

The Church

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A definition of the church

Lesson 1

Introduction

One definition of the word "church" is: "a building set aside for public Christian worship".

We see many buildings of different sizes and shapes, marked with a cross, and we call them churches. But is the church a building? What is the church?

A. The church is a people

1. The word for church in the New Testament Greek "ekklesia" means: "**a calling out**". So the church is the full company of people, called out from being under the power and dominion of Satan, by the blood of Christ, into the kingdom of God. Acts 2:41 and Acts 15:14.
2. **A foreshadowing.**

Illustration: The shadow often arrives before the real thing appears. The Old Testament is full of "shadows" of the real thing, which appears in the New Testament.

- a) **One of the shadows of the church is found in the people of Israel.**
1 Corinthians 10:1-4; Acts 7:38.

When the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, their situation grew worse and worse until they cried to God for salvation. God sent a "saviour" called Moses. He delivered them, not by frogs, hailstorms, pestilence etc., but by the blood of an innocent lamb, applied to each house. As "a called out people", they were then led through the Red Sea (baptism), which separated them from their former life, to a walk with God under the guidance of the cloud of fire (the Holy Spirit) to occupy God's promised land.

- b) **The real thing: The church.**
Acts 2:38; Hebrews 9:11; John 1:29-33.

The church is also "a called out people". By the blood of the Lamb (Jesus Christ) God called out, released and cleansed a people, brought them through the water of baptism and filled them with the Spirit, so that He could guide them into all His wonderful promises.

- c) **Not a building – but people.**
1 Peter 2:4-5; 1 Corinthians 3:9.

The "church" has nothing to do with a building of bricks and mortar, but is made up of living stones (true believers) joined together by His love and grace. During the first 150 years of church history, the church did not even own a building.

B. The church is God's own special people

Read 1 Peter 2:9

1. Special because He bought them.

Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 1:18-19.

Purchased with the highest price ever! What was the price? It was the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

2. Special because of their variety.

Revelation 5:9-10.

From where does God choose His people? He chooses them from every tribe, tongue, people and nation.

The church consists of people of all ages, from all nations and tribes, and all denominational structures.

3. Special because of common experience.

a) They are saved by grace. John 3:5.

What experience is absolutely necessary in order to be a part of God's people? You must be born again by the Spirit.

b) They are all indwelt by the same Spirit.
1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Romans 8:9.

c) They all worship the same God and Him alone.
Exodus 20:3-6; Luke 4:8.

C. The church is a body

Read Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 1:22-23

"The body of Christ" is the most common description of the church in the New Testament.

1. Christ is the head.

The full church is His body. Colossians 1:18.

Demonstration: Call a person forward – point to his body. It is one beautiful whole, yet it consists of hundreds of different members, perfectly joined in the right places. What a variety of members! There are big and small members, visible members and hidden members, members very close to one another, others not so close, members that have big movements, and some that have small movements, quiet members and loud members. They are all important and they are all in perfect harmony. How can this great variety of members function together so well? They can because they are all directed from the head. There is one spirit of love and unity functioning right through this body.

That is how it should be in the church!

2. **All members in the body have a function.**
1 Peter 4:10.

There should be no passive members. 1 Corinthians 12:11 says "each one".

3. **The church is the body of Christ.**

It is the body He will express Himself through, minister to the world through and do His work through.

Christ has no other hands, feet, voice, etc., to express His love and compassion on earth, than His church.

4. **The necessary equipment.**

Illustration: Each member of the physical body has natural gifts by which it expresses the character of that particular person.

What did Christ look like when He was on earth? Physically we don't know, but we are well acquainted with His nature, personality and actions.

Let us mention some of the attributes of Jesus: love, compassion, gentleness, wisdom, authority, power to heal and do miracles, etc.

He was the great Apostle sent from heaven to establish the Kingdom of God.
He was the great Prophet, speaking under the anointing and inspiration of God.
He was the great Evangelist with a burning compassion for the lost sheep.
He was the great and Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep.
He was the great Teacher. "Never has anyone taught like Him", said people to each other.

5. **For the church to reveal Christ on earth as God intended, each member needs to be equipped by the Holy Spirit.**

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|----|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| a) | Galatians 5:22-23. | The fruit of the Spirit. |
| b) | 1 Corinthians 12:1-8. | The supernatural gifts of the Spirit. |
| c) | Ephesians 4:11-16. | The five ministerial gifts. |

Together, all the members, filled with the Holy Spirit, will enable the church to reveal Christ in all His fullness.

Memory verse

Ephesians 4:11-13, *"And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ".*

The prophetic word of Jesus concerning the church

Lesson 2

Introduction

While on earth Jesus only mentioned the church (ekklesia) twice, although indirectly it is found in many other places. But both instances are very powerful and reveal fundamental truth concerning the church. The two occasions are Matthew 16:15-19 and Matthew 18:15-20.

A. Matthew 16:15-19

1. "I will build".

Only Jesus can build the church, because He is the only one who can provide the material for this spiritual building. Acts 4:12; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 4:11.

2. "My church".

No man or council of men can ever claim the ownership of "the church". Jesus is Lord of the church.

- a) Ephesians 3:21 – He has the final authority.
- b) 1 Corinthians 4:1-2; Hebrews 13:17 – He appoints stewards who are accountable to Him.

3. "On this rock I will build".

- a) Is it on Simon Peter as a person? Or is it on the quality of his confession: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God?"

If it were on Peter's personality, it would have been a very shaky church, for soon after Peter was satanically inspired. See Matthew 16:23.

Surely it was Peter's life-changing confession that made him suitable material for church building, and so it is with everyone with a similar confession. They are the living stones of which the church is built. 1 Peter 2:4-5.

- b) 1 Peter 2:6. Christ is the solid rock on which the church stands.
- c) Ephesians 2:20. He is the chief cornerstone.

Illustration: According to ancient building methods, a big solid stone was first carefully positioned (the chief cornerstone). The whole building was then constructed around this stone; all measurements were taken from it.

Jesus is the chief cornerstone of the church. On Him the living stones (born-again believers) are placed.

4. An invincible church.

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus says, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it".

"The gate" was the place where the ruling council of the city sat in those days. Ruth 4:1 & 11; Proverbs 31:23.

"The gates of hell" is the full council of hell, with the prince of darkness as chairman and a whole hierarchy of wicked and dark spirits. **Read Ephesians 6:12.**

They shall never prevail against the true church of Jesus Christ.

Their methods are:

- a) Persecution. Acts 8:1.
- b) Heresy. Acts 20:29-30.
- c) Division. 1 Corinthians 3:3-4.

But when Satan is finally defeated, the church will still be there, reigning victoriously with Christ.

5. A powerful church.

- a) Matthew 16:19. It has power to bind and loose in the name of Jesus.
- b) Ephesians 6:12. "The heavenly realms" here, as in Matthew 16, is the place from where the satanic and demonic forces are operating.

The evil forces in the heavenly places often control the evil circumstances on earth. But Jesus has given the church authority to bind these forces and break the chains in the heavenlies and in that way set people and circumstances free.

- c) "I give you the keys"

Christ has given the church a wonderful bunch of keys.

- i) The name of Jesus. Philippians 2:9-11.
- ii) The blood of Jesus. Revelation 12:11.
- iii) The sword of the Spirit (The Word). Ephesians 6:17.
- iv) Prayer in the Spirit. Ephesians 6:18.

In **Matthew 16:15-19** Jesus speaks powerfully and prophetically about the church.

B. Matthew 18:15-20

- 1. Again Jesus gives us a wonderful confirmation of the spiritual power and authority of the church. Verse 18.
- 2. According to these words of Jesus, in verses 15-17, unity in the church is extremely important. If it is broken – do all you can to restore it!

The four biblical steps to restore unity:

- a) Verse 15, you must be reconciled face to face (alone).
- b) Verse 16, if this is refused; take one or two witnesses with you.
- c) Verse 17, if this is also refused; bring the matter to the church (ekklesia) for reconciliation.
- d) Verse 17, if he still refuses to listen, treat him as a pagan.

Why is the judgement so harsh?

Illustration: If the human body gets a splinter in one of the members (e.g. a finger) and this member refuses to get it out, the finger will soon become inflamed and affect the next member (the hand). If it is just neglected and left for too long, the whole body will become infected, sick and inactive. It is the same with the church body.

3. Unity makes us strong and effective. Genesis 11:6.

What made them able to build the tower of Babel, reaching up through the clouds? Unity! Even evil unity. God said, "Nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them".

How much more powerful is the true unity of the Spirit!

Jesus said that it would powerfully affect the whole world; "that they may be perfectly one that the world may believe". John 17:20-23.

Perfect unity in the church gives:

- a) **Power in prayer.** Verse 19, "If two of you on earth **agree** about anything you ask for, it will be done".

The key word here is "**agree**". It only takes two to disagree.

- b) **The glorious presence of Jesus.** Verse 20, "Where two or three are gathered **together** in My name, there I am in the midst of them".

The key word here is "**together**". It is possible to be in the same room without being together.

"**Two or three**" is the smallest church you can get, but even here you can get disagreement and division.

The result is that heaven is "closed" and the glorious presence of Jesus is not evident in the church.

Let us pray for the unity and effectiveness of the church of Jesus Christ.

Memory verse

Matthew 16:19, *"And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven"*.

The divine building plan

Lesson 3

Introduction

Jesus said: "I will build My church".

Illustration: A building starts long before the first stone is laid. There is a period of planning, preparation and collection of materials. So also with the spiritual building called the church.

A. A mystery from eternity

1. Planned before the creation.

1 Peter 1:18-20; Romans 16:25-26; Ephesians 3:8-9. When God, before the foundation of the earth was laid, planned our wonderful redemption in Christ, the "building of the church" was a part of the divine master plan.

Ephesians 3:8-11, "His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known ... **according to His eternal purpose**". Verses 10-11.

Colossians 1:17-20, "He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning ..."

2. Illustrated right throughout the Old Testament.

The "shadow" of the church:

- a) In the people of Israel.
- b) In the building of the tabernacle.
- c) In the Song of Solomon (the bride and bridegroom).
- d) "Hidden" in many events.

Example: When Abraham sacrificed his son, Isaac, he received him back "from the dead", and through that son a people as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand of the sea was born.

This was a "shadow" or illustration of God offering His Son and through His death and resurrection a mighty people would be born, counting both Jews and gentiles.

B. Preparation for the building of the church

1. Preparation through the law and the prophets.

The prophets were to prepare people for the coming Messiah; Jesus and His Kingdom. Galatians 3:24, "The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ".

2. Preparation through the life of Christ.

The thousands who followed Him, heard His teaching, saw and experienced His healings and miracles, were being prepared for the day of Pentecost, when many of them must have been among the three thousand who repented and became the start of the wonderful "spiritual building" called the church.

3. Preparation through His death and resurrection.

- a) Titus 2:14; Revelation 5:9.
Jesus became the perfect Lamb of God who by His own blood bought us, freeing us from the slavery of sin and Satan, to be God's "ekklesia" (called out people).
- b) 1 Corinthians 15:3-8; Acts 26:23; Acts 4:10-12.
And God sealed our redemption by raising Him from the dead.

4. Preparation through His ascension.

- a) **The outpouring of the Holy Spirit.**
John 16:7; Acts 1:4-5.

Jesus said, "It is good for you that I go away. When I go away I will send the Spirit".
- b) **The giving of the gifts to the church.**
Ephesians 4:8-11.

From the throne He gives gifts to His church today, for its equipping and perfection.

5. He prepared a solid foundation for the church.

Illustration: When a building is to be built, it is of great importance to follow the exact directions of the architect when laying the foundation; otherwise the building could crack and fall apart.

Jesus (the architect) has prescribed a solid foundation for the church.

- a) He Himself is the chief cornerstone to whom everything in the building is related.
- b) Ephesians 2:20-22. Very closely linked to the chief cornerstone is the foundation of apostles and prophets.
- c) In Ephesians 4:11 three more ministries are added; evangelists, pastors and teachers. These five ministries, closely knitted to Jesus, will form a solid foundation on which the members (the living stones) are placed; to grow up in unity, to express the whole fullness of Christ. Then they will not be unstable or confused by false doctrines.
Verses 12-16. Without this biblical foundation the church is in danger of false doctrine, disunity and division.

6. **He prepared for the church by giving the great commission.**

Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-20.

a) **Gathering of the "living stones".**

Where to find them:

- i) "Go into all the world" – all nations – all tribes.
- ii) "To all creatures" – from the king to the beggar, from the learned to the unlearned.

All of them have potential for being changed into living stones and joined to the spiritual building called the church of Jesus Christ.

b) **Not all that are gathered are part of the church (ekklesia).**

i) **Like the fisherman's dragnet:**

Matthew 13:47-50.

"The kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet ..."

There will be all kinds of fish; good and bad ones. But at the end they will be sorted out. The good will be gathered into vessels. The bad will be cast into the fire.

ii) **The tares among the wheat:**

Matthew 13:24-30.

"Let them grow together unto harvest ... gather together the tares and burn them, gather the wheat into My barn".

iii) **The man without the garment:**

Matthew 22:1-14.

"Bind his hand and foot and throw him out into the darkness ... there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth".

iv) **A clear warning from Jesus.**

What kind of "guests" do we have? Do they have "the garment of righteousness?"

Jesus said, "No-one will enter the kingdom of God unless he is born again". Jesus has provided everything so that this wonderful miracle can happen for anyone who comes to Him in repentance and faith.

He is building His church according to the divine plan. It will be a most wonderful "building" which will shine to His glory through all eternity.

Memory verse

Mark 16:15-16, *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved".*

A wonderful start

Lesson 4

Introduction

The birthday of the church is said to be on the day of Pentecost when the first Christians, filled with power from on high, got off to a mighty start. Three thousand people stood before them, under conviction, crying out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

The answer today is the same as in those early days, "Repent, be baptized, and you shall receive the Holy Spirit". Acts 2:37-38.

A. The three steps for entering into the church

1. **Repent = turn.** Acts 26:18.

- a) From the world of sin to Jesus the Saviour and Lord.
- b) From the power of Satan to God.
- c) From relying on self, to relying on the finished work on Calvary.

2. **Be baptized.** Romans 6:3-4.

Baptism is a public confession of trust in the death of Christ for me. I am dead to my old sinful life and raised up, out of the water, to live a completely new life with Jesus.

The first two steps are **our** reaction and obedience to His Word. The last step is **His** reaction to our action by faith.

3. **You shall receive the Holy Spirit.**

John 3:5. A person becomes spiritually alive, "born again".

John 14:17 & 23. Christ takes up residence in his heart by His Spirit.

A membership card or a certificate of baptism is not enough. These three steps are stepping stones into the kingdom of God, into the church (ekklesia).

From the very first day of the history of the church, this was the way people joined the church, in great numbers.

B. On Jesus the chief cornerstone

The early church was a wonderful expression of Jesus. Jesus was in everything they did.

1. **They preached Christ everywhere.**

- a) Acts 2:32. To the 3000, "This Jesus God raised up from the dead, and of that we are all witnesses".
- b) Acts 4:10 & 18-19. They testified with power before the Jewish council about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. When they commanded them not to speak at all

in His name, they answered, "We cannot help speaking ...".

- c) Acts 8:5 & 35. Phillip preached **Christ** in Samaria and then to the eunuch, "From the scriptures, he preached Jesus to him".
 - d) Acts 9:22. Paul preached everywhere, "proving that Jesus is the Christ".
 - e) In fact the whole teaching of the early church was Jesus Christ.
1 Corinthians 1:23, "We preach Christ crucified".
1 Corinthians 2:2, "I will know of nothing else among you".
Colossians 1:17-20, "In Him dwells the whole fullness of God".
2. Acts 3:6 & 12-13. The healings and miracles were all performed in the name and power of Jesus, and they made sure that He received the glory.
3. Acts 2:46. Daily they had communion commemorating Christ.
Acts 2:38. They baptized all in the name of Jesus.

They greeted one another with "Maranatha" which means "He is coming".

When the time of persecution came, they made the sign of a fish by which to recognise one another. The Greek word for fish is "IXOYE", the first letters in "Jesus Christ, God's Son, our Saviour".

4. **An example to be followed.**
Ephesians 3:21.

Jesus indeed was the chief cornerstone in the early church, and will be through all generations.

C. The early church was firmly placed on the foundation

Ephesians 2:20, "The foundation of the apostles and prophets".
Their spiritual leadership made them firm, immovable and effective.

- 1. **Spiritual leadership in the Old Testament was represented by the high priest, priests and prophets.**
- 2. **Spiritual leadership in the New Testament (the church).**
 - a) Ephesians 4:8-11; Ephesians 2:20.
In the early church we find the leadership to be made up of five ministries, specially appointed by **Jesus**; apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.
 - b) 1 Timothy 3:2-13.
There are also two offices, appointed by the ministries, for local leadership. They are elders and deacons/deaconesses.
- 3. **What apostles, what prophets?**
 - a) Many would argue that the apostles and prophets spoken about in Ephesians

2:20, who form the foundation of the church, are the twelve apostles and the Old Testament prophets and that no more apostles and prophets should be added to this historical line.

- b) Matthew 10:1-4. The twelve apostles were appointed by Jesus when He was on earth.
Ephesians 4:8-11. But He continued to appoint **after He ascended to the throne** of God.
- c) In the New Testament we find several more apostles: Paul, Barnabas, Acts 14:14; James, Galatians 1:19; Andronicus, Junias, Romans 16:7.
- d) We also find prophets: Agabus, Acts 21:10; Judas, Silas, Acts 15:32; other names, Acts 13:1.
- e) Church history proves that in the first few hundred years these five ministries played a significant role.

4. **On the foundation.**

Acts 2:42; Acts 8:5, 12, 14; Acts 13:1-3; Acts 15:32, 40, 41.

- a) Right through the book of Acts we find a powerful interaction between these ministries in leading, guiding, protecting and equipping the church of God.
- b) They formed the overall leadership, the foundation, the overall government of the early church.
- c) The local Elder/Deacon team led each local church.

D. They revealed Jesus in all His glory and power

1. **The name "Christians".**

Acts 11:26. When the unbelievers looked at the early church they named them "Christians". Why did they give them that name? Because they revealed Christ in their lifestyle and actions: His love, grace and power flowed through them.

2. **They were extremely effective.**

- a) **In their relationship to one another.**

Acts 2:1 & 46; Acts 4:24.

The expression "with one accord" is used several times about the early church. This is a term meaning "in perfect harmony".

Acts 4:32 explains that they had one heart, one soul, and cared greatly for one another.

- b) **In reaching their hometown.**

Acts 2:47; Acts 6:7. People joined them daily and this affected Jerusalem in a mighty way.

Acts 4:4. Soon their number counted many thousands. Some historians even suggest there were a hundred thousand members in the Jerusalem church.

c) **In reaching their countrymen.**

They spread like a bushfire from Jerusalem right through Judea to Samaria, Acts 8:1-5; to Damascus, Acts 9:20; to Caesarea, Acts 10:24; to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, Acts 11:19.

d) **In reaching the world.**

We know that Paul preached and established the church in country after country. But many other names from the early church are recorded in church history as having reached far-away countries like India, Ethiopia, France and Britain, etc.

They actually reached the whole known world of that day with the gospel of Christ.

What a wonderful start the church of Jesus had. They certainly obeyed His commands in every way. John 13:34-35; Acts 1:8.

Memory verse

Ephesians 3:21, “....to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen”.

The decline and restoration of the church

Lesson 5

Introduction

Right from the start, the enemy did all he could to stop the church. He used all means available to him.

A. He tried persecutions

1. **Through the respected leaders of the day.**

Acts 4:5-6.

- a) Acts 4:18. By forbidding them to speak in the name of Jesus.
- b) Acts 5:17-18. By imprisoning them.
- c) Acts 5:40. By beating them.
- d) Acts 7:59. By killing some of them.

2. **Through the king of the country.**

- a) Acts 12:1. By harassing some church members.
- b) Acts 12:2-3. By killing one of their prominent leaders.

3. **Through the emperors of Rome.**

- a) In the year 66 AD, while Caesar Nero was still relatively young, he started the cruellest attack on the church and he crucified the Christians along the road to his palace, burning them as living torches in his garden, while he himself drove about in his chariot enjoying this dreadful spectacle.

He threw them before wild beasts in the arena. At this time both Peter and Paul and other prominent leaders were martyred together with thousands of other faithful believers.

- b) For the next two hundred years one terrible wave of persecution after another tried to destroy the church.

4. **But the martyrs' blood became the seed of the church.**

Acts 8:1&4.

Illustration: When a fire starts burning and somebody tries to stop it by kicking it, the result will just be that it spreads and starts to burn in many other places. The wonderful "Jerusalem fire" soon burned all over the world.

B. He tried heresy

Acts 15:1-2; Galatians 1:6-8; 2 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Peter 2:1-3.

The early apostles constantly fought false doctrines that tried to creep in.

1. Like wolves among the sheep. Acts 20:29-31, they will scatter the flock and kill some.
2. They are a danger from within. Acts 20:30, "from your own midst, men will rise".
3. They will come in secret ways. 2 Peter 2:1.
4. As the years went by it became a losing battle, more and more heresy slipped in.

C. He tried with state recognition

When Caesar Constantine became a Christian in 313 AD, the church became recognised and lifted to "**human glory**". Church buildings began to go up everywhere; Constantine himself built a large church in Jerusalem and gave beautiful garments to the leaders. The state started to support the church financially. Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire.

D. The decline of the church

What persecution and death could not do – heresy and recognition soon did.

After a "flying start" in the first century, the church seemed to slow down and drop from its high spiritual level.

1. Change in leadership.

After a while the apostles and prophets disappeared and the local elders took over the leadership. (The Greek word for elder is "episkopos" or "presbyteros". From the first of the two words we have the English word "bishop".)

The bishop soon became the most prominent minister in the church. Since Rome was the world capital, the Roman bishop became the leading bishop in the church.

2. Change in worship.

Ceremony and rituals took the place of spiritual and charismatic manifestations.

3. Change in spiritual experiences and practices.

- a) The baptism of the Holy Spirit with speaking in tongues disappeared.
- b) The practice of water baptism was changed.
- c) Outer religious forms replaced all spiritual life and holiness.
- d) Even the doctrine of righteousness by faith in Christ was exchanged for a more materialistic way.

4. Satan really had his way, and over a period of 1200 years he brought the church into darkness.

There were individuals and small groups, however, who kept the torch of truth burning clearly.

E. The restoration of the church

Praise God for His love and patience, He never gives up His plan and purpose. He sent one wave of revival after another and brought the truths back to the church one by one.

1. The first wave.

In 1517 God gave back to the church the fundamental truth: "I am righteous by faith in Jesus Christ and in Him alone". A wonderful fire started to burn throughout Europe and spread to the rest of the world.

2. After that another wave of revival broke forth.

The holiness and sanctification movements swept through the church and gave back more wonderful truth.

3. Then came the wonderful, fresh outpouring of the Spirit.

Around the turn of the century the charismatic gifts of the Spirit were again manifested in the church.

4. The Holy Spirit reaffirmed the call to world mission.

The gospel began to spread over the world like a mighty fire, as in the early apostolic days.

5. The five ministries have reappeared.

First the well known ones; evangelists, pastors and teachers, but in recent times it has also become very common and acceptable to speak about apostles and prophets in large parts of the church. Surely these ministries will again be restored to the church.

6. The final goal.

It is not just to reach the standard of the early church, but to go far beyond that and to become a holy, spotless, powerful church which perfectly manifests the glory and fullness of Christ in every place.

7. The old and the new wine. Luke 5:36-39.

"New truths" are always met with scepticism. Man is always saying, "What is this new stuff? The old wine is much better". All we have to do is to carefully test all "new truths" against the Word of God, and if they stand the test of the infallible Word of God, let us gladly receive them and move forward towards perfection and not let religion or tradition keep us back.

Memory verse

Ephesians 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"*.

The ministry of the church

Lesson 6

Introduction

There is no other company of people on earth that has been called to a higher or more important task than the church of Jesus Christ. The ministry of the church is:

A. To establish His kingdom

1. **The future kingdom.**

Acts 1:6-7; Revelation 20:4.

There is going to be a future millennium kingdom on earth, where Christ will reign with His church. (More about that in lesson 8.)

2. **Definition of the kingdom of God.**

The kingdom of God is everywhere where Jesus reigns supreme.

- a) Luke 17:20-21. "The kingdom of God is within you".
- b) Colossians 1:13-14. We are transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God by the blood of Christ.

3. **Preach the gospel of the kingdom of Jesus to all.**

- a) Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Acts 8:12.
That is the great commission of the church.
- b) Acts 26:18.
To rescue people from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God is the high calling of the church.
- c) To establish His reign in them.
Matthew 28:19, "Make them **disciples** of Christ".
Galatians 4:19, "... until Christ is formed in you".

B. To break down the strongholds of the devil

1. **What are strongholds?**

The Bible clearly indicates that there are demonic forces in the heavenlies, in the air, over countries, towns, families and persons, which influence, control and bind.
Daniel 10:12-13; Ephesians 6:12 & 2:1-2; Luke 8:29.

2. **The prophetic word of Jesus.**

- a) Matthew 16:18-19. Remember Jesus foretold that the church would have power

in the heavenly realm to bind evil forces, to loosen their grip on people and situations.

b) **"I give you the keys", verse 19.**

Mark 16:17, "In my name you shall cast out evil spirits".

Luke 10:19, "I give you authority – over all the power of the enemy".

2 Corinthians 10:4-5, "For the weapons of our warfare are mighty in God, for pulling down strongholds".

3. The church is called to spiritual warfare.

a) **At war with the devil and his forces.**

2 Corinthians 10:4, "For the weapons of **our warfare** are mighty". **It is our warfare.**

Ephesians 6:12, "For we ... wrestle against principalities and powers, against the rulers of darkness".

Revelation 12:11, "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony".

b) **The church should demonstrate God's manifold wisdom.**

Ephesians 3:10.

God's wisdom should be demonstrated to principalities and powers in the heavenly places.

Through the spiritual gifts, the church will expose the strategy of the enemy, and reveal his presence.

The church will reveal God's wisdom to the principalities and powers by disarming them and driving them away from their strongholds.

C. To be His royal priesthood

Read 1 Peter 2:9

1. What is the work of a "priesthood"?

a) **To bring "sacrifices" to God.**

i) Hebrews 13:15. The sacrifice of praise.

ii) Romans 12:1-2. The sacrifice of lives dedicated to Him.

iii) Hebrews 13:16. To do good and share with others.

b) **To be God's spokesmen on earth.**

i) 2 Corinthians 5:20, "We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God".

ii) Acts 1:8, "You are My witnesses".

iii) 1 Peter 2:9, "That you may proclaim".

2. **A "priesthood" is a separated, holy people.**

2 Corinthians 6:17-18, "Come out from among them, be separated, do not touch what is unclean".

1 Peter 1:14-16, "Be holy, for I am holy".

D. To be His temple, His dwelling place on earth

Ephesians 2:21-22, "You are growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a habitation for God in the Spirit".

1. **Where His glory is revealed.**

Acts 4:31. A church gathering should never be a dull or boring experience, but a glorious, joyful fellowship with God.

Colossians 1:27, "Christ in you the hope of glory".

2. **Where sinners can meet with God.**

Luke 18:13-14. If sinners cannot find a true relationship with God in the church, we are not fulfilling our call.

3. **The pillar and foundation of truth.**

1 Timothy 3:15. This "spiritual building" should stand as a pillar of truth in the midst of a confused, troublesome world.

E. To reveal Christ in all His fullness.

The "head" and the "body".

As we saw in lesson 1: A definition of the church, "the body of Christ", is the most common description of the church in the New Testament.

1. **Christ is the head, the church is His body.**

John 14:12, "the works that I do, you will do also". The works He did on earth **we must do**. Luke 4:18-19; Mark 1:32-34, 41; Luke 7:14-15.

Preach the gospel.

Teach the truth.

Heal the sick.

Raise the dead.

Cast out evil spirits.

Have great compassion on the lost.

2. **John 14:12, "and greater works than these shall he do".**

Now we must remember that for God nothing is impossible. Jesus promised you shall do greater things.

F. A powerful ministry

Acts 17:6.

The church in the early days turned the world upside down.

If the church today stepped into its powerful ministry, a heaven-sent revival would sweep over the world and bring in the last great harvest.

Memory verse

2 Corinthians 6:16, *“For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people’”*.

The church in the end time

Lesson 7

Introduction

The Bible has much to say about the church in the end time. The end time means the time just before the return of Christ. Some say the church will be very worldly and lukewarm, others say that the church will be perfect, spotless and on fire for the Lord. Who is right? What does the Bible say?

A. The two-sided picture

1. **In most of the illustrations Jesus gave of God's kingdom, you see a two-sided picture.**

- a) Matthew 13:24-30. It is like a field of wheat, but the enemy has sown tares among the wheat.
- b) Matthew 13:47-50. It is like a big net drawn in with many fish, but there were both good and bad fish.
- c) Matthew 25:1-13. It is like ten virgins, five with oil and five without.
- d) Matthew 25:31-46. It is like the King separating the sheep from the goats.

2. **The Laodicean church. Revelation 3:14-22.**

It is commonly accepted that the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 also give a picture of church history: The church in Ephesus gives a picture of the early church; the church in Smyrna of the heavy tribulation time that followed, etc.; to the church in Laodicea that gives a picture of the "end time church".

a) **The one side.**

It is a lukewarm church with all the outward things in order, "I have need of nothing", but inside it is cold and lifeless.

b) **The other side.**

- i) There is a powerful revival call from the Lord Jesus to receive all His fullness. Revelation 3:18.
- ii) It is a call to this lukewarm church, and **anyone**, in any corner or branch, who hears and opens the door and invites Jesus in with all His glory and fullness, will experience new life. Revelation 3:20.
- iii) They will be overcomers, and Jesus will invite them to sit with Him on His throne. Revelation 3:21.

- c) This revival call is reaching out to all the branches and denominations of His church today. We had better heed the call and swing our doors wide open, inviting Him in with all His fullness.

3. **The bride and the harlot.**

These two expressions are used about the church in the book of Revelation, and they clearly express the two sides of the picture.

a) **The harlot. Revelation 17, 18, 19.**

- i) The harlot is the unfaithful backslidden church, which has involved itself in politics and worldly business, Revelation 17:1-2, Revelation 18:2, and has forgotten the true gospel.

The harlot is also called "Babylon the Great" and is the fallen church, which for unity will mix all religions together, and one day will work in close association with the coming world leader called "the beast" or "antichrist". Revelation 17:3 & 7-18.

- ii) Revelation 17:6, "She is drunk with the blood of the saints". She has always persecuted and martyred the true, living believers, and does this even more towards the end.
- iii) A clear warning. Revelation 18:4. A voice from heaven is saying, "Come out from her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, and receive her plagues".

iv) **How does part of the church become a harlot? By listening to and following deceiving spirits:**

1 Timothy 4:1-5, "In the last days, some will depart from the faith, following deceiving spirits, following doctrines of demons".

2 Timothy 3:1-5, "In the last days terrible times will come, people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, having a form of godliness but denying its power".

2 Timothy 4:3-4, "For a time will come when men will no more put up with sound doctrine".

b) **The bride**

- i) **Jesus the heavenly bridegroom. John 3:29; Matthew 22:2; Matthew 25:1.**

- ii) **The church, the bride of Christ. 2 Corinthians 11:2,** "For I have betrothed you to one husband that I may present you as a pure virgin to Christ".

Revelation 19:7-8, "The marriage of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready".

- iii) **The "bride" stands for:**
Complete purity and spotless beauty.
Complete love and devotion.
Complete faith and expectancy.
Complete faithfulness.
- iv) **Preparation of the bride.** The Holy Spirit will in these last days prepare and perfect the church, the bride of Christ, which consists of the true, living believers found all over the world, in all tribes and nations, inside all denominations and church groups. He will stir them up to greater love and devotion for Jesus and for one another. He will purify them and equip them for that great day when "the bride" will meet the bridegroom face to face. Ephesians 5:27.

B. The rapture of the church

1. The church called home.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, Revelation 3:10, Matthew 24:36-42. Part of God's end time plan is the judgement of Satan, all his forces and the world which followed him. But before the severity of this judgement starts, Christ is taking to Himself His bride, the church.

This is what is understood to be "the rapture".

2. What will actually take place?

- a) 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 1 Corinthians 15:52 & Revelation 4:1. All true living believers will hear the trumpet of God and the mighty voice of an archangel call, "Come up here".
- b) 1 Corinthians 15:51-52. In a split second their bodies will be transformed, they will be caught up to meet Jesus in the air.
- c) 1 Thessalonians 4:15-16. At the same time the believers from all ages who have died will be resurrected. They will, in new glorious bodies, be raptured together with the living believers to meet the Lord in the air, and Christ will lead them to glory.

"So shall we always be with the Lord!"

Memory verse

Jude 24-25, "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Saviour, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen".

The church in eternity

Lesson 8

Introduction

After the rapture of the church, a whole line of exciting events is described in the Bible in which the church is to play a major role.

- A. The judgement seat of Christ.
- B. The church presented to God.
- C. The marriage supper of the Lamb.
- D. The millennium reign with Christ.
- E. The New Jerusalem.

Let us discuss them one by one.

A. The judgement seat of Christ

1. Where the Christians have to appear one by one.

2 Corinthians 5:10, "For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ".

Romans 14:12, "Everyone must give an account of himself to God".

1 Corinthians 3:11-15, "Every man's work shall be made manifest".

Luke 14:14, "You shall be rewarded at the resurrection of the just".

2. But what about the promise of Jesus?

Jesus promised in John 5:24, "He shall not come before judgement, but has passed from death to life".

3. What kind of judgement is this?

- a) The Greek word for the judgement seat used here is "bima", which is like a judge at a sports event or a judge judging pieces of art.
- b) So it is not a judgement of life and death, or heaven and hell, but a testing of the believer's deeds, motives and faithfulness. An account of his Christian life. 2 Corinthians 5:10, Romans 14:12.
- c) There will be rewards; crowns given out on that day.
 - i) For suffering for the name of Jesus. Luke 6:22-23.
 - ii) For unselfish service for Jesus. Luke 14:13-14, Matthew 16:24-27.
 - iii) For faithfulness and dedication. 1 Corinthians 9:24-25, 2 Timothy 4:8, 1 Peter 5:2-4.

- d) It may be a day of shame and regret, but never of losing eternal salvation.
 - i) Mark 8:38. If somebody is ashamed of Jesus and His Word, Jesus will be ashamed of him.
 - ii) 1 Corinthians 3:12-15. If his Christian life has been only "wood", "hay", "straw", it will be burned up.

B. The church will be presented to God

1. In the likeness of Jesus.

1 John 3:2, "When we see Him, we shall be like Him". Philippians 3:21, 1 Corinthians 15:49.
1 Corinthians 15:43-44. In new resurrected, glorified bodies.

2. Presented holy and blameless to God.

Jude 24, "To present you faultless before the presence of His glory". Colossians 1:22.

Ephesians 5:27, "that He might present to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle".

C. The marriage supper of the Lamb

- 1. The church will be united to Jesus in perfect unity.
Revelation 19:7-9, "Let us rejoice for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready".
- 2. All the redeemed, blood-washed believers down through the ages will be there; Abraham, Isaac, David, etc. and you. Matthew 8:11, Revelation 5:9.

D. The millennium reign with Christ

1. Christ will return to earth with His church.

Revelation 19:11-16. Compare verse 8 with verse 14.
Jude 14, "Behold the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints". 1 Thessalonians 3:13.

2. All satanic forces will be destroyed or bound for a thousand years.

Revelation 19:20-21, Revelation 20:1-3.

3. The church will reign with Christ for a thousand years.

1 Corinthians 6:2, Revelation 20:4, Revelation 5:9-10, 2 Timothy 2:12.

- a) Revelation 5:10. We will minister as a royal priesthood.
- b) Perhaps having responsibility over cities. Luke 19:13, 17-19, "You were faithful over little, have authority over ten cities". This probably means in

practical and spiritual matters. (**Kings and priests**, Revelation 5:10.)
Today evil spirits and demonic strongholds are reigning over cities. Ephesians 6:12, Daniel 10:12-14. In the millennium they will no longer have any power, and Christ will reign with His church.

4. It will be a kingdom of peace similar to paradise.

- a) The fact that Christ is physically present on earth, and the devil is absent, makes the difference.
- b) **The whole of creation will be released and at peace.**

Romans 8:19-22, "The whole creation will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God".
Isaiah 11:6-9, "The wolf and the lamb, the baby and the cobra shall be together".

E. The New Jerusalem

The church will have a prominent place in eternity on the new earth.

- 1. The book of Revelation describes all the events as illustrations. Revelation 1:1.
- 2. The church here is compared to the New Jerusalem. Revelation 21:9-11.
- 3. The glory of the church in eternity is described with the most precious things we know. Verses 18-19.
 - a) Gates of pearl and streets of gold, verse 21.
 - b) The glory of the Lord will shine in its midst, verses 22-23.
 - c) The throne of God shall be in its midst. Revelation 22:3-5.
 - d) The river of life will flow in the midst of the city, verse 2.
- 4. What all of this means we don't exactly know but, that the church will have a very special and glorious role to play throughout all eternity, is without doubt.

In 1 Corinthians 2:9, when Paul speaks about our future glory, he says, "Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it entered into any man's heart, the things God has prepared for those who love Him". He speaks here of time and of all eternity.

Memory verse

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