

ANSWERS TO BASIC QUESTIONS PART II: WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

Houses of Light Church • August 21-22, 2021 • Pastor Netz Gómez

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. When people hear the word 'church,' many ideas come to their minds; some think of a building; others see it as the service that takes place on the weekend; Others see it as a religious organization and still others, who have had a bad experience, see it as something negative that they do not want to get too close. Still others only have a prejudice and do not accept the church from the outset.
- B. But the question is what is the biblical definition of this very key institution that Jesus said He Himself would build and the very gates of hell will not prevail against it?

Matt. 16:18 "...and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." (ASV)

II. A SIMPLE DEFINITION OF THE CHURCH

- A. Perhaps a more correct way to ask this question would be: Who is the Church? Not so much, what is the church? And a simple definition is: **The church is the people regenerated by God, saved by the work of Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit for God's purposes on earth.**
- B. The word church comes from the Greek *ekklesia* and basically means an assembly or gathering for government purposes, therefore there must be a meeting for there to be a church but we can make the mistake of equating the church only with an event and that is not accurate. **The church is not a weekly event but rather focuses on THE event of Jesus saving people and drawing them to Him, therefore the church is made up of people who gather around Jesus and revolve their lives around Him.**
- C. The moment we had our encounter with Jesus and were saved, we became part of the family of God and the Body of Christ and in fact we demonstrated that we are disciples because we have communion with the other members of the church..

1 Cor. 12:13-14 "For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit. ¹⁴ For the body is not one member, but many."

1 Jn. 1:7 "but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanse us from all sin."

- D. So, the church is made up of those who are called by Jesus and who build their life around Him as King and Lord and **He builds His church through them. This means that we do not stop being the church when we leave the building on Sunday morning. Instead, everything we do, we do as God's blood-bought church, to the fame of Jesus, everywhere.**
- E. **Jesus is the one who is building His church at all times, not only in a weekly meeting but through His people throughout the world and therefore everything we do counts** because it is not just a couple of hours that we attend

the worship service , **it is our whole life, how we live it as His Church and His People in the world giving glory to Him in all things.**

Col. 1:18 "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."

Eph. 1:22-23 "and he put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, ²³ which is his body, the fulness of him that fills all in all."

- F. **Christ wants to saturate the entire world with His presence through His People while building His church everywhere. That changes how you see yourself:** If you have been regenerating by the power of God through Jesus Christ, then you are the church, you don't go to it once in a while, you are the church at all times.

III. BACK TO THE BEGINNING

Acts 2:42-47 "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' teaching and [q]fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers.... ⁴⁶ And day by day, continuing stedfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home, they took their food with gladness and singleness of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to them day by day those that were saved."

- A. The best reference to broaden this definition is to go back to the early church and ask, what did the first century church do? What are we going to do? What does God say about the church? We may have theological differences with someone, but does that put them outside of God's church?
- B. The church is not only us here at Houses of Light but believers in Christ of all races and backgrounds who recognize his Lordship and his role as the only Savior; and the irrefutable authority of the Holy Scriptures (The Bible). This is what can be called the Universal Church and we are not referring to the Pare de Sufrir' sect but to the church throughout history in all nations.
- C. According to the pattern shown in the New Testament **a local church is a group of baptized believers who meet regularly to worship God through Jesus Christ, to be exhorted by the Word of God, and to celebrate the Lord's Supper under the guidance of duly appointed leaders.** By this definition, there are at least seven requirements if a group is called a church:
1. **People must give evidence that they are believers, that they trust Jesus as Savior and Lord.** The NT makes it clear that we are adopted into the family of God through faith (**Jn. 1:12-13**).
 2. **People must be baptized.** Jesus commanded in **Matt. 28:19** that the way to make disciples is "**baptizing them ... and teaching them.**" This was the uniform practice in the early church.
 3. **There must be a regular meeting.** A group of people who only met once a year could not be called a local church because there are essential church activities that lose their meaning when they are not done corporately. **Acts 10:25** instructs us not to stop gathering.

4. **Between these meetings there should be worship.** This inevitably stems from the highest value placed on Jesus Christ, who unites us, and from our relationship with God through Him. The church is destined to live to the praise of God's glory (**Eph. 1:6, 12, 14**); therefore, it would contradict our nature not to come together to worship (**Acts 2:47; Rom. 15:6, 7**).
5. **Our meetings should include the exhortation of the Word of God.** We were born again through the living and permanent Word of God (**1 Pet. 1:23**); and our life in Christ is preserved not only by bread, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God (**Matt. 4: 4**). The pastors of the church are the provision that God has made to feed his sheep (**Eph. 4: 11-16**). Therefore, we strive to be the church that does not neglect the Word of God.
6. **Along with worship and exhortation we must celebrate the Lord's Supper to be the church.** We are commanded as a church to "**do this in remembrance**" of Christ (**Lk. 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24**). Neglecting this ordinance may seem inconsequential but it deprives the church of its essential identity and function.
7. **Ultimately, all of this must be done with the guidance of duly appointed leaders.** Paul appointed elders in all the churches (**Acts 14:23**), gave instruction on the qualifications of deacons and elders in **1 Tim. 3** and **Tit. 1**, and said that Christ had given pastor-teachers to the church to equip the saints for ministry (**Eph. 4:1, 12**). So this class of leaders must be present for that group to be a church; historic Christianity has always claimed this.

IV. THE CHURCH, LOCAL CHURCHES, AND SMALL GROUPS

- A. When you meet in a Friendship Group, we are saying that this is a part of the church gathered in a home but not the local church. **In the Bible there are at least three levels in which the word "church" is applied to the people of God:**
 1. One is the universal body of Christ that includes all believers of all time. **1 Tim. 3:15** *"...that you may know how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."*
 2. Another is a group of Christians associated by their geographic union in a city. **Acts 11:22** refers to the "**church in Jerusalem**", **1 Cor. 1:2** refers to the "**church of God which is in Corinth**", **1 Thess. 1:1** addresses "**to the church of the Thessalonians**", etc.
 3. And a third would be a smaller segment of believers meeting in a home. The Bible several times speaks of church in someone's home. In **Col. 4:15**, Paul sends greetings "**to Nymph and to the church in her house.**" And Paul's letter to Philemon is also addressed to "**your house church.**"
1 Cor. 16:19 *"The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Prisca salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house"*.
- B. **With this understanding we can know that there are also para-church ministries but they are not churches.** Many of them do evangelism and discipleship work in certain settings but are not considered churches. For example Campus Crusade meetings, Young Life and Youth for Christ high school and college clubs, etc. It is important to understand this so that no Christian is

content to participate in these groups while neglecting the regular life of the local church. These groups have tremendous value in working alongside churches but they cannot replace the local church.

V. OUR CALL

- A. **Houses of Light we are a local church that belongs to the church in all nations and God has called us to fulfill the goals that He has for His church.**
So we must embrace this with all our hearts so that the world and all creation will see the glorious wisdom and power of God in our local church.

Eph. 3:10 "to the intent that now unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God."

- B. The ultimate goal of the church is to live in such a way that God's wisdom (and all other aspects of his glory) are displayed to the world and the hosts of heaven. **The church's job is to live so that people can see that God is real.**
- C. Our invitation is that we love the whole church more and we commit ourselves and exercise our gifts more and help the advance of the gospel in all places like His Church and when we see a failure in it we are able to join the heart of Jesus to edify His bride instead of criticizing or belittling her.

Eph. 5:25b-27 "...Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it; ²⁶ that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

VI. REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How does Christ build His church through you?
2. How can the people around you see that God is real through you?
3. What should our calling be when we see some fault or deficiency in the church?