



# GOD, THE CHURCH, AND YOU



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**W**hat is a church? Perhaps the first images that come to mind are of a building with a steeple, a long padded bench, or a pulpit with an open Bible. Depending on where you grew up and how you were raised, thoughts of church will be different. We can build a church, volunteer with a church, and even give to a church, but the church does not belong to us. It is God's. So what does God think of the church? What does He think His church should be like? If there is a church to be a part of, it would be the one that is like God's ideal plan.

## 1 How does God spread His truth?

**2 Corinthians 4:7** "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us."

God's truth is powerful. He has designed it to be shared through weak human vessels who demonstrate its life-changing power. Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. ... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:14, 16). Imagine that! People are to shine God's light, leading others to Him. Since we cannot do that *by our own strength*, the power must come from God.

## 2 Where can we see Jesus here on Earth, since He is now in Heaven?

**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."

**1 Timothy 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, the pillar and ground of the truth."

Jesus is visible in His church, which is His body. Wherever Jesus' apostles taught the good news of salvation, a church was formed. The church is not a building, but people who carry out God's will by sharing the gospel, teaching God's truths, caring for peoples' needs, and leading them to Jesus. When Saul persecuted God's church, he did it by entering homes and taking people away (Acts 8:3). God dwells in His church by working through the people, "For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. ... Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:9,16).

## 3 What symbol does the Bible use to describe God's church?

**Ephesians 5:23** "For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church ..."

**Hosea 2:19** "I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and mercy."

**2 Corinthians 11:2** "For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ."

God's church is compared to a woman—a bride who is pure and undefiled by false teachings that weaken her loyalty to God. “For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is His name” (Isaiah 54:5). Betrothal represents a choice of commitment and loyalty to God. When God's church departs from His truth, the relationship is broken. The Bible describes a false or disloyal church as a harlot who is unfaithful to God's truth. “But you trusted in your own beauty, played the harlot because of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by who would have it” (Ezekiel 16:15).

## 4 How does Jesus view His church?

**Ephesians 5:25** “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.”

**Matthew 16:18** “... I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

**Acts 20:28** “... the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

Jesus' tender regard for His church is compared to the sacrificial care a husband is to have toward His wife. He Himself is its builder, and He desires all people to join His church. He is personally involved in the church's work of sharing the good news about salvation because it is His work. Because of this, Jesus defends His church from the enemy's attacks. He instructs each leader who cares for His people and gives them gifts that will strengthen His church (1 Peter 4:10–11).

## 5 There are many churches. How can I know which church gives the most accurate picture of God?

**Isaiah 8:20** “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”

**Matthew 15:8–9** “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”



“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.”  
**Ephesians 5:25**

We can't evaluate a church by its appearance, by its rituals and traditions, or by how it makes us feel. We must compare what it teaches to the Bible. God's church will affirm that “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). God's church will teach the Bible truth about Creation and about death. Because it longs for Heaven, where everything is joyful obedience to God, God's church will treasure every commandment of God, especially His fourth commandment to “remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8–11). God's simple instruction to remember the seventh-day Sabbath is the part of God's Law that has been forgotten and changed by men. Breaking one part of God's Law violates the whole Law (James 2:10–12). “Test all things; hold fast what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

## 6 Can all churches be right about what they teach, even though they disagree?

**John 4:24** “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

There is one way and one truth (John 14:6), not multiple options based on personal preference. A church may teach some, or even many of God's truths from the Bible. But whatever does not agree with God's Word contradicts His unified system of truth. Truth is not confirmed by a preacher's sermon, by a strong feeling, or by being warmly welcomed. Truth comes from God—who does not change (Hebrews 13:8; Malachi 3:6).

**1 Kings 12:26, 28** “And Jeroboam said in his heart, ‘Now the kingdom may return to the house of David.’ Therefore the king asked advice, made two calves of gold, and said to the people, ‘It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!’”

There is truth and error, even in churches, in worship, and in religious leaders (1 John 4:6). King Jeroboam began his own religious system with features similar to what God had ordained. His church had sacrifices, priests, festivals, and altars (1 Kings 12:26–33), but these only *appeared* to be like what God had instructed His people. Though it looked religious, it was not built by God. Instead, it was built by a man for the purpose of leading people away from God's true worship.

## 7 What characteristic does God desire His church to possess?

**John 13:34–35** “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”



“The people in God’s church will always be growing toward perfection ...”

God loves sinners and He guides His church to reveal the attractive love of Jesus by its actions, “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15). Selfishness, gossip, condemnation, distrust, comparing ourselves with others, and angry words hurt the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:29–32). God’s love in all relationships, especially marriages and families, shows what God is like (1 Corinthians 13:4–7). Studying Jesus’ love for sinners so that we love sinners more and more, as He did, will be the goal of God’s church and its members: “... but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant” (Matthew 20:26).

## 8 Will the church and its people be perfect?

**Romans 3:23** “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

God is perfect. His Word is perfect. The people in God’s church will always be growing toward perfection in their Christ-like character. We must remain “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2), rather than looking to people as perfect examples. Jesus taught in the parable of the harvest that there will be weeds (representing unfaithful people) present in God’s church (Matthew 13:24–30). We should not be discouraged by the people around us, but should continue to look to Jesus and love each person as God does.

**Ephesians 5:25–27** “... Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 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.”

Jesus is purifying His church day by day, inviting His people higher and higher toward His standard of obedience and faith. He permits trials to strengthen our faith, which is “much more precious than gold” (1 Peter 1:6–7). Testing builds perseverance and character (Romans 5:3–5), and our *faithfulness* encourages others (1 Thessalonians 1:6–7).

## 9 How does God bring church believers together to complete the church’s important work?

**Ephesians 4:11–12** “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.” (For additional study, read verses 13–16.)

**1 Corinthians 12:12–18** “For as the body is one and has many members ... so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body ... For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,’ is it therefore not of the body? ... If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? ... But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.”

God gives each member talents to support the body of Christ. Everyone has a God-given role regardless of age, education, language, gender, or race (Galatians 3:28). When His church is united, as God is, His work is done joyfully and harmoniously (Philippians 2:1–4). God’s unity includes organization, with leaders trained to encourage and teach. God brings all the success, because Jesus is the Head of His body (Colossians 1:18).

## 10 How does Satan attack the church?

**Revelation 12:17** “And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

The dragon, who is Satan (Revelation 12:9), targets the principles of God’s government on Earth and in Heaven: loyal and loving obedience to God’s Law. The enemy has tried to change God’s times and His Law—the

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seventh-day Sabbath—and has used religious persecution to attack God's obedient followers (Daniel 7:25). By inspiring many counterfeits to God's truth, Satan convinces people that all religious teachings are basically the same (Matthew 24:11). Satan knows Jesus was victorious at the Cross, but he wants to deceive as many as possible. "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12).

**Acts 20:29–30** "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves."

Spiritual attacks come from inside the church, as well as outside, through "wolves in sheep's clothing" (Matthew 7:15). False teachings are introduced to divide the church (2 Peter 2:1–2). Non-biblical beliefs and practices are accepted based on church tradition. Temptations of worldliness distract and weaken God's church. Fighting and complaining cripple the church's influence, and prompt some to leave the body of Christ to start their own body apart from Him. Satan works to tarnish the influence of spiritual leaders by tempting them to sin (1 Timothy 3:7). The enemy influences some to water down the clear teachings of God's Word so no one will be offended by the gospel (Matthew 10:34–36).

## 11 What role does God's church play in His plan to save sinners?

**Ephesians 3:10** "... now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places."

**Ephesians 3:20–21** "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

God cannot simply declare that Satan is unjust. God's justice must be demonstrated, and that demonstration is "made known by the church,"



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by individuals united as one body to represent Christ. God's glory is revealed through all eternity "in the church," in the changed lives of people who trust in God. This confirms even to angels the true principles of God's heavenly government: loyal, loving obedience from the heart—the "new heart" that God gives (Ezekiel 36:26–27).

**2 Corinthians 5:20** "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God."

The message of being reconciled to God is given through His church, by people working together to share their experience of Jesus' love (Mark 5:19). "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, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you ..." (Matthew 28:19–20). "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news ..." (Isaiah 52:7).

## 12 Is the church under the leadership of a person?

**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 built His church on something solid and unmovable, like a rock (the Greek word refers to a large, firm rock). Who is that Rock? Peter said the Rock is Jesus: "Coming to Him [Jesus] as to a living stone ..." (1 Peter 2:4). Peter, whose name means "a small stone," had just declared that Jesus is the Christ, our Savior from sin; then Jesus announces that His church will be built on that true statement: it will be built on Jesus Christ, Himself (Matthew 16:13–18). Paul said, "that Rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:4). But Jesus settled it definitively: "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock" (Matthew 7:24). Jesus is our example of immovable obedience and unchanging truth. Jesus is the only foundation of His church.

**Acts 20:28** “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 ...”

**2 Timothy 2:2** “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

God’s church is like a “flock” cared for by human “overseers” who “shepherd” the followers of Jesus. A shepherd must be like the Good Shepherd, Jesus, who laid down His life for the sheep (John 10:15). Godly leaders will strive to imitate Jesus’ love and obedience (1 Corinthians 11:1), and to study His Word so they may instruct and encourage others (2 Timothy 2:15). God works through humble, willing people, yet no person is given complete authority over God’s church.

## 13 What power has God given to the church to be His representatives on Earth?

**Acts 1:8** “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

When we pray for the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13), God says, “Yes!” The Holy Spirit empowers God’s church to carry out His commission to share His gospel by His power. When the church in the New Testament faced insurmountable obstacles, they “gathered together praying” (Acts 12:11–12). The Bible tells us that our faith “should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Corinthians 2:5).

## 14 How can I become part of the body of Christ—the church?

**Acts 2:38, 41–42** “Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’ ... Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

We demonstrate our commitment to the teachings of God’s Word and our desire to join the body of Christ through baptism—a public statement of faith. Baptism is being buried beneath the water, then raised out of the water as a symbol of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Then we can begin a new life with Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 6:3–4).

## 15 What blessing do we receive when we are members of God’s church?

**Ephesians 2:19–22** “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and

foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”

It is a privilege to stand up and be counted among God’s people by answering the call: “... ‘Whoever is on the Lord’s side—come to me!’ ...” (Exodus 32:26). Our fellowship with each other in God’s church brings us closer to Jesus (1 John 1:3).

In God’s church we declare that “our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20). In God’s church we “comfort each other and edify one another” (1 Thess. 5:11). In God’s church, we have His messengers to illuminate each step of the path through the conflicts the church will face.

In God’s church, we unite with our brothers and sisters in Christ to “keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12).

In God’s church we join Him to proclaim His invitation to the world.

**Hebrews 10:24–25** “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”

Jesus is returning soon to rescue His church. Amid an increasingly troubled world, God’s people will be united even more closely, because we share the same “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13) and the same sure promise: “... ‘I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ ...” (Matthew 28:20).

“Our fellowship with each other in God’s church brings us closer to Jesus.”





# WHAT IS THE GOOD NEWS FOR ME IN THE BODY OF CHRIST —HIS CHURCH?



**1. The Holy Spirit instructs the church through the Word of God.** "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Revelation 3:22).

**2. As imperfect as we are, Jesus still desires each of us to be included in His body.** "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit ..." (John 15:16).

**3. As members of God's church, we are part of something important.** "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy" (1 Peter 2:9–10).

**4. We are empowered by God to care for the needs of others.** "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10).

**5. God is with His people, even when they are few in number.** "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20).

**6. Jesus has given us the perfect example of what love in the church looks like.** "Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God" (Romans 15:7).

**7. God leads His church as a loving Shepherd.** "He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young" (Isaiah 40:11).

## LESSON SUMMARY

**1. God works through His church** to share the good news of salvation through Jesus. God's church is people.

**2. God's true church is faithful** to all of God's Word and all of God's Law.

**3. In God's church we are united as a family,** living out His love toward all people.

**4. Every member is an important part** of the body of Christ, to encourage each other and be a blessing to the world.

**5. The enemy wants to destroy God's church** by creating counterfeits, compromises, and conflict among God's people.

**6. Members of God's church are growing** in Christian character. God is purifying His people and His church.

**7. God invites us to join His body of believers,** to participate in His church, and to enjoy the blessings of the family of God.

Additional Notes:

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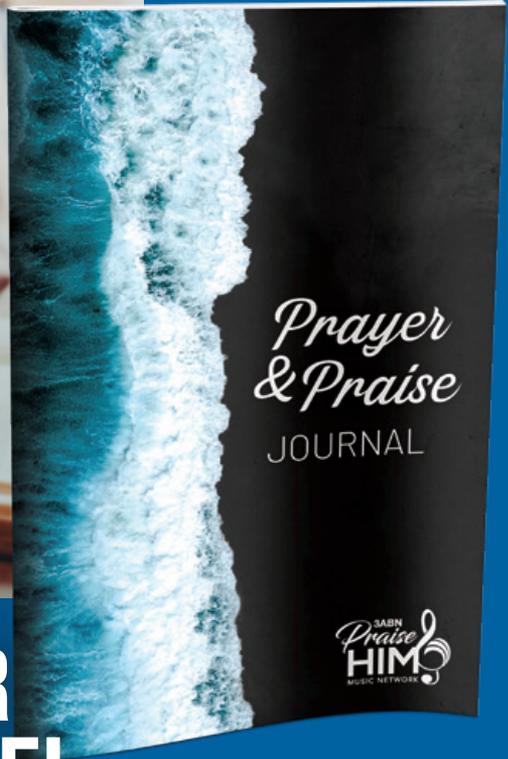
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