

## The Church

# What is a Church?

We will begin our study of the Church with a general overview of what a church is. Once we have laid this groundwork, we will move on to topics such as the church's members, government, practices, etc. If time allows, we will take a look at the issue of when the church actually started.

### I. Defining *Church*

#### A. Etymologically

##### 1. Greek - *ekklesia*

a) Strong's Concordance defines it thus: "...a *calling out*, that is, (concretely) a popular *meeting*, especially a religious *congregation* (Jewish *synagogue*, or Christian community of members on earth or saints in heaven or both): - assembly, church."

b) ... or more simply: "a called-out assembly."

##### 2. *Ekklesia* appears 117 times in the Greek New Testament.

a) It is translated "church" all but three times.

b) These three times are in which refer to assembly of people

##### 3. A further breakdown shows it refers to:

a) a particular congregation - 101 times

b) Israel - 1 time (Acts 7:38)

c) an assembly - 3 times (Acts 19:32,39,41)

(1) These three occurrences of *ekklesia* are translated "assembly"

d) the institution or subject of the church - 11 times

e) NOTE - "churches" is used in Acts 19:37 in reference to pagan temples at Ephesus, but this is translated from a different Greek word.

(1) I'm sure everyone would have noticed if I had not addressed this.

B. J.M. Pendleton in his 1867 *Church Manual* defines a church as: "A church is a congregation of Christ's baptized disciples, acknowledging him as their Head, relying on His atoning sacrifice for justification before God, and depending on the Holy Spirit for sanctification, united in the belief of the gospel, agreeing to maintain its ordinances and obey its precepts, meeting together for worship, and cooperating for the extension of Christ's kingdom in the world."

### II. What the Church is Not

A. The Church is NOT made up of everyone who claims to be Christian in any shape or form

1. This would more properly be called "Christendom", because not everyone who claims to follow Christ is a true Believer - Matthew 7:21

B. The Church is NOT the saints of all eternity

1. The church definitely started during the ministry of Christ (Matthew 16:18), so that excludes Old Testament saints at least.

C. The Church is NOT invisible or intangible

1. The New Testament NEVER refers to the church in such a manner. Churches are presented and real and local.

- D. The Church is NOT universal
1. No “universal” church could be plural (Galatians 1:2), have leadership (James 5:14), meet in one locality (I Corinthians 16:19), be established multiple times (Acts 16:5), and so many other things that I will not belabor the point.
- III. When did the Church begin?
- A. NOTE - We may have to finish this up next time...
- B. The prevalent theory today is that the Church began at Pentecost in Acts 2.
- C. This theory is FALSE.
- D. Personally, I believe the church was supernaturally *empowered* at Pentecost but that it was already in existence.
- E. Reasons why the church already existed at Pentecost:
1. Christ said He would build it in Matthew 16:18.
  2. Christ assumes its existence in Matthew 18:17, or else he gives instructions that could not be followed for years or months to come.
  3. A large group of believers existed *before* Pentecost.
  4. The Apostles were chosen, trained, and organized *before* Pentecost. They were even commissioned and sent before Pentecost - Mathew 10:1-16
  5. No one was re-baptized at Pentecost. Believers such as the Apostles and others that had believed and been baptized by John, Christ, or the Disciples.
  6. Christ instituted the Lord’s Supper for the church *before* Pentecost (Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:19-20)
  7. Christ gave the church its Great Commission *before* Pentecost (Matthew 28:19-20)
  8. The Disciples, 7 weeks before Pentecost, assembled together on the first day of the week received the gift of the Holy Spirit from Christ (John 20:19-23)
  9. In Acts 1 (before Pentecost), the believers are assembling (1:4), receiving further instructions (1:8), praying together (1:14), and electing leadership (1:15-26)
    - a) Note - According to Acts 1:15, the church at Jerusalem numbered about 120 *before* Pentecost.
  10. New believers at Pentecost were “added” to a church that already existed (Acts 2:41)
- F. The patented Matthew B. Gage view of the origin of the church using Ezekiel 37:
1. John the Baptist, as the forerunner and way-preparer, set the materials to build the church with - Dry Bones
  2. Christ built the church during His earthly ministry - Bones + Sinew and Flesh
  3. The Holy Spirit empowered the church at Pentecost - Breath of Life
  4. NOTE - I know its not perfect (that’s not what Ezekiel is talking about at all!) but I think this helps illustrate the facts very well.