

Basic Christianity

Part 5 – The Church

Common Misconceptions

1. The church is a building.

Eph 1:22-23 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, (23) which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Eph 5:30 For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.

The church is a living organism.

2. The church is a religious body.

I never refer to the Mormon church, because the church is the body of Christ, the body of true disciples of Jesus.

It includes people from many denominations, but it doesn't mean that every person in that denomination is part of the church, just because they turn up on a Sunday.

And some religious groups are definitely not part of the church, because the church is comprised of Jesus' true disciples.

3. The church is a meeting.

The very fact that we talk about going to church, is evidence that we have an idea deeply ingrained in our minds that church is a church service.

But that phrase does not exist in the New Testament for the simple reason that the idea behind it doesn't exist there.

You can't go to church – you (collectively) are the church.

Sunday services and home groups account for only a few hours per week, but we are the church 168 a week.

One of the indicators of church health is how its members interact outside of officially organised church activities like church services, home groups, Bible study groups.

Church is so much more than these, and if we don't get a grip of that, we're going to miss out on what God intended for us.

4. I am a part of the world-wide church.

This is true – we are part of the world-wide church.

But our membership of the world-wide church means nothing if it isn't expressed through the local church.

Here is a basic definition of the local church: a specific fellowship of believers that you are committed to.

Look at the letters in the NT – Romans was written to the local church in Rome, 1 & 2 Corinthians to the local church in Corinth, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 Peter, even Philemon were all written to local churches. Acts is a history of the establishment of local churches. 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus were all written to pastors of local churches. Even Revelation begins with 7 letters to 7 specific local churches. The twelve apostles were based in a local church (Jerusalem). Even Paul who had an itinerant ministry was sent out from and based in the local church at Antioch.

True membership of the world-wide church is expressed through the local church.

It's easy for me to love someone in the middle of Africa whom I've never met. But I only learn real sacrificial love with the people I know.

The hardest people to love are the ones we are closest to.

A similar thought is expressed in 1 John 4:20: If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother **whom he has seen**, how can he love God **whom he has not seen**?

Wouldn't it be equally true to say: he who does not love his brother **whom he has seen**, how can he love his brother **whom he has not seen**?

What's the point of my saying that I love the church if that love isn't expressed through a practical commitment to real flesh and blood people?

It's easy to say you love someone you've never met, or don't have to rub shoulders with regularly.

It's not so easy to love the people around you.

True love is made evident when you learn to love the people who occasionally get up your nose.

5. The church isn't very important.

Anyone who thinks this is seriously misinformed.

Mat 16:18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

Eph 1:22-23 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, (23) which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Eph 3:10 to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,

Eph 5:27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

Eph 5:29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.

These verses highlight the centrality of the church in God's thinking; the church is the centre of the plan and purpose of God.

Dropping out of church life is one of the most serious indicators of a backslidden heart?

1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

What's the opposite of walking in the light? Being backslidden.

What's the result of walking in the light? Fellowship with one another – involvement in church life.

A person may be hurt, disappointed, or angry because of the church, but we all still make choices.

What Is The Church?

Paradigms we learn from.

1. The Church as God's House

1 Tim 3:15 I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God ...

1 Pet 2:5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

We are living stones in God's house.

And from this analogy we learn the importance of **finding our place in the house of God**.

Find out your gifts and use them for the benefit of the church.

It's not enough just to show up each Sunday – we need to fulfil the purpose for which God designed us.

Where do you fit in? What does God want you to do? How can you serve your church?

2. The Church as The Body of Christ.

The church is not a club, it's a body.

A lot depends on Jesus' body working the way it should.

Heb 10:5-7 Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. (6) In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. (7) Then I said, 'Behold, I have come; in the volume of the book it is written of Me; to do Your will, O God.'"

We are the body God has prepared.

The purpose of the body of Christ is to do the will of the Father – as a body.

If there's anything we learn from the analogy of a body it's **cooperation** and **interdependence**.

1 Cor 12:12-27

Interdependence is the opposite of the spirit of independence.

The spirit of independence says, "I go to church, but I don't get involved. I just go to get fed."

But independence is the total opposite of God's plan for the church.

God made us in His image, and God is a Trinity.

The three persons of the Trinity of the Godhead have always been interdependent.

There's never been a time when they've acted independently.

You can get some wheels, metal plates, glass, an engine, seats, computers.

None of these can fly – but they can if you put all together and make a plane.

An aeroplane is a machine that consists of 100% non-flying parts.

As a body, we can achieve far more than we can individually.