

## GREAT BIBLE DOCTRINES - LESSON 13 THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

Introduction: The Greek word for "church," *ecclesia*, means "a called out assembly." It is used in two ways in the New Testament: 1) of the one church universal and world-wide (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 1:22, 23), and 2) of the separate local churches, local congregations of the universal church (Acts 14:23; Galatians 1:2; Revelation 2:1ff). But the New Testament never uses the word "church" in the modern sense of a denomination, less than the universal church and more than a local church.

1. The church in prophecy and expectation. In the Old Testament God prophesied:
  - A. The future defeat of Satan, who had spoiled creation with sin - Genesis 3:15; compare 1 John 3:8.
  - B. The blessing of all nations through Christ, Abraham's seed - Genesis 12:3; 22:18; compare Matthew 1:1; Galatians 3:8,16; Acts 3:25,26; Matthew 28:19,20.
  - C. The coming of a great prophet like Moses, whom God's people would obey - Deuteronomy 18:15; compare Acts 3:20-23; Matthew 17:1-5.
  - D. Our sins and punishment to be borne by a Savior - Isaiah 53; compare Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 9:28.
  - E. The resurrection and universal triumph of the Savior - Psalm 16:8-11; 110:1; compare Acts 2:23-26.
  - F. The pouring out of God's Spirit on all people - Joel 2:28, 29; compare Matthew 3:11; Acts 2:1-18, 38, 39; 5:32.
  - G. The preaching of the gospel of the kingdom to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem - Isaiah 2:2,3; compare Acts 1:8; Luke 24:47; Mark 16:15. Those converted under this preaching became the church.
  
2. The church (spiritual Israel) belongs to the dispensation of grace under the New Covenant, just as physical Israel belonged to the dispensation of the law under the Old Covenant - Romans 2:28,29; John 1:17; Romans 6:14; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Galatians 3:23-25; 4:21-31; 2 Corinthians 3:3-11.
  
3. The church (which is the kingdom of God on earth - Matthew 16:18, 19) was established on Pentecost after Christ's resurrection.
  - A. References to the church or kingdom previous to Pentecost look forward in expectation - Matthew 3:2; 16:18; Mark 9:1; Luke 19:11; Acts 1:6.
  - B. After Pentecost the church and kingdom are spoken of as in existence - Acts 5:11; Colossians 1:13; Revelation 1:6, 9 (some passages still speak of the kingdom as future when referring to its eternal, glorious phase).
  
4. The church is explained in many figures or comparisons.

- A. The kingdom of God - Luke 1:32, 33; Colossians 1:13; Luke 17:20, 21
  - B. The body of Christ - 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 1:22, 23; 4:4
  - C. The family of God - Ephesians 2:19; 5:1, 2; 1 Timothy 3:15
  - D. The temple of God - 1 Corinthians 3:9, 16, 17; Ephesians 2:19-22
  - E. The vine and branches - John 15:1-14
  - F. The shepherd and his sheep - John 10:1-16; 1 Peter 5:4
  - G. The bride and Christ - Ephesians 5:22, 23; 2 Corinthians 11:12; Revelation 21:2
5. The church is composed of those saved by the blood of Christ - Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:25, 26; Acts 2:47.
- A. The church does not save; it is the saved. But one cannot be saved outside the church since all the saved are in the church and are the church.
  - B. In the New Testament salvation and church membership were reached by the following steps:
    - 1) Faith in Christ and His word - Acts 16:31; Romans 10:9, 10, 17; Mark 16:16.
    - 2) Repentance of sins - Acts 2:38; 17:30.
    - 3) Confession of faith in Christ - Romans 10:9, 10; Matthew 10:32.
    - 4) Baptism - Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38,47b.
6. The worship of the New Testament church.
- A. God demands worship in spirit (not just outward ritual) and truth (a heart truly submitted to God) - John 4:24.
  - B. God also requires an obedient life (Proverbs 28:9) and peaceful relations with others (Matthew 5:22, 24; 6:14, 15; Hebrews 12:14; 1 Peter 3:7) before He will accept worship.
  - C. The principle day of worship was the first day of the week (Acts 20:7) though the early Christians often met daily - Acts 2:42, 46; 19:9, 10.
  - D. The assemblies of the early church expressed worship in various activities including:
    - 1) Singing - Ephesians 5:18, 19; Colossians 3:16; 1 Corinthians 14:15.
    - 2) Prayer - 1 Corinthians 14:15, 16, 19; 1 Timothy 2:8.
    - 3) The Lord's Supper - Matthew 26:26-28; Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 10:16, 17; 11:20-34.
    - 4) Offerings - 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2; 2 Corinthians 8, 9.

- 5) Teaching - Acts 2:42; 20:7.
- 6) Reading of scripture - 1 Timothy 4:13.

7. The work of the church

- A. Worshiping God and Christ by the Spirit
- B. Preaching the gospel - Matthew 28:19, 20; Mark 16:15, 16
- C. Teaching, building up Christians - Matthew 28:19, 20; Acts 19:9, 10; 20:20; 2 Timothy 4:2
- D. Helping those in need - Matthew 25:31-46; James 1:27; Acts 2:44,45; 4:32-37; 11:27-30; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; Acts 6:1-6

8. Organization as seen in the New Testament.

- A. Christ is the only head - Ephesians 1:22, 23.
- B. Church offices (ministries) ordained by Christ and described in the New Testament include: apostles, prophets, evangelists, elders (also known as pastors, overseers), teachers, and deacons - Ephesians 4:11; Acts 6:1-6.
- C. The work of apostles and prophets was foundational and temporary, though their original work remains effective through the scriptures - Ephesians 2:19, 20; Acts 1:21, 22; 1 Corinthians 9:1.
- D. There was no earthly headquarters for the New Testament church, and the local churches looked only to Christ in heaven as their head - John 4:19-24; Ephesians 1:22, 23.
- E. Every local church had its own elders (pastors, overseers) - Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-7.
- F. In the N.T., the words "elder" (presbyter), "pastor" (shepherd), and "overseer" (bishop) were used interchangeably for the same office - Acts 20:28,29; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Titus 1:5-7; Philippians 1:1.

9. The New Testament church was one - John 17:20, 21; 1 Corinthians 1:10-15; 3:1-9; Ephesians 4:4. It was not Christ's will that the church divide into sects and competing denominations.

- A. Division comes when each group of Christians becomes prouder of its own leader, name, custom, interpretation, or headquarters than of Christ - 1 Corinthians 1:10-15; 3:1-9.
- B. Division also comes when the church looks to human authorities such as differing creeds, councils, or leaders, rather than to Christ and His word alone - Ephesians 4:1-6. It is not the church's work to make laws but to obey Christ's laws - Galatians 1:8, 9; Matthew 28:19, 20; 7:21.
- C. In order to have unity the church must be united on basic essentials of doctrine, but willing to allow liberty and tolerate each other in matters of opinion which are less basic and harder to

agree on - Ephesians 4:1-6; Romans 14:1-23; 15:1-6; 16:17,18. Even where there is doctrinal agreement, unity is not possible unless our fallen, sinful nature is replaced by the fruit of the Spirit - Ephesians 4:1-3; Galatians 5:19-23.

Conclusion: It is very important for us to be in the center of God's will for the church, for the wisdom of God is demonstrated through the church (Ephesians 3:10; 1 Timothy 3:15). Our disobedience hinders the communication of the saving truth in God; hinders our ministry to one another and diminishes people's view of the glory of God.

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