

LESSON ESSENTIALS

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND WORLDVIEW

LESSON 8: THE CHURCH

When we talk about the 'church' we are talking about more than just a building, clergy, traditions, and doctrines. The word for church has its origins in the Greek word 'ecclesia' which means 'a gathering or an assembly of people.'

To understand the meaning and significance of the Church we should refer to the Bible. This lesson will give you a foundation of what the Bible says about the Church and God's purposes for it in the world.

What is "Church"? Is it a physical building where Christians gather for worship, or is it a community of people who follow Christ? What we think about the church has a significant impact on our Christian life. In this lesson we will be looking at the meaning and the importance of the Church.

It is encouraging to know that as a believer in Christ we are not alone. We belong to a family of Christ. All of us who believe in Christ are united in Him. It is much more comforting to know that God the Holy Spirit was sent to dwell in every one of us as a companion and guide. As a church we are in the constant fellowship with God, and with the members of the family of God.

The common understanding of a church is that it is a place or building of worship where Christians meet, similar to the way Hindus worship in a temple and Muslims in a mosque. Most often people get confused with the different kinds of churches, such as the Catholic, Protestant, Methodist, or Baptist church. When we dig deeper into the biblical meaning of the church and study the early Church in the New Testament, we will find that the Church is not a physical location or a building structure, nor is it a denomination like the Methodist and the Baptist. Rather, the Church is a group of believers who gather in the name of Jesus to worship God and to fellowship with each other.

Jesus promised that He would send the Holy Spirit as our companion when he ascended into the heavens. The Holy Spirit, who is God himself, will dwell inside every person who has accepted Jesus as their Savior. The book of Acts tells us that the Holy Spirit, who came upon the early Church, gave the disciples power and authority. With the help of the Holy Spirit's power, the disciples addressed a large crowd of people. These people had walked into Jerusalem, from different countries, to worship at the Holy Temple. The Disciples spoke to the people about the life of Christ, how He was crucified for our sins, and was resurrected on the third day to be victorious over evil. When Peter spoke about the sacrifice, resurrection, and the ascension of Jesus into the heavens, the crowd was moved in their hearts at what they had heard. The Bible records that around three thousand people, who accepted the words of Peter, were baptized and were added to the group of believers on that day. These people who believed in Jesus and followed His ways were recognized as 'Christians' by the others and were the beginning members of the Church.

The beauty of the Church was that everyone who believed in Jesus gathered as a family from diverse backgrounds and people groups. All of them came together collectively acknowledging that Christ is the leader of the Church. When we accept Christ into our lives, we begin a new relationship in Christ. This is shown in Ephesians 2:19, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God". We attain a new identity as fellow citizens and members of God's family, the Church. This identity is bestowed on anyone who believes in Jesus Christ

What did the Church do when they gathered together? We see what the believers did when they met with each other in Acts 2:42: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to

fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer". As we read further verses, we will learn that they shared everything they had, and they marveled at the signs and wonders taking place in the Church. Acts 2 goes on to say that the early believers gathered every day to fellowship with each other. They broke bread and ate with gladness and sincere hearts. The early church was without discrimination. All of the believers who came together enjoyed the fellowship of each other, in the presence of the Lord. They took care of each other's needs. This required them to sacrifice their time and belongings for the good of others.

It is the duty of the believers in the Church to care for and mentor the new believers who join the family of God. We have to enrich each other so that we may continue the works of Christ on this earth. It is quite comforting for us to know that we are not alone as followers of Christ; we belong to a large family of believers, the Church. As a family of believers who meet up regularly to worship, to pray together, and to edify each other, we have to be aware that we can have an impact on our neighbors outside. The Church's mission is to share Christ's gospel and make more disciples. We as followers of Christ, have to invest our time to ensure favorable relationships with the community around us.

IN REVIEW

- The Church is not a building or a location. It is an assembly of people with a common belief that Christ is their Lord.
- The early believers devoted themselves to the teachings of the apostles. They used to meet up every day and partake in the Lord's Supper to identify that they, as a union of believers, belonged to the body of Christ.
- The early believers loved, cared for, and edified each other by sharing their wealth and time.
- As a church we have a responsibility to show God's goodness to the people who are yet to join the family of God.

As a church, we must teach the significance of fellowship to every new believer. Sharing with, and mentoring, the new members will allow them to understand the common purpose of the church, so that the Church will grow and be able to impact the world.

HAVE YOUR SAY

- As a believer do you take an effort to serve and share with the members of your church?
- Are you an active member of a local church? What impact does being a member of a church have on you?
- Are you devoted to the teachings of Christ, like the early members of the Church were?
- Has anyone taken care of you when you became a follower of Christ? If yes, are you willing to do the same to a new member of the family?

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