

THE CHRISTIAN AND THE CHURCH

Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:47

(Not entirely original with me)

Introduction: For most people, the "church" is that building on the corner that has a steeple on top and where people go on Sundays, where some get married, and where there are some funerals. That is about all many people know about the "Church." Christians have a wonderful blessing in being members of TWO Churches - the body of Christ is one Church and the local Church where they meet together in Bible study, singing, praying, fellowship and enjoy a time of withdrawal from the outside world is the other. What is the Church all about?

I. WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

1. "Church" refers to people who have been saved:
 - When a person is "saved," the Lord adds that person to HIS Church - Acts 2:47
 - Being a member of Christ's Church (congregation, assembly), one is also a member of God's "family/household" - 1 Timothy 3:15
2. "Church" is used in two ways:
 - There is the "universal" way - meaning "all the saved throughout the world:"
 - Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18
 - "universal" meaning:
 - Only ONE Church - Ephesians 4:4 - Ephesians 1:22-23
 - Christ is the head with individual Christians as members of His BODY -
- 1 Corinthians 12:27
 - Christ's Church is NO EARTHLY ORGANIZATION but it totally spiritual in nature -
Ephesians 2:19-20
 - The "universal" Church never meets and has ONLY ONE leader - Jesus Christ and the original apostles and prophets.
 - There is the "local" way - meaning "the saved in one particular location."
 - 1 Corinthians 2:2; Revelation 1:11; Romans 16:16
 - "local" meaning:
 - There are MANY churches - Galatians 1:2
 - There is EARTHLY ORGANIZATION within each Church:
 - There are elders (bishops, pastors) and deacons - Philippians 1:1
 - "Local" churches can exist temporarily without pastors and deacons -
Acts 14:21-23
 - Local churches meet regularly, and Christians have responsibilities in connection with their fellow church members in their local church.

II. RESPONSIBILITIES WITHIN THE LOCAL CHURCH

1. Christians should "join themselves" to a local church:
 - Only Jesus Christ can add to the "universal" Church, but a Christian can and should "join" him/herself to a "local" church - Acts 9:26-28
 - Belonging to a "local" church enables one to benefit by being with other Christians and in turn gives each Christian an opportunity to be of service to others - Hebrews 3:12-14; 10:24-25
 - Some things Jesus requires of Christians cannot be filled by one's self, but requires the help of others, such as the Lord's Supper - Acts 20:7
 - Every Christian needs to be a part of a "local" faithful congregation of the Lord.

2. Christians should cooperate with the "local" church leaders:
 - Most "local" churches have designated leaders, such as elders or deacons to look after the members.
 - "Elder, pastor, bishop, shepherd, overseer" are often used interchangeably, referring to the same position - Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5-7; 1 Peter 5:1-2
 - Qualifications for leadership positions are described in 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9
 - Church members' responsibilities to the church leaders are:
 - to recognize and respect them - 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; 1 Timothy 5:17-20
 - to obey and be submissive when they lead SCRIPTURALLY - Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:2-3
 - Church "leaders" are in a way "spiritual advisors," and should be mature, experienced Christian men who are charged by God to "watch out for the souls of the members."
 - The fully developed "local" church will also have deacons to help serve the membership.
 - Deacons are "servants" who assist the elders, pastors, bishops in the work of the church.
 - Their qualifications are found in 1 Timothy 3:8-13
 - The work they do is very noble - 1 Timothy 3:13
 - There may be "evangelists and teachers" as well in a "local" church - Ephesians 4:11
 - "Evangelists" concentrate their attention on teaching the Gospel to the lost.
 - "Teachers" concentrate their attention upon building up the church members scripturally.
 - "Preachers, Ministers" may do both the work of the evangelist and the teacher.
 - All "leaders" in a local church are to submit to the leadership of the pastor or elder.
3. Christians should contribute regularly to the work of their "local" church:
 - The work of the church can be divided into three areas:
 - Evangelism - Matthew 28:19-20; 1 Timothy 3:15; 1 Peter 2:9-10
 - Edification - Ephesians 4:11-16
 - Benevolence - 1 Timothy 5:16
 - 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 shows how a "local" church can raise funds to do its work.
 - The financial support provided enables the "local" church to do much work that God designed it to do.
4. Every Christian should do his/her part in the work of the "local" church:
 - One cannot "pay" to have his/her part of the church's work done for him/her.
 - A strong, successful church congregation is one where EVERY member does his/her part - Ephesians 4:15-16
 - There are many different kinds of things Christians can do within their church - Romans 12:3-8
 - It is essential that each member do what he/she can with zeal and enthusiasm - 1 Peter 4:10-11
5. Every Christian needs to work to keep his/her church united:
 - Unity among Christians is very important to Jesus - John 17:20-21; Ephesians 2:14-16
 - Division of any kind/degree is condemned in the Scriptures - 1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 3:3-4
 - Maintaining unity in Christ requires certain attitudes and diligent effort by all - Ephesians 4:1-3
 - Be peacemakers when fellow members are having disagreements - Matthew 5:9
 - Avoid gossip - 1 Timothy 5:13, 19
 - Avoid being partial - 1 Timothy 5:21
6. Every Christian should live a life that speaks well of his/her "local" church:
 - Every Christian should be an example to others - 1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7-8
 - Some delight in finding Christians who are not living right and use them to attack the church.
 - Christians are to avoid giving people opportunities to mock the church - Titus 2:8; 1 Timothy 5:14
 - No Christian is perfect, but should strive to be an example of what all Christians ought to be like.

CONCLUSION:

1. Christian, are YOU involved in a local church?
2. Christian, how well do YOU know your pastor, deacons, teachers where you attend?
3. Christian, what do YOU do in the way of serving your church?
4. Christian, if every member of YOUR church were as active, faithful as you in serving the Lord and your church, what kind of church would it be?