

LESSON 1 – THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING THE CHURCH

1) INTRODUCTION

- a) Before the New Testament was even written, Jesus made important promises concerning the church
 - i) Understanding what the church is and fulfilling our personal responsibility regarding the church is absolutely essential to go to heaven
 - ii) This first lesson will focus on a broad picture of the church and why it is important. Subsequent lessons will hone in on specifics such as the authority, organization, worship, and work of the church

2) CONFUSION OVER THE CHURCH

- a) Ridiculed
 - i) In our day, it is not uncommon to hear people ridicule the idea of “church”
 - ii) I’ve seen billboards in Atlanta advertising churches “for those who are tired of ‘church’ ”
 - iii) A common motive in this approach is to diminish the church into irrelevancy and make it a nonfactor in the life of a Christian

Question 1: Read **Matt 16:18**. According to this verse, who built the church?

Question 2: According to **Matt 16:18**, will anything be able to prevent or destroy the church?

Yes

No

- b) Minimized

- i) Other phrases don’t ridicule so much as they attempt to minimize “church”
- ii) Phrases and clichés: “Give me Christ, not the church” and “Christians go to heaven, not churches”
- iii) These phrases are designed to lure people who profess a love for Jesus Christ but have little use in their lives for “church”

Question 3: Read **Acts 20:28**. According to this verse, what price was paid for the church?

- iv) This verse alone should tell us that catchy phrases or erroneous mentalities that criticize, ridicule, or minimize Christ’s church are incorrect
- v) It should also tell us that Christians must make sure these misunderstandings are corrected with the utmost humility. We owe it to Christ to stand up for what He died for
- vi) On the other hand, why might some have these views about the church? Have Christians, historically, done a good job of representing Christ’s church as He has expected?

- c) Misunderstood

- i) Outside of catchy phrases that attempt to ridicule and minimize the church, many simply have a terribly misguided view
- ii) I once asked someone what church they attended; they replied, “I attend the church in my heart”
- iii) Others do not worship at any church, professing they’d rather worship by themselves apart from “organizational worship”

Question 4: Read **1 Tim 3:15**. What is one of the purposes of the church?

iv) This infers that any knowledge we gain about the church has to come from God and not our own opinions, biases, and presuppositions

d) Genericized

- i) When something becomes too well-known, a product can lose its distinctiveness. This is what the trademark association calls becoming “genericized”
- ii) Examples: Kleenex, Jell-O, Scotch Tape, Band-Aid, etc.
- iii) Today, the words “Christian”, “Christianity”, and “church” are viewed in generic terms
- iv) While the bible teaches a specific pattern for the church’s organization, its worship, and its work, Satan has exploited it and turned it generic
- v) And vague religion which claims a connection to the historic Christ
 - (1) The Church of Body Modification
 - (2) Nudist Church Of The Blessed Virgin Jesus
 - (3) The High Life Social Club Church
 - (4) The International Church of Cannabis

Question 5: Read **2 Cor 11:3-4**. What “differences” were going on in the 1st century church?

Question 6: Read **Gal 1:6-9**. What awaits those who preach another gospel?

e) Denominationalized

- i) One of the most common beliefs about the church today is that it is made up of all different types of denominations
- ii) This is seen in phrases like “one church is as good as another”, or in phrases like “go to the church of our choice”
- iii) Yet within these denominations you will find different doctrines, different creeds, competing church authorities, and all of them claim to be doing God’s will
- iv) This kind of “church” presents a divided picture to the world, one which breeds doubt and skepticism in the eyes of those who see it

Question 7: Read **1 Cor 1:10-13**. What was the problem in the Corinthian church?

Question 8: Read **John 17:20-21**. What does Jesus imply would be a great hindrance to unity?

Question 9: Read **1 Cor 14:33**. What is God not the author of?

- v) Another common belief about the Lord’s church is that it’s made up of a particular group of churches
- vi) A common question asked of me is, “Do you people in the ‘Church of Christ’ think you’re the only ones going to heaven?”

- vii) This is far from the truth. It is completely false to assume that just because you happen to be a member of a particular local church that wears a religious name, that this guarantees salvation
- viii) Jesus taught differently in **Matt 7:21-23**. I've had grave concerns for some of my brethren and that belong to my local church
- ix) The Lord's church is made of individuals, not particular local churches. And there is no one official designation for the church
- x) We'll talk about these concepts later in our study, but for now it is important to understand that any view about the church that is outside of what God's word teaches is erroneous
- xi) Our goal for this series of studies is to understand exactly what God's word teaches regarding the church and to examine our own practices in relation to it

3) ***THE BIBLE'S ESTIMATION OF THE CHURCH***

Question 10: Read **Eph 1:22**. What is Christ's relationship to the church?

- a) That Christ is head over the church is clear enough. But what is meant by "to the church?"
 - i) It probably means He exercises His authority over all things in the interest of the church. In other words, Christ rules the church and therefore has its interests at heart
 - ii) What does this say about the Lord's estimation of the church?

Question 11: Read **Eph 1:23**. What is another term used for the church?

- b) The church is compared to a body and Christ's role in the body is that He is the head
 - i) The human body moves and works because the brain (the head) tells it how to move and work. It sends messages to the members of the body dictating how it should function
 - ii) Such is Christ's role as the head of the church, and the church's role as a body. The church is to be controlled and governed by Christ Himself

Question 12: In **Eph 1:23**, what is the other description used for the church?

- c) It's hard to comprehend that Christ actually has a "fullness"
 - i) Yet this fullness of Christ is represented by His body the church. The church is the earthly means by which Christ's focus and work for this world is accomplished
 - ii) This also tells us that if we are to be in Christ (Eph 1:3), we must be in His church because the church represents Christ's fullness

Question 13: Read **Eph 3:10-11**. How long has the church been apart of God's plan?

- d) So God had a plan for all eternity
 - i) Before God even made the heavens and the earth, the church was in His plans for mankind
 - ii) And through this church, His manifold (abundant) wisdom is made known

Question 14: Read **Eph 3:21**. From where does God receive His glory?

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- e) “Glory” means “Honor, praise, fame, admiration, etc.”
 - i) The church, by its very nature, brings glory and honor to God through what it is and what it does
 - ii) Therefore, it was God’s eternal plan that He Himself would receive glory from those people in Christ’s church

Question 15: Read **Eph 5:23**. In addition to Christ being the head of the body, what else is He?

- f) It’s important to note that Christ is not the Savior of all men. Christ is the Savior of the church
 - i) The implication is clear. If we want to be saved, we must be in His church. It is not an option

Question 16: Read **Eph 5:25**. What did Christ do for the church?

- g) The primary teaching of this verse is that husbands are to love their wives
 - i) But to understand to what extent a husband must love his wife, we are told he must love her in the same way that Christ loved the church
 - ii) And Christ loved the church so much that He gave His life for it (John 3:16). A husband must do this for his wife. A husband’s life must be devoted to the well-being of his wife

Question 17: Read **Eph 5:26-27**. What end result will there be for the church when all is said and done?

- h) Christ seeks to cleanse the church, to sanctify unto Himself
 - i) Christ desires that there be no spot/wrinkle in the church, but that it should be holy and w/o blemish
 - ii) When that is completed, it is presented to God as a glorious church

Question 18: Read **Eph 5:29-30**. What else does Christ do for His body, the church?

- i) We focus a lot of attention on our physical bodies, not just in the morning as we’re preparing for the day, but also through dieting, physical fitness, etc
 - i) Christ nourishes and cherishes His body in the same way – except Christ nourishes His body (the church) better than we could ever hope to nourish our physical bodies
 - ii) He makes sure His church has everything it needs to function fully and according to His will

4) CONCLUSION

- a) Though there is a lot more we’ll learn about the church in upcoming lessons, from just these few verses we learn that the church should be something we all want to be apart of it
 - i) If we love Christ, how can we not love His church? How can we not speak of it with the utmost honor and respect? How can we not desire to be a part of something so wonderful?
 - ii) Unfortunately, since Satan has his grips on Earth, he has used men in the past, present, and future to turn the church into something God never intended it to be
 - iii) Since our world contains more than 7000 distinct denominations with different name and different doctrines, it is hard to deny Satan’s influence on Christianity in this way
 - iv) This is another reason why we should study the church – so we can know what God expects of us