

The Church of Jesus Christ

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Western societies are often quite individualistic, missing the importance of a corporate entity. Yet groups of people are very important and can function in ways individuals cannot. Here is an illustration: Think about matches. An individual match can easily be broken. However, if ten or twenty matches are bundled together, it is very difficult, if not impossible, for humans to break them. So is the Christian church versus individual believers. Although the church is made up of individuals, it is a kind of organism that surpasses them. It is a group of people who believe in Jesus Christ and are His disciples and followers.

I. Nature and Meaning of the Church

1. Messianic Community

Matt. 16:18; John 10:16	Jesus has founded the church, and it is His community.
Acts 10:41	Through baptism believers are added to the church.
Heb. 10:25	The Bible does not teach that we can be Christians in isolation.
1 Tim. 5:1-2; James 2:15	The church is the family of believers. Church members are brothers and sisters.
Eph. 3:11-13, 19; Gal. 3:28	All barriers are gone. All believers belong to God's household.

2. The Structure of the Church

1 Thess. 1:1, 6-7; Rev. 3:14-17	There are local churches with different characters and problems.
Eph. 1:20-23; 3:10	There is also the universal church.
Col. 1:18; Eph. 2:20	Jesus is the head of the church and her chief corner stone.
Eph. 2:20	Together with Him the apostles and prophets form the foundation.
1 Peter 2:9; Rev. 1:5-6	All believers form a priesthood.
Eph. 4:11-12	There are also leaders.
1 Cor. 12:12-13	The unity of the church is important.

3. Images Depicting the Church

The NT uses many images to describe the church. Some of them are listed here. These images are complimentary and express some of the many facets of the church and her ministry.

1 Cor. 12:12-26	The body of Christ
Eph. 2:21-22	Temple and house
Matt. 5:13-16	Salt and light
1 Tim. 3:15	A pillar
2 Cor. 11:2	The bride of Christ

II. The Church in History

1. Problems of the Church

Paul had already predicted problems for the church (Acts 20:28-30). Internal difficulties include the following:

Rev. 2:4	A lack of love
Rev. 2:6, 14-15, 20-24	False teachers/teachings
Rev. 3:1	Spiritual death
Rev. 3:15-16	Lukewarmness

Rev. 3:17	Self-deception
External challenges are:	
Rev. 2:9	Blasphemy
Rev. 2:9-10; 13:7, 16-17	Tribulation and persecution
Rev. 2:10; 6:9; 13:15	Death and martyrdom

2. Apostasy in the Church

The appearance of false doctrines and their adoption led to apostasy. The church of Christ split into various denominations. Revelation depicts a pure church in the wilderness (Rev. 12) as opposed to an apostate and persecuting church (Rev. 17-18). Time spans given (Rev. 12:6, 12; 13:5) take us to the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century.

3. The End-Time Remnant

In the time of the end (after A.D. 1798) a faithful remnant would occur. Characteristics of this remnant are:

- Keeping God's commandments (Rev. 12:17; 14:12).
- Having the testimony of Jesus (Rev. 12:17; 19:10).
- Patience (Rev. 13:10; 14:12).
- Faith (Rev. 13:10; 14:12).

In addition: (1) They are the property of God and Jesus (Rev. 14:1, 3-4). (2) With them there is no false worship (Rev. 14:4). (3) They are followers of the Lamb (Rev. 14:4). (4) They are truthful and blameless (Rev. 14:5). (5) They proclaim on a worldwide scale the three angels' messages (Rev. 14:6-12). People are called to leave apostasy and join Christ's remnant community (Rev. 18:4).

III. Tasks of the Church

Church members have received spiritual gifts that should be used to benefit the church and others (1 Cor. 12:7-11). The tasks of the church can be grouped into three broad categories:

- Ministry to God:
Worship, following Jesus, prayer, etc. (Rev. 5:8; 14:3-4, 7)
- Ministry to believers:
Nurture, fellowship, support, etc. (John 13:34; Acts 4:34-35; Eph. 4:12-16)
- Ministry to the world:
Evangelism and social concern (Matt. 25:31-40; 28:18-20; Acts 1:8)

IV. The Church and I

We are called to become part of the church, attend church, and get involved in the mission of the church. If we do so, we will be greatly blessed and will become a blessing for others.

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