

Ecclesiology - The Doctrine of the Church (Part 1)

What is the Nature of the Church?

Jesus promised to build **his church** and gave brief instructions regarding the church.

- “And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.’” - Matthew 16:17-18
- “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” - Matthew 18:15-17

The **universal church** consists of all believers—across time and space—united in Christ.

- “And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.” - Eph. 1:22-23

The **local church** consists of believers in an area who gather together to glorify God.

- “When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” - Acts 14:21-23

The local church is the church in that area.

- “To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours” - 1 Cor. 1:2
- “We should note that the individual congregation, or group of believers in a specific place, is never regarded as only a part or component of the whole church. The church is not a sum or composite of the individual local groups. Instead, the whole is found in each place.” - Millard Erickson
- “A local church is a group of Christians who regularly gather in Christ’s name to officially affirm and oversee one another’s membership in Jesus Christ and his kingdom through gospel preaching and gospel ordinances.” - Jonathan Leeman

Metaphors for the Church in the New Testament

- The church is made up of many different members that comprise the one **body of Christ**.
 - “For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.” - Rom. 12:4-5
 - “Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.” - 1 Cor. 12:12
 - “Equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” - Eph. 4:12
- The church is the **bride of Christ**.
 - “‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.” - Eph. 5:31-32
 - “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.” - Rev. 21:9
- The church is the **family of God**.
 - “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” -Eph. 2:19
 - “I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.” - 2 Cor. 6:18
- The church is the **temple of God**.
 - “Do you not know that you [plural] are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.” - 1 Cor. 3:16-17
 - “You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” - 1 Pet. 2:5

“Give yourself to the Church. You that are members of the Church have not found it perfect and I hope that you feel almost glad that you have not. If I had never joined a Church till I had found one that was perfect, I would never have joined one at all! And the moment I did join it, if I had found one, I should have spoiled it, for it would not have been a perfect Church after I had become a member of it. Still, imperfect as it is, it is the dearest place on earth to us... All who have first given themselves to the Lord, should, as speedily as possible, also give themselves to the Lord’s people. How else is there to be a Church on the earth? If it is right for anyone to refrain from membership in the Church, it is right for everyone, and then the testimony for God would be lost to the world!” - Charles Spurgeon