

Church Unity and Denominations

The Church is not nearly as fragmented as people think. There has only ever been one true Church. It covers many denominations and is not restricted to any particular creed or dogma which often serves only to create divisions within the Body of Christ. God's Holy Spirit is the unifying force that supersedes any barriers posed by religious institutions or doctrine. When we settle into a form of religion that no longer preaches the uncompromising Word of God but adds to or subtracts from it in various ways, and lacks any real power to transform lives, then we are not functioning within the scriptural definition of His Church, and are not in sync with what the Holy Spirit is doing in the earth.

Our reward in heaven is based on our obedience to the calling of Christ on our lives and not the expectations of religion or the world. Some may be surprised at who is rewarded and who is judged as lacking when that final glorious day of judgment arrives (Matt 7:21-23). This is a very sobering passage of Scripture where 'lawlessness' is synonymous with 'doing you own thing', without reference to God's authority, will or instruction.

Church Structure and Leadership

Men may argue and fight over position and power, but God's people are known by their fruit. Jesus even had trouble with His disciples on this point (Luke 22:24-30) and had to instruct them on what it means to lay down their lives and serve one another in love. Nothing much has changed over the years.

The Father gave headship of this kingdom structure on earth to Christ, who now functions in His Body (the Church) through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Col 1:18; Eph 1:22-23). God has delegated His authority to those chosen to oversee the Church. By relating in this way to God's structure, we are in fact being obedient to the Head, which is Christ (Heb 13:17).

God has placed "**Gifted Ministries**" in the Body of Christ such as **Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor** and **Teacher** (Eph 4:11-13), who must, in turn, appoint leaders within the Church. They are to train the believers to function as ministers to the Body of Christ and properly equip them for the task of expanding the Kingdom of God on earth.

In the New Testament special offices or leadership positions are established to govern and maintain the local church in harmony, such as '**Elders**' and '**Deacons**' (1 Tim 3:1-13). We are all 'workers' in the kingdom of God, doing His will in the earth and preaching the kingdom message to those who are ready to receive it (Luke 10:2). However, the harvest (of souls) is indeed plentiful, and labourers in the church equipped and willing to minister are still so few. Jesus encouraged us to pray that more labourers would enter the harvest field and gather the crop. The role of the church is to be the rallying point where we meet to be trained, encouraged, and sent out into the fields to reap the harvest of men and women who are hungry to hear a healing Word from God.

To be chosen by God is an awesome responsibility, but also a privilege, and a joy to fulfil as we bring salvation and eternal life to the people around about us.

When we take up the call of God to find our place in the Body of Christ as a member of a local Church, the church will flourish and prosper.

- You need the church, and the church needs you! -

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WHAT IS THE CHURCH

The word “**church**” comes from the Greek word “**ecclesia**”, which means “**a people called out from**” or an “**assembly of people**”. A church is therefore simply a gathering of people who have specifically come together by agreement to worship God and be in relationship together with Him.

“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst” (Matt 18:20)

A Place To Belong

God never intended we should be alone in our Christian walk (Heb 10:23-25). When we become a Christian we are spiritually re-born to function as members of the Body of Christ (Rom 7:4), called into union as part of God's divine plan for the salvation of all Mankind.

The Apostle Paul calls the Church the “Body of Christ” (1 Cor 12:12-31) and likens it to the human body. The members of the church make up the different parts, neatly fitting together to form a whole in order to function correctly, just like the human body. As members we each have our own individual role to play as part of the Body of Christ on earth.

In New Testament times meetings happened locally in homes where believers gathered to worship God and share their faith with each other (Acts 2:46-47). As the early Church grew, they formed themselves into larger, more organised groups, often naming themselves after the city or town where they gathered (the Roman church, the church at Galatia, the Ephesian church, etc). Both house churches and city churches are spoken of in the book of Acts and in Paul's letters. As early believers travelled forth, their message of salvation spread wherever they went. Over time these new converts to Christianity became linked by a network of God's ministers to the Body of Christ, and wherever they gathered in groups became known as “local churches”.

The early church met together on ‘the Lord's day’ each week, sharing communion and singing songs of praise to God. By the second century this was almost universally on a Sunday.

A Place To Grow

When we meet together to worship God we receive valuable teaching and enjoy rich fellowship. Heb 10:24-25 instructs us not to neglect this part of our spiritual walk as some do, but spur each other on to love and good deeds. Attending church is vital for a believer and is not an option if we want to progress in our relationship with the Lord and not become stale and lukewarm in our faith (Rev 3:15-16).

It is from this perspective – *by finding the church God wants us to belong to and committing ourselves to that church* – that we can then ascertain our own individuality in Christ. Not as an independent ‘believer’, but as someone inter-dependent and committed to seeing God's purposes on earth fulfilled through his chosen vessel, which is the Church (Eph 1:22-23). When the fit is right, church becomes our spiritual family.

As with our own natural body, it is imperative that the Body of Christ functions in harmony and unity, otherwise problems can occur. With so many different Christian around in churches today it can sometimes be confusing where to fit in.

The Holy Spirit promises to lead us into all truth (John 16:13). God's Word, the Bible, is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Ps 119:105). It's important that a Christian church preaches messages that line up with Scripture. Churches that fail in this are said to “hold to a form of religion but denying its power” (2 Tim 3:1-17). The Bible indicates that spiritual bondage, rather than spiritual freedom, is the fruit you will usually know them by (Matt 7:15-20). Fortunately, there are God-fearing, Spirit-filled, Bible-believing churches within all denominations. Let the Holy Spirit lead you to the place He can you to belong and make your own spiritual family.

A Place To Function In Our Spiritual Gifts

It is essential Christians become active as part of the Body of Christ. A ‘lone’ Christian is about as useful as an arm or finger left lying on the sidewalk, and casual Christians too often become Christian casualties!

To be an active member of a local church involves meeting together, making new friends and becoming part of its ministry outreach, it is also a place to grow spiritually. The Church is a Christian's spiritual family. And family is important. A person in true communion with Jesus Christ and his Church should be able to function better in every area of their lives, including their relationships at home, work or school.

“For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ” (Rom 12:4-5)

In John 15 Jesus uses the analogy of the vine and the branches. He declares that by bearing much fruit the Father is glorified, and that by this we prove to be His disciples (v8). We are considered His friends if we do what He commands (v14) which includes integrating into and becoming actively involved in a local church.

Authority of the Local Church

All power and authority rests with the Head of the Church, which is Jesus Christ. Apart from the Head there is no authority, for the Head is the source of all authority (Matt 28:18). All other authority exercised is delegated authority (Rom 13:1). By being a part of God's kingdom structure, becoming one with it, we become candidates for the channelling of God's divine power and authority in our own lives. The source of all authority (Christ) becomes the source of authority in our lives and circumstances, and in our effectiveness as believers!

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus Christ (Matt 28:18), who has chosen to delegate much of this authority to His Church. The Bible teaches that we are not of this world (John 15:19; 17:14) but have been bought with a price (1 Cor 6:19-20). As such we take our place as responsible citizens of the Kingdom of God. In this way we can be channels, allowing God's blessing to continually be released into our lives, for the benefit of ourselves and others.

“We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God” (1 Peter 2:9)

We are given the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt 16:19) and instructed to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. (Matt 6:33). In this way our needs will continually and abundantly be met, as we also seek to be a blessing to others.

“The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly” (John 10:10)