**The Nature Of The Lord's Church**

**Introduction:**

It can be a confusing endeavor if one is trying to choose a church to attend.  We are a society who is programmed to search for things which please us.  We shop for clothes that we like, we search for cars that we like, we shop for homes that we like and then we personalize them to our own taste to the best of our ability and our budget.  So if we take this mindset that we are going to choose a church that we like or that appeals to us, we might overlook some important things that we need to take in to consideration.  The purpose of this lesson is two-fold.   First, for anyone who may be searching for a church and is unsure what to look for, this lesson is aimed at providing some vital information that is necessary for one to make an informed decision.   Second, to help those who are in the Lord's church to have the necessary information to help others who may be searching for a church make an informed decision.

Discussion:

**I.  The Word 'Church' and what it means**

First, let's define the term church and put it in its proper perspective.  The word in the original language for 'church' is pronounced 'Ekklesia' and it has two meanings depending on the context in which it is used.  The word can mean an 'assembly' of people and it does not necessarily mean an assembly of Christians.  In Acts 19:38 and following we read of an assembly, or 'ekklesia' of a mob of people who were upset and intent on murdering the apostle Paul in the city of Ephesus.  This usage of Ekklesia has nothing to do with a group of Christians.  Then in Romans 16:16 we see this same word used in reference to all of the individual assemblies of Christians when Paul wrote "*the churches of Christ salute you*".   So this word in the original language carries a meaning of an assembly or gathering of people called together for any purpose, not necessarily of a religious nature.  It simply means an assembly.

Then there is the other meaning which this word can apply which represents that universal body of Christians world wide.  We are all here today in a local 'Ekklesia' or assembly of God's people, but we are also a part of the universal worldwide 'Ekklesia' of God's people, which is made up of every Christian living on earth.  This is universal worldwide 'Ekklesia' or 'church' is also identified in scripture as the "*body of Christ*" in [Ephesians 5:23](file:///C:\Users\david\Documents\My%20Web%20Sites\Church\Bible\KingJames\Ephesians\5.htm#TwentyThree), [Colossians 1:18](file:///C:\Users\david\Documents\My%20Web%20Sites\Church\Bible\KingJames\Colossians\1.htm#Eighteen) later in and [Colossians 1:24](file:///C:\Users\david\Documents\My%20Web%20Sites\Church\Bible\KingJames\Colossians\1.htm#TwentyFour) which reads, "*Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church*".  So we see that the universal 'ekklesia' or church is that universal body, or assembly or 'calling' of God's people on a worldwide scale.  And for the purpose of this lesson, this is sense in which we are going to use this word until the very end of this lesson where we will make some applications to our little local 'ekklesia' right here in Granby, MO.

**II. There Is Only One Worldwide Church In The New Testament and it belongs to Jesus Christ**

In [Matthew 16:18](file:///C:\Users\david\Documents\My%20Web%20Sites\Church\Bible\KingJames\Matthew\16.htm#Eighteen) we have an inspired eye-witness account of Jesus promising to build His church.  Jesus was speaking to His followers who had accompanied Him during His earthly ministry.  On this occasion, Jesus started the conversation that led up to this by asking them who they thought He really was.  Peter spoke up and boldly stated that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God.  The word Christ comes from the Greek word 'Christos' and means the 'anointed' one.  Peter declared that Jesus was the anointed one or the 'Messiah' that had been promised and that the whole nation of Israel had been waiting for.   Let's notice a few things carefully when we read this scripture.  First, Jesus promised to build only one worldwide universal church.  And He referred to the church He was going to build as His church, meaning that it was going to belong to Him.  Matthew 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.*"

Jesus promised to build one universal worldwide 'ekklesia' or 'body' or 'church'.  Let us keep in mind here that the worldwide 'church' and 'body' of Christ and spiritual 'kingdom; of Christ are one and the same.  He indicated that this 'body' or 'church' would belong to Him.  He said "*I will build my church*", singular and claimed it as His property or His possession.  After Jesus said He would build his church in [Matthew 16:18](file:///C:\Users\david\Documents\My%20Web%20Sites\Church\Bible\KingJames\Matthew\16.htm#Eighteen)  he went on to say in [verse 19](file:///C:\Users\david\Documents\My%20Web%20Sites\Church\Bible\KingJames\Matthew\16.htm#Nineteen) to make the connection between the church and the kingdom.

In [Ephesians 4:4](file:///C:\Users\david\Documents\My%20Web%20Sites\Church\Bible\KingJames\Ephesians\4.htm#Four) we have an account of Paul illustrating the unity of the worldwide church and he makes a very important point that is of particular relevance to this oneness or singleness of the world wide church.  Keeping in mind that the worldwide church and the body of Christ are the same thing, let's read what Paul has to say concerning this:  [Ephesians 4:4](file:///C:\Users\david\Documents\My%20Web%20Sites\Church\Bible\KingJames\Ephesians\4.htm#Four), "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism..." (NKJV)  Since there is only one body of Christ, and the universal church and the universal body of all Christians is the same thing, then we see that there is indeed only one church of the New Testament. 

**III.  The Worldwide Church is Ruled By Jesus Christ**

In Colossians 1:18, Paul writes concerning the relationship between Christ and the church:  Paul illustrates Jesus as the head of the church.  The head of any organization is in a position or place of leadership, greatest authority, or honor.  This is a person to whom all others are subordinate.  Jesus as the head of the church makes Him the supreme ruler of it.  Starting in verse 18, "*And he* [Jesus] *is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.*"  Preeminence means to be first in rank or influence which goes along with the meaning of Jesus being the head of the church.   As the head of the church, Jesus Christ is the supreme ruler over the church that He established.

In Matthew 28:18, in what we today call the great commission, we read an account of Jesus saying that "*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.*" (NKJV).  Jesus is the supreme ruler over the new testament church that He established both in heaven and on earth.  In 1 Peter 3:22, we read of another account of Jesus' authority over not only the church but also of everything else.  Everything both in heaven and on earth are subject to the rule of Jesus Christ.  Peter writes in 1 Peter 3:22, "*who* [speaking of Jesus] *is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.*"  The word subject to in this context is a verb which means to be put under the authority of of.  All the angels, authorities and powers, both in heaven and on earth are subject to the authority of Jesus Christ.  This includes but is certainly not limited to the one universal worldwide church that Jesus established.

In 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 we learn more about this sovereign position that Jesus has over the church.  We learn that in the end, Jesus will deliver the church to God the Father.  We also gain an understanding that while the church and all the other earthly powers are subject to Jesus rule, they are not yet compliant or submissive to Him.  In the end, all who refuse to bow to His authority will be overcome.  1 Corinthians 15, starting in verse 24 reads, "*Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. 27 For He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. 28 Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.*"  When Jesus comes again, He will subdue all those who have not bowed to His authority, and He will deliver the church/body of Christ/the spiritual Kingdom of Christ to God the Father in heaven.

**IV.  The Worldwide Church was bought by Jesus Christ**

The worldwide church that Jesus established was expensive and it came at great personal cost.  In Ephesians 5:25, Paul is comparing the love that Christ has for His church with the love men are supposed to have for their wives.  Paul is making some multiple points here when he writes, "*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her*" (NKJV).   We learn from this verse that Jesus gave Himself for the church.  Then turning to Acts 20:28-29, we see just what Jesus had to do to purchase His church.  Jesus gave His life in order to purchase the church.  He shed His blood on the cross when he was crucified.  Acts 20 starting in verse 28 reads, "*Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood*" (NKJV).

The universal church, the worldwide body of Christ, the spiritual kingdom of God's people was paid for by Jesus Christ when He was crucified and shed His blood for us on the cross.  The death He suffered on that cross is what redeemed mankind from their sins.  The cost of the church was high.  The price paid was the physical death of its king.  Jesus Christ, the owner, ruler and king over the universal church has been resurrected and is now reigning over it from Heaven.

**V.  The Worldwide Church Strives for Unity**

Going back to Ephesians chapter 4, we are going to observe some additional points that are of particular relevance to what we see out in the religious world today.  Earlier we saw that Paul declared there was only one body of Christ.  He made a lot of other claims in that context regarding ones.  There were several things in that teaching that there is only one of.  Let's read the whole section to help give us an overall view of what Paul is teaching.  Ephesians chapter 4, starting in verse 1 reads, "*I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."*

Paul said to strive for unity.

There is only one body, only one universal church, only one spiritual kingdom of Christ.  This one body of Christ strives for unity.

There is only one hope to strive for...  John 14:6, "*Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*"

There is only one Lord, and one Father to strive for... 1 Corinthians 8:6, "*yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live*."

There is only one baptism to strive for....   Matthew 28:19-20, "*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...*"

There is only one faith to strive for.... Philippians 1:27, "*Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with* ***one mind*** *striving together for* ***the faith*** *of the gospel...*" (NKJV).

Striving for the unity of the faith does not mean we can join with those of other beliefs such as Buddhism or so called Christians faiths which are in conflict with what the Faith of Christ is in the New Testament.  Let's look at some key scriptures which help us to come to a better understanding of this.  This is important because when we look out over the religious landscape of the world we live in today, we don't see this unity of the faith that is commanded in scripture.

In 1 Corinthians 1:10, Paul writes about divisions in the faith of Christ and urges his readership to strive for unity....  "*Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment...*" (NKJV).   The unity that the faith of Christ commands is the unity of doctrine and practice.  In 1 Timothy 1:3, Paul urged Timothy to command the Christians in Ephesus to teach no other doctrine, or teaching. 1 Timothy 1:3 reads, "*As I urged you when I went into Macedonia — remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine...*" (NKJV).  We are not permitted to make up our own faith, or alter the faith of Christ, and teach it to others.  In Galatians 1:9, we see Paul condemning this sort of practice with some of the strongest language in all of the new testament. Galatians 1:9, "*As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed*" (NKJV).  Those who alter the faith of Christ are said to be cursed and those who follow these cursed teachers are equally condemned.  In 2 John 9-11, the inspired Apostle John teaches that Christians are not to even fellowship those who alter or change the faith of Christ as it is given in scripture.  2 John 9-11, "*Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. 10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; 11 for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.*" (NKJV).

So with this in mind, it is vitally important that the one faith we strive for is the one faith of Christ that we read of in the new testament.  We cannot strive with others who are teaching something different.  We cannot strive with those who alter it or change it in any way.  If they teach less than what we read of in the new testament then they are not teaching enough.  If they teach more than what what is in the new testament, then they are are teaching too much.  Those who do this have altered the doctrine of Christ and replaced all or part of it with the teaching of men.  Jesus had something to say about that in Matthew 15:9 when He said, "*And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.*'" (NKJV).

When we look out at the religious world of today, we see many faiths which do not follow Jesus Christ and the scriptures teach they are lost.  We also see a whole bunch of faiths who claim Jesus Christ as their savior but teach and follow different variations of the faith of Christ.  There are hundreds of denominations or divisions out there and they all don't teach the same thing.  They teach different ways of being saved, they teach different ways of behaving, or they teach different ways following Christ.  They teach a different gospel than one found in the Bible and Paul says they are cursed, (Galatians 1:9).  They are transgressing and not abiding in the one doctrine of Christ and John says they are evil, 2 John 9-11.  And if we join with them, we are just as condemned as they are, 2 John 9-11).

  Since there is only one Bible, and it contains only one standard of righteousness, and we have hundreds of different beliefs regarding what the Bible teaches about the faith of Christ then men have replaced the doctrine of Christ with their own doctrines.  They have altered it in some way.  They have left something out, or they have added something to it.   Romans 10:2-4 reads, "*For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. 3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.*" (NKJV).

So since we are commanded to both strive for unity in the faith, and forbidden to join with other faiths or variations of the faith of Christ in doing so, we must stand completely apart from all of these different organizations and point the way to the only right path and stand steadfastly on it and no other.

**V.  How Do We Make Sure We Are In the One Universal Church, or Body of Christ?**

Jesus only established one church.  That's the one we must belong to.

Jesus only died for one body of Christ.  It's that body we must be members of.

Jesus only reigns over one spiritual kingdom.  That's the kingdom we need to be subjects in.

All three of these things, the church, the body of Christ and the kingdom of Christ are representative of a group or assembly of people.  It has nothing to do with buildings or any other physical thing.  The church, the body of Christ and the kingdom of Christ are all terms which refer to the same thing.  Peter refers to this assembly or called group of individuals as a "spiritual house" and a "holy priesthood" in 1 Peter 2:5.  In 1 Peter 2:9 he went on to say Christians are a "*chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people...*" (NKJV).   The true church, the body of Christ, the kingdom of Christ, the chosen generation, the royal priesthood, the spiritual house, the holy nation and God's special people are all one and the same thing.   The church, the body of Christ is known by many different descriptive terms in the New Testament, but they all refer to the same thing.  They all refer to the people of God, Christians.  The church/Ekklesia meaning the assembly of all the saved.

So how do one join this group of saved people and live as members of the one true church or body of Christ?  When we look out in the world today we see lots and lots of different answers to that question.  But when we look in the Bible there is only one answer to that question and it is much more simple than one would expect.  That's not a hard question to answer at all.   And for any one interested in living a pleasing and acceptable life before God this is the most important question of all.  This is where it all begins.

Since the Bible says there is only one faith and anyone teaching or living anything different is condemned then How can I be absolutely sure, beyond any shadow of a doubt whatsoever that I am in the right church.  How can I be 100% confident that I am in the one church that Jesus Christ built, bought, bled for, died for and rules over?

That is such an easy question to answer that it is amazing that so many people miss it.  The answer to this question is, we do it today the same way the Christians became members of the Lord's church we read of in scripture.  We can become members of the same church we read of in scripture in exact same way Christians living in the first century did it.  By doing what they did, we will be what they were.

OK, that makes sense, so how did Christians become members of the universal church/body of Christ then?  To answer that question, we need to turn to Acts chapter 2 where we have an account of the very first Christians who ever became members of the church/body of Christ.  Acts chapter 2 beginning in verse 14 and continuing to verse 36 is an account of the very first gospel sermon preached ever.  Peter was was doing the preaching and He preached the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.  And many of the people listening to the word of God being preached believed it.  Romans 10:17, "*So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*"

Then in Acts 2:37, we read that "*when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?*"  They realized they were guilty and lost and needed to be saved and they asked what they had to do to achieve this.

Peter answered them in Acts 2:38 where he told them all to "*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...*"  they were told to repent.  In Luke 13:5, Jesus said, "but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."  Peter also told them to be baptized for the remission or forgiveness of their sins.  When Paul became a member of the body of Christ, he was told the same thing in Acts 22:16, "*And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*"   So we have hearing and believing, repentant and baptism.  What else did they do?

Acts 2:41-43, "*Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. 42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.*"  After they heard, believed, repented and were baptized, they continued in the faith.  They were spreading the gospel and proclaiming Jesus Christ as savior.  Romans 10:9-10, "*that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*"  Confessing Jesus Christ means they were proclaiming Him, they were telling others about Jesus Christ.

They were living steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and in the breaking of bread.  This means they were living faithfully in accordance with God's will.  They were living obediently to God's instructions given to them by the apostles.  So now we have hearing, faith, repentance, baptism, confessing Christ as savior and steadfast obedience to the will of God and let's see what happened to them in verse 47.

Acts 2:47, "*praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*"God added them to the church.  Which church did God add them to?  He added them to the one church, the body of Christ, the assembly of the saved.  Also known as the kingdom of Christ, the holy nation, the royal priesthood, the house of God, the family of God, the children of God.  God added them to His church Himself.

So how do we get in the church?  We get in the church the same way they did when we do what they did to be added.  This is the way that must be right and cannot fail.  This is the way we can know we are part of the one body of Christ, the one church of Christ that we read of in the Bible.  If we use the Bible and only the Bible, and we do what they did, we will be what they were.  Christians only, in the church of the new testament, added to it by God Himself and living faithfully in accordance to God's will and saved beyond any shadow of doubt whatsoever.

The lesson today is yours and with this we will close with Romans 16:16, "*Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.*" (NKJV).

David Hersey

January 24, 2016