

The Church

The Problems We Face Today

One of the challenges facing Christians today is the difficulty of finding the right church so we can grow spiritually and live out our faith.

- For many church has become just a weekly routine where they go to get a spiritual boost.
- There are so many churches and we do not know which one is right for us and which ones truly follow the teachings of Jesus Christ.
- What ministries or church programs should we be involved with?
- We get sidetracked by the things of this world and our church attendance becomes sporadic or stops altogether.
- We are not growing spiritually and we do not know how to break out of our spiritual rut.

These problems are common to many Christians. This lesson will help you understand the purpose of the church and how to find a church home that will be right for you and your family.

Lesson Truth

As Christians, it is important for us to gather together to worship God, equip believers to be disciples, and to make other disciples. The church is the means God has provided for us to do this. We must understand the purpose of the church and the importance of finding a church home where we can grow spiritually and serve Jesus Christ.

Lesson Goal

To know the purpose of the church and then join a local church and be baptized.

Lesson Discussion

What is the Church?

The word “church” means different things to different people. The word is used by Jesus in the gospels only a few times. It is used in the Epistles many times and refers to a group of Christians living in a particular city who gathered together to worship God and carry out the mission of Jesus Christ.



Matthew 16:18 “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”

The word “church” is also used to refer to the community of all Christians, a local body of believers, or even a building where Christians gather together.



Acts 9:31 “Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.”

For most Christians the term “church” refers to the place we go to worship on Sunday mornings and where we hear the Word of God preached. It is a local community of believers who financially partner together to provide a place of worship and a place from which they can reach out to the community.



Acts 13:1 “In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul.”

It is important for every Christian to belong to a local church and to use the gifts God gives us for the building up of the body of Christ. The challenge is to find the church that is right for you and your family.

Purpose of the Church

Many who have been saved were saved in a church after they heard the gospel of Jesus Christ preached. They often join that local body of believers and continue their membership until they relocate or find that particular church is no longer meeting their spiritual needs.



Matthew 28:18-20 “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age’.”

The primary purpose of the church is to preach and teach the Word and make disciples. The church also provides an opportunity for Christians to worship together and for the gospel to be preached to the lost.

Other church activities include programs to help the poor and homeless, visiting those in prisons and hospitals, and outreach programs to connect with the local community for outreach.

Why People Attend Church

Each person comes to church for a reason. Often the reason is to obey the Bible because it teaches us we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves. Many attend church to learn more about the Christian faith and how to grow spiritually. Some want to be actively involved in outreach or ministry within the community.



Hebrews 10:25 “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

Some attend church because they believe it is what Christians are supposed to do on Sunday or because their parents always took them. Some attend because they like the social activities or because they just want to be with people of like faith.

What Are Denominations?

The concept of denominations is not biblical, but refers to different groups of churches whose beliefs may differ. Most denominations have their own constitution describing what they believe. Denominations can be divided into two basic groups: those that are evangelical and those that are not.

The term evangelical means the denomination holds to some very specific common beliefs which include:

- Belief that the Bible is the inerrant word of God
- Belief that God came to earth in the form of a man named Jesus Christ and died on the cross for man’s sins and on the third day He arose and ascended into Heaven
- Belief that the only way to receive salvation and eternal life is to admit that they are sinners and cannot save themselves and to accept Jesus Christ into their heart as their Lord and Savior.

One of the most important beliefs of evangelical denominations is the divinity of Jesus Christ. This simply means they believe Jesus is God.



John 20:26-28 “A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe’. Thomas said to him, ‘My Lord and my God!’”

A second important belief of evangelical denominations is that people are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Salvation cannot be earned or deserved.



Ephesians 2:8 – 9 “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

Non-evangelical denominations either deny that Jesus is God (they may believe Jesus was from God but they deny His divine nature) or they believe you can get to heaven by good works or some other way.

The only way you can really know what a particular denomination believes is by reviewing their statement of faith and doctrines so you can get a sense of what they really believe. You can also talk to other Christians you know and ask them about their church.

The teachings in the *One Step* series are evangelical. I recommend finding an evangelical church that will support these truths.

Selecting a Church

Among evangelical denominations there are churches and then there are better churches. The key is to find a church that will consistently emphasize the importance of your relationship with Jesus Christ. This means Jesus will be kept in the forefront of everything it does. The best churches will not necessarily have a lot of

programs and activities. However, they will understand and teach the importance of following Jesus and how to be His disciple.

You will want to find a church that is teaching through the bible or teaching lessons that are solidly biblically based in their content. If the teachings are not leading you to submit more of your life to Jesus or are not helping you to love and trust Him more, then you may want to look elsewhere.

You may want to visit several churches in your local community and try different denominations. Don't just look at a church from the perspective of what the church can do for you or what programs they have for you and your family. Consider also how the church reaches the lost and is making disciples as Jesus commanded.

A good place to start is to find out where your friends or coworkers attend. You may find this approach to be less intimidating since you will know someone who can meet you at the church and introduce you to others.

You may have to attend several churches before you find one that is right for you and your family. The Holy Spirit can help guide you in selecting the best church to help you grow spiritually. Keep spiritually in tune with the Holy Spirit asking Him to lead you to a church that He wants you to attend.

How Do I Join a Church?

Joining a church is pretty simple. All you have to do is make contact with the church leadership and let them know of your desire. They may ask you if you are saved so they know how best to serve you and may ask how you came to be saved. Ask if there are any other requirements for becoming a member.

Each church has its own unique characteristics. Often they will have an orientation program to help you understand what they believe and what programs and activities they offer. If they do not have an orientation program, you will want to ask them any questions you would like

answered about their church or what they believe.

You can ask them about the programs they offer for different age groups. Find out what training programs they have for new believers and how they go about making disciples and preaching the gospel to the lost.

Baptism

Jesus said we must be baptized. Baptism represents dying to your old way of living and being raised to newness of life in Jesus Christ. It is a visible outward testimony of our repentance and our choice to be obedient to Jesus Christ.



Acts 2:38 “Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven.’”

The most common practice of baptism in evangelical churches is through submersion. This just means you are lowered down into the water and immediately raised back up. It is a simple procedure, but if you are afraid of the water, it may require a step of faith on your part. If you haven’t been already, you should ask to be baptized as soon as possible after joining a church.



Colossians 2:11-12 “In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.”

Romans 6:3-4 “Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”

Financial Giving

You will want to begin supporting your local church immediately. This is a critical area in your spiritual obedience. Many Christians procrastinate here and they fail to receive the blessings God wants to give them.



Malachi 3:8-12 “Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, ‘How do we rob you?’ In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. ‘Test me in this,’ says the LORD Almighty, ‘and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit,’ says the LORD Almighty. ‘Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,’ says the LORD Almighty.”

When one gives financially it should be from the desire to share and to honor God. It is more blessed to give than receive. Begin by giving something that fits within your budget. The Holy Spirit will teach you over time how and what He wants you to give.

Failure to give willingly will impact your spiritual life significantly. Couples who are struggling financially will need to spend time praying and asking God for wisdom in giving. The best practice is to give to God first before spending your income on other things.

There are some very good Christian books on managing your finances. Your church may have resources or offer training to assist you with money management.



Luke 6:38 “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together

and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

1 Corinthians 9:14 "In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel."

One thing you may have to work on right away is making your wants less— maybe a lot less. Those who are married will have a greater challenge because both partners will need to agree on an approach to decreasing individual wants if that is what is required. Spend time in prayer about your giving and develop an attitude of giving out of a cheerful heart.

Many Christians believe 10% is the standard for giving. But you may need to start with much less until you have adjusted your living so you can continue to increase your giving over time.

Remember, the Christian life is a life of faith. Give to God first what is due Him and then God will see to it you always have what you need. So give and trust Him to work out the details.

Serving in the Church

The purpose of the church is to equip us for works of service which include ministering to and equipping church members to serve God. The church is also responsible for ministering to those in need inside the church and to the lost outside the church to make disciples. We must evangelize the lost and disciple them.



Ephesians 4:11-13 "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge

of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

The church is not buildings and programs. The church is the body of believers, wherever they are and wherever they meet together. The Bible teaches that Jesus is always present when believers gather together.



Matthew 18:20 "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

The actual building referred to as the church is just a central location where believers can meet together to carry out the mission of Jesus Christ. There is nothing holy or sacred about the building. The holiness and sacredness is found in the lives of the individuals who make up the church.

Each member of the church is gifted by the Holy Spirit to be of service. It is important to allow God time to bring your life to a point where you are ready to serve. New Christians should not immediately jump into the work of service.



John 12:26 "Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me."

We can only serve Jesus Christ when we are following Him as His disciple. Therefore it is important first to learn how to be His disciple before we run off and try to serve Him.

The Holy Spirit will show you when and where to serve according to the gifts He has given you. When we are born again we have the tendency to want to serve in any and every way we can. Many Christians have lost their way because of this tendency to rush into service, often overwhelming themselves. They find themselves operating in their own strength instead of totally relying on the Holy Spirit.

As workers for God we need to be properly equipped. This takes time. Pride, jealousy, unrealistic expectations, selfishness, and a dozen other things will trap you if you are not patient and you try to do it your own way. You must let God be God in your life. In His time He will equip you and lead you where He wants you to serve.



One Step for Living This Truth

Next we will suggest the specific action step you can take to allow the truth taught in this lesson to be lived in your own personal life.

You only have to do this one step to master this lesson. Your focus and effort should be to make sure you consistently and persistently do the one step as directed.

God has ordained the church to carry out His mission by equipping the saints for works of service. You will need to find a church home and be baptized. Once you have accomplished these steps, you are living the truth of this lesson.

ACTION STEP

Spend at least ten minutes each and every day with God. During this time with God, ask Him to lead you to the church He wants you to join.

After you have joined a church, ask to be baptized if you haven't yet been baptized.

The above step is to be done each day in addition to anything else you might do such as read the Bible, attending Bible study and church etc.

As you spend time with God, talk to Him as you would a friend for whom you have a lot of respect and reverence.

The key to mastering this step is to be persistent and not let anything rob you of this time with God. God loves you and desires to have time with you each day to show you how much He wants to be a part of your life.

You should continue to read at least one chapter a day in the Gospels. The gospels are where you learn the teachings and commands of Jesus.

As you visit various churches, ask the Holy Spirit to make it clear what church you should join. The attitude of the congregation, the message of the preacher, and the Bible class teachings are often indications of where the church is spiritually.



2 Corinthians 10:4–5 ...“We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ”.

When thoughts that are not God-focused try to press in, thrust them out of your mind immediately.

If you suddenly remember something you need to do later in the day, have pen and paper handy to write it down. Then immediately let it go and get back to concentrating on God.

If your mind seems to be overwhelmed with non-God focused thinking and nothing seems to be working, a little trick that works well for me is to constantly say “in the name of Jesus” over and over until your mind is free to concentrate on God and God only.

There is tremendous power in the name of Jesus Christ and just saying it can be very powerful in helping you get free from troublesome thinking, even if you have to do this for the entire ten

minutes. Eventually you will begin to have greater control over your thinking.



Illustration for Living the Truth

Bob and Sharon were born again during a Billy Graham crusade. They were both excited about their newfound life in Jesus. They knew they needed to join a church, but they also wanted it to be the right church for the both of them. They began to pray every evening together and asked the Holy Spirit to lead them to the church He wanted them to attend. They did some research on the Internet about churches in their community. There were many denominations and many churches within each of those denominations. They decided to visit several so they could see the differences before they made their decision.

Some of the differences they noted were with the style of preaching and how closely the message did or did not tie to the teachings of Jesus. Some churches had better choirs than others, and the style of worship music varied considerably. The Sunday school classes also varied in the nature of their teaching and the spiritual maturity of the teacher. Some classes were more social in nature and focused on various life challenges, whereas other classes studied through the Bible.

One of the churches had a visitation program where members would visit newcomers at their home. Dan and Carl came on a Monday evening to welcome Bob and Sharon and thank them for attending a service at New Harvest. The men provided an orientation about their church's beliefs and the programs and ministries of their church. They also asked Bob and Sharon if they had any questions about New Harvest. Both men shared their testimony about how they came to be born again and how the church had really helped them grow.

After the men had left, Bob and Sharon discussed their experience at New Harvest and

Dan and Carl's visit. They both agreed the preaching and Sunday school class were biblically based. The people were friendly and the worship music was a good balance of new and old. They continued to pray throughout the week and felt the Holy Spirit leading them to attend another New Harvest service. They continued to visit for several weeks, and then joined the church and asked to be baptized. They knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that New Harvest was the church the Holy Spirit had led them to.



Other Scripture Verses

Acts 14:26-27 "From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles."

Acts 20:28 "Guard yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood."

1 Corinthians 4:17 "For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church."

1 Corinthians 12:28 "And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues."

1 Corinthians 16:19 "The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house."

Ephesians 1:22-23 "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head

over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”

Ephesians 5:23-24 “For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.”

Colossians 1:24 “Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.”

1 Timothy 3:14-15 “Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.”

1 Timothy 5:17 “The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.”

Revelation 3:14-16 “To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”