal life
I John 3:2 – we will see Him
II Timothy 2:12 and Revelation 22:5 – we will reign with Him.

8. The Gift of Using the Name of Jesus.

(Acting in His authority)

John 15:7, 16; Acts 3:16 (read background)

Philippians 2:9-11 (the power of the name of Jesus)

Hebrews 4:14-16

9. The Gift of His Word.

John 2:22; 5:24; 8:31-32.

VI. The Practices of the Church

The practices of the Church are traced to Acts 2:42 where the church “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and prayers.” Thus, we see that the Church should teach sound doctrine. It is important that such teaching be done in a way that faith and knowledge of the truth may be increased. Fellowship is important in the Church and the atmosphere in the Church should be conducive to fellowship. The Bible tells us we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together (Hebrews 10:25). Breaking of bread describes eating with others in the Church; this was a way to signify oneness and unity in the body. Prayer is essential to the Church and as seen from a study in Acts, prayer is the hub of an ever moving work of God. From Acts 2:42 we see teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer as practices of the Church. (The ordinances

of the Church [i.e. communion, baptism] were discussed in Church 101).

When the Church assembles, it should be a time of celebration. It should be a time to discover, learn and be enriched as a believer. When the body assembles, it should be an exciting time! It should be the most important and most fulfilling time of the week as we realize the power of the risen Christ in our midst.

VII. The Responsibilities of the Church

The following is a list of immediate responsibilities of the Church (from Paul Oxley, professor at Emmanuel College):

1. Worship and fellowship (Colossians 3:16)
2. Preach and communicating (Acts 1:8)
3. Teaching and nurturing (Colossians 3:13-17).
This includes forgiving and restoring one another.
4. Healing and serving (Matthew 20:28; Luke 4:18-21)

*NOTE: There should be balance! Ministry to the body and to those outside the body.

VIII. Why Belong to a Local Church?

In Kevin Conner's book *The Church in the New Testament*, we see several reasons why some persons will not join a local church. Some feel that the concept of numbering is unscriptural and is similar to David's sin of conducting an illegal census of the people. Some also feel that there is an over-emphasis of numbers which places a lesser emphasis on caring for the needs of individuals.

A. Reasons People Will Not Join a Local Church

Teryl Todd, in his Living Stones New Members class, quotes Kevin Conner's nine other reasons why some people will not join a local church:

1. Fear of being hurt by other shepherds (Ezekiel 34; Jeremiah 23; John 10).
2. Fear of legalism.
3. Do not believe it is scriptural, as belonging to the Church mystical, invisible and universal.
4. Do not have a submissive spirit.
5. Desire to be self-governing, self-directing, lawless, go-it-alone, independent, "Jesus and me, I need nobody else" attitude.

6. Do not want to support a church financially with tithes or offerings.
7. Do not desire to come under correction, discipline or protection (I Corinthians 5).
8. Do not want to be committed to anything local or visible.
9. Do not want to be responsible and accountable to anyone.

On the other side of the coin we see that there is scriptural basis for membership in a local church. Bill Scheidler states that in Acts the early church is numbered (Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1, 7). I Corinthians 14:23 speaks of the Church coming together, and other passages refer to groups of believers coming together (Hebrews 10:25; Acts 14:27). Also, I John 1:3, 6-7 speaks of the necessity of enjoying fellowship with one another as we fellowship with Christ.

B. Blessings of a Local Church Membership

The following are nine blessings Kevin Conner says we receive when we are a member of a local church:

1. Security in the family of God. Everyone needs a sense of security.
2. Fellowship – a sense of belonging with the company of God’s people.

3. Protection from wolves (Hebrews 13:7,17; Acts 20:28-32).
4. Spiritual food and nourishment from the Word of God.
5. Discipline, correction and adjustment when necessary (I Corinthians 5:13).
6. Ministry of life, healing and health by members of the body (James 5:14).
7. The Service of Communion – the life of the risen Lord.
8. Love, care and concern in a practical way by the Oversight Ministries (Ephesians 4:9-16).
9. Support of the ministries of the Church by tithes and offerings and the blessings of an open heaven (Malachi 3:8-11).

