

## The N.T. Church #1 *Universal vs Local Church*

There are several misconceptions about the church commonly held today. We are not immune to these misunderstandings.

- I. Jesus said that He would build His church. Matt 16:13-19 *When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples...who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 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.*
  - A. Jesus promised to build something that even His pending death could not prevent. That something is the *church*.
  - B. Church - literally means *the called out*
    1. a collective noun, like *flock* or *herd*, *forest* but used of people.
    2. A non-religious term (translated *assembly* in acts 19:32,39,41)
  - C. The Church is the people Jesus saves when considered as a group.
    1. *Not* something Jesus built and then put people into (wagon).
    2. It is the people who share Peter's confession - *You are the Ch, the Son...*
    3. 1 Peter 2:9-10 *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*
  - D. Christ is head of only one body or church (Eph 1:22f; 4:4-6).
    1. Paul's point was that God doesn't have different churches for: Jew/Gentile, rich/poor, male/female - Jesus has only one flock.
    2. Gal 3:26-28 *For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*
- II. This addresses two common misconceptions:
  - A. Misconception #1 "*The One Universal Church is Comprised of all the diff. Denominations.*"
    1. John 15:5-8
    2. The One Universal church is not made of denominations - but individual Christians. "*if anyone...*"
  - B. Misconception #2 "*The One Universal church is Comprised of all the different Local Churches of Christ.*"
    1. No - and for the same reason - The one church Jesus is building is not built out of *congregations*. It's built out of *individual souls*.
    2. The only way to fix this misunderstanding is to maintain a clear distinction between the One Universal church and the many local churches:

III. The **One Universal** church and the **Many Local** churches.

- A. As the apostles went about converting people to the Lord. They would gather the people who were in Christ together in what we call *local churches*.
1. Examples: 1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; Rev. 2:1; 2:12; 2:18; 3:1
  2. Within these congregations, Christians encouraged each other, worked to spread the gospel, worshiped together, assisted one another with spiritual, emotional and financial burdens (acts 2:42ff).

B. Key distinctions between the Universal & Local Church:

	<b>Universal</b>	<b>Local</b>
1.	All Christians everywhere	Christians in a local area
2.	There is only ONE	There are Thousands...
3.	Began at Pentecost	Begins many times
4.	Enter by Lord Adding	Enter by Joining (Act 9:26f)
5.	Roll - Lamb's book of Life	Roll - Human Judgment
6.	Consist of all the saved	Consists of Saved & Lost
7.	No earthly org. / function	Has earthly org. / function
8.	Death doesn't affect	Death ends membership

C. **Most of the Christians I know mix these two concepts.**

1. I've read many articles talking about "*How to Find the One True Church*,"
  - a. They cite passages referring to the Universal Church.
  - b. But define it by characteristics that refer to local churches:
    - (1) Organization - yet there is no earthly organization of the universal church.
    - (2) Worship - prayer, singing, preaching, the Lord's Supper, and giving. Yet the universal church does not gather anywhere on earth to do these things.
2. We need to teach people to come to **Christ**, When they respond to the gospel, He will add them to His one church.
  - a. After they have come to Christ, we should encourage them to join a local church that is seeking to do God's will.
  - b. But these are *two distinct things*.
  - c. We are not concluding that it makes no difference what local church a person joins.
    - (1) There are many Biblical factors for a Christian to consider when making that decision.
    - (2) In coming lessons we will consider what some of those factors are.

D. Two important applications:

1. Your acceptance into a local church is no guarantee that you are acceptable to God!

- a. Example - *Ananias & Saphira* (Acts 5)
  - b. We are human and cannot see into the heart! But the Holy Spirit searches men's hearts. Jesus knows those who are His.
2. Your exclusion from a local church is no guarantee that you are not in fellowship with God.
- a. **Saul** was not accepted at Jerusalem for a time.
  - b. 3 John 10 **Diotrephes** - *he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church.*

Conclusion: I want to encourage you to come to Christ. He promises to save those who believe and are baptized (Mark 16:16). Those who obey His gospel from the heart, He will add to His body of saved people, the church. who are registered in Heaven and whose names are recorded in His book of life.