



CHURCH - What and Why?

Imagine this is your FIRST TIME at church...ever. What are some of the questions you might have? For those new to church, these are some real questions that need answers. For those familiar with church - let's be reminded WHY we do WHAT we do...and YOU.

* All Scripture is from the CSB (Christian Stand Bible) unless otherwise noted.

Today answer a 2 foundational questions: 1) **WHAT IS church** and 2) **WHY is it so important?**

The **word we have translated as 'church'** comes from the Greek word *ekklesia* and refers to any assembly or gathering of people - for both secular & sacred purposes.

- The Greek word *ekklesia* is used 114 times in the New Testament, of which only 3 refer to secular assemblies.¹ (Acts 19:32, 38, 41). The other 111 times are sacred assemblies of God's people.
- '*Ekklesia*' is also a New Testament term **used of God's people in the Old Testament** (Acts 7:38 translates *ekklesia* as "assembly" or "congregation").
- The **Septuagint** (Greek translation of the Old Testament) often refers to God's people (e.g. Dt. 9:10). *Ekklesia*, now translated as "church" had been **used to refer to God's people** for over 200 years before the time of Jesus.
- All 114 times *ekklesia* (church or assembly) is used in the New Testament, it ALWAYS refers to a **gathering of people**, NOT a religious gathering place.

WHAT is Church or *ekklesia*?

Church is PEOPLE NOT a PLACE.

Matthew translates Jesus (who was speaking Aramaic) into Greek:

Matthew 16:18 ¹⁸...I will build **my church**... [*ekklesia*]

Jesus never once built a structure called a "Church". Jesus wasn't talking about building a PLACE. He was talking about building a PEOPLE! This could be translated..."I will build *my assembly...my people*." Yet somehow, over time, a shift occurred, where many Christians began to focus on building the Place instead of the People. I am reminded of a song from **Acappella Vocal Band** many years ago:

*You can't go to church as some people say
The common terminology we use everyday
You can go to a building, that is something you can do
But you can't go to church 'cause the church is you*

🕒 "We ARE the church."

* "Church" is NOT the best translation for *ekklesia*. In fact, our English word *CHURCH* comes from the German *kirche*, which comes from a different Greek word - *kyriakon*, '[thing] belonging to the Lord' (e.g. "the Lord's Supper" - 1 Cor. 11:20), which was later applied to a church building.² Since early English translators used "church" instead of *assembly*, this stuck. However, in the New Testament, the Greek word *ekklesia* NEVER applies to a place, but to a group of people.

The first followers of Jesus were a community of Jewish people, an assembly/congregation who NEVER referred to a place as 'Church'. **They WERE the church** - the assembly belonging to Jesus! **Acts 2:46** says **the church** [*ekklesia*] met together in the Jewish temple courts and in each others' homes daily.

Romans 16:3-5 Greet also **the church** [*ekklesia*] that meets in their home...[speaking of married couple - Aquila and Priscilla]

Church is PEOPLE NOT a PLACE.

¹ Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), 398.

² F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 346.

WHY is Church Important?

Many of the early believers knew Jesus personally. They heard Him teach & watched Him heal. Everyone knew of His crucifixion. But it was what happened AFTER THAT which caused them to follow Jesus in good times and in bad times: Jesus rose from the dead, and many of them saw Him with their own eyes!

▶ **Jesus' crucifixion made them CLEAN.**

▶ **His resurrection made them COURAGEOUS.**

Many believers faced tremendous persecution from enemies & even their own families. But ***their common bond in Christ left no room for excuses for ditching Church...and I don't think they would appreciate ours...***

I know I'm not consistently involved with Church, but...

- I can worship God at home...or in a tree stand... in stadium stands...or at the mall.
- We're just so busy, after all, this is my only day off.
- The church just doesn't meet all MY needs.

Instead the first-century church saw the assembly of believers to be so important that they met frequently, even daily, for 2 primary purposes - the same 2 purposes we must make a priority. ***The Church gathers to...***

BIG TRUTH Celebrate God's Presence & Motivate God's People

Hebrews 10:19-25 (NLT) ¹⁹ And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. ²⁰ By his death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place. ²¹ And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's house [He is alive!], ²² **let us go right into the presence of God** with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. ²⁴ Let us think of ways to **motivate one another to acts of love and good works.** ²⁵ And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but **encourage one another**, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

These Jewish believers were going through persecution. It COST them something to follow Jesus & meet with other believers, as their culture called them back to their old way of living. ***For them, CHURCH was not an event - CHURCH was an investment.*** They met together to...***celebrate God's Presence & motivate God's people.***

How do we motivate one another? We do life together! We listen, counsel, correct, forgive, restore, laugh, cry, we pray, & cheer each other on! Together, we take the message of Jesus to our dying culture.

Church is not an event, but an investment - not a place, but a people...people we love, people we celebrate & grow with, people who serve together to carry the message of Jesus with our dying culture.

Is your church a PRIORITY in your life? Do you 'do life' with other believers during the week OR just during this hour?

BIG TRUTH Celebrate God's Presence & Motivate God's People

Is that why YOU are here today...or is something missing?

- ▶ Have you TURNED from your sins & TRUSTED Jesus with your life?
- ▶ Are you passionate to know & obey Him?
- ▶ Do you desire to be with His people?
- ▶ Are you concerned about the souls of others?

➡ **Turn from sin and trust Jesus with your life,**

➡ **Plug into a Bible Study or Small Group.** Sunday mornings @ 10am, Wed. evenings @ 6:30pm, or Small Groups meeting in homes.

* **Want to talk further?** Please contact **Jackie** (850-673-1582), **Justin** (704-618-6144), **Christy** (673-9764), or another follower of Jesus soon! Or call our **deacons & wives:** Tom & Martha Waddail, Steve & Debbie Bass, Freddy & Joyce Howard, Jere & Darlene Burnette, Alan & Christy Androski, Willy & Melissa Gamalero.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How long have you been involved in a church?
2. Is it hard or easy for you to imagine what it would be like to meet with a church for *the very first time...ever*? Explain your answer.
3. If this were your first time meeting with a church, what are some questions you might have? What might a long time church attendee take for granted, or never consider *WHY* do we do *WHAT* we do?
4. Biblically speaking, *WHAT is CHURCH?* How is this different or similar to what you have been taught in the past?
5. What does the Greek word often translated 'church' - *ekklesia* - mean and why is that important? (*Remember, *ekklesia* is used 114 times in the NT, with all but 3 referring to people gathering for sacred purposes, NEVER referring to a place)
6. **Read Romans 16:5.** WHO was meeting in this home? What are advantages & disadvantages to having the church (*ekklesia*) meet in a home? Why are smaller groups valuable?
7. **WHY the Church:** What was today's **BIG TRUTH** where is this seen in **Hebrews 10:19-25**?
8. How can we, as a church and as a small group, more sincerely celebrate God's presence & motivate God's people?
9. What is the difference between *COMING* to church versus *BECOMING* the church?
10. What most challenged or surprised you from today's teaching? What do you need to do to apply God's Word to your life this week?