

## The Church

- I. This study sets forth what Scripture declares about “the church” and considers such things as:
  - A. What is the church?
  - B. What is its origin?
  - C. What is its purpose?
  - D. Is it a unique entity or merely another organization or association?
  - E. How is it constructed?
  - F. How is it governed?
  - G. What are its responsibilities?
  - H. What is its form of service or worship, its ordinances?
  - I. What is its duration?
  
- II. Definitions from Oxford English Dictionary.
  - A. church: While it results from what is stated above that *kirika, cirice*, was originally applied to the building, it is clear that with the conversion of the Teutonic nations, it was assumed as the naturalized equivalent of Latin *ecclesia*, and used for that word in all its senses.
    1. The (or a) Christian community, and its ecclesiastical organization.
      - a. The community or whole body of Christ's faithful people collectively; all who are spiritually united to Christ as 'Head of the Church'. More fully described as the ***Church Universal*** or ***Catholic***.
      - b. A congregation of Christians locally organized into a society for religious worship and spiritual purposes, under the direction of one set of spiritual office-bearers.
    2. All the above points are from O.E.D.
  - B. Scripture equates *church* with *congregation*. **HEB 2:12 c/w PSA 22:22.**
    1. congregation: The action of congregating or collecting in one body or mass.
    2. congregate: To collect or gather together into a mass or crowd. To assemble.
    3. assemble: To bring together into one place or company; to gather, collect, convene.
    4. together: Into one gathering, company, mass or body.
    5. Mind that these definitions do not support the notion of “virtual church” where assembling together is not needed. Nor do they support the notion of individual assemblies being divisions of one organization called “the church.”
  
- III. There are two things in Scripture which are called “the church.”
  - A. Sometimes, “church” refers to the entire, redeemed family of God from all times, be they on earth or in heaven. This church consists only and all of those for whom Christ died according to God’s gracious election, foreknowledge, predestination, calling/quickenings and glorification by Jesus Christ. It is holy, spotless and blameless by the work of Christ. **1PE 1:2-4 c/w ROM 8:28-30 c/w 1PE 5:10 c/w HEB 12:22-24.**
  - B. general: 1. Including, participated in by, involving, or affecting, all, or nearly all, the parts of a specified whole, or the persons or things to which there is an implied reference; completely or approximately universal within implied limits; opposed to PARTIAL or PARTICULAR. 2. Concerned with, or established for, the whole of a certain territory or organization; opposed to LOCAL, SECTIONAL, etc. (caps mine)
  - C. It has been a common assumption that membership in this “general assembly and church of the firstborn” depends upon the work of and/or inclusion in the institution of an organized local church or church system on earth: the church on earth is the only way of

- entrance to the church in heaven. This is eternal salvation by church, not by Christ.
- D. This “general assembly and church of the firstborn” does not and cannot congregate or assemble in this earth. Its place of assembly is in heaven where the spirits/souls of departed saints presently convene (**HEB 12:23; REV 6:9-11**), and the rest are there represented positionally in Christ. **EPH 1:10-11; 2:4-6**.
- E. Eventually, the separation in this church will be completely eliminated. At the glorious return of the Lord Jesus Christ, the persons of all saints will be united together completely. **1TH 4:16-17**.

- IV. There is another institution in Scripture referred to as “the church,” namely a local assembly of converted followers of Christ meeting in His name under the rule of His appointed overseer(s) who minister His word unto them.
- A. The importance of the local church is sometimes overlooked or even trivialized as a stop-gap measure, as implied in Dispensational teaching.
1. “Hebrews is a series of contrasts between the good things of Judaism and the better things of Christ. Christ is 'better' than angels, than Moses, than Joshua, than Aaron; and the New Covenant than the Mosaic Covenant. Church truth does not appear, the ground of gathering only being stated (13:13).”  
(The Scofield Reference Bible, p. 1291)
  2. This position is refuted by the fact that Paul includes instruction concerning their submission to their pastors and teachers who rule over them (**HEB 13:7, 17**), which authority is a local church office. **1CO 12:27-28; EPH 4:11-12**.
  3. Likewise warning is given for these people to *not forsake the assembling of themselves together*, which by definition, is a church. **HEB 10:25**.
- B. The proper name for the local assembly is “the church.” Each biblically built congregation is in and of itself *the church of God*, as was the local church at Ephesus. **ACT 20:28; 1TI 3:15**.
1. When these congregations are spoken of plurally or collectively, they are always referred to as “the churches.” **ROM 16:1-5; REV 1:4**.
  2. Scripture knows nothing of a hierarchical system whereby individual congregations are part of a super-church, being ruled by someone other than their God-appointed pastor/elder directly under Christ who *labors among them*. **1TH 5:12; 1TI 5:17**.
- C. Local churches are not just institutions of men; they are both *in* Christ and are *of* Christ. **1TH 1:1; ROM 16:16**.
1. It is HIS “built” church (not Moses’ or Peter’s). **MAT 16:18**.
  2. He is its chief cornerstone Whose revelation directed His N.T. apostles and prophets. **EPH 2:19-22; 3:5**.
  3. It is for the glory of God by Him forever. **EPH 3:21**.
- D. The local church by itself is called the “whole church.” **ROM 16:23 c/w 1CO 1:14; 14:4-5, 23**.
- E. The local church consists of baptized believers in a given locality. **1CO 1:1-2, 6, 13**.
- F. The local church is where the ordinance of the Lord's Supper is observed as a kingdom banquet. **1CO 11:33 c/w LUK 22:29-30**.
1. This ordinance is peculiar to local assemblies and the members thereof. It is the *disciples* that come together for the breaking of bread. **MAT 26:18; ACT 20:4-7**.
  2. disciple: One who follows or attends upon another for the purpose of learning from him; a pupil or scholar.
    - a. One of the personal followers of Jesus Christ during his life; esp. one of the Twelve.
    - b. Also applied in the N.T. to the early Christians generally; hence, in religious use, *absol.* a professed follower of Christ, a Christian

or believer.

3. Can one truly be a follower of Jesus Christ if he does not follow Christ's orders or example? **LUK 6:46; 1JO 2:4.**
4. What are the attributes of a disciple of Jesus Christ? How can you identify a true disciple?
  - a. He is willing to submit to the same discipline as his Master (**LUK 6:40**). If it was not beneath the sinless Lord Jesus Christ to be baptized or wash the saints' feet, would a true disciple not be willing to thus follow His Lord?
  - b. He must bear the rejection and contempt of friends and family. He must subjugate his own ideas and concerns, accept the cost of discipleship and follow. **LUK 14:26-27, 33.**
  - c. He must *continue in Christ's word* (**JOH 8:31**). Can a person truly be a disciple of Jesus Christ if he exempts himself from requirements of His word or has allegiance to some other's word?
  - d. A disciple identifies and is numbered with those of like faith and obedience **ACT 1:15.**
    - (1) Mind that this company was meeting to conduct an article of local church business: the election of an apostle, a local church office. **1CO 12:28.**
    - (2) Also, this group is later identified as a church. **ACT 2:46.**
  - e. Disciples are understood to be baptized believers assembled as a church, over which elders are to have the oversight. Disciples and church members are synonymous terms for true followers of Jesus Christ bearing His name. **ACT 11:26; 14:20-24, 27-28.**
  - f. Disciples are not to forsake this responsibility of identifying in common assembly with like believers as members of the body, the local church (**1CO 12:27; HEB 10:25**). If a person avoids or abandons this word of Divine instruction, how then can it be said that he is *continuing in His word*?