

# 7



## Lesson 7

# What is the Church?

### Introduction

#### Key Scripture:

**“I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.” (Matthew 16:18)**

**Big Question:**  
**How can I experience the blessing of Christ’s church?**

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus said, “I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.” The church was birthed by our Lord. It stands today as an unstoppable force that is destined to fulfill His purposes. No earthly agent can prevent its growth. Not even the power of Satan himself can thwart its dominion. The Spirit of God brought the church into existence and will ensure that it will never perish. The church is the pillar of God’s truth in a broken world (1 Timothy 3:15).

#### Apply

Considering the glorious nature of the church, faithful Christ followers should have at least an elementary knowledge of what it is and why it exists. Such knowledge is especially true in modern society. Many would contend against the value of church nowadays. It seems the subject has fallen on hard times. Some claim they don’t need church, reacting against unhealthy forms of organized religion. Even many professing believers have lost faith in the value of Christ’s people.

#### Conversation Starter

Despite the growing apathy, church is as important as ever. It is an indispensable part to one’s spiritual well-being. One has said, “You do not have to go to church to be a Christian. You do not have to go home to be married either. But in both cases if you do not, you will have a very poor relationship.”

## Transition

If you want to follow Jesus well, you must be connected to His body. Let's learn about the church by looking at THREE subjects.

### 1. The Nature of the Church (Philippians 1:1)

#### Illustrate

There was an innocent children's rhyme that confused me. An older lady taught the kids in children's church to clasp their hands together while extending both of index fingers upward. Each of the last three fingers were laced together, and thumbs were held upright. While extending our arms outward, we chanted in unison, "Here is a church, here is a steeple, open the doors, and see all the people!" For years, I believed the church was isolated to a specific location.

I remember when my eyes were opened to the real nature of the body of Christ. It felt like I had been blinded for years. Today, I have no hard feelings toward the well-intentioned people who taught me. No one can be blamed for my confusion. The fact is many struggle to understand what all is involved with the body of Christ.

The Greek New Testament often used a compound word (ekklēsia) for the church. Put together, the two words literally meant "called out." The title depicted God's people as having been called out of the world to live devotedly for Christ. From the biblical language used of the church, we learn something of great importance. The church is not a place. It is a people.

When Paul spoke of believers, he often referred to them as "saints" (Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1:2, 2 Corinthians 1:1, and Ephesians 1:1). In addressing the church in Philippi, he called them "the saints in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:1).

Used of the church, the title "saints" literally meant "holy ones." It teaches us that the church, although it is made up of people, is not made up of just any people. The church is an assembly of people who have been purified of their sins through faith in Christ.

#### Key Scriptures:

Romans 1:7

1 Corinthians 1:2

2 Corinthians 1:1

Ephesians 1:1

Philippians 1:1

#### Apply

Family heritage, national identity, culture, or allegiance to a denomination is not what makes one a member of the church. Faith in Jesus Christ for salvation from sin and death does. There is a need for one to commit to membership to an individual congregation, but all become a part of Christ's church when they are born again. This reality is important. It informs us that the church is not built upon a physical structure but a spiritual salvation.

### 2. The Purpose of the Church (Matthew 5:16, Matthew 18:18-20)

#### Illustrate

I have a decent number of tools. There was a day in which I never thought I would. Before I owned a home, I used to stand amazed at men who had garages filled with countless tools. After I got married and purchased a home, I began buying different tools I needed on a regular basis. In time, I built a decent collection. Many men have a lot more than I do, but I have my share of tools.

Sometimes I open my tool boxes and discover a tool that seems unfamiliar. I realize I probably purchased it at some point, but memory escapes me. I sometimes forget the purpose of some tools. I likely bought them for a special job only to never use them again. Without a purpose, a tool is useless.

### Apply

To experience the full potential of anything, one must understand its basic purpose. The same is true for the church. Many never cultivate a faithful devotion to Christ's body because they don't understand why it exists. Fortunately, Scripture is clear on the purpose of the church. God's reason in gathering a people for Himself has always been to get glory for Himself (Isaiah 43:6-7).

### Key Scriptures:

**"In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16)**

**Matthew 22:37-40**

**Matthew 28:18-20**

Jesus affirmed that His church exists to make Him famous. In the Sermon on the Mount, He said, "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Our Lord provided His church with two great teachings – the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-40) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20)

### Apply

When Christ followers foster a commitment to loving God, loving others, and making disciples, they will naturally get glory for Jesus. They will help fulfill the purpose of the church.

## 3. The Benefit of the Church

### Illustrate

If you are like me, you've heard a common excuse people have for not engaging with a church. Many argue, "I don't need to go to church. I can worship God anywhere." The rationale is that one can connect with the Lord on the golf course, on a hiking trail, or at the lake. HAVE YOU HEARD SIMILAR REMARKS ABOUT CHURCH?

### Apply

Remember that the church is a body of people. As such, it serves a unique purpose for the people of God. It exists as a gathering point for those who identify with Christ. The church provides an opportunity for believers to mingle with other believers. It gives space in life for people to experience community with Jesus' family. Those who discount the need for the church by saying they can worship anywhere completely overlook the biblical concept of the body. Church isn't just about meeting with God; it is also about meeting with God's people.

Scripture speaks of several benefits that come from interacting with the body of Christ. Let's examine four.

### Encouraging (Hebrews 10:25)

The author of Hebrews encouraged first-century believers to stay committed to the regular assembly of God's people. He warned them to not get into the habit of not gathering together as some were doing. To motivate his readers, he reminded them that one of the purposes of meeting was for "encouraging each other" (Hebrews 10:25). The word translated "encouraging" was a compound word that depicted the act of one coming alongside another. It portrayed one offering assistance, aid, or help.

**Key Scripture:**  
**Hebrews 10:25**

## Apply

In life, we all need help from time to time. Encouragement is in short supply nowadays. When we face life's storms, we need a body of believers to support us. The world can't give us what God's people can give us. Be committed to the church and you can gain the encouragement you need to press on in Christ's truth.

## Energizing (Hebrews 10:24)

### Key Scripture: Hebrews 10:24

The author of Hebrews also spoke of the way in which the body of Christ has an energizing effect. In the verse prior to the one I just mentioned, he exhorted his readers, saying, "And let us consider one another in order to provoke love and good works" (Hebrews 10:24). The word rendered "provoke" is an interesting one in the original language of the New Testament. It is one that often referred to the negative act of irritating a person. Used positively, it spoke of one sharpening or stimulating another.

## Apply

The rough stuff of life can make us spiritually dull. We need frequent sharpening and the body of Christ has a way of helping us.

## Illustrate

Have you ever left a meeting with a small group of believers energized? I have. Sure, some believers can be draining and discouraging. However, when the body functions like it ought to function, believers are stimulated to fresh faithfulness for the Lord.

## Edifying (Romans 15:2)

In Romans 15:2, Paul instructed the Romans regarding the goal of their meetings. He said, "Each one of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to build him up." The words "build him up" are a translation of a Greek word from the first century that was often used in the world of construction. It commonly referred to the act of building a physical structure. Used figuratively and spiritually, it spoke of one making another person more able.

### Key Scripture:

**"Each one of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to build him up." (Romans 15:2)**

Older translations often translate the term with the word "edification." Though we may not use that word much nowadays, it is a good term. It portrays the healthy sort of enabling that should take place in the body of Christ.

## Apply

Meeting with one another can make us stronger. When each serves Christ for the benefit of others, each can be built up in the faith. One can become stronger in truth and receive encouragement needed to press on.

## Equipping (Ephesians 4:11)

### Key Scripture: Ephesians 4:12

In Ephesians 4:12, Paul said pastors and teachers within the church should serve "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12). The word rendered "to equip" is one that was used of training in the first century. It described "a process of adjustment that results in a complete preparedness."

## Illustrate

One could think of equipping like the act of tuning an instrument. When one meets with the body of Christ, he or she receives training in truth that tunes his or her heart to the realities of God. As a result, the believer is equipped to live for Christ and serve Christ in a way that makes His name great.

I once ministered to a widow who was grieving the loss of her husband. Though she was deeply sad, she bragged on her church. Several members had expressed support, sent cards, and prepared meals. Other widow ladies had even spent the night at her house to help with the loneliness of loss during the transition. As I talked with the woman, she said, "Pastor, I don't know what I would do without my church family."

The grieving widow had experienced the benefit of the body of Christ. She could surely have worshipped God anywhere, but she knew she needed more than worship. She needed God's people to help her through life. If she had not had a commitment to the church, she would have never received encouragement during her time of loss. There is great benefit in the church! Have you experienced the blessing of a local church? **SHARE A TESTIMONY ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE.**

## **Follow Me Challenges**

**PERSONAL:** Identify 2 areas of service in the church where God could use you.

**PUBLIC:** Host and invite folks to a Backyard BBQ. More information can be found at [tabernaclebaptist.org/events](http://tabernaclebaptist.org/events).

**PRAYER:** Pray for:

- The people on your "My 5" list to get involved in church.
- The worship services on your own or join the War Room team Sunday mornings (for more info go to [tabernaclebaptist.org/prayer](http://tabernaclebaptist.org/prayer)).