

I. What is Church

1. The Meaning of Church

The word church in the New Testament comes from the Greek word *ekklesia*. This word is formed from two parts: *ek*, meaning “out of,” and *kaleō*, meaning “to call.” Together, *ekklesia* means “those who are called out.” From the meaning of the word itself, we can see that the church is not something physical. It is not a building, not a location, and not a place that people go to. The church is a people who have been called out by God.

In its original Greek usage, *ekklesia* was not a religious term. It was commonly used in society to describe an assembly of people who were called out from among the citizens to gather together for a purpose, especially to deliberate and make decisions. The focus of the word was never on a place, but always on the people who were called and gathered. This background helps us understand why the New Testament uses this word to describe the church.

When the Bible uses the word *ekklesia*, it gives it a deep spiritual meaning. The church is the assembly of those whom God has chosen and called out of the world to Himself. These are people who believe in Christ, love the Lord, and respond to God’s calling. Though they live in different places and belong to different times in history, they are one because they share the same calling.

Therefore, wherever there are people who have been called by God and gathered to Christ, there the church exists. Simply speaking, the church is not a place we attend; it is a people we are—those who have been called out by God for His eternal purpose.

2. The Content of the Church — The Church Is Not a Chapel

To truly grasp the historical development and significance of the church, we must begin by carefully examining its fundamental nature—what the church actually is at its core—and how it originally functioned in its earliest days. The term “church” does not refer merely to what many people casually identify as Christianity as a broad religious system, nor does it denote a physical structure such as a chapel, cathedral, or any designated place of worship. In everyday conversation, it is common for believers to say, for instance, that they are “going to church” on the Lord’s Day when they leave their homes to meet with fellow Christians.

However, what they typically mean by this phrase is that they are heading to a specific building—a meeting hall or assembly space—where believers gather for fellowship, teaching, and worship. Crucially, that building itself is not the church; rather, the church is the community of believers, the living body of Christ composed of redeemed individuals united by faith.

Unfortunately, the widespread use of such colloquial expressions has contributed significantly to a persistent misunderstanding among both believers and non-believers alike, leading many to equate the church exclusively with a physical edifice. This confusion stems largely from centuries of tradition within forms of Christianity that have drifted from their original biblical foundations, where institutional structures and architectural symbols gradually overshadowed the organic, relational reality of the church as described in the New Testament.

3. The Church Is the Enlargement of Christ

The church is not a chapel, nor does it refer to a physical meeting place. What, then, is the church? The church is the enlargement of Christ. But what is Christ? Christ is the union of God and man—God and man joined as one. In Him, you can see both God and man; Christ is the One who is both God and man. Outwardly, He appears as a man; inwardly, He is God. He is God dwelling in man—He is Emmanuel.

This is Christ. Then what is the church? The church is also the union of God and man. Just as Christ is the union of God and man, so also is the church; what Christ is, the church is also.

4. The Church Is the Totality of Those Who Have God Within Them

The church is not a gospel meeting, not an organization, not a chapel, nor today's degraded Christianity. What, then, is the church? The church is a group of people in whom God dwells. In summary, the church is an assembly of called ones who have God within them. Outwardly, they are human; inwardly, God is in them.

What is an electric lamp? Having only a bulb is not enough, and having only electricity is not enough; it is when electricity enters into the bulb that there is a lamp. What is the church? The church is God as the "electricity" and man as the "bulb," with God entering into man so that the two become one. The bulb shines because of the electricity—this is the lamp; this is the church. The church is God added to man, God within man, and man expressing God. God and man, man and God, becoming one—this is the church.

When the Lord Jesus was on earth, outwardly He was truly a man, yet inwardly He was truly God. From the outside, He was one hundred percent man; from the inside, He was one hundred percent God. People called Him Christ. After His resurrection, the Christ within Him was enlarged—expanded into Peter, into John, and into His other disciples. These disciples were truly human, yet God dwelt within them. All such people, who have God dwelling in them, collectively are called the church. The church is not merely you or me individually, but the totality of all who have God within them.