

Sermon  SNAPSHOTS



FOUNDATIONS

THE UNIVERSAL
& LOCAL CHURCH

fishers
Church of Christ

THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus promised to “build” His “church.” But **what** is this “church”? He intends to “build?” Let’s put aside preconceptions, and learn about the nature of that “church” which He promised to build. As we study, keep in mind that, in this passage, He is discussing what we call the “universal” church, which is the entire body of the redeemed, transcending both time and death.

The universal church is a “called” people

- Called **out** of sin (and into the service of God) via the gospel (1Pt.2:9-10; 2Th.2:14)
- Called **together** (into local communities) for work and worship (Hb.10:24-25)
- Called **forth** (after assembling) to teach and serve others (Mt.28:18-20; Jm.1:27)
- Called **up** (at some future time) to be in the presence of God (cf. 1Th.4:13-18)

The universal church is a “united” people

- United in their **conversion** experience (1Cor.12:13)
- United in their **worship** (Ac.2:42; 1Cor.10:16-17)
- United in their **devotion** to Christ (Ac.11:19-26)
- United in their **search** for truth (Ph.1:27)

The universal church is an “unorganized” people

- We are a “**brotherhood**” – NOT a “church-hood” (cf. 1Pt.2:17; 5:9)
- Hence, we are a relationship of **INDIVIDUALS** to God in Christ
- We are not bound by “time” or “place” (Mt.16:18; cf. Hb.12:22-24)
- We all submit to King Jesus *as individuals* – NOT as an organization!

The universal church is an “indivisible” people

- There *was, is, and shall ever be*, only ONE body of God’s people (Ep.4:4)
- While “local” churches may divide, *the “universal” church is indivisible!*
- Since we transcend time and death, *it is also indestructible* (Mt.16:18)
- This is in keeping with the ancient prophecy made by Daniel (cf. Dn.2:44)

When the pure, unadulterated gospel is preached, believed, and obeyed, the resulting product is called the “church” of Christ (Ac.2:36-38, 41, 47). This body of people is not a denomination (organization of churches), or an organization of ANY kind, but a relationship of individuals to God in Christ. So, are you a part of the body of Christ?

THE LOCAL CHURCH

Having discussed the “universal” church (all saved), we now discuss the “*local*” church (Ph.1:1). The universal church has *no* organizational structure – *but a local church does!* It is the divinely-approved means by which saints pool their efforts and resources for *specific and limited* purposes. It is a relationship of saints with saints, which grows out of their “universal” relationship with God. Let’s give our attention to this very important subject, as we seek to further define a “local” church.

It is local saints

- A “church” is simply “*a group of saints,*” whether we refer to the “universal” or “local”
- Each of these verses will illustrate this: Ac.2:47; 8:3; 9:31; 11:22; 14:27; 1Cor.14:28
- In a *local* church, saints “join” together for prescribed work and worship (Ac.9:26-28)
- Individual obligations continue! This is an *additional relationship* for doing *more* work!

Scripturally organized

- It may exist for a time without approved organization – **but it is “lacking”** (Tit.1:5)
- Organization requires qualified **oversight, servants, & funds** (1Tm.3:1-13; Ph.1:1; 4:15)
- Each local church is an **independent and autonomous** body (Ac.14:23; 1Pt.5:1-3)
- But **why** do local saints organize? What is the **God-assigned work** of the local church?

For limited work

- Note legitimate **distinctions** between individual[s] and a local church (Mt.18:15-17)
- Though made up of individuals, a local church has **limited responsibilities** (1Tm.5:16)
- This means that a local church “as such” **cannot** “do anything the individual can do!”
- A local church is a **spiritual** (NOT political, business, social) organization! (1Cor.11:22)

As Divinely-authorized

- We must seek those passages which “order” **local churches** to act (cf. 1Cor.16:1)
- The local church has obligations to **God: worship** (1Cor.11:18, 23-26; Ac.20:7)
- The local church has obligations to **saints: edify** and **relieve** (1Cor.14:26; 16:1-3)
- The local church has obligations to **the world: convert** (Ac.13:1-3ff; 1Th.1:8)

The definition given above recognizes the “church” simply as God's people. It also recognizes the organizational structure by which they function. And, it allows us to consistently maintain proper distinctions between the “universal” and “local” church. I therefore conclude that it’s an adequate, Scriptural definition of a local church of Christ. It will hold up under scrutiny!

DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN ”UNIVERSAL” AND ”LOCAL” CHURCH

While not using the **words**, 1 Corinthians 1:2 does distinguish between the “universal” and “local” church. Understanding this distinction is **basic** to a proper understanding of the Bible, similar to understating the distinction between the OT and NT. To make this simple, we often say that “church” is used in two senses: “universally” (all saints everywhere), and “locally” (an organized group of saints). This study will show that: any argument based on the word “church” **must define whether we refer to “universal” or “local” church** -- or remain a useless and ambiguous statement...

Trait	Universal Church	Local Church
Relationship of	Saints with God	Saints with saints
Number of	One church (Ep.1:22-23; 4:4)	Many churches (Rm.16:16)
Location of	Heaven and earth (Ep.3:14-15)	Earth only (Rv.1:10-11)
Durability of	Cannot be destroyed (Mt.16:18)	Can be destroyed (Ac.8:1-4)
Membership of	All saved, w/o error (Ac.2:47)	Some, subject to error (Ac.9:26)
Fellowship	Controlled by God	Controlled by man
Entrance of	Baptized into (1Cor.12:13)	Join self to (Ac.9:26-28)
Exit of	Name blotted out by God (Rv.3:5)	Death (Ac.9:36-39)
		Discipline (1Cor.5:1-13)
		Driven out (3Jn.9-10)
		Disassociation (1Jn.2:19)
Organization of	Individual and Christ (1Pt.2:25)	Elders, deacons, etc. (Ph.1:1)
Function of	Individual(s) action (1Tm.5:16a)	Collective action (1Tm.5:16b)
Assembling of	Fig. assembled from sin (Hb.2:22)	Literal assemblies (1Cor.14:23)

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Sunday Worship: 10 am
Sunday Bible Study: 5 pm
Wednesday Bible Study: 7 pm

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