

## The Church

Today I want to return to our series of lessons on division in the Church by discussing the Church itself. It seems that there is much division about what the Church is and who are members of the Church.

First of all I would like to point out that there are specific local churches recognized in the Bible. Paul wrote his epistles to local churches. The Revelation was written to seven churches in Asia minor. At many points in the Scripture commands are given directly relating to the local church. For instance, Paul instructed Titus to ordain elders in every city (Titus 1:5).

It is clear that the Biblical example is that there are local churches with local leadership, and I think every denomination/sect follows this example in their beliefs in one way or another. There is disagreement, though, with regard to other aspects of the church.

Let's look at some of these areas. First of all, there's disagreement as to the importance of membership in the local church. There are some churches which do not keep a membership role but count all who regularly attend as members. There are some churches which do not keep membership roles but only count those who have been baptized into the church as members. There are some which keep membership roles and baptize into the church. There are some which keep membership roles of all baptized believers who have applied for and been granted membership. There may be other models as well.

Among those above there are those who believe that membership in the local church is the same as membership in the Lord's Church, while others believe that the local church is just a physical representation of a spiritual church.

Let's look at the Scripture. First of all, in Acts 2:47 we see that "the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved." There does not appear to me to be any other prerequisite to becoming a member of the Lord's Church than to have been saved. If you don't know what it means to be saved please email me at [john@intotheword.org](mailto:john@intotheword.org).

So if the Lord adds to the church then that precludes any human intervention in this process. This, then, indicates to me that there is a church universal that is made up of all who have been born again. In 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:9 and again in Galatians 1:13 Paul says that he persecuted the church of God. He didn't talk about multiple churches but one church. In Ephesians 5, as well as other places, we find Christ referred to as the head of the church. Once again, one church is referred to.

So if there's one church which church is it? Many denominations (and I'm using that term to represent any group of likeminded churches) claim that they are THE church and those who are not members of their church are not a part of the body or bride of Christ. To me this seems to go against what the Scripture says, though, since it says that the Lord adds to his church and these churches have requirements of some sort.

Since churches disagree over who the church is there is no wonder that there is division within the church. This is a real problem since the Lord Jesus Christ himself said that a house divided against itself cannot stand (Matthew 12:25).

Satan's strategy appears to be divide and conquer. Divide the church by making each group think they're better than the other. Divide the church by making the church not even recognize who the church is. This is a message that Satan doesn't want out – he has hindered the completion of this lesson in various ways for weeks. It's time that the church unite against our common enemy.

In our next lesson I will look at how issues such as abortion and homosexuality are dividing the church.

Yours in Christ,

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