

What Is Church ?

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[0 : 0 0] You may be wondering why the table is here and not the lectern. And that is just because today we are having communion together.

! We want that to be front and centre. We come together and break bread together. And we'll talk about that in a little bit. But firstly I want to answer a question or address a question that can be confused at times.

And that is the question of what is church? And so if you flip over to 1 Peter chapter 2. Peter writes this to Christians.

And yet he quotes the Old Testament and applies it to those who are in Christ. He writes this.

You are a chosen race. A royal priesthood. A holy nation. A people for his own possession.

[1 : 4 2] That you may proclaim the excellencies of him. Who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were not a people.

But now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy. But now you have received mercy. Amen.

This is God's word. If your neighbour was to ask you. What is church? What would you say? Or if your neighbour asked.

What is church all about? What would you tell them? How would you answer that question? Perhaps a simpler question might be this.

If your neighbour was to ask you. What is wrong with the church? Maybe you would have a lot more to say about that. I imagine that.

[2 : 4 6] It might be easier for a lot more people to say. Something about that question than the other questions. If I were to ask you. If I were to ask you to tell me.

To list all the things wrong with my wife. I wonder how many of you would dare to say a thing. I imagine most of you would be a bit more reserved.

And I hope so. However. Why do so many Christians. Think nothing of constantly criticising the bride of Christ.

Why do many believers think it's fine to point out everything wrong with the adopted children of God? Or why is it so common to find people who say they follow Jesus.

But they constantly fight against the body of Christ. Many of you will know of the 80s and 90s Christian musician Rich Mullins.

[3 : 5 3] Remember Rich Mullins? Our God is an awesome God. Our God is an awesome God. He reigns. He wrote that. And many other things.

Well Rich Mullins in an old, old interview once said this. He said. It's so funny being a Christian musician. Because it always scares me. When I talk to you guys.

And you guys think so highly. Of Christian music. Especially contemporary Christian music. Because I kind of go. Man. I know a lot of us.

And we don't know Jack about anything. That's what he says. And he says. Not that I don't want you to buy our records. And come to our concerts. I sure do. He says this.

But you should come for entertainment. If you really want spiritual nourishment. You should go to church. Because those people care about you. And you don't have to buy a ticket.

[4 : 51] Isn't that something? We forget that though. Now he's making a particular point about. You see the exhortation. If you care about entertainment.

Go to a concert. But if you care about spiritual nourishment. If you care about your soul. Go to church. And yet often. You can hear Christians speaking more highly.

Of concerts. Christian concerts. Good concerts. Than you can of them speaking about church. You may hear many people talk with excitement.

About going to a Christian praise concert. And these things require tickets. And are full of people who don't know you. And yet.

You may hear the same people say very few good things about church. Now I'm not saying. Christian concerts and such are not good. They are good. But what I am saying is by and large.

[5 : 49] We often highly. Undervalue the goodness of church. Church. And we don't just have. A very low view of church. Very often. But it can be easier.

To share that low view of church. Than it can be to share the gospel. To share the good news. And so. The past few years.

I've been working on a biblical study. Of the nature of church. And what it means to follow Jesus. And belong to his family. So that we know who we are.

And what we are. And who we are together. And how good that is. And so I introduced three documents. At the AGM last year. For folks to read and consider.

And the first one. Was a statement of faith. Which was adapted. From biblical historical. And modern sources. And basically that summarizes. What we believe as a church.

[6 : 46] A statement of faith. Is a good thing. To clarify. And summarize a church's position. On key doctrinal subjects. It keeps elders and deacons. And members. From veering off the track.

On doctrinal standards. It protects the gospel. By defining. Other key doctrines. That have a bearing on the gospel. And it preserves the language. Of the church. On key doctrines.

And it promotes unity. In the church. Relating to those doctrines. And it also promotes freedom. And charity. On secondary issues. And finally. It protects the future.

Of the church. Which exists. In an ever shifting culture. And so a statement of faith. Is a good thing. Second thing. It was an introduction. To church membership.

Called joining the family. The church family. And this document. Is a short summary. On who we are. As a church. And why. And how to be a part. Of this family.

[7 : 42] And finally. A church membership booklet. Called your place. In his family. And that's a brief. Biblical overview. Of the nature. Of church. And the various pictures.

The New Testament. Authors use. And how. The followers of Jesus. Belong. And live. And grow together. This document. Ultimately. Makes a biblical case.

For a form of church. Membership. That reflects. The teaching. Of the Bible. And also. Raises our view. Of the church. To see. And understand. That the church.

Is. Something glorious. That Jesus. Is doing. In the world. That was a mystery. Before Christ. That shows. The manifold.

Wisdom of God. To the rulers. In the heavenly places. And that will once. That will only. Fully be revealed. And celebrated. In the age to come. That's what church is.

[8 : 39] And so. Your neighbor asks. What is church? What do you say? So the church. It's not a building. It's not a place.

But it's also. Inaccurate. To say. That the church. Is the people. More accurately. It is. The gathered people. Church. Is the assembled. Local.

Followers. Of Jesus. And the term. In Greek. Ecclesia. Literally. Means. The called out ones. And this was a common term. In ancient. Greek.

That was used. For people. Who were called out. Of their homes. To a public gathering. For civic purposes. So a town gathering. People were called out.

Of their homes. And yet. The New Testament authors. They use it. To convey something. Practical. And natural. That people are called.

[9 : 32] Out their homes. This morning. We have all been called. Out of our homes. To gather publicly. In a public meeting. Yet also. Something theologically. Something supernatural. Supernatural.

That this particular. Group of people. Have been gathered together. By Jesus. And called out of darkness. Into his marvelous light. Is that not a wonderful thing? And so some people.

Might gather with us. On Sundays. Who don't follow Jesus. But the Bible. Uses the term. Church. Properly. To refer. To the Jesus followers. Who are gathered together. And that is those.

Who were. Not a people. But are now. In Christ. A people. Think of all of us. Here. Who love. And follow Jesus. At one time.

We were not a people. But look at us. We are this. This ragtag. Bunch of people. Brought together. Under Christ. At one time. We were not a people.

[10 : 31] But now. We are a people. We are a definitive. Group of people. Called Bells Hill Baptist Church. Go figure. At one time. We had not received mercy.

But now. In Christ. We have received mercy. At one time. We were. In the darkness. But now. We've been called out. Of the darkness. Into his marvelous light.

To proclaim. The excellencies. Of him. Who called us. Isn't that a wonderful thing? And so. When we gather. We are church. When we go home.

We're no longer church. But we belong. To the church. The assembly. We belong to. Is our local family. Of brothers and sisters. In Christ. Who he has called out.

Of the darkness. Into his light. Who have received mercy. And who he has made. A people. For his own possession. So. Your neighbor asks you. What is church? What do you say?

[11 : 29] In one Corinthians 12. Paul calls the church. A body. More specifically. The body of Christ. Now. Most of the time. The Bible talks about.

The church being a body. It's talking about. The local assembly of believers. Not the universal. Assembly of kingdom citizens. It's talking about. The local assembly of believers.

And the picture of the church. As a body. Is where we get the term. Member. Member. The body of Christ. Made up of many members. I.E. Body parts. Hence.

The old term. To be dismembered. What does that mean? Means to get a limb chopped off. Dismembered. And so. Paul uses this term. To teach believers.

About the nature of their unity. And function. As a family. Nowhere. In the Bible. Is there a Christian. Who does not belong to.

[12 : 26] A church. It doesn't exist. And Paul is teaching. That if you are in Christ. You are in his church. You cannot be in his church. Without being in him.

And you cannot be in him. Without being in his church. They are one and the same. Because the church is his body. He did not die to save you. To make you a lone ranger.

Or a loner. He saved you. To make you a citizen. In his kingdom. Or a sheep. In his flock. Or a child. In his family.

Or a limb. A member. In his body. And so. In 1 Corinthians 12. Paul is addressing. Two particular issues. There were some people. Who didn't feel like. They belonged.

In the body. And there were some people. Who treated others. Like they were not needed. In the body. And so. I don't know. This morning. If you feel like. You don't belong in a body. Maybe you feel like. I don't know what I can contribute.

[13 : 22] To the body. Maybe you feel like. Nobody really talks to me. Maybe you feel like. At one time. I was. Able to do so much. But now. I'm not able to do.

An awful lot. I don't feel like. Part of the body. Or I don't feel like. I belong to the body. And if that's you. Paul says this. If the ear should say.

Because I'm not an eye. I don't belong. In the body. That would not make it. Any less a part of the body. Just because you see it. Or feel it. Doesn't make you. Any less a part of the body.

Jesus sees you. If you are in him. He sees you. As part of his body. Likewise. If you feel that way. Because someone else. Is treating you like you.

You are not needed. In the body. Paul would say. No. That person's wrong. The eye cannot say to the hand. I have no need of you. Nor can the head.

[14 : 18] To the feet. Say. I have no need of you. On the contrary. The parts of the body. That seem to be weaker. Are indispensable. The parts of the church. That seem to be weaker.

Are indispensable. If you feel weak. Know that you're indispensable. Our unrepresentable parts. Are treated with greater.

Modesty. You know that. When you get up. And get dressed in the morning. Which your more presentable parts. Don't require. God has so composed the body.

Given greater honor. To the part that lacked it. And so. If you feel like you lack that. Or if you're unrepresentable. Or if you're not a part of the church. That can do loads of things.

God has given you greater honor. So that. There may be no division in the body. But that the members may have the same care. For one another.

[15 : 14] That's good. So membership in a local body. Is not an extra. Or optional thing. It's the nature of being in Christ. That you would be part of his body.

Which is the church. Now. One thing I should say about membership. It's not like a fixed term contract. It doesn't have different standards. Like a gold membership. A platinum membership.

You don't have to pay a fee. And you don't need to look out for. Members benefits. That you're signing up to. Being in a local family of faith. Is essential.

To God's purpose for you. And for your brothers and sisters. Belonging to a church. Individually. And being a church together. Is God's plan A. There's no other plan. This is God's plan.

For gathering his people together. For them to belong. And live. And grow together. And to be a light. To the nations. It's what Paul says. In Ephesians 3. He calls a mystery.

- [16 : 10] That was hidden. In ages past. Which has been brought to light. In Christ. A mystery of how Jews. And Gentiles. And all kinds of people. Would be brought together.
- In Christ. And he says in Ephesians 2. That God might create. In himself. A new man.
- One new man. In place of the two. That we would be all brought together. In Christ. That he is. Reconciling. All things in himself. And together.
- We are evidence. We are living evidence. This morning. That he is reconciling. All things together. In himself. Because he's reconciling us.
- Together in himself. And so. When somebody asks you. What is church? What do you see? You see. It's really easy. To point out flaws.
- [17 : 05] Really easy. It's really easy. To point out the flaws. In anyone. Or anything. I know that church. Is not perfect. But neither.
- Am I. And neither. Are you. So. We make up the church. Therefore. The church. Is not going to be perfect. It's not going to be perfect. It's not going to be perfect. However.
- What good would it do. To always point out each other's flaws. Does it say anywhere in the Bible. Always make sure. To point out each other's flaws. No. It doesn't say that.
- It says. Forgive one another. Bear with one another. Love one another. Show mercy. The measure with which you show mercy. Will be shown to you. The measure with which you forgive.
- You will be forgiven. Love one another. Serve one another. Remember. So. A church.
- [18 : 01] A church doesn't make you a member. But we are tasked. By the Lord. To carefully identify those who belong to him. So that they can belong to his body.
- And this is not just the job of. Some leaders. It's the job of every member. And it is incumbent upon us to ensure. That people. Don't think they are the Lord's sheep.
- If they are not. That would be a terrible thing. For someone to think. That they are one of the Lord's sheep. When they are not. Because then they are beyond evangelizing. You want to tell them. Who they are.
- And equally. It's incumbent upon us. To ensure. That we. Welcome. The Lord's sheep. The true sheep. If they are. And not leave them out in the dark.
- In danger. And so. It's up to us. To identify. Who the real Christians are. And then. They would become. They would be members. And that's.
- [18 : 59] There's a process. To do that. But the church. Doesn't make you a member. Jesus makes you a member. When you become a Christian. The church. Just recognizes that. And affirms it. In front of everyone.
- And so. It's a process. In which. The church. Identifies you. As a true sheep. And you identify the church. As a true flock. And you know this.
- You know that. If you. Are a true believer. John says. In his first letter. That the true believers. Love their brothers and sisters. And they want to be with. Their brothers and sisters.
- If you're a true child. You want to be with. Your family. And you know this. Because I'm sure. That you Christians. Whenever you go on holiday. You start to look for churches. When you're on holiday. It's like.
- Give yourself a break. But you do that. Don't you. You're like. Where's a church. I can go to. I want to see. Where the brothers are. Where the sisters are. And so. To be a Christian.
- [19 : 58] And yet. Not be. A member. Is theologically. Impossible. However. It might be. Practically. Possible. To cut yourself. Off. From the body.

But you know. What happens. To a limb. That's cut off. From the body. It doesn't do the limb. Any good. And it doesn't do the body. Any good. And that's the same. With the church. And so.

I said. I said. A couple of weeks ago. And I do remember. That I said this. I said. A couple of weeks ago. When we were coming. To our church meeting. That I would explain. The difference. Between a member. And an adherent.

And it's simply this. An adherent. Is simply. Those. Who have yet. To go through. The process. By which. We identify. Them. As true sheep. And they identify.

Us. As a true flock. That's all. And there will. There may always be. Adherents. Because there may always be. New people. Coming into the church. However. Nobody should stay.

[20 : 56] In that category. Because to be a Christian. Is to be a member. Part of a body. Nobody should stay. In that character. Because when the Lord.

Makes someone new. He makes them. A part of his body. And so. My exhortation. To all of us. Is to be the body. If we are. In Christ.

Is to be. Members of his body. And if you want. A little help. To look at. What that means. Or if it's in the Bible. I've. I've. Come out with these documents.

To help us to do that. And we've all looked at them together. So look around the room. Let me just. Come to a close. Look around the room. And consider. All that the Lord.

Is doing. The things that we. Can see. Think about all the things. We can see. Okay. There is a people. Who have been brought together. Who were once. Not a people.

[21 : 50] We were not. A clan. Or a group. Or a club. But we've been brought together. By Christ. A people. Who were once. Not a people. You know.

One time. You didn't receive mercy. But now. You have received. Mercy in Christ. Once. You were in the darkness. Do you remember. What that was like.

I remember. What it was like. To be in the darkness. Thank God. That he brought me. Into his light. He brought us. Into his light. We are gathered together.

Without having to buy a ticket. We are gathered together. With people. Who care for your soul. We hear the true word of God. Proclaimed. And we exalt.

The name of Jesus. In song. Together. Together. What a privilege that is. See the world. Doesn't know it yet. But Jesus is the king of all. He's the lord of all.

[22 : 48] The maker of the heavens. And the earth. The one who is making. All things new. And we get to come together. And praise his name. And exalt his name. Together. These are the things.

That we can see. We get to. Forgive one another. And love one another. And serve one another. We get to break bread. Together. And speak life.

And light to one another. We get to remember. Our lord. We remember. And remind one another. That we are reconciled.

By his body. That was broken for us. And we are redeemed. By his blood. That was poured out for us. And these are just the things. That we can see. Isn't this wonderful?

So when your neighbor asks. What is church? What are you going to say? How much. Do you think. Someone would buy this church for? Now I imagine.

[23 : 45] That that question. Immediately makes you think. Of the building. And yet we have just spent. A lot of time. Talking about it. Not being the building. But maybe. Maybe. Maybe. Maybe. Maybe. Maybe.

We think. That somebody would pay more. For this building. Than they would pay for this group of. Rag tag. Jesus followers. What do you think. What do you think.

Someone would pay for. A people like us. Because it says. In Acts chapter 20. And Paul is talking to a local church.

He's talking to the elders. Of the church in Ephesus. And he says. That you are the church of God. Which God has bought. With his own blood. And so.

However much this building is worth. This group of people. That have been gathered here today. Have been bought. By God. With his own blood. Are you worth something?

[24 : 43] Of course you are. So your neighbour asks. What is church? What do you say?

Well. It's a people who have been bought. By God's own blood. A rag tag bunch of sinners. Saved by God's amazing grace.

Bought with his own. His very own blood. His son's blood. Brought together by Christ. And made new creations. In Christ.

Forgiven. Redeemed. And being transformed. For a kingdom. That is yet to come. We are each part of his body. That was broken for us.

So we break the bread. Looking back to the cross. Which unites us. Looking up together. To God our father. Who loves us. So much that he would send his son for us.

[25 : 41] And looking forward together. To our saviour. Who is coming back for us. All these things. All these things we can see. And yet there is so much more the Lord is doing.

That we cannot see. So. Your neighbour asks you. What is church? What are you going to say to them? Well.

Church is just. A gathering. In a field. Oh. Yet there is treasure. There is treasure. Like you wouldn't believe it. Our king.

And our saviour. Who conquered sin and death. And who loves us. And gave himself for us. He gathered us together. He brought us out of darkness. Into light. His marvellous light.

We were not a people. And he made us a people. We didn't have mercy. And he gave us mercy. We didn't belong to him. And yet we are part of his body. And he is transforming us.

[26 : 38] For his kingdom. Which will last forever. Oh yes. He is our blessed hope. And we proclaim his name. And we get to sing. And exalt his name together.

For his glory. He is our blessed hope. And together we love to exalt him. And we stand on his promises. And we look forward. To his coming again.

That's what church is. Come and see. Hey. Let me pray. Lord. We thank you so much.

For these truths. That you have given us. Through your word. Because your eyes deceive us. All the time. We cannot always rely on our eyes.

Yet there is so much. That we can see. That you are doing. Yet our minds. And our bodies. They betray us. And sometimes.

[27 : 32] We focus so much. On the mess. That we miss. The master. At work. And so Lord. We thank you so much. For these truths. And we thank you so much.

For making us a part. Of your glorious kingdom. And your glorious people. We thank you. That you have made us a people. And you have forgiven us. And given us mercy. Help us to encourage one another.

Lord. Help us to remind each other. Of how wonderful it is. To be saved together. And to be together. And help us. As we come to a time.

Of communion. Help us. To look back at your cross. That unites us. To look up. To the father. Who loves us. And to look forward.

To our savior. Who is coming back for us. We give you thanks. In Jesus name. Amen.