

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

WHAT IS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST?

By Kyle Campbell

When Jesus promised to build His church in Matthew 16:18, not everyone realizes what that means. We can understand that Jesus purchased the church (Acts 20:28), and we can understand about the name “church of Christ” (Rom. 16:16), but beyond that we’re at a loss. Thankfully, the Bible provides several synonyms that fill in our knowledge about the church.

The Called Out Body

The term “*church*” is derived from the word *kuriakos* which means “of or belonging to the Lord.” The actual term used by Jesus and the apostles is *ekklesia*, which means “to call out.” *Ekklesia* is translated as “*church*” 112 times in the New Testament and as “*assembly*” 3 times (Acts 19:32, 39, 41). The Greeks used this word for the assembly of free citizens in a Greek city to discuss affairs of state (hence the use in Acts 19). The word is also used in the Septuagint where it refers to the “congregation” of Israel (cp. Acts 7:38; Heb. 2:12). So the church in the New Testament simply means a “called out body of people.” “*Call*” is from the verb *kaleo*, which means “to invite or summon.” It is used especially of the divine call to partake of the blessings of redemption. The nature of our calling has several very important facets.

First, we are called by God, therefore it is a divine calling (1 Pet. 5:10). *Second*, the agency of our calling is the gospel (2 Thess. 2:13-14). *Third*, we are called into the fellowship of Christ (1 Cor. 1:9). *Fourth*, our calling is made possible by the suffering of Christ (1 Peter 2:21). *Fifth*, we are called to be children of God (1 Jn. 3:1). *Sixth*, we are called to be saints (Rom. 1:7). *Seventh*, we are called to live a holy life (1 Thess. 4:7). *Eighth*, we are called out of darkness (1 Pet. 2:9). *Ninth*, we were called that we may be worthy (2 Thess. 1:11-12). *Tenth*, we were called to perfection (Phil. 3:13-16). *Eleventh*, we were called to inherit a blessing (1 Pet. 3:9).

The Household Of God

The church is referred to as the “*house of God*” which equates the church with a family (Eph. 2:19; 3:15; 1 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 3:6).

What are the blessings of the relationship? First, we have an approach to God as our Father (Matt. 6:6-9; Eph. 3:14). We have His fatherly provision (Rom. 8:32; Jas. 1:17; Matt. 6:8, 33-34; 7:7-11), correction (Heb. 12:4-11), and love (1 Jn. 3:1; Rom. 8:38-39). Because God is our Father, we are His heirs (Rom. 8:17; Gal. 3:29; 1 Pet. 1:3-5). Second, we have Christ as our High Priest and advocate (Heb. 4:14; 10:21; 1 Jn. 2:1). Third, we have the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us (Rom. 8:14). The Spirit is the truth of God (Jn. 16:13). We receive the Holy Spirit because we are sons. Furthermore, because we receive the Spirit, we walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16).

The demands of the relationship mean separating from the world (2 Cor. 6:17-18; 7:1; 1 Jn. 2:15-16). Christians also have to be obedient as children (Rom. 8:12-17; Eph. 5:6; 1 Pet. 1:14; 1 Jn. 3:10). We have to consider our relationship toward brethren, which is an obligation to love (1 Jn. 4:7, 20-21; 3:13-19). Because Christians walk by the Spirit, as we saw above in Galatians 5:16, we cannot walk after the flesh (1 Jn. 1:6-7). Finally, while some may see this as unimportant, or would willingly substitute another name, Christians should wear the family name that was given by God (Acts 4:11-12; 11:26; Col. 3:17; 1 Pet. 4:15-16).

How do we enter the family relationship? First and foremost, we enter because of the gracious provision of God (Jn. 3:16; Eph. 2:8). However, there is something that God requires of mankind. It begins with faith (Gal. 3:26-27; Heb. 11:6). Acting on our faith includes repenting of our sins (Lk. 13:3; Acts 2:38; 17:30), confessing Jesus Christ as the Son of the living God (Matt. 10:32-33; Rom. 10:8-10), and being baptized into Christ (Jn. 3:3-5; Acts 2:38; Gal. 3:26-27). It is baptism that washes away our sins and saves us (Acts 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21).

The Vineyard Of The Lord

In two parables of Jesus, the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16), and the parable of the two sons (Matt. 21:28-31), one point among many is that the kingdom of heaven is a place for work, not idleness. As we do our work in the vineyard of the Lord, we demonstrate God's wisdom and we glorify Him (Eph. 3:10-11, 21).

In keeping with the idea of a vineyard, we bear fruit for God (Jn. 15:8; Rom. 7:4). We bear fruit in many ways: 1) Brotherly love (Jn. 15:12); 2) caring for the poor (Rom. 15:26-28); 3) demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 22-23); 4) abiding in Christ (Jn. 15:5-7); 5) contributing to the work of the church (Phil. 4:15-17); 6) growing as a Christian (1 Pet. 2:1-2); 7) “hiring” laborers into the vineyard (Matt. 20:1-9; Lk. 10:2; Jn. 4:35-38); and, 8) doing every good work (Col. 1:10).

The reward at the end of the day for workers is a crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8). Peter expresses the reward as **“an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away”** (1 Pet. 1:3-5). The **“crown of righteousness”** is also referred to as a **“crown of life”** (Rev. 2:10). Paul wrote, **“Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful”** (1 Cor. 4:1-2). Remember that your work in this vineyard will be called into question on the judgment day, for the ones who are unfaithful are **“gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned”** (Jn. 15:2, 6; cf. Matt. 25:41).

The Kingdom Of God

Although the term **“kingdom”** is used a few different ways in the New Testament, its primary use is to designate God’s church as the kingdom.

What evidence exists to show the connection between the church and kingdom? The kingdom was **“at hand”** (Matt. 3:2; Mk. 1:14-15). The parables of Jesus show the church as the kingdom (Matt. 13:24, 44, 45, 47). The apostles were given authority in the kingdom (Matt. 16:18-19; 18:18; 19:28). The people alive in the time of Christ witnessed the coming of the kingdom (Mk. 1:1; Lk. 12:31-32). After the coming of the Holy Spirit, the kingdom was spoken of as in existence (Acts 8:12; 20:25; 28:23, 31; Col. 1:13; 1 Thess. 2:12). When we come into the church through the gospel, we receive the kingdom (Heb. 12:22-28). When we partake of the Lord’s Supper, we do it in the kingdom (Lk. 22:16-18, 29-30). The church and the kingdom are the same!

Furthermore, Christ is king of the kingdom. He was king by His own teaching and acknowledgement (Lk. 23:1-3; Jn. 18:37). He conquered the realm of Satan and spiritual darkness in becoming king (Matt. 12:24-29; Lk. 10:17-19; 11:17-22; Heb. 2:9, 14-15; 1 Jn. 3:8; Rev. 1:18). He also had a territory that was wrested from Satan (Matt. 28:18-20; Lk. 4:5-8; Rev. 1:5-9). He had authority and a throne (Lk. 1:32-33; Eph. 1:18-23; 1 Tim. 6:15; 1 Pet. 3:22). He had a law (Jn. 1:17; 17:8; 1 Cor. 9:21; 1 Jn. 4:6). This law will be the basis of our judgment (Jn. 12:48).

Someone who wants to go to heaven has to do God’s will (Matt. 7:21). God demands faithfulness (Matt. 25:34-36; 2 Tim. 4:7; Rev. 2:10). One has to center their affections on heavenly realities (Phil. 3:12-15; Col. 3:1-4). One has to be united with the saints, for a house divided against itself cannot stand (Lk. 11:17). In the end, greatness in the kingdom of Christ means sacrifice and service (Matt. 20:20-28; Mk. 10:23-31).

The final picture of the kingdom is revealed in the parable of the tares (Matt. 13:36-43). At the end, Paul additionally said the kingdom of the righteous will be delivered up to God (1 Cor. 15:22-24). However, the fate of those who do not obey the gospel is disclosed in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8, 10; they are the **“goats”** of Matthew 25:31-46 who inherit **“everlasting punishment.”**

The Temple Of God

The temple is a place where God meets those who worship Him. In the Old Testament, God dwelt in the tabernacle after leading the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage (Ex. 25:8-9; Lev. 26:11-12; Deut. 12:5; 16:2-6). After a span of several hundred years, God dwelt in the temple built by Solomon (2 Chron. 7:12-16). Similarly, in the New Testament, God dwells among His people (Matt. 18:20). Because the church is composed of people who are redeemed by the blood of Christ, it can also accurately be said that God dwells among His church (Eph. 2:19-22).

Instead of thinking about the church in “brick and mortar” terms, you now, in the New Testament, need to recognize that the church is a spiritual building in which the Spirit of God dwells (1 Cor. 3:9). This is why it’s said that **“church”** isn’t really a place, it’s a state of relationship with God. Additionally, if anyone destroys this building, God will destroy him (1 Cor. 3:16-17).

In the Old Testament, the temple was built according to a meticulous plan revealed to Moses in Exodus 25-40. Actually, God had a complete plan for service to Him in the Old Testament (Ex. 25:40; 1 Chron. 28:10-19; Psa. 127:1). Likewise, the New Testament temple (or church) must be built according to God’s plan (Heb. 8:4-5). The pattern is critical for Paul said, **“But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon”** (1 Cor. 3:10). Christians are the stones which are placed together in the temple (Eph. 2:21-22; 1 Peter 2:5). The strength of the building depends on the stones being cemented and built together in peace, love, and truth (Eph. 4:1-3, 16).

All of these rich facets ought to make us very grateful for the rich blessings we enjoy in Christ. In fact, Peter emphasizes that it is our duty to make our calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10). Make sure you are up to the task. ■

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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