
Title: What is the Church?

Series: Speaking of God

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Introduction **What is the church?**

The church is the community of all true believers for all time (Eph. 5:25). While there are various opinions as to when the church *specifically* began, what we should not or cannot deny is that the NT saints are one body with the OT saints. Pentecost is a significant event. But it does not mean that the OT saints are not a part of Christ's bride, the church. The church refers to all the people Christ died to redeem (Revelation 5:9).

The Invisible yet Visible Church

The true church, in its spiritual reality as the fellowship of all genuine believers, is invisible (2 Tim. 2:19). We must not make the mistake of seeing all mentions of the church in scripture to be the "visible church" and we must not make the mistake of seeing all mentions of the church in scripture to be the invisible church. Overemphasis of either the visible or invisible church explains much of the division in denominations and the historical church. We must see the text as layered; this means that even when the point of emphasis in a certain passage is the local church, there is also probably a broader application of the same principle that applies to the invisible church. Seeing the local church in a passage does not negate that the invisible may also be in the purview of the passage.

The "invisible church" is the church as God sees it. We cannot read hearts. We can only read what comes from the heart.

The "visible church" is the church as Christians on earth see it. The visible church is made up of those who have professed faith in Christ and have obeyed Christ in baptism. One is brought into the membership of a church through the public profession and declaration of baptism.

The visible church will always contain genuine believers as well as others who do not truly believe and have made false professions of faith.

Other Descriptions of the Church

The word "church" can describe: a small house church (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19), the church in an entire city (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1), the church in an entire region (Acts 9:3 1), and the church throughout the entire world (Eph. 5:25; 1 Cor. 12:28). We need to be leary of the claim that every mention of church in the NT involves a single house church. These passages will not support that kind of claim. Yet there is a movement today called the house church movement, which is either explicitly or implicitly

making that claim. Not all churches mentioned in the NT can be forced into that paradigm.

There are other ways that the church is described in the New Testament. The church is described as a family (1 Tim. 5:1-2). The church is the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:32; 2 Cor. 11:2). The church is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23, 4:15-16; Col. 2:19). The church is a new temple (Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:4-8; 1 Cor. 3:10-17). The church is a priesthood (1 Peter 2:5). The church is a nation (1 Peter 2:5), a new Israel (Gal. 6:16).

What Makes a Church a Church?

Historically, the reformers and puritans identified from scripture, three characteristics of churches that are following the scriptures. 1. Correct preaching from the Bible is a mark of the church. 2. Correct administration of the ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Table, is a mark of the church. 3. Consistent practice of church discipline is a mark of the church.

What Is the Church Supposed to Do?

Nothing is more controversial in this day of the historical church than this question. How one answers this question largely determines where one will worship on Sundays. Many believe that the sole function of the church is to reach the lost for Christ. Others, mostly unintentionally, treat the church as if it were a social club. But the scriptures tell us that evangelism is merely *one* facet of the church's function. And the church is certainly not a social club. It is a living organism.

The church is supposed to minister to God, to its members, and to the world (Col. 3:16). Ministry to God is done through worshiping him (Eph. 1:12). The church's ministry to its members is done through nurturing and building them up so that the church can "present everyone mature in Christ" (Col. 1:28). The church's ministry to the world is done through preaching the gospel to all people in word and in deed (Matt. 28:19).