

Why the Church Exists and What It Is (and Isn't)

In the coming months, we will likely be transitioning from mission status to particular status as a church. For this reason, the elders felt it prudent to go through the Bible's teaching concerning the church.

To begin our study, consider the humorous confusion expressed in a Peanuts comic strip, where Sally writes: "When writing about church history, we have to go back to the very beginning. Our pastor was born in 1930."

This reminds us of how confused many are about the church. Some think it's a building, some a business, some a social club. But we want to understand what the Bible teaches about the true nature and purpose of the Church.

Read: Matthew 16:13–20

1. Peter's Confession and Christ's Response

Peter confesses that Jesus is the _____, the Son of the _____ (v.16).

Christ responds by blessing Peter and explaining that this revelation came from _____ (v.17).

Jesus then says, "You are _____ (Πέτρος), and on this _____ (πέτρα) I will build My Church."

- Petros is a _____ noun meaning _____.
- Petra is a _____ noun meaning a large _____ or _____.

Compare:

- Matthew 7:24 – The wise man builds his house on the _____.
- 1 Corinthians 10:4 – That _____ was _____.

2. Christ the Builder and Owner

Jesus says, "I will _____ My Church."

Who is the builder? _____ Who is not the builder? _____

Who owns the Church? _____

3. The Gates of Hades

Jesus says, "The gates of _____ shall not prevail against it."

- Are gates offensive or defensive? _____
- Who is advancing: the Church or Hell? _____
- What does this imply about the Church's mission? _____

4. The Keys of the Kingdom

Jesus says, "I will give you the _____ of the kingdom of heaven..."

- The Greek word for "you" here is (circle one): singular / plural
- Compare Matthew 18:18. Who else receives this authority? _____

18 "Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

- Keys represent _____ and _____ (cf. Isaiah 22:22).

22 The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder; So he shall open, and no one shall shut; And he shall shut, and no one shall open.

- How does the Church use the keys today?

1. _____ 2. _____ & _____

3. _____, _____ 4. _____

5. Ephesians 2:19–22

Read: Ephesians 2:19–22

Paul says we are no longer strangers but _____ with the saints.

The Church is built on the foundation of the _____ and _____, with Christ as the _____.

The Church is described as a _____ and a _____ of God in the Spirit.

What does it mean to be "fellow citizens" and "members of the household of God"?

How does this challenge our individualism and consumerism in church life?

If we are being built together as a temple, what does that say about our unity, holiness, and mission?

How does seeing the Church as God's dwelling place change the way we treat it, speak of it, and serve within it?

6. Conclusion

The Church is not a building, a business, a social club, or a man-made institution. It is not defined by traditions, programs, or the personality of a pastor. It is certainly not the creation of Peter or any human authority.

According to Scripture, the Church is the people of God, called out by the gospel, built by Christ, and founded upon the apostolic confession that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16–18). It is His Church—He owns it, He builds it, and He preserves it.

The Church is both visible and invisible. The visible Church includes all who profess the true faith and their children. The invisible Church is the full number of the elect, united to Christ by grace. The Church is Christ's temple, His household, His body—and it exists to proclaim His name, advance His kingdom, and display His glory.

To belong to the Church is to belong to Christ. To love Christ is to love what He is building. And no power in hell can stand against it.

7. Reference

Westminster Larger Catechism (WLC)

Q.63. What are the special privileges of the visible church?

A. The visible church hath the privilege of being under God's special care and government; of being protected and preserved in all ages, notwithstanding the opposition of all enemies; and of enjoying the communion of saints, the ordinary means of salvation, and offers of grace by Christ to all the members of it in the ministry of the gospel, testifying that whosoever believes in him shall be saved, and excluding none that will come unto him.

Q.64. What is the invisible church?

A. The invisible church is the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one under Christ the head.

Q.65. What special benefits do the members of the invisible church enjoy by Christ?

A. The members of the invisible church by Christ enjoy union and communion with him in grace and glory.

Q.66. What is that union which the elect have with Christ?

A. The union which the elect have with Christ is the work of God's grace, whereby they are spiritually and mystically, yet really and inseparably, joined to Christ as their head and husband; which is done in their effectual calling.

Chapter 25 – Of the Church

25.1

The catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all.

25.2

The visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, and of their children; and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.

CRPC BCO 5-9 Summarized:

Before a mission church becomes fully organized, the men in the church are taught what it means to be an elder. Then, they're interviewed to see if they meet the Bible's standards for that role. A list of those who are qualified is made, and the church members choose from that list who they want to serve as elders. At least a month before the official organization, those names are submitted. Once the church is organized, those men are ordained and officially made elders. After that, they meet to begin leading the church, choosing someone to run meetings and someone to keep records.