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# "The Church of God"

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Eph 5:25b-27 ASV

- (25) *even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it;*  
(26) *that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word,*  
(27) *that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.*
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## The Church



“The church is never a place but always a people; never a fold but always a flock; never a sacred building, but always a believing assembly. The church is we who pray, not where we pray. A structure of bricks or marble can no more be a church than one's clothes of serge or satin can be.

The church is one of the few aspects of Christian theology that can be observed. Karl Barth noted that the one of the several ways in which the church witnesses to Jesus Christ, “is simply by its existence.”

There are concrete evidences that the church exists; the church buildings, both ancient and new. Church structures where maybe a very few people gather, are proof of the church. In the United States the church is to be kept separate from the state. People belong to a church; they go to church on Sabbath or Sunday. We have multiple images of the church, it being a building, a body of believers, as the Newton Church of God (Seventh Day). It may be referred to as a denomination, a group set apart with their dogmas and beliefs, as the Church of God (Seventh Day) or the Baptist, or the Methodists. We need a clear understanding of the church, so we can have a clear understanding of its relationship to Christ and all the other areas that it affects. And its understanding ultimately affects the way we view God and our relationship with Him. Our relationship with God determines how we interact with Christ!



John Macquarrie once said; – “Traditionally, the church was thought of as distinct from the world, as standing over against and intended to transform it. In the most fully developed form of this view, the church is the repository of grace, and the world can receive this grace and be

transformed by it only by being connected to the church and receiving its sacraments. In a more Protestant form, this view holds that the church possesses the gospel, the good news of salvation, and that the world, which is lost and separated from Christ, can be saved or reunited with him only by hearing that gospel, believing, and being justified and regenerated.”

The Church - It's a place to come in from the outside secular world, a place of refuge from the storms of life. It's the one place that we can be free, to worship God without any interference from the world.

Many theologians look to the history of the church to tell them what the church is; and what it has been through the ages.

The word church is derived from the Greek; meaning, “belonging to the Lord.” In a secular sense the word “church” refers simply to a gathering or assembly of persons, a meaning that is still to be found in Acts 19:32, 39, 41.



Paul uses the word church more than any other New Testament writer. Most of his writings were addressed to local gatherings of believers, the church. We find several of Paul's letters;

- Addressed to the “church of God in Corinth” (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1)
- Paul writes to “The churches in Galatia” (Gal 1:2)
- Paul addresses letters to “The church of the Thessalonians” (1 Thess. 1:1)
- Paul visited local churches to appoint elders (Acts 14:23) “*And when they had appointed for them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they had believed.*” (Act 14:23 ASV)
- Paul also traveled to instruct and encourage the church. (Acts 15:41) *and he passed through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the Churches.* (Act 15:41 WNT) (Acts 16:5) *So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily.* (Act 16:5 ASV)



The Bible also refers to meeting of churches in the home, known as house churches. In sending greeting to Priscilla and Aquila, Paul greets the church that meets at their house. (Rom. 16:5) *Greetings, too, to the Church that meets at their house. Greetings to my dear Epaphroditus, who was the earliest convert to Christ in the province of Asia; (Rom 16:5 WNT)* (1 Cor. 16:19) *The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.* (1 Co 16:19 KJV) And then in Paul's letter to the Colossians, Paul writes; *Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house.* (Col 4:15 KJV)

In some instances, a larger geographical area is in view. As an example look at Acts 9:31; *So the church throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being edified; and, walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, was multiplied.* (Act 9:31 ASV)

The Apostle John in Revelations opens the book with an address to the seven churches in Asia. (Revelation 1:4) *John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from him who is and who was and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits that are before his throne;* (Rev 1:4 ASV)

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. Paul Schmidt says, "We have pointed out that the sum of the individual congregations does not produce the total community or the church. Each community, however small, represents the total community, known as the church." One author put it this way, "When Paul addresses the church he is writing to the church as it is manifested or appears in one place. Yet, it is one throughout the whole world and yet is at the same time fully present in every individual assembly." (Coenen)

The concept that the church is universal in nature, which enables us to understand certain New Testament passages more clearly. For example, Jesus'

statement in Matthew 16:18, *“And I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. (Mat 16:18 ASV)* “This makes good sense in the light of this concept.”

Its Christ’s church that will be built and it will consist of a whole. In Ephesians,



Paul particularly emphasizes the universal nature of the church. *“and he put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.” (Eph 1:22-23 ASV)*

The church makes known the wisdom of God; *to the intent that now unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God, (Eph 3:10 ASV)* And God will be glorified; *unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever. Amen. (Eph 3:21 ASV)*

There is only one true body; *There is one body, and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all. But unto each one of us was the grace given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. (Eph 4:4-7 ASV)* Christ is also the head of the church as well as the Savior of the church and the church is subject to Christ, *For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, being himself the saviour of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives also be to their husbands in everything. (Eph 5:23-24 ASV)* Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her; *Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it; (Eph 5:25 ASV)* *A great mystery is the church and Christ; This mystery is great: but I speak in regard of Christ and of the church. (Eph 5:32 ASV)* All of these verses point to the universal nature of the church as does several other verses in Scripture.

Obviously the church includes all persons anywhere in the world who are savingly related to Christ. It also includes all who have lived and been part of his

body, and all who will live and be part of His body. While the church is universal in nature, it finds expression in local groupings of believers that display the same qualities as does the body of Christ as a whole.

We next need to inquire regarding the qualities or characteristics that are present in the true church. I want to go over three of them with you today; 1- The people of God, 2- The body of Christ, and 3- The temple of the Holy Spirit.

### **1. ~The People of God~**

The church is constituted of God's people. They belong to him and he belongs to them. In 2 Cor. 6:16, Paul wrote of God's decision to make believers his people: *And what agreement hath a temple of God with idols? for we are a temple of the living God; even as God said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.* (2 Co 6:16 ASV)



In the Old Testament, God did not adopt, as his own, an existing nation, but actually created a people for himself. He chose Abraham and then, through him, brought into being the people of Israel. In the New Testament, this concept of God choosing a people is broadened to include both Jews and Gentiles within the church. Paul writes to the Thessalonians: *“But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, for that God chose you from the beginning unto salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto he called you through our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (2 Th 2:13-14 ASV)

Among the Old Testament texts in which Israel is identified as God's people is in Exodus 15:13, 16. We pick up the story where Moses is singing to the Lord after the crossing of the Red Sea. Moses notes that God stretched out His right hand and the earth swallowed them. (Exo 15:12) And then Moses said; *Thou in thy lovingkindness hast led the people that thou hast redeemed: Thou hast guided them in thy strength to thy holy habitation.* (Exo 15:13 ASV) *Terror and dread falleth upon them; By the greatness of thine arm they are as still as a*

*stone; Till thy people pass over, O Jehovah, Till the people pass over that thou hast purchased. (Exo 15:16 ASV)*



God takes pride in His people and He keeps them “as the apple of His eye.” (Deut 32:10) A particular quality of holiness is expected of the people of God. God had always expected Israel to be pure or sanctified. As Christ’s bride, the church must also be holy, let us look at Ephesians 5:25-27; *Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it; that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. (Eph 5:25-27 ASV)*

## **2. ~The Body of Christ~**

The church is Christ’s body and is used both of the church universal and of individual local congregations. Ephesians 1:22-23 illustrates the church universal; *And He put all things in subjection 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 NASB)* Paul’s letter to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 12:27 illustrate the individual local congregation: *Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. (1 Co 12:27 ESV)*

Christ is the head of this body, Colossians 1:18 says; *And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. (Col 1:18 ESV)* And I’m just throwing in Colossians 1:17 because I love this verse, there is so much truth in it; “*And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*” (Col 1:17 ESV) He is the glue that holds it all together, no matter what it is. As we mess things up with our human reasoning, He fixes it back for us.

Believers, united with him, are being nourished through him, the head to which they are connected; *and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments,*

*grows with a growth that is from God.* (Col 2:19 ESV) This image is virtually parallel to Jesus' image of himself as the vine to which believers, as the branches, are connected in John 15:1-11. You may want to look these verses up if you don't remember them. We are to stay connected with God, He is the vine and we are the branches and unless we stay connected we die spiritually.



God rules the church as well as everything else; *For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.* (Col 2:9-10 ESV) For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. Christ is the Lord of the Church as well as the Lord of the Sabbath. *“so that the Son of man is lord even of the sabbath.”* (Mark 2:28 ASV)

In 1 Corinthians 12; Paul develops the concept of the interconnectedness of the body, especially in terms of the gifts of the Spirit. Here he stresses the dependence of each believer upon every other believer. Let us look at these verses; *For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit.* (1 Co 12:12-13 ASV) You may want to read the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of 1 Corinthians to see how all the parts are joined with the body. It tells us that not all gifts are for everyone; this means conversely, that no one person has all the gifts. Each member needs the others, and each is needed by the others.

Each believer encourages and builds up the others is the mutual understanding here. In Ephesians 4:15-16, Paul concludes; *but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint*

*supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. (Eph 4:15-16 NASB)* Members of the body are to bear one another's burden, Galatians 6:2 says; *Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. (Gal 6:2 ASV)* And restore those who are found to be in sin. Now, let us look at the previous verse Galatians 6:1; *Brothers, if a man is taken in any wrongdoing, you who are of the Spirit will put such a one right in a spirit of love; keeping watch on yourself, for fear that you yourself may be tested. (Gal 6:1 BBE)*



Sometimes restoring others that have gone astray, may involve a little tougher measure as Jesus refers to in Matthew 18:17; *"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. (Mat 18:17 NASB)* As Jesus spoke of this possibility of a little firmer action for those that need somewhat of a little stronger hand. Paul also did so in Romans 16:17; *Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. (Rom 16:17 NASB)* We are all to stay tuned into Biblical teachings.

Paul also alludes to these tougher measurements in 1 Corinthians 5:12-13; *For what have I to do with judging them that are without? Do not ye judge them that are within? (1 Co 5:12 ASV) But them that are without God judgeth. Put away the wicked man from among yourselves. (1 Co 5:13 ASV)* In short, don't let the wicked man bring down the church, as far as that goes, don't let the wicked man bring you down.

The body of Christ is to be characterized by genuine fellowship. This does not mean merely a social relationship, but an intimate feeling for and understanding of one another. There are to be encouragement (edification). Paul addresses this in his writings to the Corinthian Church, 1 Corinthians 12:26; *And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. (1 Co 12:26 NASB) We stand or we fall as a group!*



The body of the church is to be a unified body. Members of the church in Corinth were divided as to what religious leader they should follow. Paul wrote about it in 1 Corinthians 3:1-9; *And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men? What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom*



*you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. (1 Co 3:1-9 NASB)*

Social cliques or factions had been formed and were very much in evidence at the gatherings of the church; *But in giving you this charge, I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better but for the worse. For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also factions among you, that they that are approved may be made manifest among you. (1 Co 11:17-19 ASV)* This was not to be, for all believers are baptized by one Spirit into one body, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12; *For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Co 12:12-13 ASV)* On another occasion Paul wrote to the Ephesian Church; *There is one body, and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one*

*faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all. (Eph 4:4-6 ASV)*

As the body of Christ, the church is the extension of his ministry. In Matthew 28:18 all authority in heaven and on earth had been given to him. *And*



*Jesus came to them and spake unto them, saying, **All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth.** (Mat 28:18 ASV) He sent*

his disciples to evangelize, baptize, and teach even to the end of the world. *Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.* (Mat 28:19-20 ASV) In the gospel of John, Jesus told them to carry on his work to an amazing degree; *Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto the Father. (John 14:12 ASV)*

So, the works of Christ is therefore to be done by his body, the church.

### **3. ~The Temple of the Holy Spirit~**

The concept of the church is the picture of the church as the temple of the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts shows where the Spirit brought the church into being at Pentecost, where three thousand were baptized. (Acts 2:41) And in Acts 2:38 Peter said to them, *And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Act 2:38 ASV)* Then in Acts 2:40 Peter continued; *And with many other words he testified, and exhorted them, saying, Save yourselves from this crooked generation. (Act 2:40 ASV)* As we look around and see what the message was then; it hasn't changed much. "Same message, different time." And what is that message? Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus and be saved from this perverse generation!

Paul writes about the Spirit and the body in 1 Corinthians 12:13: *For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether*

*bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Co 12:13 ASV) Paul also writes to the Corinthians; Know ye not that ye are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man destroyeth the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, and such are ye.*

*(1 Co 3:16-17 ASV) Paul later on in 1 Corinthians tells them; Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? (1 Co 6:19 NASB)*

Else where Paul describes believers as; *in whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God in the Spirit.*



*(Eph 2:21-22 ASV) Paul speaks of believers as “a spiritual house,” ye*

*also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Pe 2:5 ASV)*

While dwelling within the church, the Holy Spirit imparts his life to it. There qualities are spoken of as the “fruit of the Spirit. *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control; against such there is no law. (Gal 5:22-23 ASV)* Notice the word in this verse; it says “fruit of the Spirit,” not “fruits.” We are to have all of them, not just one or two, we take them all as a whole. Jesus so indicated in Acts 1:8; *But ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. (Act 1:8 ASV)* Referring to the Holy Spirit, Jesus said in John 16:8; *And he, when he is come, will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: (John 16:8 ASV)* This promise was very soon fulfilled for three thousand persons responded to Peter’s preaching at Pentecost and the Lord added daily to their number of people being saved. (Acts 2:41, 47) The Holy Spirit filled the early Apostles and that was the reason for their success, not anything they did, but the working of the Holy Spirit. For we read it

in Acts 4:31 where it says; *And when they had prayed, the place was shaken wherein they were gathered together; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spake the word of God with boldness.* (Act 4:31 ASV) And then in verse 33, we see the power and what their testimonial preaching was; *And with great power gave the apostles their witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.* (Act 4:33 ASV)

As we can now see, the Spirit, being one, also produces unity within the body. This does not mean uniformity, but an oneness in aim and action. Acts 4:32



describes the early church as being one of heart and mind. *And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them.*

(Act 4:32 NASB)

They viewed their possessions not as “mine” and “yours,” but as “ours.” We conclude that the indwelling Spirit is the means of Jesus’ presence with us. So Paul writes in Romans; *But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you. But if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the spirit is life because of righteousness.* (Rom 8:9-10 ASV) Paul uses interchangeably the ideas of Christ’s being in us and the Spirit’s dwelling in us. The Holy Spirit make the church; ‘holy and pure.’

As we close out this message just remember the three highlights, we are the people of God, we are the body of Christ, and we are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

The People of God; the church is constituted of God’s people and they belong with Him and He belongs to them.

The Body of Christ; the church is Christ’s body and is used both of the church universal and of individual local congregations.

The Temple of the Holy Spirit; the concept of the church is the picture of the church as the temple of the Holy Spirit.

## The Church's One Foundation

Paul calls himself a wise architect because the foundation he laid was not different from the one eternally laid. How foolish an architect would be if he refused to follow the laws of nature and civil engineering which are actually the laws of God. You, too, are unwise if you diverge from the Church's one Foundation, "Jesus Christ, and Him crucified," laid down by God from the beginning.

## The Perfect Church

I think that I shall never see  
A church that's all it ought to be:  
A church whose members never stray  
Beyond the strait and narrow way;  
A church that has no empty pews,  
Whose pastor never has the blues,  
A church whose deacons always deak,  
And none is proud, and all are meek;  
Where gossips never peddle lies,  
Or make complaints or criticize;  
Where all are always sweet and kind,  
And all to others' faults are blind.  
Such perfect churches there may be,  
But none of them are known to me.  
But still, we'll work, and pray, and plan  
To make our own the best we can.

*-Author Unknown*



*I have gotten information for this article from a number of different sources; From God, internet, Bibles, dictionaries, and study materials from several different authors, etc. I do not take full credit for these writings since there are many. I did not in some cases keep up with this information in order to give proper credit. Credits will sometimes be in the above writing. My comments, writings and rewriting of the sources are in this article. I therefore cannot take full credit for this writing. The full credit would have to go to Jesus Christ, the creator of all things.*

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Dewey E. (Obbed) Fox, Bond Servant of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

"This sermon in part was a modified version from the book by Millard J. Erickson, Christian Theology."

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