

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT CHURCH

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A church as an assembly of professing believers in Christ who have been baptized and who are organized to carry out God's will.¹

It is the church which God purchased with the blood of Jesus Christ (Acts 20:28). It is the church which Christ loves, nourishes, and cherishes (Eph. 5:25, 29), and which he shall present to himself blameless in all her glory one day (Eph. 5:27). The church is Christ's primary work in the world today, and even in the midst of strong opposition it will be sustained by him (Matt. 16:18).

A. THE THREE PURPOSES OF THE CHURCH

1. Purpose No. 1: Ministry to God (worship)

Col. 3:16b. "...as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."

Eph. 1:12 (NLT). "God's purpose was that we who were the first to trust in Christ should praise our glorious God."

Eph. 5:19b. "Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord."

2. Purpose No. 2: Ministry to believers (service/nurture)

Eph. 4:12. "...to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up."

Col. 1:28. "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ."

3. Purpose No. 3: Ministry to the world (evangelism and mercy)

Matt. 28:19. "...go and make disciples of all nations."

Luke 6:35-36. "But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

¹ Ryrie, 469.

B. THE CHURCH IS TO BE LIKE THIS

1. The church is to be like a human body

Romans 12:4-5 "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."

Ephesians 4:4-6 "There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called--one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

2. The church is to be like a bride

Rev. 21:9 "One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."

3. The church is to be like a holy temple

Eph. 2:19-22 "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."

C. TWELVE MARKS OF A TRUE CHURCH

Since any group of people can gather together and call themselves a "church," the question can be raised, "What are the marks of a true church?"²

1. Love for Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 1:8 "Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy."

2. The preaching and teaching of sound biblical doctrine.

Titus 1:9 "He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it."

3. Spiritual power in ministry.

Acts 1:8 "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Rom. 1:16 "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile."

1 Cor. 4:20 "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power."

4. The proper use of the sacraments (ordinances).

1 Cor. 11:26-27 "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the

² Grudem, 874.

Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord." (See 1 Cor. 11:17-34 for the broader context).

5. Genuine worship.

Eph. 5:19-20 "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Col. 3:16-17 "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

6. Effective prayer.

Col. 4:2 "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful."

1 Pet. 3:12 "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer..."

7. Personal holiness of life among members.

Heb. 12:14 "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord."

8. Effective witness.

Acts 1:8 "(Acts 1:8 NIV) "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Matt. 28: 19-20 "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

9. Effective fellowship.

Acts 2:42 "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

1 John 1:3 "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ."

1 John 1:7 "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."

10. Care for the poor.

Rom. 15:26 "For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem."

Gal. 2:10 "All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do."

11. Right use of church discipline.

1 Cor. 5:6 "... Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough?" (See 1 Cor. 5:6-7, 12-13 for the broader context)

12. Biblical church government.

Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18. Jesus Christ is to be the head of the church.

1 Tim. 3:1-13. Then within the church there are to be overseeing elders and serving deacons.

1 Tim. 2:5. No matter what form of government a church adopts, Christ is always to be the head and there is to be no mediator between God and man other than him).

Where To Get More Information

Enns, Paul. *The Moody Handbook of Theology*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1989.

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