

QUICK THEOLOGY

# Why Bother With the Church?



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## INTRODUCTION

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In this booklet, we will explore why Christians should bother with the Church. This is a massive, ongoing discussion, especially in America. When the Holy Spirit draws people to Christ and those people respond, they become part of a new family. Jesus is the Church's cornerstone, and He draws us together to be a part of that community. Yet many hurts have come from people who claim to be Christians—or who are Christians but are not walking in the Spirit. Confusion and pain over church runs like a scar across Christendom. This pain leaves so many confused over what church even is.

This whole topic cannot be condensed into one book, but we will take a high-level look at what the Church is in Scripture and explore how we can be the Church in today's culture.



CHAPTER ONE

## What is Church?

**T**welve years ago, in Bible college, my professor asked our class, “What is church?” One student answered: “I think this is church. We are in a Christian college class. We are all Christians. To me, this is church.” Another answered: “I like to go to a big church where nobody knows me. No one tries to stop me or talk to me. That is church to me.” Even back then, I was disturbed by these definitions. Something is off about a gathering of people who happen to be Christians as the definition of the Church. There is more to it than existing together as followers of Christ. We also cannot have a consumer mentality of in and out: of taking what you want and not investing or talking to

anybody else. But if those definitions of church aren't quite right, what is? Is church a sermon, a worship service, and an altar call? Is it a small group Bible study? Rather than coming up with our own definition, let's dig into church history for answers.

First, the word "church" comes from a Dutch word, "kirk." That word descends from a Greek word, which simply means "Lord's house." However, the Lord's house is not just a building. Ephesians 2 explains:

*"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of His household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In Him, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in Him, you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit."*

We, the followers of Christ, are the Church built together into a temple of the Lord. Most of the instructions that are given in the New Testament use the plural word for



you. It refers to you as a collective. Our faith is inherently communal. Our bodies house the spirit of Christ. His spirit is an advantage to us, but His influence is not simply for our self-improvement. It is to unite us with other believers. Christianity was never meant to be a solitary sport.

Once we understand what the Church is, we can look to Scripture to learn the role the Church is meant to fill. In Acts, when Peter preached at Pentecost, three thousand people came to know Jesus. Many of those first Christians, who had come to Jerusalem to partake in the Passover, chose to stay and were integrated into the Jerusalem church. Acts 2:42 describes what they did at the meetings of this first church—the start of the body of Christ: they devoted themselves to the apostle’s teaching (expounding on the scriptures), fellowship (relationship, unity, and support of one another), the breaking of bread (sacraments—observing what Jesus instituted before His death), and prayer. These four components should characterize a gathering for it to truly be a church.

However, these elements were not all that made the Church powerful. Early followers of Christ were overcome by a reverence for God and an amazement at the work of Christ. A sense of awe or reverence filled the Church as

they gathered to learn from the Word, break bread, and live in imperfect fellowship. It is easy to imagine people in the early church as more perfect than the brothers and sisters in Christ we know today. But these people had the same sins and problems we do. Read the New Testament: read Corinthians. What is Paul correcting these people for? Sexual sin, being completely out of order, gossip—all stuff that we still deal with today. The early church was made of imperfect people who had to walk with one another in the fruits of the spirit just like we do. They gathered to seek God, and a church full of people in awe of God's goodness will always have an impact on their world.

In modern America, we have added all this stuff to our idea of what a church should be. As church leaders, we can feel like we must have perfect programs, music, and aesthetics to keep people coming back. But the draw for these early Christians was not what a church building or institution had to offer. The draw was Jesus; it was the opportunity to learn more about Him and how to walk in His spirit. How you get somebody into a church is the reason they stay or go. If you sell someone on amazing lights and performances and music, as many megachurches do, you must keep that up. That is what people will expect. If the draw to church

is fellowship with Jesus and other believers, continued discipleship, the true gospel, and growing more like Christ that is why people will stay.

I cannot speak for church culture in other countries, but Americans can have this haughty mentality that church is about what a church community will give them. If a church makes us uncomfortable, crosses us, or it does not provide the right programs, then the Church does not care about us. Many people think of church this way because that is the format that churches have sold them on. The call to church can become, “Come to our franchise location that has these amenities” instead of, “Come to Jesus in the true gospel and grow into the image of Christ so you can be His hands and feet in the world.” Instead of individuals gathering to be the Church to others—recognizing needs, giving up their time, and supporting one another—the Church becomes a dispensary responsible for giving those things to us. If it does not, the consumer can leave.

You cannot hold an awe of God and His work and approach church with a consumer mentality. Programs in themselves are not bad, some can do a lot of good, but the Church is so much simpler than that. The question we should ask is, when it all becomes too much, how much of what we do