

What is the Church?

Four Aspects

The church, according to the scriptures, is not a building or meeting place, but rather the people themselves who gather together. The word "church" doesn't literally mean anything to us today. The greek word translated "church" literally means "assembly." The church, being all of God's people, is also called Christ's body, of which He is the Head. The church is also called God's house, and the bride of Christ.

Local gatherings of believers were called the church or assembly of God at that location, i.e., the church of God at Corinth (I Cor. 1:2), since they represented the church at that location.

Nowhere in scripture does the word church or assembly refer to the building or meeting place. The early church met from house to house (Acts 2:46, 5:42, 12:12, 18:7, Rom. 16:5, I Cor. 16:19, Col. 4:15, Phile. 1:2) or in synagogues (Acts 5:42, Jas. 2:2), wherever they could. In the scriptures, the important thing about the church is who was there (God Himself and His people), not where they were or in what building.

Every born again believer is baptised into the church, not by water, but by the Spirit of God (I Cor. 12:13). When we trust in Christ for the first time, putting our faith in Him for our salvation, we are sealed by the Spirit of God and become a part of the church (Eph. 1:13). If we have not trusted in Christ alone for our salvation, and do not have the Spirit of God, we are not of Christ and are not part of His church, no matter what organization we may be a member of called a "church."

As stated above, the church is spoken of in four different ways in the scripture: as the assembly (church), God's house, the body of Christ, and the bride of Christ. Let us look at the church in these four characters and see what they bring to our hearts and minds.

The Assembly

First, the church is called God's assembly. As stated above, "Assembly" is the literal translation of the greek word translated "church" in many bible versions such as the King James. The word assembly is more meaningful to us, and brings to our thoughts the idea that the saints are gathered together as one. God's purpose in the death of Christ was to gather into one all the children of God that were scattered abroad (John 10:15-16, 11:51-52, 17:20-23). God wants His people to gather together frequently for worship (I Cor. 11), prayer (Matt. 18:19-20) and ministry (I Cor. 14). Hebrews tells us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together (Heb. 10:25). The scripture gives special directions and authority to the saints when gathered together as the assembly (Matt. 18:17-20, I Cor. 5, 11-14). The Lord is in our midst in a special way when we gather together in assembly- it is our priviledge to have Him there (Matt. 18:20).

God's House

One of the characteristics of God's house is that it is literally where He dwells. Originally, in the Old Testament, God's house was the temple building in Jerusalem. In the New Testament, God dwells in His people, corporately as well as individually. Corporately, they are His house, His dwelling place (corporately) by the Spirit (Eph. 2:20-22, I Pet. 2:5). He no longer dwells in a physical building, but in His people. Another characteristic of God's house, connected with the fact that He dwells there, is that it is

holy (Ps. 93:5). Think about your own house. Your house has a certain character, according to the character of its inhabitants, and especially according to the character of the head of the house. All who enter conform to that character or are conspicuously out of place and create an uncomfortable situation. The same is true of God's house. Paul wrote to Timothy so "that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." Let us be mindful of Whose house we are in.

The Body of Christ

The church is spoken of as the body of Christ, and Christ is its Head in heaven. In our natural bodies, assuming all is well, all directions come from the head, and the body is the expression of the thoughts and directions of the head. So it should be in the body of Christ (I Eph. 1:22-23, 4:15-16, 5:23-32, Col. 1:18, 2:19). Further, our natural bodies have many different appendages and organs which all work together to make the whole. The church referred to as the body of Christ also brings to our minds the thought that Christ's body also has many members, many parts, which all work together to form the one whole which represents Christ here corporately. Each member has its own function, just like our natural bodies have many parts which each have their own function (I Cor. 12). There is only one body, and we should endeavor to keep the unity that the Spirit brings to it (Eph. 4:3-4). The presentation of the church as the body of Christ should bring to our minds our dependence upon each other and need for each other. It should also remind us of our dependence on the Lord, the Head of the body, for guidance and direction. We are the living expression of His mind on this earth.

The Bride of Christ

The church is called the bride of Christ. Everyone has seen or felt the excitement and joy that a bride has over her bridegroom, and the love of a bridegroom for his bride. A bride and bridegroom can spend hours together talking about anything and everything. This brings to our thoughts the intimate relationship that we have with Christ, the love that He has for us, and the excitement, joy and love that we have for Him. We have the privileged place of being the bride of Christ. He has made us suitable to be His bride by His death on the cross, and continues to beautify us by His word (Eph. 5:25-27). The Old Testament saints were friends of the Bridegroom, but we are His bride (Jn. 3:29). We are to remain pure for Him while in this evil and defiling world, keeping ourselves as a chaste virgin for Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2). We also want to be waiting expectantly for our Bridegroom to return for us from heaven, as well as remaining pure for Him (Rev. 21:2, 9, 22:17).

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