

Meaning of the Church

Matthew 16:18

INTRODUCTION:

- A. **Matthew 16:18** – “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”
- B. No one will deny that the Bible talks about a church . . . But . . .
 - 1. Whose church?
 - 2. Which church?
 - 3. What church?
- C. In view of so much religious division today, these questions need to be answered and answered only by the Bible. But first, we want to find out what the church is.

WHAT THE CHURCH IS NOT!

- A. The church as described in the Bible is:
 - 1. Not Catholic!
 - 2. Not Protestant!
 - 3. Not Jewish!
- B. The church as described in the Bible is:
 - 1. Not denominational!
 - 2. Not inter-denominational!
 - 3. Not sectarian!
- C. The church as described in the Bible is:
 - 1. Not a political organization!
 - 2. Not a just another social organization!
 - 3. Not a material meeting house, building, or cathedral!

WHAT THE CHURCH IS

Observation: The majority of people do not understand the church because they do not know what it is. Consequently, they do not understand (1) the purpose of it . . . (2) the importance of it . . . (3) the work of it. The Bible plainly tells us what it is.

- A. **The church is a called out body of people.**
 - 1. The word church comes from the Greek word ekklesia which means “the called out.”
 - 2. So the church is a called out body of people, those who have been called out of the world into the kingdom of God’s dear son. **Colossians 1:13** – “He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love.”

B. The church is the spiritual body of Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:27 – “Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.”

1. The church is made up of those who have obeyed Christ’s will as expressed in the gospel of Christ. Mark 16:16 – “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”
2. The church is made of those whom Christ has saved and added to it just as was done in Jerusalem. Acts 2:47 – “. . . And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”
3. Another way of stating what we have just observed , the church consists of the followers of Christ.

THE CHURCH APPEARS IN THE BIBLE IN TWO SENSES.

A. It is spoken of in the UNIVERSAL sense.

1. Matthew 16:18 – “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”
2. A number of verses in the Bible reference the church in the universal sense.
3. Wherever the church may be found around the world, it is the Bible church . . . It is the church Jesus said He would build.

B. It is spoken of in the LOCAL sense.

1. When the apostle Paul was writing to the church at Rome, and speaking of the various congregations, he said in Romans 16:16 – “The churches of Christ salute you.”
 - a. He wasn’t speaking of a number of churches in the sense of denominations, but rather of local congregations of the Lord’s church.
 - b. These were congregations in different locations, with each one made up of those people obedient to the call of Christ through the gospel.
2. To further explain, you will note that the Scriptures speak of the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:2), the church at Ephesus (Ephesians 1:1), and the church at Philippi (Philippians 1:1).
 - a. All of this is confusing to some people because they are accustomed to thinking of the church only in terms of denominationalism.
 - b. In the three examples just mentioned, you have a number of congregations spoken of and each congregation is the Lord’s church in its particular community.
 - c. It is so simple when denominationalism is forgotten and one goes to the Bible and sees the church as the Lord gave it.

TO PROMOTE BETTER UNDERSTANDING, THE BIBLE PICTURES THE CHURCH AS:

A. The church is spoken of as being the BODY OF CHRIST.

1. The church is the spiritual body of Christ, and as His body has Christ as its head. **Ephesians 5:23** – “. . . Christ is the Head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.”
 2. There is but one body. **Ephesians 4:4** – “There is one body . . . ”
 3. The one body is the one church. **Colossians 1:18** – “”
- B. The church is spoken of as the **HOUSEHOLD OF GOD**.
1. The word “house” in the Bible suggests a family. The “household of God” helps us to understand that the church is the family of God.
 2. In **1 Timothy 3:15** Paul says that the church is the family of God. “”
 3. In this family, God is the Father and we are His children.
 - a. **Galatians 3:26-27** – “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”
 - b. **Ephesians 1:3** – “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”
- C. The church is spoken of as the **KINGDOM OF GOD**.
1. A kingdom suggests a king, and so Christ is the King. “. . . Lord of lords, and King of kings . . . ” **Revelation 17:14**
 2. But to be a King, the kingdom has to exist now, and it does. **Acts 8:12** – “But when they [Samaritans] believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.”
 4. Four things are necessary in order to constitute a kingdom.
 - a. **KING** . . . Christ is our King
 - b. **SUBJECTS** . . . Christians are His subjects
 - c. **TERRITORY** . . . The world is His territory
 - d. **LAW** . . . The New Testament gospel is His law
- D. The church is spoken of as the **VINEYARD OF THE LORD**.
1. Christ is the vine and Christians are the branches. John 15:1-8
 2. The idea here is the Christian’s role in the vineyard is to work to bear fruit.

CONCLUSION:

- A. Yes, the church is defined in the Bible. All matters pertaining to it must be studied in light of God’s written Word.
1. Such a study will help you to see what God wants you to see.
 2. Such a study will help you to better understand what God wants you to understand.
 3. Such a study will help you to see the church as God wants you to see it.
 4. Such a study will help you to change your attitude and prejudices about the church.

5. Such a study will help you to see that denominationalism is not a part of God's will.
6. Such a study will help you to see that in obeying the gospel, Christ will add you to His church . . . And not to one of the thousands of churches of men.
7. Such a study will help you find an active role in the Lord's body as one of its members.
8. Such a study will help to change your life here and your eternity to come.

B. God's Plan for Man's Salvation