



# **The Church Jesus Built**



**Studies On The Church  
We Read About In The Bible**

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# The Church Jesus Built

## Why Study The Church?

### INTRODUCTION

1. In **Mt 16:18**, we read where Jesus spoke of His church...
  - a. In which He promises ***“I will build my church”***
  - b. In which not even the “gates of Hades” (i.e., death) shall prevail against it
    - 1) Either by trying to prevent its establishment (death did not prevent Jesus from establishing His church)
    - 2) Or by any means to destroy the church (the death of Christians does not destroy the church)
2. It is not uncommon today to hear people disparage the church...
  - a. I have heard people say in effect, **“Christ, yes; the church, no”**
  - b. While some profess they love Jesus, desiring even to follow Him, they have little use for “the church”
3. This low estimation of the church may be due to several reasons, including...
  - a. A lack of understanding of what the church truly is, as taught in the Bible
  - b. A misconception of the church, perhaps fostered by erroneous views of the church held by many
4. With this lesson, I wish to begin a study of **“The Church Jesus Built”**, in which I hope...
  - a. To increase our understanding and appreciation of the Lord’s church
  - b. To make sure that our concept of the church is in harmony with the Bible

[In this lesson, I would like to emphasize the importance of studying the church. Many reasons can be given, but I will focus on two, the first of which is...]

### I. THE HIGH ESTIMATION OF THE CHURCH IN THE BIBLE

#### **A. ESPECIALLY IN THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS...**

1. **Christ is “head over all things to the church” - Ep 1:22**
  - a. That Christ is head over all things is clear enough, but what is meant by the phrase ***“to the church”***?
  - b. Perhaps that Christ exercises His authority over all things “in the interest” of the church (Hendriksen); i.e., the rule of Christ is for the benefit of His church!  
-- Does this not say something about the Lord’s estimation of His church?
2. **The church “is His body” - Ep 1:23**
  - a. The body of Christ!
  - b. It is His spiritual body, of which He is the head!
3. **The church is “the fullness of Him who fills all in all” - Ep 1:23**
  - a. Christ fills all in all; what fills Him?

- b. The church constitutes His fullness!
  - If one is to be in Christ, by implication he or she must be in the church!
- 4. **The church is part of God's "eternal purpose" - Ep 3:10-11**
  - a. The manifold wisdom of God is made known through the church
  - b. In keeping with God's eternal purpose; i.e., His plan which He had from eternity!
- 5. **To God be "glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages" - Ep 3:21**
  - a. Certainly God is worthy of all glory
  - b. In the church and by Jesus Christ, God will be glorified forever!
- 6. **"Christ is the head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body" - Ep 5:23**
  - a. His authority over the church is again emphasized; also that it is His body
  - b. But here we note that Christ is the Savior, not of all men, but of His body, the church!
    - Again the implication is clear; to be saved, we must be in His body, the church!
- 7. **Christ "loved the church and gave Himself for it" - Ep 5:25**
  - a. Jesus loves His church, even as husband is to love his wife
  - b. His death on the cross had His church in view; He was dying for the church!
- 8. **Jesus' design is to present it as "a glorious church" - Ep 5:26-27**
  - a. He seeks to "sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word"
  - b. He desires for it to not have spot or wrinkle, but to "be holy and without blemish"!
- 9. **Jesus nourishes and cherishes the church - Ep 5:29-30**
  - a. Even as you care for your own body
  - b. So Jesus has the same concern for His body, the church!
    - All because "we are members of His body"!

## **B. OTHER PLACES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT ALSO...**

- 1. The church was purchased with the blood of Christ - **Ac 20:28**
- 2. The church is His body - **Co 1:18,24**
- 3. The church is the family of God, the pillar and ground of the truth - **1 Ti 3:15**

[Whatever the Lord's church is, I want to a part of it, don't you? If you love Jesus, and the church is His church, His body, how can you not love the church? How can you not desire to learn more about the church, its nature, its purpose, its design?

Unfortunately, misdirected if not careless men have sought to change the church from what we see it in the Bible. Such efforts should not go on unnoticed or unanswered. This leads me to my second reason why we need to study the church...]

## **II. EFFORTS TO CHANGE THE CHURCH IN THE BIBLE**

### **A. AS REPRESENTED BY "THE DENOMINATIONAL VIEW"...**

- 1. In seeking to describe the Lord's church today, some suggest that it is **made up of all the different denominations**
  - a. Despite their doctrinal differences, their creedal affirmations
  - b. Despite their competing ecclesiastical authorities, all claiming to be led by the Spirit of God today
- 2. But is this the "glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle"?
  - a. A church with hundreds of differing creeds, names, and doctrines?

- b. Teaching a multitude of contradictory doctrines, adding a plethora of man-made traditions?
  - c. Presenting a divided picture to the world, one that breeds doubt and skepticism in those that see it?
3. Such confusion comes not from God! - **1 Co 14:33**
- a. God is the source of peace in His churches
  - b. Where confusion dwells, Satan is the author! - cf. **Mt 13:24-30; 36-43**
4. When people no longer abide in the doctrine of Christ, they have not God! - **2 Jn 9**
- a. When they stop abiding in Christ Himself, they are cut off - **Jn 15:2,6; cf. Ro 11:22**
  - b. They may believe they are still His disciples, doing things for Him; but unless they continue to do the Father's will, they sadly mistaken! - cf. **Mt 7:21-23**
- **This view of the Lord's church is too "broad"!**

#### **B. AS REPRESENTED BY "THE SECTARIAN VIEW"...**

1. Some understand the Lord's church as **made up of a particular group of churches**
- a. All wearing just one "official" name
  - b. All listed in some church directory
2. This view fails to take into consideration some important principles
- a. There is no one "official" name for the Lord's church
  - b. The Lord's church is a body made of individual members, not individual congregations
  - c. One might be a member of the Lord's body, but not yet associated with a local congregation (e.g., the Ethiopian eunuch)
- **I will have more to say on this, but this view of the Lord's church is too "narrow"!**

#### **CONCLUSION**

1. Again, we are talking about "**The Church Jesus Built**"...
- a. One that is highly esteemed in the Scriptures
  - b. One that should be highly esteemed in our own hearts!
2. It is easy to be influenced by erroneous views which permeate the religious world...
- a. Perhaps your view of the church has been a **denominational** one
  - b. Perhaps your view of the church has been a **sectarian** one
3. I hope that in this lesson I have...
- a. Reminded you of the great estimation the Lord has placed on His church
  - b. Stimulated you to consider whether your understanding of the church may need some major overhauling or fine-tuning!

In any case, "**The Church Jesus Built**" is always worthy of our prayerful consideration!

# The Church Jesus Built

## What Is The Church?

### INTRODUCTION

1. In our first lesson, we began looking at “**The Church Jesus Built**” - cf. **Mt 16:18**
2. We surveyed why the church is a subject worthy of careful study...
  - a. Because of the high estimation of it in the Scriptures; e.g.:
    - 1) The church is the body of Christ - **Ep 1:23**
    - 2) The church is “the fullness of Him who fills all in all” - **Ep 1:23**
    - 3) The church is part of God’s “eternal purpose” - **Ep 3:10-11**
    - 4) Christ “loved the church and gave Himself for it” - **Ep 5:25**
    - 5) Jesus’ design is to present it as “a glorious church” - **Ep 5:26-27**
    - 6) He nourishes and cherishes the church - **Ep 5:29-30**
  - b. Because of efforts by men to redefine the church in the Bible; e.g.:
    - 1) As represented by the **denominational** view
    - 2) As represented by the **sectarian** view
3. But what exactly is the church...?
  - a. What is this “church” Jesus said He would build?
  - b. What is this “church” that Jesus loves, nourishes, and cherishes?
  - c. What is this “church” that some have sought to redefine?-- **For if we desire to be in “The Church Jesus Built”, we should know exactly what it is, shouldn’t we?**

[Perhaps a good place to start is by defining the word “**church**” itself...]

### I. THE “CHURCH” DEFINED

#### **A. THE GREEK WORD IS “EKKLESIA”...**

1. Many have noted that this word is a combination of two words: **ek** (out of) and **kaleo** (to call)
  - a. Concluding that the primary idea is that of being “called out”
  - b. That Christians were called the “ekklesia” because they were “called out”
    - 1) Now it is true that Christians have been called out - cf. **1 Pe 2:9**
    - 2) But the use of “ekklesia” in the New Testament does not stress the “called out” nature of the church!
  - c. This is a common mistake of defining a word by its etymology rather than by its actual usage in its historical context
2. The word “church” as defined by **Easton’s Bible Dictionary**: “In the New Testament it is the translation of the Greek word ‘ecclesia’, which is synonymous with the Hebrew ‘kahal’ of the Old Testament, both words meaning simply an assembly.”
3. Notice **Thayer’s** definition: “a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some

- public place, an assembly”
- a. “an assembly of the people convened at the public place of the council for the purpose of deliberating” - cf. **Ac 19:39**
  - b. “the assembly of the Israelites” - cf. **Ac 7:38**
  - c. “any gathering or throng of men assembled by chance, tumultuously” - cf. **Ac 19:40-41**
- **The usage of “ekklesia” therefore emphasizes the “assembled” nature of the church; i.e., it simply refers to a gathering, an assembly of people**

## **B. “EKKLESIA” AS USED IN THE CHRISTIAN SENSE...**

1. **Thayer’s** definition offers the following uses of “ekklesia” in a Christian sense:
    - a. “an assembly of Christians gathered for worship in a religious meeting” - cf. **1 Co 14:19,35**
    - b. “a company of Christians, or of those who, hoping for eternal salvation through Jesus Christ, observe their own religious rites, hold their own religious meetings, and manage their own affairs, according to regulations prescribed for the body for order’s sake” - cf. **1 Th 1:1**
    - c. “those who anywhere, in a city, village, constitute such a company and are united into one body” - cf. **1 Co 1:2**
    - d. “the whole body of Christians scattered throughout the earth” - cf. **Ep 1:22-23**
    - e. “the assembly of faithful Christians already dead and received into heaven” - cf. **He 12:22-23**
  2. Putting it most simply, we can think of the church in two primary senses:
    - a. The church **universal** - the whole assembly of people who are saved, both living and dead
    - b. The church **local** - a company of saved people in a geographical area who work and worship together as a local congregation
- **The difference between the “universal” and “local” church will be examined in another lesson**

[What is the church, then, especially in the **universal** sense? It is that grand assembly or company of people who are saved by Christ (cf. **Ep 5:23,25-27**).

But the term “assembly” alone does not do it justice; which is why we find other terms in the Scriptures used to describe the company of God’s people...]

## **II. THE CHURCH “DESCRIBED”**

### **A. THE CHURCH IS “THE BODY OF CHRIST”...**

1. So described in **Ep 1:22-23**
2. This metaphor depicts the relationship we enjoy with Christ and each other
  - a. Christ is our Head, from which we as the body receive nourishment - **Co 2:19**
  - b. We are members of the body, and of one another - **1 Co 12:27; Ro 12:5**

### **B. THE CHURCH IS “THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD”...**

1. I.e., the family of God - **1 Ti 3:15**
2. This emphasizes the familial relationship we enjoy in Christ

- a. We are in Jesus' "family" - **Mt 12:48-50**
- b. We have many brothers and sisters - **Mk 10:28-30**
- c. We are to treat each other accordingly - **1 Ti 5:1-2**

**C. THE CHURCH IS "THE TEMPLE OF GOD"...**

1. I.e., a holy habitation or dwelling of God - **Ep 2:19-22; 1 Pe 2:5**
2. As such, we have a responsibility to maintain purity - **1 Co 3:16-17; 2 Co 6:16-7:1**

**D. THE CHURCH IS "THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST"...**

1. As Paul wrote to the Colossians, they had been "translated into the kingdom of the Son of His love" - **Co 1:13**; cf. also **Re 1:9**
2. This emphasizes the authority-making power in the church; Christ is King, He has all authority! - cf. **Mt 28:18,20**
  - a. The church is not a democracy, nor a republic
  - b. The citizens do not make the laws, they are made by the King!

**E. THE CHURCH IS "THE BRIDE OF CHRIST"...**

1. We are betrothed to Christ - cf. **2 Co 11:2**
2. This figure portends of an even greater relationship with Christ in the future! - cf. **Re 19:6-9; 21:2**

**CONCLUSION**

1. What is the church? As used in its **universal** sense, the church is...
  - a. A great assembly, a great company of people
  - b. Made up of all those redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, both living and dead
2. To illustrate the blessings and privileges of this great company, the church is also called...
  - a. The body of Christ
  - b. The household of God
  - c. The temple of God
  - d. The kingdom of Christ
  - e. The bride of Christ

-- **This is "The Church Jesus Built", of which Jesus spoke when He said "I will build my church..." (Mt 16:18)**

We will have more to say about the church as revealed in the Bible in our next lesson, as we contrast the difference between the church **universal** and the church **local**...



# The Church Jesus Built

## The Church “Universal” Vs. The Church “Local”

### INTRODUCTION

1. The nature of “**The Church Jesus Built**” can be discerned when one...
  - a. Considers the meaning of the word **church** itself
    - 1) From the Greek word **ekklesia**, it means “**an assembly**”
    - 2) Which is used most frequently in the New Testament in two senses:
      - a) The church **universal** - that company of souls redeemed by the blood of Christ
      - b) The church **local** - Christians in a geographical area that work and worship together as a congregation of God’s people
  - b. Considers other terms which enhance our view of the church
    - 1) The **body** of Christ
    - 2) The **household** of God
    - 3) The **temple** of God
    - 4) The **kingdom** of Christ
    - 5) The **bride** of Christ-- These expressions reveal different aspects of the Lord’s great assembly!
2. Our understanding of the nature of the church can also be enhanced by...
  - a. Contrasting the church **universal** with the church **local**
  - b. Noting how the New Testament carefully delineates between the two
3. Failure to observe the distinction between the church **universal** and church **local**...
  - a. Leaves one open to erroneous concepts of the church
  - b. Makes one susceptible to false views of the church

[In this lesson, therefore, I would like for us to notice ways in which the church **universal** is different from the church **local**. Let’s begin by looking at...]

### I. THE CHURCH “UNIVERSAL”

#### **A. COMPOSED OF ALL CHRISTIANS...**

1. This is the church to which Jesus referred in **Mt 16:18**
2. As already noted, it is made up all the saved, both living and death - cf. **He 12:22-24**

#### **B. THERE IS ONLY “ONE” CHURCH...**

1. Remember, the universal church is called the “body” of Christ - **Ep 1:22-23**
2. There is only one “body” (**Ep 4:4**); therefore, only one church!

#### **C. BEGAN ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST...**

1. In Jerusalem, following the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ - **Ac 2:1-47**
2. As Peter later referred to this day, it was the “beginning” - cf. **Ac 11:15**

**D. ENTER ONLY BE BEING “ADDED” BY THE LORD...**

1. One cannot “join” the church by their own volition
2. Rather, they are “added” by the Lord Himself when saved - **Ac 2:41,47**

**E. THE LORD KEEPS THE BOOKS OF MEMBERSHIP...**

1. There is no agency on earth that keeps the registry of true members
2. Enrollment is in heaven; only the Lord knows those who are truly His - **He 12:23; 2 Ti 2:19**

**F. CONSISTS OF ALL THE SAVED...**

1. The Lord is presenting to Himself a church holy and without blemish - cf. **Ep 5:25-27**
2. Those in the church who are sinning and refuse to repent are “cut off”, “cast out”, “spewed out” - cf. **Jn 15:2,6; Ro 11:19-22; Re 3:16**

**G. MUST BE IN THIS CHURCH TO BE SAVED...**

1. For the Lord is the Savior of the “body” (which is His church) - **Ep 5:23**
2. Since the Lord adds one to His church when they are saved, one cannot be saved and not be in the church **universal!**

**H. HAS NO “EARTHLY” ORGANIZATION...**

1. The church **universal** has organization - cf. **Ep 2:19-22; 1 Pe 2:5**
  - a. What organization exists is spiritual in nature
  - b. E.g., Christ as the cornerstone, together with His apostles and prophets as the foundation, and all Christians as “living stones”
2. There is no earthly headquarters for the church; e.g., no telephone number to call to speak with the “head” of the church (for He is in heaven!)

**I. CANNOT BE DIVIDED...**

1. For there is no **earthly** organization to divide!
  2. If division appears to exist...
    - a. Some unscriptural organization of churches must have been created
    - b. Such an organization can have division, but the Lord’s church **universal** cannot!
  3. Those who would seek to divide the church through doctrine, conduct, etc., are simply cut off by the Lord Himself!
- **There is and always will be, “one body”! - Ep 4:4 (we need to make sure we are remaining faithful to be in it!)**

**J. DEATH DOESN’T AFFECT MEMBERSHIP...**

1. The church **universal** is made up of the saved, both living and dead - **He 12:22-23**
2. When one dies, they are still with Christ! - **Ph 1:21-23; 1 Th 5:10**

[These ten things are true of the church **universal**; now let’s contrast that with...]

**II. THE CHURCH “LOCAL”**

**A. COMPOSED OF CHRISTIANS IN ONE LOCATION...**

1. A local church is made up of Christians in one geographical area
  2. E.g., the church at Corinth, the church of the Thessalonians - **1 Co 1:2; 1 Th 1:1**
- **In contrast, the church universal is made up of Christians everywhere!**

**B. THERE ARE “MANY” CHURCHES...**

1. Paul had reference to local churches when he wrote **Ro 16:16**
  2. And again when he wrote **Ga 1:2**
- **When it comes to the church universal, though, there is just ONE!**

**C. BEGINS WHENEVER PEOPLE JOIN THEMSELVES TOGETHER...**

1. As the gospel spreads and people respond to it, those in a particular area start a local church when they agree to work together as one
  2. Just as the church in Antioch began later than the church in Jerusalem - **Ac 11:19-26**
- **Whereas the church universal began in Jerusalem on Pentecost, local churches have begun at different places and different times!**

**D. ENTER BY “JOINING” THE CHURCH...**

1. When one wishes to become an accepted member of the local church, they must “join themselves” to that church
  2. Such as Paul sought to do when he came to the church in Jerusalem - **Ac 9:26-28**
- **Whereas one is “added” by the Lord Himself to the universal church, we can seek to “join” a local congregation (if its members are willing to accept us)**

**E. ENROLLED THROUGH HUMAN JUDGMENT...**

1. Whether we are accepted into a local church is a decision made by the leaders or members of that church
  2. Sometimes people are rejected when they should be received - **3 Jn 5-9**
- **Evil men may succeed in kicking one out of a local church, but only the Lord determines who stays in the universal church!**

**F. CONSISTS OF BOTH SAVED AND LOST...**

1. Since enrollment occurs through human judgment, fallible decisions can be made
  2. A local church may therefore have some who are nominal Christians - cf. **Re 3:1-4**
- **Hypocrites may become members of a local church; but they don’t sneak by the Lord to become members of the universal church!**

**G. DO NOT HAVE TO BE IN THIS CHURCH TO BE SAVED...**

1. One can be saved, and not belong to any local church
  2. Such was the case of the Eunuch immediately following his conversion, and of Paul when he was in transit between Antioch and Jerusalem - cf. **Ac 8:39; 9:26**
- **Of course, this should be temporary; in the universal church, it is impossible!**

**H. HAS “EARTHLY” ORGANIZATION...**

1. A local church when scripturally organized will have bishops and deacons - **Ph 1:1**
2. These bishops were also called “elders” and “pastors”, whose role was to oversee and feed

- the local congregation - **Ac 14:23; 20:17,28**  
 -- **The only role or position ever given men over the universal church on earth was the apostles, and they were not replaced when they died - e.g., James in Ac 12:2**

**I. CAN BE DIVIDED...**

1. Local churches can easily be divided over doctrine or personalities
  2. Such was the case with the church at Corinth - **1 Co 1:10-13; 3:3,4**
- **While we can't divide the universal church, we can be responsible for dividing local churches!**

**J. DEATH AFFECTS MEMBERSHIP...**

1. When we die, our membership in a local congregation ends
  2. Just as when Stephen died, he was no longer a member of the Jerusalem church - **Ac 8:1-2**
- **But our membership in the church universal continues on after death!**

**CONCLUSION**

1. To illustrate the differences between the church universal and local, consider this table...

<b>The Church "Universal"</b>	<b>The Church "Local"</b>
Composed of all Christians	<b>Composed of Christians in one location</b>
There is just one	There are many
Began on the Day of Pentecost	Begins when people join together
Enter only by being added by the Lord	Enter by joining ourselves
The Lord keeps the books of membership	Enrolled by human judgment
Consists of all the saved	Consists of both saved and lost
Must be in this to be saved	Do not have to be in this to be saved
Has no earthly organization	Has earthly organization
Can't be divided	Can be divided
Death doesn't affect membership	Death does affect membership

2. Why note these differences between the church **universal** and the church **local**?
  - a. To better understand how the word "church" is used in the New Testament
  - b. To avoid confusion in our thinking when we use the word "church"

-- **When we are aware of the differences, we are also better able to identify the New Testament church today! (see next lesson)**
3. One could say that a key difference between the two is this...
  - a. The church **universal** in essence concerns our relationship with Christ
  - b. The church **local** basically concerns our relationship with one another

-- **Of course, our service in the latter can certainly affect our standing in the former!**

Is our relationship with Christ and each other what it should be?

# The Church Jesus Built

## Identifying The Church Today

### INTRODUCTION

1. In our last lesson we noted some of the distinctions between the church **universal** and the church **local**...

<b>The Church “Universal”</b>	<b>The Church “Local”</b>
Composed of all Christians	<b>Composed of Christians in one location</b>
There is just one	There are many
Began on the Day of Pentecost	Begins when people join together
Enter only by being added by the Lord	Enter by joining ourselves
The Lord keeps the books of membership	Enrolled by human judgment
Consists of all the saved	Consists of both saved and lost
Must be in this to be saved	Do not have to be in this to be saved
Has no earthly organization	Has earthly organization
Can't be divided	Can be divided
Death doesn't affect membership	Death does affect membership

2. When we are aware of the difference between the church **universal** and **local** churches, we are better equipped to identify **“The Church Jesus Built”** today...
  - a. In view of the high estimation placed upon the church as described in the New Testament, I would like to be able to identify it today, wouldn't you?
  - b. But is our task one of being able to identify the church **universal**, or **local** churches?

[It is the latter question that I wish to address in this study. Let me begin by asking...]

### I. CAN WE IDENTIFY THE CHURCH “UNIVERSAL”?

#### **A. ONE POPULAR APPROACH IN EVANGELISM IS AS FOLLOWS...**

1. Jesus said He would build **His** church, and we read about it in the Bible
2. If today you could find that church we read about in the Bible, wouldn't you want to be a member of it?
3. Well, here is a chart which shows the **pattern** of the New Testament church...
  - a. A chart is then used which describes the beginning of the church (its founder, place and time of origin, and its head)
  - b. The chart also lists verses describing the organization, name, worship, etc., of the church
4. If you can find the church that is like this in all respects, then it is the New Testament church today!

#### **B. THE PROBLEM WITH THIS APPROACH...**

1. Are we not trying to identify the one and true church, i.e., the church “universal”?

2. But charts like the one described above often make no distinction between the church **universal** and the church **local**
  - a. E.g., its founder, time and place of origin, head, etc., refers to the **universal** church
  - b. Yet passages describing organization, name, worship, etc., refer to the **local** church!
3. This can easily lead to confusion...
  - a. Concerning the church **universal**
    - 1) That **it** may have earthly organization
    - 2) That **it** is overseen by elders and served by deacons
  - b. Concerning the church **local**
    - 1) That **they** all started in Jerusalem
    - 2) That **they** all started in 30 A.D.
4. It is virtually impossible to identify the church **universal** in this way
  - a. It has no earthly organization that can be visibly seen
  - b. Only the Lord knows...
    - 1) Those who are truly saved
    - 2) Those who thereby make up His body, the one true church!
5. At best, we can only identify **local** churches today

### C. A MORE SCRIPTURAL WAY TO DISCUSS THE CHURCH...

1. Regarding the church **universal**
  - a. Emphasize that the Lord is in the process of building His one true church
  - b. Which consists of all the saved, for the Lord adds those being saved to it
  - c. Here is how you can be saved and thereby become a member of the Lord's church...
2. Regarding the church **local**
  - a. Once saved, and a member of the body of Christ, the NT teaches you should "join yourself" with a local congregation
  - b. But which one? How can you identify which of the myriad congregations are considered by the Lord as His faithful churches in the local sense?
  - c. Now let's examine what the NT reveals about the local church...

[This approach is not only scriptural, it also has less potential for confusing the **universal** church with the **local** church. With this in mind, here are a few thoughts on...]

## II. HOW TO IDENTIFY THE CHURCH "LOCAL"

### A. THE "NAME" IS A GOOD PLACE TO BEGIN...

1. The name of a local congregation reveals much
  - a. Whether the church is concerned about promoting unity in the body of Christ
  - b. If the name is a denominational name, religious division must not be a major concern of those in the congregation
2. The "name" should therefore be a scriptural name
  - a. **There is no one scriptural name** for the Lord's church in the New Testament
    - 1) The expressions "church of God" (**1 Co 1:2**), "churches of God" (**1 Th 2:14**), and "churches of Christ" (**Ro 16:16**) are commonly used
    - 2) Other terms are used also, and all reflecting an association with God and Christ (body of Christ, kingdom of God, bride of Christ, temple of God, etc.)

- b. But **the use of scriptural names** instead of a humanly-conceived name...
    - 1) Reflects a desire to follow the Scriptures, and not human tradition
    - 2) Certainly conveys a desire to honor God and Christ, and not some man, creed or particular doctrine
  - 3. However, the “name” alone is not a sure guide
    - a. Just as the name “Mrs. Copeland” alone is not a sure guide if you were seeking to find my wife
      - 1) For there are a lot of women who go by the name, “Mrs. Copeland”
      - 2) But only one who bears the name is properly my wife!
    - b. So there may be many congregations that bear the name of Christ or God that may not be truly honoring them!
      - 1) For example, there are over 200 separate denominations that use the name “Church of God”
      - 2) Likewise, there may be “Churches of Christ” that are no less a congregation of the Lord than any with a denominational name!
- **Yet I would still recommend that one begin with the name, and in particular those congregations that use the expression “church of Christ”**

#### **B. EXAMINE THE “GOSPEL” BEING PREACHED...**

- 1. Remember how Christ is adding people to His church **universal**
  - a. Through the gospel, He calls us - **2 Th 2:14**
  - b. As we heed the gospel call, the Lord adds us to His body, the church - **Ac 2:41,47**
  - c. That is why it is so important that the gospel not be perverted in any way - **Ga 1:6-9**
- 2. If the gospel proclaimed by those in a **local** church is different...
  - a. By changing either the facts or commands of the gospel...
  - b. ...then people are not being saved, and the Lord is not adding them to His church!
- 3. A church with a perverted gospel...
  - a. May have the nicest people, but they are still unregenerate people!
  - b. May wear the name of Christ, both as individuals and as a church, but are not truly the people of God, nor a part of **“The Church Jesus Built”!**

#### **C. COMPARE THE “PRACTICE” WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT PATTERN...**

- 1. In the New Testament, we find a **pattern** regarding local churches
  - a. The NT describes the early church during its first 60 years
  - b. A careful study of Acts and the epistles reveal a picture of the church
  - c. From this picture, a pattern emerges in reference to:
    - 1) The worship of local churches
    - 2) The work of local churches
    - 3) The organization of the churches
  - d. This pattern emerges as we see the early Christians...
    - 1) Continuing steadfastly in the “apostles’ doctrine” - **Ac 2:42**
    - 2) Being taught the same things in every church - cf. **1 Co 4:17; 16:1-2**
- 2. Faithful churches abiding in the “apostles’ doctrine” will reflect this **pattern** today
  - a. Their worship will be like that described in the New Testament
  - b. Their work as a congregation will be similar to that found in the New Testament
  - c. Their organization as a congregation will seek to be like that described in the New

Testament

**CONCLUSION**

1. If we wish to identify “**The Church Jesus Built**” today...
  - a. We cannot point to one group of churches and say “There is The One True Church!”
  - b. For “The One True Church” that Jesus built...
    - 1) Is a spiritual entity, a body made up of saved individuals throughout the world
    - 2) With no earthly headquarters nor earthly organization
  
2. But such individuals will join themselves together as local churches...
  - a. Following the apostles’ doctrine as revealed in the New Testament
  - b. Imitating the pattern seen in the New Testament regarding the work, worship and organization of the local church

-- **And such churches can be so identified today!**

A person's first concern should be to look to the Lord through His Word to save him, thereby adding him to His church **universal**.

Having done that, he should then examine the New Testament to learn what to look for as one seeks to locate and worship with one of His **local** churches.

Our focus in this series will be on the latter as we consider the **organization** of the church in our next lesson...



# The Church Jesus Built

## The Organization Of The Church

### INTRODUCTION

1. In suggesting how to identify “**The Church Jesus Built**”, the previous lesson stressed...
  - a. The importance of distinguishing between the church **universal** and the church **local**
    - 1) The very nature of the church **universal** makes it difficult to identify it as such
    - 2) With the aid of the New Testament, however, we can identify **local** churches
  - b. That the New Testament provides a **pattern** by which we can identify local churches of Christ which are true to the Scriptures
    - 1) The church at Jerusalem “*continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine*” - **Ac 2:42**
    - 2) The apostles taught their doctrine in “*every church*” - e.g., **1 Co 4:17**-- Thus we should expect that the churches were similar in doctrine and practice
2. The pattern that we find for local churches includes such elements as:
  - a. The **organization** of the church
  - b. The **worship** of the church
  - c. The **work** of the church

[In this lesson, we will examine what pattern emerges from the New Testament regarding the **organization** of the Lord’s church in the local sense. But one might ask...]

### I. WHY BE CONCERNED ABOUT “CHURCH ORGANIZATION”?

#### **A. ORGANIZATION REVEALS PURPOSE...**

1. When God creates something...
  - a. He has a purpose in mind
  - b. He designs His creation with the organization to accomplish His purpose
2. This is true in the physical realm
  - a. Certain animals were created as beasts of prey
  - b. Simply by looking at the animal’s features (i.e., its organization), we can glean what its purpose is
3. This is true with the **local** church as well...
  - a. Seeing its organization will help us learn of the Lord’s purpose for the church
  - b. This will be especially helpful later, when we examine the work of the church

#### **B. APOSTASY OFTEN BEGINS WITH CHANGES IN ORGANIZATION...**

1. One of the earliest departures from the New Testament was in church organization
  2. Modern-day apostasies often start this way as well
- And usually when people seek to change the purpose or work of the church!

[The **organization** of the church as revealed in the New Testament should not be taken lightly. The Lord had a purpose in mind, and organized the church to meet that purpose. With that said, let’s now

consider...]

## II. CHURCH ORGANIZATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

### A. ELDERS TO OVERSEE THE LOCAL CONGREGATION...

1. A congregation, once fully developed, would have elders - cf. **Ac 14:23; Ti 1:5**
2. These elders were also called bishops and pastors
  - a. **Elders** (Grk., “presbuteros”, presbyter) for they were older men
  - b. **Bishops** (Grk. “episkopos”, overseer) for their task was to oversee the congregation - cf. **Ac 20:17,28; 1 Pe 5:1-2**
  - c. **Pastors** (Grk. “poimen”, shepherd) for their task was to shepherd and feed the flock of God - cf. **Ac 20:17,28; 1 Pe 5:1-2**

-- **Not three distinct offices, but different ways to describe the men and their work (cf. Easton’s Bible Dictionary, Moody Handbook of Theology)**
3. Elders were appointed only after meeting stringent qualifications
  - a. The qualifications are listed in **1 Ti 3:1-7; Ti 1:5-9**
  - b. Note that they “*must be...*” (no exceptions), e.g....
    - 1) Husband of one wife
    - 2) With faithful children

-- **Such qualifications prepared them for their role - cf. 1 Ti 3:5**
4. In every congregation with elders, there was always a **plurality**, never just one (see below)
5. The authority of the elders to oversee was limited...
  - a. They were to take heed to the flock of God “*\_among which\_ the Holy Spirit has made you overseers*” - **Ac 20:28**
  - b. They were to “*shepherd the flock of God \_which is among you\_*” - **1 Pe 5:2**

-- **No elder (bishop, pastor) or group of elders had any authority beyond their local congregation!**

### B. DEACONS TO SERVE THE ELDERS AND THE CONGREGATION...

1. These were **servants** (Grk., “diakonos”, servant, minister) who assisted the elders in the work of the church
2. Their qualifications are found in **1 Ti 3:8-13**
3. The work they do is a very noble one - **1 Ti 3:13**

### C. THE MEMBERS OF THE CONGREGATION ITSELF...

1. Commonly called **saints** (Grk., “hagios”, holy one) in the New Testament -- cf. **1 Co 1:2; Ph 1:1**
2. Also called **disciples, Christians, believers**, etc.
3. Among such members there may have been **evangelists** and **teachers** - **Ep 4:11**
  - a. The **evangelists** would take the gospel to the lost
  - b. **Teachers** instructed and edified the members
  - c. Note: Those commonly referred to as **preachers** or **ministers**...
    - 1) May do the work of both evangelist and teacher - e.g., **2 Ti 4:5; 2:2**
    - 2) But whether they serve as evangelist, teacher, preacher, or minister, within the local church they likewise submit to the oversight of the elders

[In **Ph 1:1**, we find the organization of the local church alluded to in Paul's address: "*To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons*". Other than the members ("saints"), what organization existed was a two-tier system (bishops and deacons).

But it wasn't long before changes in organization it occurred, so perhaps a word or two should be said about...]

### **III. CHANGES IN THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH**

#### **A. ANCIENT CHANGES...**

1. In the New Testament, churches that had elders (bishops) never had just one...
  - a. There was always a plurality - cf. **Ph 1:1; Ac 20:17**
  - b. This certainly prevented a one-man rule over a church
2. But things soon changed; as noted by the **Holman Bible Dictionary**...
  - a. During the second century A.D. churches came to have a single bishop, and then that bishop came to exercise oversight over nearby rural churches as well as the city church so that his ecclesiastical territory became known as a "diocese" or "see" ("eparchy" in the East).
  - b. Bishops of churches that had been founded by apostles were said to be in succession to the apostles, and hence their teaching was held to be authentic and their authority collegial.
  - c. By 400 A.D. in the West, the bishop of Rome began to assume extraordinary authority above other bishops
3. According to **A. T. Robinson's Word Pictures**: "Ignatius shows that in the early second century the office of bishop over the elders had developed, but Lightfoot has shown that it was not so in the first century."

#### **B. MODERN CHANGES...**

1. Many denominations have simply adopted the later changes in church organization
  - a. Some go back to 400 A.D., and emulate an organization similar to Roman Catholicism
  - b. Others go back to the second century A.D...
    - 1) And have a **three tier system** of bishop, elders, deacons within a congregation
    - 2) Or where a bishop or group of bishops (presbyters) oversee a number of churches
2. Some who have sought to restore New Testament Christianity have adopted changes that are not much different than what occurred in the past
  - a. **The International Church of Christ** has developed a hierarchy of control over churches that emulates the structure found in Catholicism and other churches
  - b. **The sponsoring-church concept** adopted by many churches of Christ has the same effect as changes which occurred in the second century (elders in one area overseeing other churches or areas)

#### **C. THE IMPORT OF SUCH CHANGES...**

1. One might wonder whether such changes have any importance
2. My response is yes, for several reasons...
  - a. **First, it reflects an attitude toward the Scriptures and the Lord**
    - 1) That we are free to change whatever we desire

- 2) That we can come up with a more efficient plan than the Lord
- b. **Second, organization (design) reflects purpose; change the organization and you change the purpose**
  - 1) E.g., in the New Testament organization of the local church, the purpose of the elders is to watch and feed the flock over which the Spirit has appointed them
  - 2) But when elders become overseers of other churches or works in other areas...
    - a) They are no longer shepherds, but administrators
    - b) They presume authority in areas they have not been given
    - c) They take on works they really can't oversee (at least, effectively)  
-- Their purpose as God's shepherds has changed
- c. **Third, changes in organization upset the "balance of power"**
  - 1) Other than the authority given the inspired apostles, no man or group of men were given more authority than the elders of a particular church
    - a) Even their authority was limited to the church where they were
    - b) A plurality of elders in one congregation also kept them in check
  - 2) But when changes in church organization occurred...
    - a) It became possible for one man to control one or more churches
    - b) It became possible for a group of men to control a group of churches
  - Thus authority over churches which ought to rest in Christ and His apostles now becomes vested in uninspired men!
- d. **Finally, the Divine wisdom to slow the development of error is hindered**
  - 1) Some changes in church organization were an attempt to restrain error
  - 2) But whenever you have an organizational structure above the local church, the potential for error's spread multiplies
    - a) If error creeps in a local church, it is less likely to spread if each congregation is independent and autonomous
    - b) But if error creeps into a hierarchy like those developed in the second century and later, it can quickly spread to churches expected to submit to such hierarchy

## CONCLUSION

1. A study of church history should illustrate the danger of making changes in the **organization** of the church
2. When Jesus said, "***I will build My church...***", I believe He knew the best way to do it!
  - a. The New Testament reveals how He did it through His apostles
  - b. A clear **pattern** concerning the **organization** of churches in the New Testament reveals its simplicity and evidence of Divine Wisdom

If we are content to "***continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine...***" (Ac 2:42), then we will make sure that we follow their ways in Christ pertaining to the local church!

# The Church Jesus Built

## The Worship Of The Church - I

### INTRODUCTION

1. Our previous lesson examined the **organization** of the church, in which...
  - a. A clear pattern emerges that illustrates its simplicity and Divine Wisdom
  - b. A congregation, when completely organized, consisted of:
    - 1) Bishops to oversee the local congregation (also called elders, pastors)
    - 2) Deacons to serve the congregation in its work
    - 3) Saints, i.e., the members of the congregation-- As indicated in Paul's address to the church at Philippi - **Ph 1:1**
  - c. Authority was carefully limited
    - 1) A plurality of bishops in each church prevented one-man rule
    - 2) Charged to shepherd the flock of God among them, bishops were prevented from exercising authority over more than one congregation-- Thus the potential spread of error was severely hindered
2. In this lesson and the one to follow, we shall examine the **worship** of the church...
  - a. For this too can help us identify "**The Church Jesus Built**"
  - b. For certainly those who "*continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine*" today will worship in the same manner as did the early Christians under the instruction of Christ and His apostles
3. Now, it is important to appreciate that not all worship is acceptable to God...
  - a. There is **vain worship** - **Mt 15:7-9**
  - b. There is **ignorant worship** - **Ac 17:22-23**
  - c. There is **will (self-imposed) worship** - **Co 2:20-23**-- We should seek to offer what Jesus described as **true worship** (see below)

[What can we learn about the worship of the church? Consider some thoughts regarding **the nature of worship** in the church...]

### I. THEIR WORSHIP WAS "IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH"

#### **A. THE TIME HAD COME FOR A NEW KIND OF WORSHIP...**

1. As Jesus explained to the Samaritan woman at the well - **Jn 4:23-24**
2. In which people are to worship the Father "*in spirit and truth*"
3. In which those who seek to worship Him "*must worship in spirit and truth*"

#### **B. WORSHIPPING GOD IN "SPIRIT"...**

1. Some understand this to mean "**to do so with sincerity, from the heart**"
  - a. But this does not fit in with the idea that Jesus is making a contrast between OT and NT worship - cf. **Jn 4:19-24**
  - b. And sincerity was required under the OT - **Deu 6:4-7; Isa 1:10-18**

2. I suggest that to worship in spirit means to offer “**spiritual worship**”
    - a. I.e., in contrast to worship that is physical or fleshly
    - b. This contrast is in harmony with the context
      - 1) Jesus began by saying “*God is Spirit*”
      - 2) Therefore the worship of Him is to be “spiritual”, that is, in keeping with His nature
    - c. This interpretation is in harmony with what we learn elsewhere about the contrast between OT and NT worship
      - 1) **He 9:1-10** teaches that OT worship consisted of **fleshly** ordinances; e.g.:
        - a) A physical structure (tabernacle)
        - b) Special clothing for priests
        - c) Lampstands
        - d) Burning of incense
        - e) Instruments of music
        - f) Animal sacrifices
 -- All of which appealed to the **physical** senses
      - 2) But NT worship is focused toward the **spiritual** side of man:
        - a) God’s temple is spiritual, made up of Christians - **1 Co 3:16; Ep 2:19-22**
        - b) All Christians are priests, offering up spiritual sacrifices - **1 Pe 2:5,9; Ro 12:1; He 13:15**
        - c) Our prayers are as sweet incense - **Re 5:8**
        - d) Our music is making melody with the **heart** - **Ep 5:19**
      - 3) Physical ordinances of the OT were to last until a “time of reformation” - **He 9:9-10** (which has occurred with the coming of the New Covenant)
- To “worship in spirit”, then, is to offer up “spiritual” worship as taught in the NT and not the “physical” worship as found in the OT

### C. WORSHIPPING GOD IN “TRUTH”...

1. Some understand this to worship **according to the commands of God**
  - a. Certainly we should do this
  - b. But again, this is no contrast to what God expected in the OT - cf. **Deu 5:32-33**
  - c. Jesus admitted that the Jews had been right in their worship - **Jn 4:22**
 -- So the contrast is **not** between **true** and **false** worship
2. The contrast is between that which is **true** (or **real**), and that which had been a **shadow** (or **type**) pointing toward the true!
  - a. Many elements of OT worship were simply a “shadow” of what was to come
    - 1) The Tabernacle was a symbol or type - **He 9:8-9**
    - 2) The Law with its worship was only a “shadow” of that which was to come - **He 10:1**
  - b. Christ is now in the **true** tabernacle (heaven)- **He 9:11-12,24**
    - 1) Therefore we should expect the worship of the **true** to be different from that of the **shadow**
    - 2) And we have already seen that to be the case:
      - a) The OT worship, which was but a **shadow**, was **physical** in nature
      - b) But NT worship, which God now expects of “*true worshipers*”, is according to the **true** realities (God is Spirit, Christ in heaven) and is therefore **spiritual** in nature

- To “worship in truth”, then, is to offer up the “true”, “spiritual” worship as taught in the NT, and not the “physical” worship in the OT which was but a “shadow”

[When we consider **the elements of worship** in our next lesson, I trust we shall see that the worship in the early church was indeed spiritual in its focus. But before we conclude this study, two more things can be said about **the nature of worship** in the church...]

## **II. THEIR WORSHIP WAS FOR EDIFICATION**

### **A. WORSHIP WAS CERTAINLY DIRECTED TO GOD...**

1. As we will see later, they sang “hymns” - cf. **Ep 5:19**
2. The definition of “hymn” is a song of praise to God
- **As God’s creatures, especially those created in His image and redeemed by His Son, the Creator is the primary focus of any worship service - e.g., Re 4:9-11**

### **B. WORSHIP WAS ALSO TO BUILD UP EACH OTHER...**

1. As Paul instructed the church in Corinth - **1 Co 14:26**
  - a. All things were to be done “for edification”
  - b. That is, for the purpose of “building up”
2. Note that in regards to singing...
  - a. They were “*speaking to one another...*” as well as to the Lord - **Ep 5:19**
  - b. They were “*teaching and admonishing one another*” - **Co 3:16**
3. Note the true source of their edification...
  - a. Not the music or melody of the songs themselves
  - b. But the words of the songs which taught and admonished them
  - For **spiritual worship** is designed to impact the spiritual side of man, not his fleshly side

[Worship in the church should therefore edify or build up those engaged in it, not by what may sound good to the ears (the flesh), but by words that impact the heart of man (the spirit). Sadly, it is easy for us to more interested in the melody and beat of a song, than the actual words! But those seeking true edification will be careful to note the difference. Finally...]

## **III. THEIR WORSHIP WAS DONE DECENTLY AND IN ORDER**

### **A. THE CHURCH IN CORINTH HAD A PROBLEM...**

1. At a time in which Christians enjoyed the gifts of tongues (speaking in a foreign language), those in Corinth were misusing them
  - a. Tongues were designed to be a sign for unbelievers - **1 Co 14:22**
  - b. They were speaking without interpreters, and all at once - **1 Co 14:23**
2. Therefore Paul commanded them to do things decently and in order...
  - a. They were to speak one at a time, and no more than three - **1 Co 14:27**
  - b. If there were no interpreter, they were to remain silent - **1 Co 14:28**
  - Thus they were to do things “*decently and in order*” - **1 Co 14:40**

### **B. WORSHIPPING DECENTLY AND IN ORDER...**

1. Worship that is “*decent*” is that which...

- a. Is done “in a seemly manner”; i.e., fitting for the occasion
  - b. Glorifies God by offering up “spiritual worship” (worship in keeping with His nature; not necessarily what we want) - cf. **Jn 4:23-24**
  - c. Edifies the brethren by teaching and admonishing them - cf. **1 Co 14:26**
2. Worship that is “**in order**” is that which...
    - a. Follows “a fixed arrangement”; i.e., not totally spontaneous - e.g., **1 Co 14:27**
    - b. Contributes to peace, not confusion - cf. **1 Co 14:33**

## CONCLUSION

1. When we consider **the elements of worship** in our next lesson...
  - a. We will see how they are consistent with **the nature of worship**
  - b. That what the worship of the early church was indeed done:
    - 1) **In spirit and truth**
    - 2) **For the purpose of edification**
    - 3) **Decently and in order**
2. Remember, not all worship is acceptable to God. Worship based upon...
  - a. The doctrines of men is **vain worship** - **Mt 15:7-9**
  - b. A lack of understanding of God’s nature is **ignorant worship** - **Ac 17:22-23**
  - c. What we think is best is **will worship** (self-imposed religion), and of no true value in overcoming the flesh - **Co 2:20-23**

Let those who seek to be a part of “**The Church Jesus Built**” listen closely to the Master...

*“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”*  
(**Jn 4:23-24**)

Are we “*true worshipers*” of the Father?



# The Church Jesus Built

## The Worship Of The Church - II

### INTRODUCTION

1. In seeking to better understand “**The Church Jesus Built**”, we are looking at the **worship** of the church as revealed in the New Testament
2. The preceding lesson made the following observations about **the nature of worship** in the early church...
  - a. Their worship was “*in spirit and truth*” - **Jn 4:23-24**
  - b. Their worship was “*for edification*” - **1 Co 14:26**
  - c. Their worship was to be done “*decently and in order*” - **1 Co 14:40**
3. In determining what was meant to “*worship God in spirit and truth*”, I suggested that...
  - a. It involved worship in keeping with God’s nature (i.e., God is Spirit, our worship is to be spiritual)
  - b. It would be different from the “fleshly ordinances” of the Old Testament which were a “shadow” of that which is true (or real)
4. This lesson will identify **the elements of worship** as described in the NT...
  - a. I.e., the activities in which the early church engaged in their worship
  - b. With some observations about their “spiritual” nature in contrast to OT worship

[Let’s begin by noticing...]

### I. ACTIVITIES IN THE WORSHIP OF THE CHURCH

#### **A. THEY OBSERVED THE LORD’S SUPPER...**

1. As commanded by the Lord and His apostles
  - a. A memorial feast instituted by Jesus Himself - **Lk 22:14-20**
  - b. Taught to the churches by the apostles - **1 Co 11:23-29**
  - c. In this memorial they remembered:
    - 1) The sinless body offered on the cross
    - 2) The blood shed to provide forgiveness for their sins
  - d. In this memorial they proclaimed their faith in the efficacy of the Lord’s death
2. On the first day of the week
  - a. As described in **Ac 20:7**
  - b. One can infer from this passage that they were doing this every week
  - c. Other passages certainly indicate they were assembling regularly on the first day of the week - e.g., **1 Co 16:1-2**

#### **B. THEY GAVE TO MEET CERTAIN NEEDS...**

1. The church was noted for its love for one another

- a. As exemplified in the church at Jerusalem - cf. **Ac 2:44,45; 4:32-35**
- b. Such love went beyond those in the local congregation - **Ac 11:27-30**
- 2. A weekly collection was instituted
  - a. To provide for the needs of the saints - **1 Co 16:1-2**
  - b. Principles were taught to determine how much one should give
    - 1) “As he may prosper” - **1 Co 16:2**
    - 2) Whatever is given with “a willing mind” - **2 Co 8:12**
    - 3) “According to what one has” - **2 Co 8:12-13**
    - 4) “As he purposes (plans) in his heart” - **2 Co 9:7**
    - 5) Whatever one can give “cheerfully”, not “grudgingly” or “of necessity” - **2 Co 9:7**
    - 6) Keeping in mind the principle of “sowing and reaping” - **2 Co 9:6,8**
- 3. Funds so collected were used to help needy Christians, including those who devoted their lives to preaching the gospel - cf. **2 Co 11:8,9; Ph 4:10-18**

### **C. THEY LISTENED TO THE WORD...**

- 1. They were noted for their attention to the Word
  - a. The church in Jerusalem “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine...” - **Ac 2:42**
  - b. As ambassadors of Christ, the apostles’ words were taken very seriously - cf. **1 Co 14:37; 1 Th 2:13**
- 2. They therefore used their assemblies to hear God’s Word
  - a. As when Paul spoke at Troas - **Ac 20:7**
  - b. Or when letters from the apostles had been received - cf. **Co 4:16**

### **D. THEY OFFERED PRAYERS AND SONGS...**

- 1. Prayers were offered in their assemblies
  - a. As indicated in **1 Co 14:15-17**
  - b. Especially in times of trouble - cf. **Ac 12:5,12**
- 2. Songs were sung when they were together
  - a. Using psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to speak to one another - **Ep 5:19**
  - b. Using the same to teach and admonish one another - **Co 3:16**

[Such were the activities in which the Christians engaged in the worship of the early church. But in what way was their worship any more “spiritual” than that seen in the Old Testament? Let me suggest a few observations regarding...]

## **II. THE SPIRITUAL NATURE OF THEIR WORSHIP**

### **A. CONTRAST THE LORD’S SUPPER WITH O.T. SACRIFICES...**

- 1. The OT required elaborate ritual in offering various sacrifices, which certainly involved the physical senses (sight, sound, smell, touch)
- 2. The Supper, a memorial of Christ’s sacrifice, involves the mind more than the senses
  - a. Requiring meditation rather than much in the way of physical action
  - b. Involving a time for reflection, self-examination

### **B. CONTRAST THEIR GIVING WITH O.T. TITHING...**

- 1. The OT required a specific amount (a tithe, or ten percent), which could easily be given in a

perfunctory manner

2. Giving in the NT was based upon principles requiring careful thought and proper attitudes
  - a. As one prospered and purposed in their heart
  - b. Cheerfully, without grudging obligation

### C. CONTRAST THEIR SINGING WITH O.T. MUSIC...

1. Mechanical instruments were used in the OT to accompany praise to God
2. In NT worship, the instrument they used was the “heart”, not the “harp”
  - a. Upon which they were to “make melody” - cf. **Ep 5:19**
  - b. In which they were to sing “with grace” - cf. **Co 3:16**

### D. CONTRAST OTHER ELEMENTS OF WORSHIP...

1. The OT required:
  - a. A physical tabernacle (temple)
  - b. Separate priesthood
  - c. Special garments
  - d. Burning of incense
  - e. Elaborate ceremonies, special feast days
2. In NT worship:
  - a. The temple is the people of God - **1 Co 3:16-17; Ep 2:20-22**
  - b. All Christians are priests - **1 Pe 2:5,9**
  - c. They adorned themselves with Christ - **Ga 3:27; Co 3:5-14**
  - d. Their prayers were as incense - **Re 5:8**
  - e. Observance of feast days was a cause of concern - **Ga 4:10,11; Co 2:16,17**

## CONCLUSION

1. The worship in the early church was **simple**, and it was **spiritual**...
  - a. Certainly simple in contrast with the worship of the Old Covenant
  - b. Designed to encourage the worship of God with the inner man, not to make an impression on the outer man

-- Not to say that the outer man was not affected, but keeping the priority on the spiritual
2. This was especially true in regards to the use of mechanical instruments of music...
  - a. “... the first Christians were of too spiritual a fiber to substitute lifeless instruments for or to use them to accompany the human voice.” - **Catholic Encyclopedia**
  - b. “The execution of Byzantine church music by instruments, or even the accompaniment of sacred chanting by instruments was ruled out by the Eastern Fathers as being incompatible with the pure, solemn, spiritual character of the religion of Christ.” - **Constantine Cavarnos, Byzantine Sacred Music**
  - c. “Musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting up of lamps, the restoration of the other shadows of the law. The Papists, therefore, have foolishly borrowed this, as well as many other things, from the Jews. Men who are fond of outward pomp may delight in that noise; but the simplicity which God recommends to us by the apostle is far more pleasing to Him.” - **John Calvin, Commentary on the Book of Psalms, Vol. I, p. 539**

3. Sadly, many today think that to become more “spiritual” requires innovation (change)...
  - a. Such as mechanical instruments, clapping, burning of incense, theatrical productions
  - b. But such things appeal to the fleshly side of man, rather than to his spiritual side!  
-- **When one looks to the OT for the kind of worship they offer, they are taking a step backward, not forward to true spirituality!**
  
4. Some complain that simple singing and worship is outdated and boring...
  - a. But the “fleshly ordinances” of the OT are older than the “spiritual worship” of the NT!
  - b. If we find the “spiritual worship” of the NT boring, is that not a sad commentary on our own spiritual condition?
    - 1) The melody of a song may only be a simple chant...
    - 2) But if the words of the song present spiritual truths, how can that be “boring”?  
-- **Is it really outdated, or simply challenging to those seeking to entertain themselves?**

In “**The Church Jesus Built**”, the worship will seek to worship God the way Jesus instructs, again noting His words:

*“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”*  
(Jn 4:23-24)

Is our worship “in spirit and truth”?

# The Church Jesus Built

## The Work Of The Church

### INTRODUCTION

1. Having considered the organization and worship of “**The Church Jesus Built**”, what about the **work** of the church?
  - a. What does the Lord intend for His church to do in this world?
  - b. Are we free to involve the church in whatever work we deem suitable?
  
2. In asking such questions, we should continue to note the distinction between the church **universal** and the church **local**...
  - a. The church **universal** has no earthly organization in which to do its work; what work it does is done as individuals who live and work in the world
  - b. The church **local** has organization as we have seen, and as such is capable of some sort of corporate (as opposed to individuals) work

-- **It is the work of the church local that I am addressing in this study**
  
3. The work of the church can be gleaned in some respects from what is revealed about the organization and worship of the church...
  - a. For the Lord organized His church to effectively carry out its work
  - b. And the worship ordained would certainly complement the church in its work

-- **Look at the organization and worship of the church, and that begins to tell one what the work of the church is!**

[With that in mind, and turning now to the Scriptures, let me first stress that the work of the church includes...]

### I. EDIFICATION (PREPARING THE SAINTS FOR SERVICE)

#### **A. IMPLIED BY ITS ORGANIZATION AND WORSHIP...**

1. The local church when completely organized will have bishops (elders, pastors)
  - a. Their function is to feed and oversee the flock - **Ac 20:28; 1 Pe 5:1-2**
  - b. As they carry out their responsibilities, the church will be built up (edified)
2. The activities of their worship are designed to edify
  - a. E.g., singing designed to exhort and admonish, as well as praise God - **Ep 5:19; Co 3:16**
  - b. E.g., preaching and teaching which certainly edifies the church

#### **B. EXPLICITLY STATED IN THE SCRIPTURES...**

1. Speaking of the gifts which Christ gave His church - **Ep 4:11**
2. Such gifts (including that of evangelists, pastors and teachers) are designed:
  - a. For the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry
  - b. For the edifying of the body of Christ - **Ep 4:12**

3. As each person in the church does their part, the end result will be the “growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” - **Ep 4:15-16**

[When one looks at how the local church is organized, what it is called to do in worship, and the purpose of the gifts that Christ gave His church, I believe it is fair to say that the primary work of the local church is **edification**, i.e., the spiritual development of its members! But clearly there is more. The work of the local church certainly includes...]

## **II. BENEVOLENCE (PROVIDING FOR THE NEEDY SAINTS)**

### **A. THE EARLY CHURCH CARED FOR ITS MEMBERS...**

1. We see it in the church at Jerusalem for its own - **Ac 4:32-37**
2. We see it in the church at Antioch for their brethren in Judea - **Ac 11:27-30**
3. We see in the churches of Macedonia and Achaia for their brethren in Jerusalem - **Ro 15:25-26**

### **B. ITS ORGANIZATION AND WORSHIP ACCOMMODATED SUCH WORK...**

1. Deacons were appointed - cf. **Ph 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8-13**
  - a. They served the congregation
  - b. If the seven selected in **Acts 6** were prototypes of the work of deacons, they would certainly serve in providing assistance for widows and other needy members - **Ac 6:1-6**
2. The collection for needy saints was made a part of the weekly assembly - **1 Co 16:1-2**

### **C. BUT THERE WERE LIMITATIONS TO ITS BENEVOLENCE...**

1. In Paul’s instructions to Timothy - **1 Ti 5:9-16**
    - a. Widows with believing family members were not to be supported
    - b. Their own families should support them, that *“the church not be burdened”*
  2. Examples of church benevolence are limited to needy saints
    - a. In every case of church benevolence, i.e., where money was taken from the church treasury, the recipients were believers in need - cf. **Ro 15:25-26; 1 Co 16:1-2; 2 Co 8:1-4; 9:1**
    - b. Of course, individually Christians would be expected to be “good Samaritans” and help those in the world as they had opportunity and ability
- **This implies that the local church was not intended to be a social agency to cure all the social ills in the world. It has neither the organization nor resources to do so!**

[The work of **benevolence**, while important, appears to take a back seat to the primary work of the church, which was **edification**. But there is another work of the church, which is a natural outgrowth of equipping the saints for ministry...]

## **III. EVANGELISM (PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL TO THE LOST)**

### **A. THE EARLY CHURCHES WERE INVOLVED IN EVANGELISM...**

1. They sent out preachers to spread the word in new places - cf. **Ac 13:1-3**
2. They provided support for such preachers - e.g., **2 Co 11:8,9**

**B. THIS IS CONSISTENT WITH WHAT THE LORD EXPECTS...**

1. For His disciples were to make more disciples - **Mt 28:19-20**
2. For His people are to proclaim the praises of God - **1 Pe 2:9-10**
3. And among the gifts He gave to His church was the function of “evangelists” - **Ep 4:11**

**CONCLUSION**

1. The work of the church can be summarized as:
  - a. **Edification** (preparing the saints for service)
  - b. **Benevolence** (providing for the needy saints)
  - c. **Evangelism** (proclaiming the gospel to the lost)
2. For such work the Lord designed His church, especially in the **local** sense...
  - a. As reflected in its **organization**
  - b. As reflected in its **worship**
3. There is a danger in taking what the Lord created and using it for purposes He did not intend, such as political or social activism...
  - a. Not that such causes are without merit
    - 1) As individuals, Christians can certainly participate in such causes
    - 2) Using other organizations such as family, community, or governmental agencies
  - b. But the local church is limited in its resources
    - 1) It can easily become “burdened” (cf. **1 Ti 5:16**)
    - 2) It can be hindered or distracted from fulfilling its true purpose.

-- **If the church is not free to do its work, then its work will suffer!**
4. When we let the **local** church do its proper work, it will...
  - a. “equip saints for the work of the ministry”
  - b. “edify the body of Christ”
  - c. “grow up in all things into Him who is the head, Christ”
5. If we are to truly be “**The Church Jesus Built**”...
  - a. Let’s be sure to understand what the work of the church is
  - b. Let’s make sure that we carry out that work in the local church as taught in the New Testament

May we today let the church be “**The Church Jesus Built**”, in its nature, its organization, its worship, and its work! In this way we can do our part to fulfill the prayer of Paul:

*“to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” (Ep 3:21)*