

The New Testament Church #4

“What is the Church?” #1

Introduction; Some things are hard to understand.

A. It may be because they are so varied.

1. They may take many forms or can do many different things. A Swiss army knife is like this.
2. Some products in a store are like this. A cleaner may clean many different things and polish too.

B. The church of Christ can not easily be defined.

1. It would be much easier if the Bible gave us a simple definition somewhere.
2. However it does not do that. It uses a number of illustrations or parallels or word pictures to tell us.
3. Not one of them fully describes the church. We must consider all of them to see what the church is.

B. The church is one of the important topics in the N.T.

1. The word, ‘church’ or *ekklesia* (ἐκκλησία), is used over 70 times in scripture. However the church itself is referred to many times more.
2. The church is the promised **kingdom** of the O.T. It is the **family** and **household** of God. It is the **bride** of Christ. It is the Lord’s **vineyard**.
3. All of the illustrations of the church make it one of the most mentioned and important topics in the N.T.

C. We will consider today, “What is the Church”

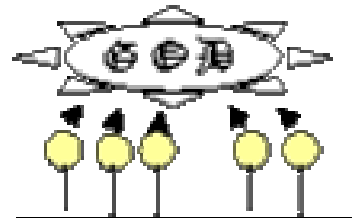
I. First, the church is persons...

A. We belong to the ‘Clearwater church of Christ.’

1. This isn’t the building at 601 South Hercules Avenue. This building is simply where we meet.
2. If something happens to the building or a hurricane destroys it, the church isn’t destroyed.
3. The Clearwater church of Christ is the people who now meet at 601 So. Hercules Ave. We could meet at another place if the building is ruined.
4. 1 Cor 16:19 *The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.*
5. Buildings do not send greetings. It was not Aquila and Priscilla’s house that sent greetings but the church that met in their home.

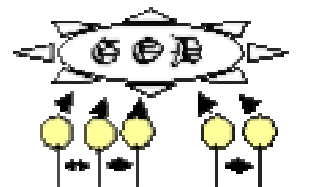
B. The church is people who have a relationship with God.

1. When we believe and repent and are baptized, we are baptized into Christ.
2. The sins that separated us from God are washed away in baptism and we become pure children of God.
3. Acts 22:16 *‘And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.’*
4. Col 1:21 *And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled...*
5. We were sinners who were members of the world. We become saints who are reconciled to God in baptism.



C. The church is also people who have a relationship with each other.

1. Since we all have a relationship with Jesus Christ, we also have a relationship with each other. .
2. We also have responsibilities to God and each other. We must assemble regularly to worship God and encourage each other. We are bound to one another in Jesus Christ and must think of each other’s needs.
3. Heb 10:23-25 *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.*



Clearwater Largo

D. Each local church is complete in itself.

1. It is **‘the church’**. It is not a **part** of the church in one sense. Each local congregation is complete and can offer all that the church has to offer.
2. Rom 16:1 *I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea...*
3. Each congregation has the complete word of God to teach. Each congregation can pray and sing and give on the Lord’s day. Each can offer the Lord’s supper on Sunday.
4. Each congregation can preach the word of God in their community and be a shining example to those around them. Each local church can baptize believers and they become children of God.
5. There are no insignificant churches –or Christians. Each one is important, independent and self-governing. Each local congregation is not dependent on any individual or group of preachers or congregation to do its work and worship.
6. Matt 18:20 *“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”*
7. Each local congregation is fully the church. The church of Jesus Christ is best understood in the N.T. by local churches.
8. There is no higher authority on earth than the local churches. No preacher or council of preachers or magazine has any authority over the local church.
8. We must be parts of a local church. If we aren’t then we are not a part of Christ. The church is His body.
9. Acts 9:26 *And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple.*

E. The church then is people who are the Lord’s.**II. Second, some word pictures of the church.****A. These word pictures each tell us something about us.**

1. Since we are the church these illustrations are for us to understand our relationship with Christ and God.
2. There are several of these pictures because our relationship to the Lord is not simple. It involves many things and areas.

B. We are the “Bride of Christ.”

1. This very close and loving relationship has always been used of God’s people. Even ancient Israel was married to Jehovah.
2. Isa 54:5 *For your Maker is your husband, The LORD of hosts is His name; And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of the whole earth.*
3. We are the bride of Christ. We are betrothed as a pure virgin. We are loved and provided for.
4. 2 Cor 11:2 *For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.*
5. Eph 5:25-26 *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,*
6. As the bride of Christ we need to be faithful to Him in all things.
7. Eph 5:22-24 *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. 24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.*

C. We are the “Flock of the Lord.”

1. In rural areas the relationship between the shepherd and his flock was one of direction and care. A good shepherd cared greatly for his flock.
2. John 10:11-12 *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. 12 But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them.*
3. Jesus saw Himself as a good shepherd. He saw the people as needing leadership. He came to lead men to the safety of God’s sheepfold.
4. Matt 9:35-36 *Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. 36 But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.*
5. As the flock of the Lord we are to follow Him in all things. Sheep that stray away are lost and can be destroyed by the lion or wolf or bear.

6. John 10:26-28 *“But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. 27 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. 28 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.”*
7. Satan is a roaring lion seeking to devour us —1 Pet 5:8, 9. **Elders** are shepherds who watch for our souls for Christ —1 Pet 5:2-4, Heb 13:17.

D. We are the “Family of God.”

1. As the family we are loved and protected by our Father. Jesus is the older brother and we are the children.
2. Matt 6:26 *“Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”*
3. Heb 2:11 *For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren...*
4. If we want to be children in the household of God we must live according to the rules of the house. If we do not we are cast out. John tells us how to tell the difference between the children of God and those of the devil —see also Phil 2:14, 15.
5. 1 John 3:10 *In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.*
6. Eph 5:1 *Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.*
7. If we continue as children in the household of God we have a hope of a great inheritance. While there are many blessings in this life from our Father the greatest blessing is heaven.
8. 1 John 3:1-2 *Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*

E. We are ‘Laborers’ in the ‘Vineyard’.

1. As laborers we have work to do. The church is not a place to be at ease but a place to be at work.
2. **Matthew 20:1-16;** This is a parable of the kingdom of heaven. It is a parable that shows the Lord is seeking laborers to be in his vineyard.
3. We are to be workers in the church. We all have different things we can do. Some can do more than others. Some can do things others can’t. Yet we all need to be doing what we can.
4. Luke 10:2 *Then He said to them, “The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”*
5. Matt 10:41-42 *“He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward. 42 And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward.”*

F. We are citizens in His ‘kingdom.’

1. We are citizens of a kingdom that cannot be destroyed. It is a holy nation. We are priests and servants of the most high God in His nation.
2. Heb 12:28 *Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.*
3. 1 Pet 2:9 *But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;*

G. We see some of what the church is.

Con.; The church is complicated

A. Yet we can easily understand if we spend the time.

B. If anyone wants to be a part of the Lord’s church why not today?