

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 2:46-47.**
 - 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*?
 5. A disciple must be willing to submit to the judgment of the church when it acts within the framework of its delegated authority. **MAT 18:15-18.**
 - a. **MAT 18:15-18** is Christ's directive for dealing with *perceived* faults *between brethren*. It is not a formula for dealing with crimes against the law of God which demand separation from the offender even if he concedes or admits his error. ct/w **1CO 5:9-13.**
 - b. This responsibility of godly judgment between brethren in the church is the subject of Paul's reproof in **1CO 6:1-8.**
 - c. A brother who considers himself to have been faulted has the option of pursuing remedy by following **MAT 18:15-18** or, at any time, dropping the matter, per **1CO 6:7; PRO 19:11.**
 - d. The church does not have authority to manufacture law against brethren but only to operate within given law as set forth by Christ and the apostles. **JAM 4:11; 1JO 4:6.**
 - e. A proper understanding of **MAT 18:15-18** allows for conflict between brethren to occur and be settled by overlooking a matter (forbearance, forgiveness, longsuffering), by pursuing remedy personally, by pressing for adjudication by others, and even for admission of error: all without requiring the church to separate fellowship from a brother.
 - (1) The separation by which one is to be deemed as a *heathen and*

publican is reserved for either brother who refuses the judgment of the church in personal conflict resolution. Such a one is guilty of *variance* or *rebellion*, which are works of the flesh. **GAL 5:20.**

- (2) Being deemed a *heathen* or *publican* implied someone in need of repentance and conversion, and not to be eaten with (**MAR 2:16; ACT 11:3**), which in a church context has relevance to the Lord's Supper. More on this issue to follow.

G. The local church is also held accountable for the discipline of its members who are *commonly known* to have violated God's law for N.T. believers.

1CO 5:1-5; EPH 5:3-5.

1. God judges the corporate body for the sake of one or few offenders. **JOS 7:1 c/w REV 2:14-16.**
2. God promises to withdraw support and fellowship from the congregation if they do not execute judgment to purge the church. **JOS 7:12-13.**
3. God is not subordinate to the vote of a church in areas of publicly known sin which He has declared He will not tolerate in fellowship. Man is a fool to think that he by himself or in concert with others can disannul God's judgment. **JOB 40:8; EXO 23:2, 7.**
4. Even when the church does execute judgment upon a member, its decision is only a ratification of what God has already decreed. **1CO 5:3.**
5. "...The Lord shall judge His people" (**HEB 10:30-31**).
 - a. God will take appropriate action to punish transgressors, regardless of what the church decides.
 - b. He will judge His people if they will not judge themselves by repentance in timely fashion. **1CO 11:31 c/w REV 2:20-23.**
 - c. As with Joshua, if the church is not aware of an offense which needs to be addressed, God can bring it to light. **1CO 4:5; 1TI 5:24-25.**
 - d. God may cut the sinner off Himself. **ACT 5:1-5; 1CO 11:28-30.**
6. This system of examination, judgment and separation can only apply to the *local church*, not the general assembly/church comprised of all who have been purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ.
 - a. The members of that church still on earth would be expected to be accountable for the actions and beliefs of people they have never met or never (in this life) will meet, which would be an absurdity.
 - b. Secondly, how would the corporate general church on earth exercise discipline from the born-again regenerate family? How would they form a consensus to formally excommunicate someone? Could they excommunicate a saint out of heaven because some sin was exposed after his death? How would someone's name be stricken from the membership role of the general church: could living saints read of David's sin and vote to cast him out of heaven? ct/w **JOH 10:28-29.**

H. If "the church" is really multiple congregations which are considered collectively, like "the Methodist Church" or "the Presbyterian Church," again, it would be impossible for an individual congregation to be held accountable for the actions and beliefs of people they do not know and with whom they do not commune as a body at the Lord's Table. "Church" systems like that tend to fabricate false hierarchies which determine retention or excommunication of a system member rather than the matter being entirely in the hands of a local congregation.

I. Thus, the accountability of fellowship to which God holds believers is restricted to the

membership of a single congregation, which, as already seen, is the “whole church” (**ACT 15:22; ROM 16:23; 1CO 14:23**) or “all the church” (**ACT 5:11**).

1. The local church's judgment concerns those of its own membership, no more.
 2. Scripture knows nothing of one local church being accountable to another or for the sin of another. The regional churches of Asia which were in good order (Smyrna and Philadelphia, **REV 2-3**) were not praised for judging the membership of the five disorderly ones, nor were they tainted by the others' disorders.
- J. Intimately connected with church discipline is the keeping of the Lord's Supper or communion. Notice that in the instructions for discipline in the church is also a warning against eating a particular feast until a known offender has been purged out (**1CO 5:6-11**). This feast is of course the N.T. passover kept in commemoration of the sacrifice of Christ which delivered His people, not out of Egypt but out of hell (**v. 7**), which later in the same epistle is dealt with in greater detail. **1CO 10:16-17; 11:17-34**.
1. The communion service of a local church is to be kept pure of known transgressors. Light and darkness are not to be held in common union. **2CO 6:14; MAL 2:17**.
 2. To maintain fellowship with known transgressors and dine with them at the Lord's Table would be tantamount to saying that there will be no separation from sinners at the judgment seat of Christ which introduces the marriage supper of the Lamb in glory. **MAT 25:31-46**.
 3. Thus, since church purity (the absence of commonly known offenders) is an absolute prerequisite to the keeping of the Lord's Supper and (as already seen), the discipline of the church a local matter, we conclude that the communion feast is restricted to the members of a local congregation.
 - a. They are accountable to each other and to God to see that no common-report transgressor partakes of the table of the Lord.
 - b. As such, the church testifies that it is a holy society which does not condone the works of the flesh in its midst. Known sinners will *not be named among them*. **EPH 5:3-7**.
 - c. The Lord's table is the focal point of church membership; it is the acid test.
 4. We never in Scripture find the communion feast being observed by anyone other than the members of a local congregation.
 - a. The one exception to this is found in **ACT 20:4-13**, where Paul did partake of communion at Troas.
 - b. Observe, however, the shift in pronouns from the *first person plural* in **vs. 5-6** (we, us; i.e. - Luke, Paul and the travelling companions) to the *third person* (them, they) in **vs. 7-12**.
 - c. **vs. 7-12** describe the activities of Paul and the Troan disciples. Paul's travelling companions are not included in this group.
 - (1) Hence, a minister may serve communion in a church of which he is not a member. Paul was a member of the church at Antioch, not Troas. **ACT 13:1-3**.
 - (2) This is reasonable inasmuch as ministers are the proper administrators of the ordinance. Evangelism could not proceed otherwise.
 5. Potential problems arise if an individual who is not a member of a given local church is considered eligible to partake of the communion of the Lord's table with the members of that church:
 - a. If the individual claims to be a child of God and an heir of the promises of Christ's redemption, but has not been baptized into a church in obedience to

his professed Lord, his “faith” does not have the seal of the good work of baptism, rendering his faith dead. **JAM 2:17-20.**

- (1) Baptism (not the lack of it) is *the answer of a good conscience*.
1PE 3:21.
 - (2) Consideration applies to the professed believer whose circumstances militate against his baptism but not against his eternal destiny (**LUK 23:39-43**) but the rule of “baptized church members only” at the Lord’s Table still stands. “Unsealed” faith in such a believer is not dead but *handicapped*.
- b. If the individual is, in fact, a properly baptized member of another legitimate, separate, local N.T. church, there is still a problem.
- (1) The communing congregation would have to not only consider the individual, but also the state of the other body (church) of which he is a member. To commune with *him* is to commune with *them*, since he is part of them. **1CO 12:12, 18-20.**
 - (2) It would then have to be determined that the other church is “in order,” not promoting *heresy* (a work of the flesh, **GAL 5:20**), nor communing with known sinners, nor rejecting *apostolic* tradition. **2TH 3:6, 14.**
 - (3) Has the other church purged itself of the ungodly or are they communing with those whom ought to be avoided?
 - (4) If doubts about propriety in an area of liberty defile the doer (**ROM 14:23**), how much more would doubts in participating in something contrary to command and apostolic example defile the doer?
- c. For an inter-church communion to be observed, an inquisition into the teachings and practices of the other church would be necessary, resulting in a lot of meddling in other's affairs, which ought to be avoided.
PRO 20:3; 1PE 4:15; LUK 12:13-14.
- (1) It is this kind of activity which usually results in some governor or governing body being set up over the local congregation and its elder(s) to monitor and dictate terms of fellowship, thus usurping the God-given authority and autonomy of the local church.
 - (2) The closest thing to a “mother church” hierarchy system in Scripture is the example of the Jerusalem church council in **ACT 15** which, under immediate living apostolic direction, actually put a stop to an effort of false hierarchical authority being imposed on other churches. **ACT 15:24.**
 - (3) Scripture upholds the concept of local authority in other areas like marriage, parenting, master-servant relationships, etc.
EPH 5:22-24; 1TI 3:4, 12; ROM 14:4.
- d. Consider this policy from another perspective.
- (1) The Lord’s Table is a commanded ordinance for the church.
1CO 11:2, 23-25.
 - (2) A church member who wilfully and publicly refuses to keep the ordinance would be in direct violation of the order of Jesus Christ and the church would have to separate company from him and declare him unfit for fellowship in Christ’s kingdom.
 - (3) Imagine the problems that would be created if a communing church

- tried to enforce this order upon a visiting member of another church.
- e. Whereas a local church ought not to partake of the Lord's table with anyone not a member of its body, this should not be taken as an insult by someone not of that body. It is simply that the church has no judgmental authority outside of its own body. A visitor to a congregation may have a valid standing before God in another legitimate church elsewhere and is accountable to them.
- K. The local church is the body of Christ into which one is baptized by the Spirit.
1CO 12:13, 27.
1. Each local church is the body and there are many churches, thus, many bodies.
 2. This is not contradicted by **EPH 4:4** which refers to one in kind, not in number.
 - a. Paul is emphasizing that there are not diverse camps for Jew and Gentile.
EPH 4:4-6; 2:14-16 c/w 1CO 12:13.
 - b. All baptized believers share in the common faith of a common salvation.
TIT 1:4; JUDE 1:3; GAL 3:27-29.
 3. Scripture does not authorize “denominations” of local churches whereby different congregations teach and practice different doctrines.
 - a. denomination: A collection of individuals classed together under the same name; now almost always *spec.* a religious sect or body having a common faith and organization, and designated by a distinctive name.
 - b. Though we can see in Scripture that a church may have errors within it and still be called by the Holy Spirit a church, this is no license to strive for diversity of beliefs based on the doctrines and whims of men contrary to the words of Christ and His apostles. Such a presumption is the basis for God fighting against or no longer recognizing a church. **REV 2:15-16.**
 - c. Denominational churches generally develop from poor Bible hermeneutics in which there is either a deficiency in trust in or a denial of a preserved Bible, and/or an errant way of interpreting it.
 - d. There is one faith that was *once delivered unto the saints*. **JUDE 1:3.**
 - (1) This argues against novel faith systems springing up.
 - (2) This argues against post-apostolic revelation.
 - e. The scriptural order is for uniformity of belief and practice and it is an honorable goal for which God’s people should *strive together* (**1CO 1:10; PHIL 1:27**) in sincere search for light more than heat to bring them closer to the ideal of **EPH 4:13-14.**
 - f. The Apostle Paul taught uniform doctrine and example in all the churches. **1CO 4:17; 7:17; 11:16; 14:33; 16:1.**
 - g. Far from promoting schisms and denominations, Paul commanded the saints to resist departures from his gospel which was the standard. **ROM 16:17; GAL 1:8-9; 1TI 1:3; 4:1; 2TI 2:16-18.**
- V. The doctrine and importance of the local church (i.e., an independent congregation of baptized believers having membership in that body) is something that has been commonly maligned or trivialized. It is generally assumed that God's true program for His children in this life is fulfilled somewhere other than local churches. The notion that true fellowship with God can be enjoyed without local church membership is a common one.
- A. “Whenever a few Christians assembled together it was called A church, such as for instance the Church of Corinth, or Ephesus or the church which is in Thessalonica. It was merely a name to designate them and distinguish them from Christians who might be

meeting in other cities such as Rome or Colosse or in Galatia. In these assemblies were members of the one true body, the one Church of Christ, but THE church refers to something else... The true church, the Body of Christ transcends all local gatherings.” (*The One True Church*, M.R. DeHaan; pp. 3, 15)

1. Yet the Holy Ghost calls a single congregation of organized converts under the oversight of a pastor/elder/bishop THE church. **1TI 3:5, 15; 5:16.**
 2. As already seen, a local church is called THE body of Christ. **1CO 12:27.**
 3. Paul refers to the local church at Ephesus under its ordained elders as “...the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (**ACT 20:28**).
- B. “Church (visible), Summary: The passages under this head (1 Co.10:32; 1 Ti.3:15) refer to the visible body of professed believers called, collectively, 'the Church,' of which history takes account as such, though it exists under many names and divisions based upon differences in doctrine or in government. Within, for the most part, this historical 'Church' has existed the true Church, 'which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all,' like the believing Remnant within Israel... Church (true), Summary: The true church, composed of the whole number of regenerate persons from Pentecost to the first resurrection, united together and to Christ by the baptism with the Holy Spirit, is the body of Christ of which He is the Head.” (*The Scofield Reference Bible*, pp. 1276, 1304)
1. Would the Holy Spirit call something a church of God (**1TI 3:5**) and in God (**1TH 1:1**) if it was not the true church?
 2. As already seen, the Scriptural order opposes the concept of divisions and denominations.
- C. Faulty ideas concerning the purpose of the church have been at the root of some erroneous teaching concerning it:
1. Example: “The purpose of the local church is the synergistic strength found in a society of individuals... Therefore, a local church is a group of Christ's disciples voluntarily joined together practically for mutual strength and encouragement in gospel duties. It is not a mysterious body of spiritual union apart from or superior to this practical union.” (*Baptism and Church Membership*, J.R. Crosby; sermon outline of 4/90, p. 2)
 2. This assumption changes the local church from being a Christ-centered spiritual organism to a man-centered organization like Alcoholics Anonymous which is a group “voluntarily joined together practically for mutual strength and encouragement.” Baptized saints could even voluntarily form a club or organization by mutual agreement for mutual benefit yet that would not be a church.
 3. Mind that Scripture calls a local church “...the body of Christ...” (**1CO 12:27**) into which one is baptized by the Spirit (**1CO 12:12-13**), “...a spiritual house...” (**1PE 2:5**) and converts are “...baptized into Christ...” (**GAL 3:27**). How is this not a spiritual union?
 4. The primary purpose of the local church is for the glory and promotion of its Creator and Savior. **EPH 3:21; 1TI 3:15.**
 - a. Christ builds it and preserves it. **MAT 16:18.**
 - b. Christ is its chief cornerstone. **EPH 2:20.**
 - c. Christ purchased it. **ACT 20:28.**
 - d. Christ is proclaimed its King/Head. **EPH 1:22-23.**
 - e. Christ's law governs it. **MAT 28:18-20.**
 - f. Christ instructs angels by it. **EPH 3:9-10 c/w 1PE 1:12.**
 5. Even the redemptive work of Christ is primarily for His glory.

EPH 1:3-6; 5:25-27.

6. All of God's creations are for Himself and His pleasure. **PRO 16:4; REV 4:11.**
 7. The accordant benefits of church membership are the result of this greater purpose; they are not the primary purpose.
- D. "All societies or organizations require the mutual assent of the body and the applicant. Marriages, nations, and businesses among other organizations require such assent: spouses, citizens, and employees all enter and participate in these relationships by voluntary submission." (*Ibid*, p. 3; premise for opposing baptismal church membership)
1. The local church is the kingdom of God in this world (**MAT 16:18-19; LUK 22:29-30 c/w 1CO 10 & 11**) but it "...is not of this world..." (**JOH 18:36**). Hence, the analogy drawn from things of this world may not necessarily apply.
 2. Whereas mutual agreement may be necessary for the maintenance and health of a relationship in a society, it may not be necessary for induction into that society:
 - a. Citizenship in a country is generally granted without the knowledge of the majority of populace. A potential candidate for citizenry is generally interviewed and examined by an acknowledged representative of that country who has authority to grant or deny citizenship in that country. This is essentially the same as when a pastor baptizes a qualified candidate on behalf of a local church comprised of citizens. **EPH 2:19.**
 - b. Employees don't enter into relationship with co-workers in a corporation based on mutual agreement with them. Rather, their status as an employee is granted by the appointed personnel officer of the corporation, who reviews the applicant. An employer who deemed a job applicant as suitable would hire him regardless of whether the rest of workpool all knew about it or consented. If another employee found this set-up to be unbearable, he could always leave. If he causes trouble because of the new qualified co-worker, he may have to be fired. Again, this bears similarity to an obstinate church which wouldn't tolerate co-existence with someone that their pastor, on behalf of the church, had judged worthy of baptism and church membership.
 3. Verses like **AMO 3:3** are obviously dealing with the maintenance of relationships, not the formation.

VI. The concept of a church/congregation in this world for the glory and service of God did not start in the book of Acts. God has had a visible church/congregation in this world ever since the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt (**EXO 16:1-2 c/w ACT 7:38**). That church under the Sinaitic Covenant would also be His nation and kingdom on earth. **EXO 19:5-6.**

- A. Remember that the word "church" is "the naturalized equivalent of Latin *ecclesia*."
1. ecclesia: A Greek word for a regularly convoked assembly; chiefly applied to the general assembly of Athenian citizens. On the introduction of Christianity it became the regular word for CHURCH, q.v.
 2. ekklesia (SRN G1577): a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place, an assembly. (Thayer's Dictionary of the New Testament)
 3. This was a significance of the exodus: God was calling His people from their homes in Egypt to assemble with Him in the wilderness for worship. **EXO 5:1-3.**
 4. This also marked a shift in the manner in which God was to be worshipped.
- B. From a standpoint of approaching God in religious service and worship, history may be divided up into three distinct periods:
1. Pre-Moses. From the fall of Adam up until the the exodus of Israel, the service of

God was observed in very simplistic form. It was not congregational in nature, and about the only furniture that was required was an altar.

- a. There was a time, place and proper manner: the elements of divine service which span all ages. **GEN 4:3-5.**
 - b. Sacrifice was offered by a head of the family, often a prophet (Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) or a priest, e.g., Melchizedek. **GEN 14:17-20.**
 - c. At the place of service, God communed with the worshipper. **GEN 28:10-22; 35:1, 6-7, 9-15.**
 - d. In this era, divine service was essentially family and private, not a calling out to a distinct public assembly.
2. The kingdom of Israel under the Sinaitic/Mosaic Covenant. From the exodus up until the day of Pentecost (and with tailings until 70 A.D.), the first format of “called-out assembly” congregational worship existed as a divine institution. Now the individual was to dislodge himself from his home to go to a designated place of public worship no less than three times each year for appointed feasts. **EXO 34:23-24.**
- a. An appointed priesthood (the house and lineage of Aaron) was established for the offering up of sacrifices with their brethren the Levites as helpers and teachers.
 - b. A specific place for service was established (replete with carnal furnishings and carnal ordinances), first in the tabernacle which was moved from place to place, later in the temple in Jerusalem. Both were called “the house of God.” **1CH 6:48; 2CH 3:3.**
 - c. Sacrifices were not to be made anywhere else, nor by anyone other than priests. The average church member/citizen was restricted in access to the house of God.
 - d. Specific, detailed rituals and ordinances were to be strictly observed.
 - e. Exclusion from the nation of Israel meant exclusion from full fellowship with God.
 - f. Communion with God was found in the Holy of Holies, where the ark of the covenant was kept and where the High Priest alone could enter. **EXO 25:21-22; 29:42-43; 40:33-34; 2CH 7:1-2; HEB 9:6-7.**
 - g. During this era, synagogue worship also developed where people could assemble for public prayer and exposition of the Scripture but not for the offering of sacrifices. **PSA 74:8; ACT 15:21.**
 - h. An overview of the Old Testament shows the program of God transitioning from a Levitical emphasis to a Davidic emphasis as God was preparing the way for the son of David, King Jesus, and His New Covenant order.
3. The gospel church made up of Jew and/or Gentile. With the coming of John the Baptist, a new order of service was introduced in fulfillment of prophecy. **MAL 1:11; 3:1; 4:5-6 c/w MAT 11:13-14; LUK 16:16; JOH 4:20-23.**
- a. The old system was on the way out, to be displaced by the next phase of the kingdom/church. **MAR 1:14-15.**
 - b. The nationalistic church/kingdom of the Mosaic Covenant was going to be deprived of its status before God in favor of something else: the gospel church which is the house of God. **MAT 21:43 c/w LUK 12:32; 1PE 2:5-10; 1TI 3:15.**
 - c. This kingdom/church would not be set aside nor destroyed. **DAN 2:44 c/w MAT 16:18-19; EPH 3:21.**

- d. At the death of Jesus Christ, God openly showed His abandonment and abolition of the Old Covenant system which revolved around the Temple. **MAT 27:50-51.**
 - e. At Pentecost, God proved His intentions by filling the local church at Jerusalem with His presence in the form of the Holy Spirit, as He had done in Moses' and Solomon's days. The Holy Ghost fell only on this group of about 120 disciples, whose names were numbered together and who were conducting church business. **ACT 1:15-2:4.**
 - f. NOTE: Multitudes had been baptized by John the Baptist and the disciples of Jesus (**MAT 3:5-6; JOH 4:1-2**) but the Holy Ghost only fell on the infant church to indwell it.
 - g. Contrast the ministerial restriction at the indwellings of the tabernacle and the later temple with the power of the apostles on the Day of Pentecost. **EXO 40:34-35; 1KI 8:11 c/w ACT 2:4-47.**
 - (1) The Holy Ghost had not come upon a lifeless compartment but upon living believers who had personally witnessed the resurrected Son of God's victory over death and the powers of darkness.
 - (2) The apostles had recently been told that they would receive power at this time. **ACT 1:1-3, 8.**
 - (3) Combining their eyewitness experience with their knowledge of the promise of power and the effectual working of that power in them, their minds were flooded with spiritual understanding that put ancient prophecies and present events in full and accurate perspective.
 - (4) Truly, the gospel was preached "...with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven..." (**IPE 1:12**).
 - (5) The Spirit of truth would co-endure with the N.T. form of the church. **JOH 14:16-17; MAT 28:19-20.**
 - h. NOTE: This was the reformation of the church of God which had existed since Moses (**HEB 9:10**). The Protestant Reformation, for all its good points, was still nevertheless the reformation of Catholicism and retained much of the doctrine and ecclesiastical structure of that system.
4. reformation: Restoration (of peace). 2. Improvement in form or quality; alteration to a better form; correction or removal of defects or errors; †reparation, rebuilding.
- a. Christ put us back into peaceful relations with God. **COL 1:20.**
 - b. His sacrifice took away the enmity that separated both Jew and Gentile from God, making a new form of church possible. **EPH 2:15-16.**
 - c. The *event* of Calvary made way for the *process* of improvement. Without the New Testament in the blood of Christ, the form of the church could not be altered but because of it, it had to be altered. **HEB 7:12.**
 - d. The reformation (**HEB 9:10**) Christ initiated was a large-scale remodeling job which (as is typical) involved some confusion, rough edges, time and testing before a quality, finished structure took shape.
 - e. It may be observed that the project blueprints (the apostolic revelations) were being made at the same time the N.T. church was under construction.
 - f. It is for this reason that there seems to be some "awkwardness" in the transitional period of the church from Moses to Christ: it was a time of weaning minds away from a long-standing order to a new one. Even the apostles under the Holy Spirit took a little time to put the pieces together.

- ACT 11:1-2; 15:5-6.**
- g. The First Century saw overlap when there were essentially two phases of God's kingdom/church program on earth co-existing and the commissioning of Paul to be the apostle to the Gentiles was a major dynamic shift in fulfillment of the words of Jesus in **MAT 21:43**. See **ACT 13:46; 28:28**.
5. While the apostles were spreading the gospel and building N.T. churches and changing the form of service, we still find some carryover from the O.T. service. (**ACT 15:19-21; 18:21; 20:16; 21:17-26**). God didn't slay the Mosaic institutions all in a moment; He let them die on the vine. **HEB 8:13**.
 6. God had promised to bear with Israel until the destruction of Jerusalem. **DAN 9:24-27**.
 - a. Between about 30 A.D. and 70 A.D. the N.T. form of the church was blessed with miraculous signs and wonders which were primarily designed for the benefit of His children among the Jews, to effect their conviction or conversion. **MIC 7:14-16 c/w ACT 7:36; JOH 4:48; 1CO 1:22**.
 - b. Indeed, as a testimony to His mercy, many thousands of Jews were converted owing to God's longsuffering. **ACT 21:20; 2PE 3:9**.
 - c. The Master of the house did, though, finally shut the door. **LUK 13:23-30**.
- C. The ministry of John the Baptist was designed to put people into the *kingdom of heaven*. **MAT 21:31-32 c/w LUK 7:29-30**.
1. Some attempt to dissociate baptism from church membership and suggest that that kingdom to which men were joined by baptism could not be the church, since Jesus Christ spoke of the building of His church in the future tense in **MAT 16:18**.
 - a. This assumes that something which will be built cannot have already been under construction.
 - b. But consider **1CH 17:7-16; JER 22:13-14; EZR 3:10-11; 4:3**.
 - c. The building of the church of Jesus Christ was already underway in its foundations by the time Jesus said, "...I will build my church..." (**MAT 16:18**).
 2. An interesting example from God's dealings with King Saul may help explain how God could suffer two inherently opposing systems to co-exist.
 - a. Saul was anointed king over Israel (**1SAM 10:1**), and for a while prospered in the office.
 - (1) Saul, though, was not careful to keep the commandments of God and fell into disfavor with God as a result. **1SAM 13:13-14; 15:22-23**.
 - (2) The kingdom was legally rent from him that very day and given to another. **1SAM 15:28**.
 - (3) God then had Samuel anoint David king, at which time the Spirit of God departed from Saul. **1SAM 16:1, 13-14**.
 - (4) God's favor and the crown now rested upon David. However, David did not formally assume the reins of the kingdom at that time. Saul was allowed to fulfill his years as king, though it was an empty shell routine. He died a miserable suicidal death.
 - b. Likewise, Israel was appointed (chosen) to be God's kingdom/church; His standard-bearer in the world. They fared well in that office for a while, but like Saul, were headstrong against the commandments of God. After repeated warnings by the prophets, God finally sought another nation to be the standard-bearer: the N.T. church.

- (1) At the crucifixion, God manifested His abrogation of the O.T. church by rending the veil of the temple which closeted His dwelling place in the Holy of Holies.
 - (2) At Pentecost, the Spirit of God filled and indwelt the new standard-bearer, which for a period, like David, co-existed with the former.
 - (3) Israel and its temple, like Saul, continued to go through the motions in an empty-shell routine (**MAT 23:38**), fulfilling the appointed years and ending in a suicidal destruction in 70 A.D.
 - (4) Remember that Daniel had declared that the kingdom of God, once it was set up in the days of the Roman empire under King Jesus would "...never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people..." (**DAN 2:44**). Not only would it endure, it would not change hands as it had from Israel to the gospel church.
 - (5) God is willing and able to graft Jews back into the kingdom if they turn to Christ but He is not willing to revert the kingdom to natural Israel and its abolished system of divine service! **ROM 11:18-24**.
- c. The analogy of Saul and David fits this to a tee: co-existing powers for a season until the abrogated power was taken out, never to recover it once it had changed hands.
- (1) The place for Saul's house thereafter was at David's table, which Mephibosheth wisely recognized. **2SAM 9:6-8**.
 - (2) The place for Jews is at the Son of David's table through repentance, faith and baptism into a church of Jesus Christ. **ACT 2:38-41**.
 - (3) The gospel church is the *rebuilt tabernacle of David* which was void of Levitical appurtenances and carnal sacrifices, not a rebuilt temple of Solomon full of both. **ACT 15:14-17**.

VII. Consider the nature and structure of the N.T. gospel church.

- A. The local church is the house of God. **1TI 3:15**.
- B. It is a spiritual house. **1PE 2:5**.
 1. This house of Peter's first epistle is the church.
 2. Instruction is given for the management of church gifts. **1PE 4:10-11 c/w 1CO 12:28**.
 3. Warning is given concerning the primary focus of the judgments of God, the realization of which is seen in Christ's oversight of the seven churches of Asia. **1PE 4:17 c/w REV 2-3**.
 4. Instruction is given for pastoral duties. **1PE 5:1-3**.
- C. The local church is God's dwelling-place. **2CO 6:16; EPH 2:22**.
- D. The local church is built upon a heavenly foundation. **EPH 2:19-22**.
 1. The saints to whom this epistle is addressed (**EPH 1:1**), are obviously church members. **ACT 20:17, 28**.
 2. **EPH 2:19-22** is not only referring to the doctrines and teachings of apostles, prophets and Christ but also their *persons* since they were as persons promised exaltation and the immediate guidance of the Spirit. **MAT 19:27-28; JOH 14:26; 16:13**.
 - a. If the spiritual foundation stones of **EPH 2:19-22** are only the doctrines and teachings upon which the church is built, one could conclude that the spiritual lively stones of **1PE 2:5** imply ongoing building of the church by the doctrines of different church members.

- b. If the term “Jesus Christ himself” is only referring to His teaching, should we therefore assume that He will simply send back a copy of Scripture in the day of the resurrection? **1TH 4:16.**
 - c. Foundation stones are obviously referring to the persons of note in the church. c/w **GAL 2:9; REV 21:14.**
- E. As such, it is obvious that there is a link between the church/kingdom on earth and the church/kingdom in heaven. The house of God is indeed the gate of heaven. **GEN 28:17.**
- 1. When a person is graft into the local church on earth, his fellowship and communion is not just among his brethren on earth. It goes much higher than that. **ACT 2:41-42 c/w 1JO 1:1-3; 1CO 12:13.**
 - 2. The active approach to God in worship that the church observes on earth meets and blends with the on-going worship of the general assembly/church in heaven. **HEB 10:19-25; 12:18-24.**
 - 3. Unlike the O.T. church service where only the high priest entered into the holiest on earth, we now in service enter into the holiest in heaven by Jesus Christ. **HEB 9:24.**
 - 4. Much of the book of Hebrews is dedicated to the “coming” of the Lord's people to Him in service, worship and prayer. **HEB 4:16; 10:1-2; 11:6.**
 - 5. Our coming to the Lord begins with being built up a spiritual house, the church. **1PE 2:4-5.**
- F. This order of common approach unto God through Christ is all part of His new creation for His new creatures. **2CO 5:17; EPH 2:10.**
- 1. The first creation was formed from nothing (ex nihilo): no expense.
 - 2. The new creation is formed from the great expense of Himself. It cost God dearly to make us fit to come unto Him.
 - 3. The cost we pay in personal sacrifice to come to God through Christ in every good sense, including our coming to Him in church worship, is nothing compared to what it cost Him.

VIII. The local church is built by gospel ministers preaching the word of God exhorting men to repentance, faith and baptism in continuance of the model of the fountainhead of Christianity in Judea. **1TH 1:6-10; 2:13-14.**

- A. At Pentecost, a universal pattern for initial addition to a local church was established. This pattern involved the preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ and His doctrine, men receiving that testimony, repenting, being baptized and added to the local church the same day. **ACT 2:37-47.**
- 1. **ACT 2:37-41** is setting forth a cause/effect sequence. The word “then” in **vs. 38, 41** is a conjunctive adverb, which is an adverb which joins two elements of thought together while acting as a modifier at the same time. Other examples of conjunctive adverbs are: *therefore, however, consequently, likewise, moreover, nevertheless, otherwise* and *accordingly*.
 - 2. In **v. 38**, “then” modifies “said” but in **v. 41**, “then” modifies two verb phrases: “were baptized” and “were added” which are joined by the conjunctive coordinate “and.” Thus, the final outcome of being added to “them” (the church) is a direct result of their baptism upon responding to the preached word.
 - 3. Some would divorce the cause/effect sequence by denying the grammatical role of “then” in **v. 41**, maintaining that it only modifies the action “were baptized” but cannot modify “were added.”
 - a. This assumes that the adding was a separate event independent of their

- baptism by some action or process not even mentioned.
- b. However, compare the use of conjunctive adverbs in the following verses and ask yourself if they only modify the first clause in the verse or if the secondary clause is also modified by them.
1SAM 1:11; PSA 16:8-9; HAG 1:9-10.
4. Some maintain that the colon following “baptized” in v. 41 separates the two clauses joined by “and” and, as such, the thought sequence is not connected. Observe similar grammar in these verses and ask yourself whether the colon logically interrupts the thought sequence: **GEN 1:3; 31:54; 32:7.**
- B. Some maintain that the directive for the Spirit to make a person a member of the Lord's church is only by the vote of church members, who decide whether the repentant sinner who has been baptized is worthy of church fellowship. In the same breath they acknowledge that God has deemed him worthy of fellowship with Himself in an “unchurched state” by blessing him with “...the personal ministry of the Spirit of God (given) to individual believers regardless of church affiliation.”
(Baptism & Church Membership, p. 15, J.R. Crosby, outline of 4/90)
1. This assumes that someone who has met sufficient criteria (repentance, faith, confession and baptism) to satisfy God's conscience needs to exhibit more proof to a church to gain their approval.
 2. This brings up an interesting consideration: the testimony of Scripture is that baptism is a testimonial washing away of sin (**ACT 22:16**), and that God deems baptism as the answer of a good conscience (**1PE 3:21**). If that is the case, a position which questions what God has deemed clean is on shaky ground.
ACT 10:15.
 3. If a church member cannot be made without the consensus vote of other church members to direct the Spirit to add a person to a body of believers, how could a pastor start a church somewhere else where there are no church members? Who is going to direct the Spirit to make baptized candidates into church members? If the pastor can declare them as members, why can't he do the same at his home church?
- C. Some maintain that the “gift of the Holy Ghost” in **ACT 2:38** can only be *objective-genitive*, i.e., God gives the Holy Ghost.
1. The fact is that it is also *subjective-genitive*, i.e., the Holy Ghost gives something.
 2. God the Holy Spirit gives the gift of membership in the church which He indwells.
1CO 12:13; EPH 2:22.
- D. God desires/commands His children to identify with Him in a local church, where they submit to the godly rule of an elder and are accountable to each other (and God) in gospel duties.
1. However, where is the direct command or admonition for someone who has never been properly added to a legitimate church to do so, if it is not found in the commandment to “repent and be baptized?” All other verses about the importance and necessity of congregational identity, duty and assembly (e.g. **HEB 10:25**) are contextually applied to people who already are church members.
 2. If baptism has nothing to do with church membership except it being only a prerequisite, would a gospel minister holding that position baptize someone who met the necessary criteria but stated that he did not intend to ever become a member of a church? On what basis would he deny the ordinance, if baptism has no relation to church membership?
 - a. Could this minister justly conclude the candidate to be an impenitent rebel,

when he (the minister) has no law which he believes would apply to this person? Remember, "...where no law is, there is no transgression" **(ROM 4:15)**.

- b. This minister would be obligated to baptize this person in spite of his rejection of N.T. church membership and duty, assuming him to have all the blessing of God that attends fully committed believers who are members of a true church keeping His ordinances and submitting to His discipline.
3. Such are the implications of divorcing baptism from church membership and inventing a spiritual kingdom of God consisting of baptized folks other than the gospel church.