

# WHAT IS A CHURCH?

1. **A DISTINCTION:** Bible teachers draw a distinction between the *universal church* and particular united manifestations of that universal church in *local churches*.
2. **ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ (EKKLĒSIA): THE NEW TESTAMENT WORD FOR “CHURCH”**
  - 2.1. The New Testament word for “church” is *ekklēsia*.
    - 2.1.1. The word *ekklēsia* in the gospels appears twice referring to the future institution of Christ.
      - 2.1.1.1. **Matt 16:18**
      - 2.1.1.2. **Matt 18:17**
    - 2.1.2. The word *ekklēsia* is used in the New Testament to refer to generic assemblies.
    - 2.1.3. By the time we get to the early epistles, we see special modifiers joined to the church:
      - 2.1.3.1. **1 Thess 1:1** “the church . . . in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.”
      - 2.1.3.2. **1 Thess 2:14** “the churches of God . . . in Christ Jesus”
      - 2.1.3.3. **2 Thess 1:1** “the church . . . in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”
      - 2.1.3.4. **2 Thess 1:4** “the churches of God”
    - 2.1.4. Soon the word could stand by itself in a technical sense:
      - 2.1.4.1. **Acts 11:22** “the church which was in Jerusalem”
      - 2.1.4.2. **Acts 13:1** “the church that was at Antioch”
    - 2.1.5. On a few occasions, the word even picked up the sense of the church universal.
      - 2.1.5.1. **Acts 8:1**
      - 2.1.5.2. **Acts 9:31a**
      - 2.1.5.3. **Hebrews 12:22-23**
  - 2.2. What a church is not.
    - 2.2.1. A church is not a building.
    - 2.2.2. A church is not a human institution.
    - 2.2.3. A church is not a national or state organization.
    - 2.2.4. A church is not a denomination.
    - 2.2.5. The church is never identified with Israel. [Excurses]
      - 2.2.5.1. Israel never called a “church.”
      - 2.2.5.2. Eph 2:11-22
      - 2.2.5.3. “Israel” is still addressed in the book of Acts after the church is founded.
      - 2.2.5.4. The nature of spirit baptism teaches that the church is new.
      - 2.2.5.5. Paul teaches that there is a future salvation for national Israel.
      - 2.2.5.6. A note on Gal 6:15-16
  - 2.3. New Testament Metaphors and Images for the Church
    - 2.3.1. The Flock (**John 10**)
    - 2.3.2. Vine and Branches (**John 15:1ff**)
    - 2.3.3. People of God (**1 Pet 2:9-10**)
    - 2.3.4. Body of Christ (**1 Cor 12:1-3ff**)
    - 2.3.5. Bride of Christ (**Rev 21:9; Eph 5:23-32**)
    - 2.3.6. Temple of God (**1 Cor 3:9-13**)
3. **THE INVISIBLE UNIVERSAL (A.K.A. “CATHOLIC”) CHURCH**
  - 3.1. We draw a distinction between the universal and local church.
  - 3.2. Some people believe that there is no such thing as a universal church.
    - 3.2.1. The Roman Catholic Church denies a distinction between the visible and invisible.
    - 3.2.2. Some Baptists, called “Briders” or “Landmarkers,” deny the universal church.
  - 3.3. The key passage that teaches the existence of the universal church is **1 Cor 12:12-13** (cf. Acts 1:5; 10; 11:14-16).
4. **REGENERATE CHURCH MEMBERSHIP**

- 4.1. If the invisible church is made up of those who have been spirit-baptized, who is it that makes up visible, local bodies?
- 4.2. What is the New Testament Warrant for Regenerate Church Membership?
  - 4.2.1. Those comprising NT churches are only saints or professing Christians.
    - 4.2.1.1. **Acts 2:41**
    - 4.2.1.2. **Romans 1:7**
    - 4.2.1.3. **1 Corinthians 1:2**
    - 4.2.1.4. **Galatians 1:2b-4**
    - 4.2.1.5. **Ephesians 1:1**
    - 4.2.1.6. **Philippians 1:1**
    - 4.2.1.7. **Acts 11:26**
  - 4.2.2. Paul told the church to excommunicate those who scandalized their profession through unrepentant, sinful living. **1 Corinthians 5:11**
  - 4.2.3. Each local church is a miniature version of the universal church.
  - 4.2.4. Churches should be comprised of professing believers alone.
  - 4.2.5. It would be destructive to comfort unbelievers with a place in the church.
  - 4.2.6. The church should never countenance someone who denies the gospel.
5. **APPLICATION**
  - 5.1. Let us attend church.
  - 5.2. Let us appreciate the grand variety and unity of the invisible church.
  - 5.3. Let us be faithful in our commitment to regenerate church membership.