

☞ What is the church?

Just for fun... from Mama's Family: "Now Mama, you don't have to go to church to go to heaven." "Well, you don't have to wear a parachute to jump out of an airplane either, but it certainly helps."

☞ Common ideas:

From Mark Roberts, Fuller Seminary...

☞ **People get their ideas of church from their past experience of church.**

These days, more and more people come to church with no religious background whatsoever. But most folks still have at least some prior history of church, even if it's limited to weddings and funerals. People tend to have diverse feelings about their past church experiences. Some come with negative memories. Others look back through the rose-tinted glasses of nostalgia.

☞ **People get their ideas of church from pop culture.**

Even folks who've never stepped into a church might have seen a television show with a pastor or a church in an episode or two. Of course there are dozens of other images of the church in pop culture. These often shape their expectations.

☞ **People get their ideas of church from the news.**

The media is generally not inclined to report on the good things that churches do, but church scandals tend to make headlines because they draw viewers and sell advertising.

☞ **People get their ideas of what a church should be from a projection of their personal needs and preferences.**

People have a need and figure the church is the sort of place that should meet their need. Sometimes it's the need for friendship, or financial assistance, or political activism, or, well, you name it. Folks take their needs and project them onto the church. To be sure, a church does meet many needs. But this does not mean the church should meet whatever needs people might happen to feel.

☞ **People get their ideas of church from analogous institutions.**

People often expect the church to be like some similar organization or event. For

*☞ example, some people expect a church to be **like a concert**. When you go to a concert, you file into an auditorium. You sit in rows and watch something happening on the stage up front. If the concert is any good, you feel lots of positive emotions. At times you might even get into the act by standing, clapping, or even singing along. You leave a good concert feeling uplifted and satisfied by the performance. Church, for many people, is just*

like this, only better, because you don't need a ticket, and don't even have to pay anything if you don't want to.

☞ *Others think of church **like a school** and they come for religious education.*

☞ *For others, a church is **like a club**. At church, as in a club, we make friends and find a center for our socializing.*

☞ *Many people today see the church as **some kind of store**. Both churches and stores hope to attract interested "consumers." If the church you attend provides what you're wanting to consume, you continue to go there. If that church stops meeting your needs, you think nothing of finding a better church, just as you might switch markets or clothing stores.*

☞ *It's also common for people to see the church as something **like a hospital**. When you're physically sick, you go to a hospital to get well. Similarly, churches promise to help you overcome your spiritual ailments.*

All of these analogous institutions – concerts, schools, clubs, stores, and hospitals – are like churches in many ways. Thinking of a church in these categories makes sense, to a point.

- *A church is like a concert, but it's better to see a worship service as a concert in which God is the audience and the worshipers are the performers.*
- *A church is like a school, but a church offers much more than religious and moral education. It seeks to transform people's hearts and lives, not just to educate their minds.*
- *A church is like a club, but at church even non-members are welcome to participate in many aspects of "club" life. Those who think of their church like a club tend to exclude others and to think that their church exists primarily to meet their own needs.*
- *A church is like a store, but it ought to do far more than offer "products" for consumption. A church will thrive only if its members are committed to the church in a way far beyond consumer loyalty.*
- *A church is like a hospital in that it offers healing to those who are spiritually sick, just like Jesus did. But a church is not like a hospital because it seeks, not only to get "patients" well, but also to enlist them on the caring team.*

People have many preconceived ideas about church. Often, people think of the church as ☞ **a building**. In fact, that's how an online dictionary defines it: A building used for public Christian worship. Someone might say, "We go to Open Bible Church on the corner of Hancock and Linn in Boone." So, there's churches all over the place. Some are big, some are small. Some are wood, others are brick, etc. Some people like the old, traditional building with a steeple and a bell. Others like a more generic building. Church, as a building can be judged by "who has the building that fits my idea of church;" or, "who has the biggest building with the coolest stuff."

☞ Others tend to think of church as **the Sunday morning meeting**. Someone might say, "We 'have church' at 10:00 on Sundays." So, there's an expectation of a certain order of

events. Some expect to “have church” by singing a lot of songs. Others are expecting a lengthy sermon and prayer. Some are expecting a series of traditional rituals. Still others are looking to socialize. Church, as a meeting then, can be judged by “who does all things I like, when I like it, and the way I like it.”

Churches often have a building and almost always have a regular meeting. But those things alone are not the church. Many preconceived ideas about the church are just plain wrong. Here at OBC we want to find out what the Bible says about church. People’s opinions about the building or the order of service are just that, “opinions.” We want to know what God says and then do our best to follow his guidelines.

☞ **What the Bible says:**

☞ The word “church” is used exactly **79 times in the NIV version of the Bible**, all of which are found in the New Testament. Some of those references are descriptive while others are simply a brief mention of the word “church.”

☞ The word “church” comes from the Greek word **ecclesia**. Originally, this was a generic term meaning “**a gathering of people.**” Over time it came to mean “**the called out ones.**”

--Strong’s dictionary... a "gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place; an assembly"

☞ The Church refers to people... people who have been "**called out" of the world... called out of their homes... to a common assembly.**

We aren’t "called out" in the sense of separating ourselves from the world... Which, I’m afraid, many churches have become... little "monasteries" where just our own people come for spiritual blessing. We are called forth to serve and to work and to grow and to reach new people! So when Jesus said "I will build my church... He was talking about

☞ **people being called forth with a purpose!**

Here are some the things the Bible (those 79 verses) says about the church...

The church belongs to God.

Jesus builds the church.

The church grows.

The church is strengthened by the Holy Spirit.

The church prays.

The church gathers together.

The church sends out ministers.

The church welcomes ministers.

The church is led and directed by overseers, who “shepherd” it.

The church can meet in houses.
The church is called to be holy.
The church is supposed to judge its members.
The church is edified by spiritual gifts.
The church is a group of individuals who each have something to offer.
The church is the body of Christ and he is the head.
The church shows God's wisdom.
The church submits to Christ.
The church is loved by Christ.
The church listens to the Spirit.

☞ **The Key concepts:**

If you study the Bible regarding the church you will find some core ideas about what the church is...

☞ **The church is a group of people.**

The church (people) belongs to God.

The church has leaders who direct and shepherd it.

The church is the body of Christ and he is the head.

☞ The word church is always used in reference to **a gathering of people**. It is never used to refer simply to people that believe. It's actually inaccurate to say that believers are the church. That leaves out an important part of the biblical definition. We are the church when we gather together. To say, "I'm a part of a church but I don't attend" would be like if you invited me to a party at your house on Sunday evening, "I'm having a little *gathering* of friends on Sunday night. Can you come?" and I answered, "Sure, I'll be a part of your gathering, but I won't be able to attend." You'd be confused by my answer, because being a part of a gathering means being physically present. The church is a gathering of believers. So what does the Bible say about the gathering or the meeting that the church has?

☞ **The Church meeting:**

Actually, the Bible gives very little detail about the specifics of the meeting. From those 79 scriptures we can see some things that are often included in the meeting...

☞ **Prayer**

Singing

Spiritual gifts

Ministry and missionary reports

Welcoming & sending ministers

Giving money

Teaching from the word

Those sound familiar? Right, these are things we typically include in our Sunday meetings. But the Bible **never gives specific details** or an outline for how the meeting is supposed to be run. Whether there's two songs or ten songs; whether there's a short sermon or long sermon; or even if there's an interactive discussion. These are all left up to individual congregations. Sometimes people say that church should be like the early church in the Bible. But what exactly was that like? We only know little snippets. But, here is what we do know...

☞ **Summary:**

Church is not a building; it's brothers and sisters in Christ.

Church is not a place; it's a people.

Church is not just something you go to; it's something you are.

☞ Church is comprised of **Individuals** who are **Interconnected** and **Interdependent**. With so many individuals, there is a great variety. Scripture says that we are many parts. But those many parts form one body. That's how we are interconnected and unified. And all those parts must cooperate and work together in interdependence to accomplish God's purpose.

The very first time the church was mentioned in the Bible was by Jesus:

☞ **Matthew 16:18** **"I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."**

I will build. Jesus doesn't build buildings; he builds people.

My church. The church belongs to Christ. It's not mine; it's not yours; we are his church.

Gates of Hades... We will endure and have the ultimate victory through Jesus.

☞ **C** hrist-followers

Hearing the Spirit

United together

Reaching the lost

Continually growing

Honoring God

☞ ***"I am part of the Church, which is God's primary means of accomplishing His purposes on Earth."***