

What Is the Church?



“The highest expression of the will of God in this age is the church which He purchased with his own blood.”

A.W. TOZER

REFLECTION and PREPARATION

- Tozer’s thoughts spring from Acts 20:28, Ephesians 1:7, Titus 2:14, 1 Peter 1:18-19, and Revelation 5:9. Ponder for a moment this heart transforming truth:

God the Son obtained, by purchase, His church—the whole church and each member of it—by giving Himself as a sacrifice in their stead (suffering their penalty) and thus, believers are called His purchased possession and inheritance. The church, bought at such at cost, is worthy of all care. (*Cf. Eph.1:18; Heb.7:25; 10:39; 1 Thess.5:9; 2 Thess.2:14; 1 Cor.6:20*)

LESSON AIM:

- To define what the church is, its distinguishing marks, and its unique purpose in God’s plan.

DISCUSSION: Are the following statements true or false? (circle one)

- Eve is a type of the church. T F
- You can be a Christian without the church. T F
- One of the evidences of a true church is the presence of the Bible. T F

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

Let's answer this question with a comprehensive, theologically anchored, text-supported definition of the church, then we will work out the meaning and applications of it throughout this study guide.

"The church is defined as the people of God who have been saved through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and have been incorporated into His body through baptism with the Holy Spirit...the church consists of two interrelated elements, the universal church (*stretching from the inception of the church at Pentecost to the Second Coming—incorporating deceased believers now in the presence the Lord and living believers scattered throughout the world*) and local churches manifested through Christians associating themselves with one another and (*characterized by*) by seven attributes:

- 1) **Doxological** (*oriented to the glory of God*),
- 2) **Logocentric** (*centered on the incarnate Word of God Jesus Christ, the inspired Word of God—Holy Scripture*),
- 3) **[Spirit-dependent]** (*created, gathered, gifted, and empowered by the Holy Spirit*),
- 4) **Covenantal** (*gathered as members in new covenant relationship with God and with each other*),
- 5) **Confessional** (*united by personal confession of faith in Christ and common confession of the Christian faith*),
- 6) **Missional** (*identified as the body of divinely called and divinely sent ministers to proclaim the Gospel and advance the kingdom of God*), and
- 7) **[Transitional]-temporal** (*assembled in time and space with an "already—not yet" reality*)...led by qualified and publicly recognized pastors/elders...served by qualified and publicly recognized deacons...exercises church discipline...and discipling of their members through education and sharing in community life, caring for people through prayer and giving...and celebrating the two ordinances of their covenantal relationship with God through Christ...of baptism and the Lord's Supper."³

Wow! Here is what you should take away from this comprehensive definition:

- From the nature of the church flows the function of the church. (Tease this thought out...think about *what something is by nature* and *what it does as a result*).

Definitions are important in the Christian faith. What is God? Who is Christ? What is sin? What is salvation? What is the church? One of Satan's most effective and deceptive strategies is to redefine or distort the truth of God's Word. So, let's take a few minutes and clarify the meaning of these seven effective characteristics of the church which encapsulate a biblical view of the church.

- A. **The church is doxological.** Read Eph.1:7-12; 3:14-21. Who is qualified for this doxological purpose? (*Cf. John 3:5-6; 4:23-24*)

- B. **The church is logocentric.** Read John 1:1-3, 14-18; 2 Tim.3:15-17. What two metaphors emphasize the centrality of Jesus Christ to the church? (*Cf. Eph.2:20-22; 1 Pet.2:4-6; Eph.1:20-23; Col.1:15-20; 2:9-10*)

³ Gregg R. Allison, *Foundation of Evangelical Theology, Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, p.31-32

- C. **The church is Spirit-dependent.** Read John 16:8-11; Eph.1:13-14; Tit.3:5-6; 1 Cor.12:13; Rom.8:4-8; 23; Gal.5:16-23.

John Webster writes: "This rooting of the doctrine of the church in the doctrine of the Spirit has one crucial effect...it ensures that the economy of salvation is a divine work...the church is what it is because in the Holy Spirit God has completed the circle of His electing and reconciling work and consummated His purpose of gathering the church to Himself."⁴

- D. **The church is covenantal.** Read Acts 2:42-47; Eph.4:1-6. What are we to share in according to these verses?
- E. **The church is confessional.** Read Rom.10:9-10, 14-17; 1 Tim.3:16. To be confessional means that *we are united both by a personal confession of faith in Christ and a common confession of the historic body of doctrines* which comprise the Christian faith (*The Deity of Christ, Salvation by Grace, The Bodily Resurrection, The Inspiration of Scripture, The Second Coming of Christ, The Trinity*).
- F. **The church is missional.** Read John 20:21-23. Jesus' exhalation and command are best understood as a kind of *enacted parable* pointing forward to the full endowment still to come. It forecasts the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to launch the church's mission (*Acts 1:5-8; Luke 24:47-49; Matt.28:18-20; 2 Cor.5:18-21*).
- G. **The church is transitional/temporal.** Read 1 Cor.1:2; John 4:23-24. The church has two residents: here and in heaven. Two citizenships (*Phil.1:1; 3:20*). We do not have to be in a place to engage in true worship, but genuine worship must take place somewhere (*Acts 2:46; 3:11; 1 Cor.16:19; Acts 20:8; Heb.10:24-25*).

Application:

- In what way should these characteristics affect your *daily life, schedule, resources, or priorities*?

Close in prayer thanking God for making you part of His forever family in Christ.

⁴ John Webster, *On Evangelical Ecclesiology*, p.26



HART-TO-HEART

Jody Hart, *Editor and Director Mountaintop Resources*

Define the Terms

"We are the true church
Of the living God"
Is what the sign outside read.

Who are "we"?
What is "true"?

Define the terms. Define the terms.

The shirt on his back
Read, "believe" on a cross
The front with a passage address.

Is he part of the church?
Believe what? We must ask.

Define the terms. Define the terms.

Don't claim the name "church"
Unless you are clear
Of all that title entails.

For the glory of God,
Centered on the Son of God
Are just two features in her sails.

Spirit led and empowered,
A people united,
Called from all walks of life to her King.

Proclaiming His Gospel,
Producing disciples,
Under orderly leadership therein.

So, you can say you're the church, but
Do the Scriptures concur?
Only then can her people affirm.

Is Christ the head?
Is her function Spirit-led?
Please...define the terms.

ANSWER KEY:

DISCUSSION

- False
- False
- False

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

- A. All the saints (believers in Christ)
- B. Cornerstone of a building and the head of a body
- D. Community and doctrinal unity

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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible: 1960, 1962, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1975, 1977, 1995 by the Lockman Foundation.