

26 QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD BE ASKING!

QUESTION # 20: WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

Q. What is the church?

A. The church is the community of all true believers for all time.

Text: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Eph 5:25).

1. THE CHURCH IS GOD'S ASSEMBLY: THE CHURCH ABOVE AND THE CHURCH BELOW

The Greek word for church (*ekklesia*) literally means "assembly" or "people who had come together."

A. ASSEMBLY (CHURCH) IN THE OT

Ekklesia (or its verb form) is used to describe non-religious and religious gatherings ("I hate the assembly of evildoers" – Ps. 26:5; and "Assemble the people before me to hear my words" – Deut 4:10)

To be a member of the people of God was to stand with the great assembly before the Lord. It was a privilege . . . however, Israel did fail, but the prophets proclaimed a new and great assembly of the people of God. (Kirk Wellum)

B. CHURCH (ASSEMBLY) IN THE NT

- The idea of "church" (assembling to hear the Word) is continued in the NT
- Most often refers to a local assembly of Christians (1 Thes 1:1; Gal 1:2).
- Also refers to the heavenly eschatological gathering (Eph 5:23-24, 27)

Heb 12 ²² But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering,²³ and to the church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, ("church" has been supplied for assembly)*

"Local churches should see themselves as the outcropping of heaven . . . colonies of the New Jerusalem providing on earth a corporate and visible expression of the glorious freedom of God." (D.A. Carson)

C. IMPLICATIONS FOR US

- Church is for believers (WORSHIP in TRUTH; Jn 4:24; 1 Tim 3:24).
- There is only one church (UNITY; Jn 10:16; 17:21, 23).
- The church exists on earth in anticipation of what is to come (PILGRIM SPIRIT; Phil 3:20).
- The authentic gathering of the church is a foretaste of the life to come (DELIGHT; Rev 4-5).

2. MARKS OF THE CHURCH

There are true and false churches. The Reformers argued that there are three things that mark a true church: 1) Right preaching of the Word (Gal 1:6-9); 2) Right administration of the ordinances (Mt 28:18-20; 26:26-29; Lk 22:14-23; and 1 Cor 11); and 3) Church discipline (Mt 18:15-20; 1 Tim 5:20; 2 Tim 4:2). Acts 2:42 is a good model.

3. METAPHORS FOR THE CHURCH

Some metaphors used to describe the church are the following: the family of God (Mt 12:49-50), the bride of Christ (Eph 5:32), a field of crops (1 Cor 3:6-9), God's temple (1 Pet 2:5); God's house (Heb 3:6), the pillar and buttress of truth (1 Tim 3:15), the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:16-17), the new humanity (Eph 2:11-22) and **the New Covenant community as empowered by the Spirit** (Heb 9:15; 10:14-22; Acts 2:14-41; Jer 33:31-33 and Ez 36-37).

A. A BRIEF SURVEY OF THE COVENANTS

(1) Edenic Covt (Gen 2-3) → (2) Noahic Covt (Gen 8-9) → (3) Abrahamic Covt (Gen 12,15,17,22) → (4) Mosaic Covt (Deut 6-11) → (5) Davidic Covt (2 Sam 7) → (6) New Covt (Ez. 36-37; Jer 31:27-34; Joel 2:28-32; Isa 40-66)

B. OT COMMUNITY = A MIXED CHURCH VS. NT COMMUNITY = A BELIEVER'S CHURCH

The New Covenant is not tribal; nor is it racial (with Israel). The New Covenant Community is a believer's church.

Jer 31³³ But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel... I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD . . .

C. THE NEW COVENANT COMMUNITY AS EMPOWERED BY THE SPIRIT (FREEDOM)

Jesus ushers in the New Covenant. Upon his exaltation, He sends the promised Spirit (Acts 2; Joel 2:28-32).

Luke 22²⁰ "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

Acts 2³² This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.³³ Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. (Acts 4:8, 31; 5:32; 6:3, 5; 8:15...)

2Cor 3⁶ (God) has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (Heb 8, 9, 10; Jer 31:27-34; Ez 36-37; Joel 2)

4. PURPOSES OF THE CHURCH

A. MINISTRY TO GOD: WORSHIP (DELIGHT)

Eph 1¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

B. MINISTRY TO BELIEVERS (BELOW): NURTURE (TRUTH)

*Eph 4¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. *Also Col 1:28*

C. MINISTRY TO THE WORLD (BELOW): EVANGELISM (HUMILITY)

Matt 28¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . .