

Week 15 – The Church of God

The Church of God

“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:19-22).

Since the Church is the Lord’s idea, membership is not optional. In Acts, those who responded to Peter’s sermon were added to a local church.

“And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, Be saved from this perverse generation! So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.” (Acts 2:40-41)

The church is God’s idea and provision for His people, so we can grow in Christ and be equipped to fulfill the purpose of God for our lives.

“...and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another ; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” (Hebrews 10:24-25)

Definition of the Church

The church is a body of people, called in the New Testament Greek the *e...es.a*, meaning the called-out ones. God’s church, is not a building but people – God’s elect, called to be His own and to share eternity with Him.

The Lord Jesus taught about both the universal church (all of God’s people through all time) and the local church (His people joined together in a local setting).

Universal Church – Heavenly, Eternal, Comprehensive

He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon, Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.” (Matthew 16:17-19)

The universal church is a dynamic, victorious body of believers. Peter's confession of Christ is the "rock" the church is built upon. Christ Himself will lead His Church to victory.

Local Church – Local, Earthly, Definable

"And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer. ... For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst." (Matthew 18:15-20)

God has a significant plan and purpose for the local church and every believer is expected to be a functioning member of one. The believers who confess allegiance to the universal church but will not commit to a local church, do not walk in biblical obedience. Finding a local church and being "plugged in" is essential.

False Believers in the Midst

In the parable of the wheat and tares (Matthew 13:24-30), Jesus depicts how the enemy puts the unrighteous right amid God's own people. Ultimately God is the judge of those who are truly His own. We can speak of the "visible" church and the "invisible" church:

Many churchgoers are not really part of God's people (Matthew 7:21-23). – "They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed" (Titus 1:16).

Some will enter the church as believers, but later act contrary to the gospel. Paul describes these as having "shipwrecked their faith" (1 Timothy 1:19). Members who fall into sin and do not repent may be subject to church discipline. Jesus told us that an offender who rejects one-on-one admonitions, and then a formal, witnessed confrontation, must be removed from the local church (Matthew 18:15-17)

Excommunication, this rare procedure of excluding someone, is a last resort. Paul speaks of some who should not be included in the fellowship of believers:

"But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler – not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves." (1 Corinthians 5:11-13)

Once this special judgment is administered, the church can remain pure (1 Corinthians 5:7) and the excommunicated one is often restored (2 Thessalonians 3:14).

Review:

1. What is the “Church”?
2. Name the two forms of the Church.
3. Does our membership in the universal church require us to participate in the local church?
4. Does one’s membership in the church assure salvation?
5. How did Jesus teach us to deal with a fellow church member who has fallen into some particular sin?