

## THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

*Mat 16:18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

The word church comes from the Greek *ekklēsia* and originally meant “a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place, an assembly”, according to James Strong. The Church, in a Christian sense, refers to those whom the Lord calls out of the world and into his Kingdom through the agency of repentance, baptism in Jesus name and the infilling of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). It is important to underscore the fact, as stated in Matthew 16:18, that it is the Lord Jesus who is building the Church – he is the chief architect of this most glorious of kingdoms. God uses humans in various capacities in building his church, but make no mistake, it is the Lord who builds his Church, humans can only be co-laborers with him. “For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building” (I Cor 3:9). The Apostle Peter warned the elders of the Church, “Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock” (I Peter 5:3). Next, the Church is founded on the teaching of the apostles and prophets, but the Lord Jesus is the cornerstone, according to the Apostle Paul:

*Eph 2:20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;*

*Eph 2:21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:*

*Eph 2:22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*

The prophets foretold the coming of God in flesh (Isaiah 9:6; Micah 5:2) while the apostles were witnesses of the fulfilment of these prophecies and preached salvation in the name of Jesus. The Lord Jesus is the chief cornerstone. The chief cornerstone was the first stone laid down. The Lord Jesus is the firstborn among many brethren. “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8:29). In addition, the cornerstone provided stability and alignment for the building. We must ensure we are aligned with the doctrine, character and will of the Lord Jesus as the Church grows and takes shape. If not, the building will be crooked. So far, we have considered two characteristics of the Church of Jesus Christ: the Church is called out of the world by the Lord. Jesus issues the call and leads the believer into repentance, baptism in his name and regeneration through the Holy Spirit. Secondly, we

are founded upon the teachings of the apostles and prophets with the Lord himself acting as the cornerstone. Next, let us consider the ministry of the Lord in the Church, which is his body.

***Eph 4:11** And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;*

***Eph 4:12** For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:*

Once we are in the body of Christ, the Church, we are to grow and go on to perfection. The Lord works through the offices mentioned in Ephesians 4:11 & 12. Edifying has roots in the term “edifice” which is a building. In other words, the task of the ministry in the Church is to edify the believers and help them on to perfection. This is why the Christian should attend Church. The Lord himself taught in the Temple in Jerusalem and the Synagogues across Israel on a regular basis. “In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me” (Matt 26:55). Jesus is personally building the Church and selects individuals through whom he prepares us for his second coming. Just as a baby has no milk of its own but must rely on its mother, the newborn Christian will find spiritual milk in the Church. “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (I Peter 2:2). Peter goes on to exhort the Church, “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen” (2Peter 3:18). We ought to evaluate our growth in the Church at certain intervals. Ask yourself, “Have I matured in the Lord in the last year? Where am I lacking?”

***2Cor 3:18** But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

Furthermore, the Church is the place God ordained for us to learn about several Christians graces, such as prayer, giving and worship. Jesus declared, “And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves” (Matt 21:13). Note the Lord called his house “the house of prayer”. The Church is the ultimate house of prayer par excellence. Something unprecedented happens when we come together and pray in one accord. The Bible records several mighty miracles: Jehoshaphat and Judah prayed and fasted and the Lord delivered them miraculously from a combined force of Moabites, Ammonites and others (2 Chron 20). Queen Esther and all Jews worldwide prayed and fasted and God delivered them from a certain Holocaust planned by Haman of Persia

(Esther 4). In the New Testament, the Church gathered in the house of John Mark and prayed for the deliverance of Peter who was miraculously loosed from prison by the angel of God. Furthermore, the Bible records that giving is a grace associated with Church attendance.

***Mal 3:10** Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.*

***Mal 3:11** And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts.*

We remember the poor widow whom the Lord commended for her giving in the Temple. “And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much” (Mark 12:41). There was a treasury in the Temple and the Lord observed what people gave. Finally, the Church is also intended to be a place where believers enjoy each other’s company and carry each other’s burdens. Technology may have facilitated greater connection across the globe, but that does not mean people are any less lonely than they were. God has given us the Church as an antidote to loneliness. We celebrate birthdays, marriages, graduations and other successes, and console each other when tragedy strikes. The three friends of Job may have been “miserable comforters” (Job 16:2), as he called them, but they at least came and mourned and spent time with him. Social scientists, such as Robert Putnam, know that Churches have much social capital. This basically refers to favors, services and all forms of help that Church members render to each other because of their commonly held faith. Imagine how much Churches save in costs in regard to voluntary activities, such as renovation, transport, financial giving etc. “Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2).

In summary, the Church of Jesus Christ is comprised of individuals whom the Lord personally calls out of the world into his Kingdom. The Lord builds the Church which is his body and is founded on the doctrine of prophets and apostles with the Lord being the chief cornerstone. The Lord bestows the gifts of the Spirit upon individuals who edify and perfect the Church. The Church is the place where we learn about and practice the virtues of prayer, giving and worship, among others. It is for this reason that the writer of Hebrews exhorts:

***Heb 10:25** Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*