

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

Church of Christ Series

“Church of Christ Series -Lesson 1 -What is the Church?”

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

Jesus said, "I will build my church," Matthew 16:18.

Welcome you today to our study of: what is the church of Christ? What do you know about the Lord's church? The church we read about in the Bible, God's people, His family. What do we know about the Lord's church?

Let's begin by thinking about why there is such a great need to study this subject, why does a person need to think about the church of the Lord Jesus Christ? We want you to know from the outset that our aim and our purpose first and foremost is to speak the truth. The Bible says in Ephesians 4:15, "Speak the truth." As Christians, as followers of God, we have a great responsibility to speak God's truth on this issue. Proverbs 23:23 says, not only do we have a responsibility to speak it, but every hearer has responsibility to that as well. The Bible says we are to buy the truth and sell it not. If it's truth, regardless of the cost, regardless of what changes may be necessary, my responsibility is to accept truth and put that to use in my life. The value of the truth cannot be underestimated. Jesus said in John 8:32, "You shall know the truth, and the truth will make you free." What is it that sets men free from sin and removes them from the stranglehold of the devil? The truth sets people free, John 8:32.

Let's also realize this, there's a great need for this study because not only do we want to speak the truth, we want to do it the right way. Let's hear the rest of Ephesians 4:15. Paul said to speak the truth 'in love.' We want you to know that out of a sincere love, 1 Corinthians 16:14, for men

and women's souls, we're saying these things today. Our motivation, our aim, and the reason we're bringing these lessons is because we love souls, and we want men and women to go to heaven.

God doesn't want anybody to be lost, 1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9. At the Gospel of Christ, we feel the same way about men and women and souls. The Bible says in Proverbs 27:5, 'open rebuke is better than love, carefully concealed'- to say what God says is better than to skirt around the issue and act like we love people when in reality if we love them, we would say what the Bible says.

There's a great need for this study also because men and women need clarity on clear subjects on the subjects God talks about in the Bible. When I think about the clarity of speaking, the way God wants us to, there's a minor prophet, a passage mentioned in Habakkuk 2:2 that I often think of. God said to the minor prophet Habakkuk, "Make it so plain that he who runs may read it." John 10:25, they said to Jesus in verse 24 and 25, 'tell us plainly.' We want to make it so clear and so plain that people can understand what God says.

When I think about this idea of making it plain, that the person who runs can read it, I think about this- you're driving down the interstate at a high rate of speed, 70 miles an hour, billboards are coming at you and the messages, you never miss those messages. Why? They're so concise, so plain and so clear, even though you're moving at a high rate of speed, you can get the point. That's the way gospel preaching, that's the way clear proclamations of God's message ought to be.

Let's be clear today as well, our main emphasis in speaking on these subjects is ultimately to please God. Galatians 1:10 Paul said, if I wanted to be a servant of man, I wouldn't be speaking on this in essence. That's why he's a servant of Almighty God. Ultimately, we want to please God and make Him happy in the things that we say and do.

What's the backdrop? What are we trying to achieve? What's the purpose of bringing lessons to men and women on the Lord's church? Please understand, we're not trying to anger, and we're not trying to make anybody our enemy. That's the opposite of what we want to do. Paul said in Galatians 4:16, "Have I become your enemy because I preach or speak the truth?" Although, some of the things we say in this series of lessons on

the Lord's church may be different, may be unique, and may be things that you've not seen or read or heard in the Bible- if they're from the word of God, please understand our aim is not to anger or upset. According to Ephesians 6:4, and Hebrews 10:24, we're trying to help men and women draw near, draw closer to God through His truth and through His Word and thus we're not out to make enemies or upset anyone.

Also realize this, please understand we're not saying we're the only sincere religious people, but also realize sincerity alone won't save anybody. Romans 10:2 Paul said of his own countrymen, of those who were caught up in Judaism and its tradition just like he was, Paul said, "They have a zeal for God, but not according to truth." Are there zealous people who have a desire to please God, and a desire to go to heaven? You bet there are. But sincerity without truth won't save anybody. We want sincere, God fearing, God seeking people to hear the truth on the church so that they can be right with Almighty God.

And friend, please understand this is such a powerful point. Anyone who obeys God's truth can be right with Him. The Bible says again in John 8:32, "You can know the truth and the truth will make you free." Ephesians 3:3-4 says, "When we read, we can understand God's will." Anyone who will come to the Bible with an open and honest heart and do what it says, they can absolutely be right with God and live before Him in purity.

As we think about the idea of the Lord's church, we want to ask what then is the individual's responsibility to truth? If I hear the truth or as we think about truth, what's my responsibility?

First and foremost, let's realize my responsibility is to demand that I hear and know God's truth, not the ideas and opinions of men. I love the words of John 10:24-25, Jesus had already told them on multiple occasions, but this time they come to Jesus and they say, 'Tell us plainly if you're the Christ.' Jesus did indeed tell them. That's what men and women need, that's the attitude we need today. Tell us plainly what God says on this matter.

Please understand, there are a whole lot of people who want to skirt around the issues. There's a whole lot of people who proverbially want to beat around the bush and that won't help anybody. In a long-ago Jeremiah said in Jeremiah 5:30-31, "The prophets prophesy falsely, the priests rule

by their own authority, and my people love to have it so" But then there was this question and God said, 'But what will you do in the end?' Beating around the bush, skirting around the issues, and tip toeing over this is not going to help anybody come closer to God.

Men and women need to demand to know and hear God's truth. Then of course, we need to listen very carefully to what the Bible says. There is a common refrain that you will find in every letter to the seven churches of Asia Minor in Revelation 2-3. God will say to those people, "To him that has ears to hear, let him hear." What's God saying? 'Listen very carefully to what I'm saying.' Our responsibility to the truth is to listen very carefully to what the Bible says, 'take heed what you hear,' Mark 4:24. Take heed how you hear it, Luke 8:18. As the Bereans in Acts 17:11, 'they searched the Scriptures daily to see if what Paul was teaching them was true to the word of God.' We want make sure we're listening very carefully to the Bible, to what God says.

But you know, even if we demand to know and hear the truth, even if we listen very carefully to the Bible- we still have another responsibility to take what I've seen to be from the Bible, and apply that to my heart and life. To hear it, to open up a Bible and see it's in the pages of the word of God, won't do anything if I don't put it into action in my life. Philippians 4:9 Paul said, "The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you." Jesus is the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, Hebrews 5:8-9. It's not enough just to go out and look up in heaven and say, 'Lord, Lord.' Jesus said 'not everybody who does that is going to heaven.' Who is then? 'He, who does the will of my Father in heaven.'

We hope that as we've mentioned some things leading up to this, that those things will be on our heart and mind as we think about the Lord's church.

Let's then turn our attention to thinking about some characteristics of the church, and as we do that there is a lot of confusion in our world about the church.

We often hear people talk about the church or something related to the church, and sometimes wonder is that really what the church is? Let's think for a few moments about common explanations or common terms we

hear about the church that's really not the church in the Bible. Here are a few of those. What is the church not? As you read the Bible, it is clear the church is not the building. Acts 7:48-50, the Apostle Paul said, listen to this, "God does not dwell in temples made with hands. As the prophet says, "'Heaven is my throne, earth is my footstool, "'what house will you build for me?' "Says the Lord. "'Has not my hand made all these things?'"

Then when we talk about the church, we're not talking about beautiful ornate stained glass, we're not talking about comfortable pews, we're not talking about a pulpit or a building located on a street corner somewhere. The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is not the building. Jesus didn't die for the building, did He? Acts 20:28, Jesus purchased the church with His own blood. He didn't die for two by fours and cinder block. That's not what He died for. Jesus died for more than an edifice that we sometimes refer to as the church.

Secondly, let's realize that the Lord's church is not worship. And by that we mean this, sometimes we say, 'I'm going to go to church.' Is the church worship? The church does worship there's no doubt about that. John 4:23-24, "God is a Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." Let's realize the church is not the same thing as worshipping God. God's people go to worship, we gathered together to worship, but here's the problem in that- sometimes we disconnect the idea of this, that every day of my life as I live for the Lord, I'm a member of the Lord's church whether I'm at work, whether I'm on the ball field, whether I'm at home, or whether I'm assembled with the saints every day, not just at worship, I'm a member of the Lord's church.

What else is the church not? The church is absolutely not a denomination. I want you to take your Bible, and I want to ask you to turn with me to 1 Corinthians 1:10-13. Look at what the Scripture says here, by denomination we carry with it the idea of division, or naming after another, the church you read about in the Bible is absolutely not any of those things. Look in your Bible in 1 Corinthians 1:10-13. Paul said, "Now plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing." Listen to this, "And that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." Paul what was going on? "For it has been declared to me

concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are divisions among you. Now I say this, each of you says, "I am of Paul," or, "I am of Apollos," or, "I am of Cephas," or, "I'm of Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" When we think about the denomination dividing, division, the Bible says, 'let there be no division among you.' The very idea of a denomination carries with it inherent in the word, naming after another. And the Lord said, some of you are saying 'I'm of Paul, I'm Apollos, I mean, are any of those crucified for you? Did Paul die for you? Let there be no divisions among you.' The modern religious landscape that we see in our world today with a denomination on every corner, carrying a different name, teaching different ideas, dividing the body of Christ, that is so foreign and contrary to what you read in the New Testament.

What else is the church not? The church is not a human man-made organism; it's just not. Isaiah 2:1-4, God prophesied that when the gospel would go forth Jerusalem, all nations would flow to it, and God would set up His house from Jerusalem. We read in 1 Timothy 3:15, that the church is the house of the living God. Daniel 2:44, Daniel prophesied that during the time of these four kingdoms, Babylonians, the Greeks, the Medo-Persians, and the Roman era. God would set up a kingdom which would never be destroyed. Then we open our Bible to Acts 2, Peter stands up in Jerusalem for the very first time, preaches salvation in Jesus as a present reality, and those who obey the gospel, listen to these beautiful words, the Bible says 'the Lord added them to His church.' We're not talking about a man-made human organism- we're talking about God's eternal kingdom set up and established by Jesus in the 1st century.

As we think about the church, let's realize the church is not of little value. Sometimes when I hear people talk about the church, they want to talk about, 'give me Jesus.' Let's think about salvation. I want to hear more about Christ, but don't talk to me about the church. Is the church worthless? That's not the case. Jesus died for it, didn't He? Acts 20:27-28 the Bible says, "The Lord purchased the church with His own blood." And so, when we talk about the church, we're talking about something that is of great value so much so that Jesus died for it.

Let's switch gears. If these things are not the church, what is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ?

The Lord's church, as we think about this word in the New Testament, the word in the original language is the word *ekklesia*. And I know that's a lot of Greek to throw out, but please understand it just simply means this, the word church means 'the called out' or 'the assembly.' You see 2 Thessalonians 2:14-15 says that we are called by the gospel. God says in 2 Corinthians 6:17-18, "'Come out from among them and be separate' says the Lord." And so, when we think about what is the Lord's church, it's the called-out people. The people who have heard the message. Your caller, His name Jesus, 'He will save His people from their sins,' Matthew 1:19-20. Those who listen to that message, those who obeyed what Jesus said, they became a part of the called out, His people, His body. The church is just that. God's own special people, Titus 2:11-13.

What else do we know about what the church is? We hinted at this earlier, but let's realize the church is the people. Open your Bible to 1 Corinthians 12:27. I want you to see Paul's words here to the church of God at Corinth and to Christians. Paul says, 'Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.' What's the church? The church is the body; the church is the people. Why is the church important? Because it's made up of souls. God's concerned about souls, God's concerned about people, and all the saved people are the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What else do I know the church is? I know who owns the church. The Bible says, Jesus speaking in Matthew 16:18, after Peter had noted, 'you're the Christ, the Son of the living God,' Jesus turned and said, "And I say to you that you're Peter, and on this rock," on this foundational truth, I'm the Son of God. "I will build my church and the Gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The Lord purchased the church with His own blood. Who does the church belong to? Jesus said, 'I'll build my church.'

We understand that when we talk about other things we own-like a car or house- we say 'I paid the note on that, it belongs to me.' The same is true about the Lord. Can anybody just go out and put their name on the church and call it theirs? No. Jesus purchased the church, His church with His own blood and it belongs to Him.

Let's notice this, the church is singular in its nature. I want you to open your Bible to Ephesians 1 and notice what the Scripture says in verse 22 and 23. The word of God says this, "And God, He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." And so, when we think about the church, the church is the body, those are one and the same. They're synonyms. Now flip over to Ephesians 4:4. Paul said, "There's one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above you all and through you all and in you all."

As we think about the church, we're talking about the church and the body being synonymous. And so, if the church is the body, listen to what Paul says in Ephesians 4:4, there is but one body. Now in that context, we ask ourselves, how many Lords are there? Well, there's only one Lord. How many faiths are there? Only one faith. How many Gods are there? Just one. If the church is the body, and the Bible says there's one body, how many churches did God intend to set up? Just one.

Listen to Matthew 16:18 again. Jesus said, 'On these rocks I'll build my churches.' Is that what He said? NO- Jesus said 'On this rock,' singular, 'I will build My church,' singular. And so, as we think about the church, it's singular in its nature. Jesus built one church; it belongs to Him and it ought to follow His teaching and His plan.

As we've thought today about the Lord's church, maybe you're thinking to yourself, how do I become a member of that church? These things I've seen in the Bible are from God's Word, what do I need to do to become a member of that church? Wouldn't it be great for us to just open up our Bible and see what they did in the 1st century? That's exactly what we'll want to do.

Turn to Acts 2, the very first time the gospel is preached, Acts 2:13-35. Peter preaches Jesus as the Messiah, and they heard the word of God, Romans 10:17. I know they believed it for in Acts 2:37, they were cut to the heart, they cried out 'men and brethren, what shall we do?' Meaning they realized believe Jesus was the Son of God. And what did Peter say? Look in Acts 2:38. Then Peter said to them, "'Let every one of you repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you

shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Those who did that, heard the word of God, believed in Jesus, repented of past sins, and were baptized into Christ for the remission of their sin. What happened to those people?

Acts 2:47 says, "The Lord," not man, "added to the church daily those who were being saved."

If you're not a member of the Lord's church, we want you to know this: The God of heaven loves you deeply, we love you deeply more than anything in all the world, and we want you to become a member of the Lord's body. If you've never done that, we encourage you to do that.

Study Questions for: Church of Christ Series-Lesson 1:

1. According to Ephesians 4:15, what are we to speak? How?
2. According to Proverbs 23:23, what responsibility do we have?
3. What will set us free according to John 8:32?
4. According to 1 Corinthians 16:14, what motivation should the truth be spoken from?
5. According to 1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9, what does God want?
6. According to Habakkuk 2:2 and John 10:24-25, how was it requested that the Gospel be presented?
7. In Romans 10:2, even though they had a zeal for God, what was their problem?
8. In Acts 17:11, what are the Bereans a good example of?
9. According to Acts 7:48-50, is the Church a building?
10. According to Matthew 16:18, how many churches are there?