



SESSION #3:

Faith Community

What is the Church? Am I a part of it?

The **church** is the **community** of all followers of Jesus Christ regardless of **time** or **location**. Mark Dever defines the church as follows, *"The church is the body of people called by God's grace through faith in Christ to glorify him together by serving him in his world."*

TWO CLASSIFICATIONS OF THE CHURCH

1. The **Universal Church**: The universal church is made up of everyone who has been truly converted to God regardless of time or location.
2. The **Local Church**: The local church is the physical gathering together of believers at a particular time and location.

Kings Baptist Church is a *local* church. This physical gathering can also be called the *visible* church, as we physically see it. Some people may be a member of attender of this visible, physical gathering, but not really a part of the church as God sees it (Matt. 13:24-30). Being a part of the church as God sees it is much more important than being a member of the church as man sees it. If you are a true follower of Jesus then you are a member of the universal church.

THE TRUE CHURCH



Not all gatherings of believers are true churches. In fact, our culture has many false churches. For example, Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons are false churches because they deny the biblical teachings regarding Christ. Other gatherings like the Salvation Army, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, or Boyce Bible College might preach the Bible correctly, but they do not intend to function as a church by administering the church ordinances (Baptism and the Lord's Supper) and exercising church discipline. In order for a gathering of believers to be considered a true church they must pursue all three components of a true church.

TRUE CHURCHES...

1. **Preach the Bible rightly**. The correct preaching of God's Word presents the Bible with the Gospel at its center. Right preaching is important because it is God's Word that convicts, converts, edifies, and sanctifies God's people (Heb. 4:12, 1 Pet. 1:23, 1 Thess. 2:13).

2. Practice the **ordinances** faithfully. Jesus gave the church two commands (ordinances) – baptism and the Lord’s Supper. When a church practices these ordinances, they obey Christ’s commands (Matt. 28:19-20, 1 Cor. 11:24).

3. Perform **church discipline** biblically. The New Testament Church must exercise church discipline because of God’s expectation of holiness for his people (1 Pet. 1:14-16). Church discipline should be practiced because Jesus commanded it as a means of leading sinners to repentance, encouraging spiritual health in the congregation, and communicating a witness to the watching world (Mt. 18:15-20, 1 Cor. 5:1-5).

HOW DOES THE CHURCH MINISTER?

1. By **exalting** God (Eph. 5:16-19). We minister to God by worshipping him. The world was created to spread God’s fame by announcing his greatness. Furthermore, our chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. God has destined us to live “to the praise of his glory” (Eph. 1:12). Just as worship is the reason for which God created each person, so also worship is the reason the church exists. In the context of a local church service, we corporately announce God’s greatness through the proclamation of his word in praise, preaching, and prayer.

2. By **equipping** believers (Eph. 4:12-13). We proclaim the greatness of God and encourage one another to grow in understanding him as he is revealed in his word, the Bible (2 Pet. 3:18). The Bible tells us to teach, encourage, and admonish one another as we grow in spiritual maturity (Col. 3:16). While every believer is responsible to grow in his or her faith, each believer needs a faith family to encourage him or her along the way.

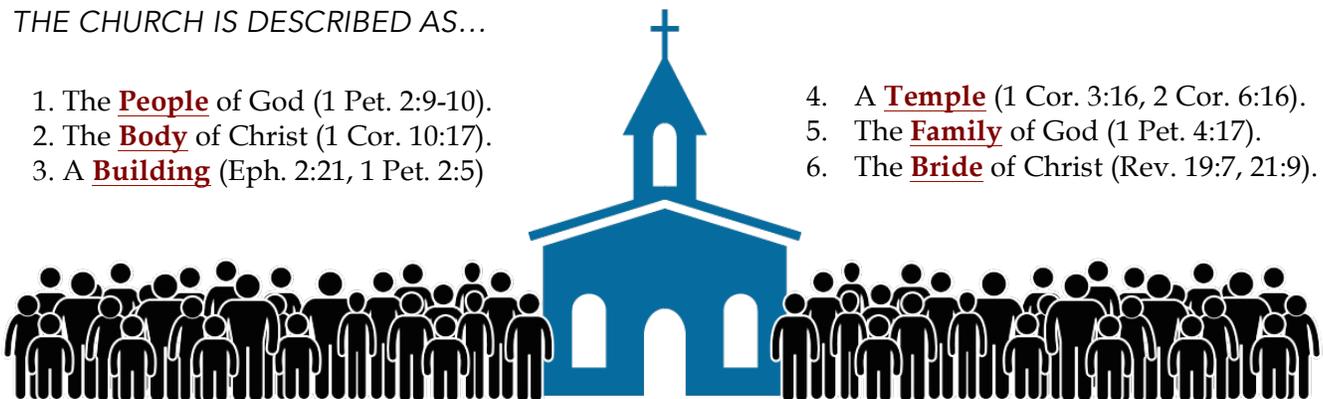
3. By **extending** the gospel (Matt. 28:19-20). Making disciples of all nations is the church’s primary ministry to the world. This begins with extending the good news of salvation (the gospel) to all nations. We do this because God has commanded us to do so and because the gospel is world’s greatest need. We also care for the poor and needy in Jesus’ name, all in an effort to shine the light of God’s love into a dark world (Matt. 5:14-16, Luke 6:35-36).

BIBLICAL IMAGES OF THE CHURCH

THE CHURCH IS DESCRIBED AS...

1. The **People** of God (1 Pet. 2:9-10).
2. The **Body** of Christ (1 Cor. 10:17).
3. A **Building** (Eph. 2:21, 1 Pet. 2:5)

4. A **Temple** (1 Cor. 3:16, 2 Cor. 6:16).
5. The **Family** of God (1 Pet. 4:17).
6. The **Bride** of Christ (Rev. 19:7, 21:9).



A BRIEF CHURCH HISTORY

The church began at **Pentecost** when Jesus sent the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 2). Those who followed Jesus were harassed and killed at the hands of the Roman Empire, but they thrived in the face of martyrdom. One church father said that the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church. Her message of hope in Jesus Christ was the central agent of her growth in the early years of the first century.

The church was persecuted until 313AD, when Emperor **Constantine** declared Christianity to be the official state religion. The church saw many challenges over the decades that followed, both for good and bad. As state persecution ended, opportunities for Christian art, architecture, and literature abounded. In addition, now that the church was not fighting for her life, she was able to concentrate her energies on refining beliefs and clarifying the meaning of the Christian faith.

In one sense, these were good days in the life of the church. But think about what could happen now that the once unpopular thing had become popular. Whereas the church was once filled with only the most dedicated of followers who were willing to lose their lives for the sake of Christ, the church soon became filled with anyone who was a citizen of Rome. Because Christianity was so popular, many people were members of the church who had no interest in surrendering their life to Christ. As the purity of the church was compromised, corruption increased. For example, the church began offering the free gift of salvation in Christ for certain amounts of money. Over the next several centuries, the church experienced increased corruption in many ways. Meanwhile, several men of God like John Wycliffe and John Huss stood up against corruption in the church. These men, along with many other, lost their lives.

In 1517, **Martin Luther** nailed a document containing 95 disagreements with the church on its door. This event sparked a course of events known as the Protestant Reformation. The focus of the Reformation was single: that the bible would be *the* source of authority and that the church would recognize and teach salvation by grace through faith alone. Luther's influence in Germany and John Calvin's influence in Switzerland soon spread through all of Europe. From this time forward, many different types (or denominations) of churches were birthed across the globe. It was during this time that Lutherans, Baptists, Presbyterians, and many others solidified their own beliefs based on their interpretation of the Bible.

Over the last five hundred years, the church has cycled through unity and division. She has experience great depression and great revival. Through it all, she has experienced the faithfulness of God to his people. The church in the 21st century faces particular challenges with the rise of post-modernism and secularism. Watered-down preaching and unregenerate church members compromise the integrity and purity of the church. Lack of discipleship leaves new believers at the mercies of popular anti-Christian sentiment. However, in the end, God will care for his people. Persecution at the hands of culture will serve the purpose that persecution has always served; **cleansing** and **revival**. The church has grown most rapidly when it is set at odds with its surrounding culture.