

THE CHURCH: GOD'S SPECIAL POSSESSION

For thought: What do others think of when they hear the word “church”? What do you think of?

What is the Holy Christian Church?

- Ephesians 2, “¹⁸ For through [Jesus] we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. ¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”

The church is God’s holy, spiritual _____, made up of all those who _____ in Christ Jesus through the work of the _____.

- 1 Peter 2, “⁴ As you come to [Jesus], the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ...⁹ You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

The church is God’s spiritual _____, made up of “living _____” who have been _____ out of spiritual _____ and praise Him as his _____ people and as his royal _____. This is also called the _____ (or community) of saints.

Other descriptions of the congregation of believers include the city of God (Ps 46:4), the people of God (1 Pe 2:9,10), the temple of God (1 Co 3:16,17), Mount Zion (Ps 48:2), the bride of Christ (Re 21:2), the body of Christ (Ep 1:22,23), and the kingdom of God.

What makes this different from local Christian congregations, or “churches”?

- Romans 1:7, “To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.”
- Matthew 18:20, “Where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”
- Luke 17:20, 21, “The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, ‘Here it is’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst.”
- 1 Samuel 16:7, “The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

Believers in Jesus love to _____ in his name, but within that gathering there may also be _____ present. (The true Church is _____.)

God’s will for Christians when it comes to church

- The Third Commandment: **Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy.** *We should fear and love God that we do not despise preaching and his Word, but regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it.* (Luther's Small Catechism)
- 1 Timothy 4:13, "Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching."
- Hebrews 10, ²³ "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."
- Matthew 28:20 – "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 [*guard, keep*] everything I have commanded you.

1. He wants us to gather to hear _____ and receive _____ from those called to serve God's people.
2. He wants us to _____ one another on toward acts of love and _____.
3. He wants us to _____ one another in our faith in Christ Jesus.
4. He want us to work together to _____ of all nations by sharing the Gospel.

Why we're particular which visible church we join

- 1 Corinthians 1:10 - I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.
- John 8:31 - Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples."
- Matthew 7:15 - "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.
- Matthew 24:10,11 – "At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, ¹¹ and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people."
- Romans 16:17 - I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.

The Lord desires his people to be _____ as they hold in faith to his Word. He tells us to anticipate that there will be _____ who will seek to divide and harm the church. True believers will want to _____ for them and keep _____ from them.

Keeping away includes any activity which would signal a unity or fellowship with churches or groups that tolerate any false teaching, including worshiping, praying, communing, or joining in charitable work together. To confess the truth is to hate the lie.

FOR THOUGHT:

- Do I think of church as a manmade and optional organization here on earth, or as a beautiful and necessary creation of God as I wait for Jesus' return?
- Will I devote myself to the work of the church on earth by supporting its ministry of truth with my efforts and resources?

FOR NEXT TIME: Complete Lesson 9 worksheet. **NEXT LESSON DATE:** _____