

# THE CHURCH: A PEOPLE FOR HIS NAME

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SCRIPTURE: Acts 21-4, 41-47; I Corinthians 12:12-31; I Timothy 3: 1-13

**LEARN BY HEART:** *“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit”* (I Corinthians 12:13).

## LESSON OUTLINE

- I. **THE CHURCH:** (Acts 2:1-4; I Corinthians 12:12-31)
  - A. **Its Commencement** - (Acts 2:1-4)
  - B. **Its Character** - (I Corinthians 12:12-31)
- II. **THE CHURCHES:** (Acts 2:41-47; I Timothy 3:1-13)
  - A. **The Membership of the Churches** - (Acts 2:41-47)
  - B. **The Leadership of the Churches** - (I Timothy 3:1-13)

## STUDY PRESENTATION:

**Do we understand what God says about the Church?** We desire to show in this study the nature of the church as the body of Christ; how it is the organism that has its manifestation in local churches in every age, and to give due emphasis to the church's place in God's plan and program.

The doctrine of the church has always been an important teaching to the people who are called Baptists. It is important first because it is a Biblical doctrine, and second because it has important effects in the carrying out of God's commission to evangelize the world.

The word *church* is used by people in many different ways. For example, its most common use is to designate a building where people gather together on the Lord's Day. It may also mean a group of believers who gather for worship, or a denomination, such as the Baptist church, or it may refer to all born again believers regardless of their location. Only the second and the fourth uses are supported by the authority of the Bible.

The word **church** is a translation of the Greek *ekklesia* which is formed by the combination of two words meaning **to call out**. A church, then, is a **called out company**.

**THE CHURCH:** (Acts 2:1-4; I Corinthians 12:12-31)

There are two meanings of the word *church* which have Biblical authority. The one which relates to all Christians who have truly accepted Christ as their Savior will be referred to in this lesson. It might be added at this point that there are two other occurrences of the word *church* in the New Testament which do not concern the doctrine of the church as it is being presented in this study. These are found in Acts 19:32-41 where the word is translated *“assembly,”* and in Acts 7:38 where Israel is

called a church. This latter reference is to be understood in the general sense of the word, meaning a called out group of people.

***The church then is a called out people:*** Called out to be separated unto Christ, separated from the nations, from the Jews and Gentiles. A people for God's own possession. (I Peter 2:9-12) There are three distinct groups of people mentioned in I Corinthians 10:31-32. We are told that we are to bring glory to God in all things and not to give offense to either Jew, Gentile, or the Church of God.

#### **A. Its Commencement:** (Acts 1:1-4)

When did the church begin? This is an extremely important consideration, since it determines to a great extent the definition of the term.

The Biblical teaching is that the church began on the day of Pentecost. Luke outlines this event in Acts 2:1-4. There are a number of reasons which lead one to believe that this is the Scriptural view.

First, the church was not in existence during Old Testament times. According to the Apostle Paul, the church is a ***mystery***. A Biblical mystery is not something difficult or impossible to understand. Rather, it is a truth that was hidden in previous times, but now has been revealed (Romans 16:25,26). Although the church is not specifically called a mystery, the *major elements which go to make up the church are called mysteries* (Ephesians 3:1-12; 5:22-33; I Corinthians 15:51-54). Therefore, it is legitimate to speak of the church as a mystery.

There is no revelation of God in the Old Testament concerning this great organism which Christ said He was going to build. As we look back upon Old Testament times with the completed revelation before us, we can see shadows and illustrations of the church in this part of God's Word. However, the church was not in existence before the time described in Acts 2.

Second, the church did not begin during the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ Himself stated in Matthew 16:18 that the church was yet to be established. The phrase, "***I will build my church,***" is clearly written in the future tense. The Lord made this statement some time after His ministry had begun. In fact some believe that it was made near the end of Christ's earthly ministry.

Third, the church is the body of Christ (Colossians 1:24), and entrance into this body is by means of the baptism of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 12:13). Since this is true, the church could not be in existence until this ministry of the Holy Spirit was operating. (John 7:37-39) This statement leads us to ask the question, when did the baptism of the Holy Spirit begin? Again, the Bible does not leave us in doubt. There is no statement in the Bible that the baptism of the Holy Spirit took place in the Old Testament. All of the references to it in the Gospels are in the future tense, which points to the fact the church was not operating during the ministry of Christ.

When one arrives in his study of this question at Acts 1:5, the Spirit's baptism is still future. However, after reading Acts 11:15,16, it is clear that the baptism of the Spirit had taken place. Peter, referring to the experience of Acts 2, says that at that time he recalled the words which are found in our Bibles in Acts 1:5. The only logical conclusion which can be drawn is that the baptizing ministry of the Spirit began on the day of Pentecost. Since this ministry is absolutely essential to the formation of the

church, only one conclusion can be drawn—the church began on the day of Pentecost.

God fulfills His sovereign and eternal purposes in bringing the blood-bought church into existence. The saved as living stones are placed in its structure. God's work in the growth, development and purposes of the church cannot be destroyed by Satanic opposition or dissipated by the compromise of professing believers. The word "defeat" is not associated with God's purpose to build His Church. Men may fail for lack of resources, or because of personal sin, but God cannot fail. Despite opposition to the church it will rise to its completion. God will succeed in His will. (I Peter 2:1-12)

#### A. Its Character - (I Corinthians 12:12-31)

There are several figures of speech which are used to describe the church. The one which sets forth most completely the nature of the church is the **figure of a body**: One of the important ideas taught by this illustration is the concept that the church is a living organism. A number of characteristics showing the basic nature of the body are to be found in I Corinthians 12.

One of the first characteristics which meets the eye of the student of these verses is the fact of the **unity** of the body. In verses 12-20 the words "one" and "whole" occur twelve times. The human body is a remarkable illustration of coordination. In order to do the simplest of actions, each part of the body needs to cooperate.

All members of the body are *sensitive* to the others. When a person's finger hurts, he usually will say, "I have a pain," although only a part of the body is directly affected. The same principle is true in the body of Christ (verse 26).

The unity of the body declares to us that each member needs the other members. When we criticize another member, we are hurting ourselves. In addition, the unity of the body demands that we *respect* one another. Each one has his part in the proper functioning of the body (verses 21-25).

Another characteristic which is plainly declared by Paul is that there is a **diversity** in the body. Every part does not have the same work to do (verses 14-20). But every job is important. No one member should be jealous and covet the job of another member. It is important to realize that God has given each one his job according to His good pleasure (verse 18).

The body is not restricted to one group of people (verse 13). God has included such diverse groups as Jews and Gentiles. All these elements have been brought together in the body by means of the baptism of the Holy Spirit (verse 13).

Although verse 27 is sometimes used to teach that the local church is the body of Christ, it must be carefully recognized that the original text of this verse does not possess the definite article "the" before the word "body." The fact that the article is absent means that Paul is emphasizing the truth that the Corinthian believers possessed the characteristics of the body because as individual Christians they were members of the body of Christ. If each individual church were the body of Christ, then we would have the unscriptural idea propagated that as many bodies existed as

there were local churches.

Careful study of these verses in I Corinthians 12 will suggest other characteristics of the body of Christ. Among other things further study will bring an understanding of the diversity, spirituality, visibility, and inclusiveness of all members as well as the interdependence of all members.

## II. THE CHURCHES: (Acts 2:41-47; I Timothy 3:1-13)

Sometimes the church is referred to as the invisible church, and the churches as the visible church. This terminology does not accurately portray the teaching of the Word. The body of Christ is made up of very visible people, except for those who have died and gone to be with the Lord during this dispensation. These individual members are then exhorted to band themselves into local churches for the purpose of worship and evangelization. ***Therefore, local churches are simply the manifestation on earth of the body of Christ.***

A fine definition of the local church is found in one of the earliest Baptist confessions of Faith, the New Hampshire Declaration of Faith. In its revised form, it has existed since 1853 as an expression of the faith of the Baptist churches in New Hampshire.

*"We believe that a visible church of Christ is a congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the Gospel, observing the ordinances of Christ; governed by his laws; and exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by his word; that its only proper officers are bishops or pastors, and deacons, whose qualifications, claims, and duties are defined in the Epistles to Timothy and Titus."*

### A. The Membership of the Churches - (Acts 2:41-47)

These verses of Acts 2 describe in some detail the requirements for membership in a local church. Although the word church is not found in this passage, it is clear from the context that this is the only organization which could be in view. (In some of our translations, the word church is found in verse 47, but the most accurate Greek manuscripts omit the phrase "to the church.")

It is clear from verse 41 that these church members were regenerated people. They received the word which was preached to them. One of the great Baptist distinctives is that of a regenerated church membership. After salvation, these believers were Scripturally baptized.

Having been saved, these believer were baptized as an outward witness of their faith in Jesus Christ. Baptism is not to be minimized as some do today nor it is considered optional with the believer. In the Acts it was the custom of the apostles to baptize new converts when they believed. Long periods of time between salvation and baptism do not appear in the New Testament. (See Acts 2:38, 41; 8:36-39; 9:18; 10:48; 16:15, 33; 19:5)

Subsequent to these initial steps being taken, verse 42 states that they followed steadfastly the teaching which was given to them by the apostles. ***They evidently believed in the Bible as the only rule for faith and practice.*** The Lord's Supper was

observed by them as the reference to "*breaking bread*" points out (verse 46). These early church members were a joyful group of people.

On the basis of verse 47, it is logical to assume that the early church was a witnessing church. They found favor with people they contacted, and the position of the last phrase of this verse indicates that many were saved by their testimony. A Scriptural Baptist church ought to possess these characteristics in its membership.

### **B. The Leadership of the Church - (I Timothy 3:1-13)**

It is not the purpose of this section of the lesson to expound all of the qualifications required of the two church officers clearly mentioned in the New Testament. However, they should be read carefully and heeded as godly men are sought to lead our churches.

The first leader of the church mentioned in I Timothy 3 is the **pastor**. The word bishop as used here does not refer to a denominational leader. Literally it means an *overseer, one who watches over others*. Another word is used in the New Testament to describe the office of the pastor and that is the word *elder*. These two titles refer to the same office as is clear from Acts 20:17,28. Practically all of these qualifications required for leading a local church fall into the area of self-control. In this important place of leadership, control of one's life, family, and emotions is imperative.

The second leader mentioned here is the **deacon**. Many of the same qualities expected of a pastor are also expected of the deacon. *The word deacon means a servant or helper*. This is his important function in the work of the church as he assists the pastor in leadership responsibilities.

Some find a third office mentioned in this passage (verse 11). This is the office of deaconess. The word "*wives*" is simply the word *women*. The words "*must their*" are not found in the original text. The women are said to function in a similar way to the deacons. Attention is also called to the reference to Phoebe in Romans 16:1 as a justification for this office. A number of good arguments can be offered for this official position in the church, however, other competent scholars believe that these were simply women helpers and not functioning in an official capacity.

**"The church may tremble on the ROCK but the ROCK (JESUS)  
will never tremble underneath it."**