

TOO HOT TO HANDLE

1 What Is The Church?

Scripture Reading

1 Corinthians 12:12 – 27

The reason for starting with the question, “What is the church?” is that I want you to see the nature and strength of the bond that joins us, because I think when you do, it will affect the way you view one another, how you relate and how you react when differences do arise. To see the nature of that bond you have to have an understanding of what the church is

A Gathering Of People

A church is a gathering of people; an assembly — that is what the word means. In that sense a crowd gathered to watch a football match is a church, but of course when the New Testament uses the word and when Christians use the word it carries much more meaning than that.

Believers

When the word church is used in the New Testament it always refers to believers: people who have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ

Matthew 16:18
1 Corinthians 1:2

The Christians Living In One Place

Sometimes the word is used in relation to the believers living in a particular place. The seven churches of Asia Minor, for example.

1 Corinthians 1:2
1 Thessalonians 1:1

Christians Who Assemble Together

And at least one time the word is used of believers assembling together in a particular home

1 Corinthians 16:19

Never the less it is clear that there is one church. These are not separate churches but manifestations of the same church in different places.

A Gathering Of People Who Belong To God

The church is also described as the church of God

1 Corinthians 1:2
1 Corinthians 10:32

Therefore it is a gathering of believers which is set apart from other gatherings because it belongs to God.

A Gathering Of People Ruled By The Lord Jesus — The Body Of Christ

The church is also referred to as the church of Christ. It belongs to Him and it is described as being His body

Romans 16:16
1 Corinthians 12:12 – 27
Romans 12:4 – 5

Ephesians 1:22
Ephesians 4:12

That idea emphasises the oneness of the church but also that this gathering of believers which belongs to God is the concrete expression of the Lord's presence in the world and is ruled by The Lord Jesus, who is its head

Brainstorm: What are the implications of that?

One implication that may not be so obvious is that the church is not something that just exists when people are meeting. There is what is sometimes referred to as organic unity. Members are linked to Christ and linked to one another: interrelated and interdependent.

It was part of Hebrew thinking in relation to the nation of Israel that the individual does not have a real existence apart from the whole people and it seems that the same idea is carried over into the New testament church

1 Corinthians 10:16 – 17
Galatians 3:27 – 28

The Temple of God

Another picture which sheds light of what the church is is that of the Temple of God. The temple was the place where God dwelt and the church is a community in which the Spirit of God dwells.

1 Corinthians 3:9, 16 – 17
Ephesians 2:20 – 22

The church is a temple that is being built as individuals are added and, here's the point, God watches over it jealously.

A Spiritual Community

Further, the church is a community through which the Holy Spirit operates and which depends on the Holy Spirit for its existence and to be effective.

Acts 1:8

The Bride of Christ

Lastly, for now, the church is described as a bride being prepared for her wedding : developing, becoming more beautiful, more holy

2 Corinthians 11:2
Ephesians 5:22 –31
Revelation 19: 7 – 8
Revelation 21:2 – 14

Let's Pull This Together

God is calling people but He is not just calling individuals, He is building a community which belongs to Him. A community of people individually and collectively ruled by Christ. A community which represents Christ in the world A community in which God dwells and which He watches over jealously. A community which is energised and directed by the Holy Spirit. A growing community. A community which looks forward to perfection as the bride of Christ.

1 Peter 2:9

Now Think!

What are the implications of what you have learned about the church?