

Why is the Church important?

Most often we use the word 'church' to refer to a building or a place. Another common association for the word 'church' is an institution or organization. In the Bible, the word 'church' has no reference whatsoever to buildings or organizations. A first century Christian would never have understood 'church' to mean a building. In fact, there were probably no church buildings until the 4th century. The earliest believers met in homes, or synagogues (James 2:2), schools (Acts 19:19), or catacombs, or...

The original word "church" in the Bible is *ekklesia*. This word is the Greek words *kaleo* (to call), with the prefix *ek* (out). Thus, the word means "the called out ones." *ekklesia* can be used in the New Testament to simply refer to a crowd (e.g. Acts 7:38; 19:32, 39, 41). However, when it is used to refer to the body of Christ it is a technical word referring to those called out of the world and joined together in a living union in Christ.

The word 'church' is used in the following ways:

- Universal or Ideal Church – a spiritual organism of which Christ is the Head, and is composed of all regenerated people. The church is both in heaven and on earth. (1 Peter 1:3, 22 25 1 Corinthians 12:13)
- Local Church – In the overwhelming number of cases, the church or *ekklesia* is the visible covenant community in a particular locale or region - a company of professing believers in any one locality or a group of local assemblies (1 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:2; Philippians.1:1) who have organized themselves for the purpose of doing God's will. Thus, the local church is part of the universal church.

The importance of the church to God is evidenced in at least the following reasons:

- Christ loved the Church and gave himself for her (Ephesians 5:25; Matthew 13:45,46). Christ is the Founder, in that He is her Teacher, Builder and the Sender of the Spirit who actually formed the Body of Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:13; Matthew 16:18; 1 Corinthians 3:11; 1 Peter 2:6-8).
- The church is the Divine plan of God and He founded the Church, bought the Church, builds the Church, and dwells in the Church. The *ekklesia* is the called-out and called-together community of God's people. She is the "chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God" (1 Peter 2:9; compare Exodus 19:5-6). The Church is being called out from both Jews and Gentiles and God is forming a new body (Ephesians 2:15). The Church is the community of the Holy Spirit. At its most basic level it is a community, not a hierarchy; an organism, not an organization (1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12:5-8; Ephesians 4:1-16; Matthew 18:20; 1 Peter 4:10-11).

- The primary purpose of God in this age is building the church (Matthew 16:18 Acts 15:14). The true church is a called out people for the Lord Jesus Christ and the Body through which He has decided to work in this time of history. The church is the focal point of God's program, for it is in the church that God's purposes converge. God has chosen to place the Church at the very center of his plan to reconcile the world to himself (Ephesians 1:20-23); Ephesians 3:10-11).
- Paul considered it his greatest sin to have persecuted the church (1 Corinthians 5:9; Galatians 1:13)
- The church is the only institution established by the apostles (Eph. 2:19-22).
- The Church will be united with Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:27; Revelation 19:7).
- The Church will reign with Christ (1 Corinthians 6:2; 1 Revelation 1:6, 3:21, 20:4-6 22:5). The Church will occupy a place of blessing and honor.
- The Church will be an eternal testimony (Ephesians 3:10, 21).
- God presences Himself in a distinctive way in and through the gathering of the Church (1 Cor. 14:24-25). We are instructed not to forsake the assembling of ourselves (Heb. 10:25). The settled and permanent practice of the church was to meet on the first day of the week to continue in the functions of teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer. Such seems to be the combined inference of Acts 20:1-12, 1 Corinthians 11:17ff., and 14:26ff.