

LESSON -16

THE CHURCH OF GOD

CHURCH, DEFINITION, BEGINNING, GROWTH, LAW, DUTIES

References : *Ephe . 2 : 13: 22*

: *1 peter. 1 : 1-10*

Memory verse : *1 peter. 2: 9*

Objective: To know about the greatness of the Church and get thrilled to be a part of it and inspired to live as real members.

Introduction: Generally Christians introduce themselves to others as members of a particular Church or group. We can find various **Church groups or denominations**, on earth. By the word 'Church' found in the Bible, God means something other than what most people think of it. Some claim that a particular organisation or denomination is the Church. But rather, the Church is the mystery of God revealed to us through Jesus Christ in the fulness of time (Eph. 3: 9 -11).

WHAT IS CHURCH?

In the original Greek, the word used for Church is "Ekklesia". It means "Those who are called out for a special purpose." In the New Testament, the word is used 115 times and in the Old Testament the word or its equivalent is used 123 times. Apart from all human definitions, let us see what the Bible tells about the church. The Church is a chosen generation a royal priest - hood a holy nation, His own special people proclaiming the praises of Him who called them out of darkness into His marvelous light. (1 pet. 2: 9)

ITS BEGINNING :

The Church of God was a reality existed in the mind of God in eternity. It was a mystery hidden from the people of the Old

Testament times, and later revealed to the apostles and prophets in this dispensation of grace (Colo. 1 : 25-26), Eph. 3: 9-11) The first mention of the Church that Jesus is seen making to the disciples was at Ceasarea Philippi (Matt : 16 : 13: 19). Jesus said, "I will build my church" thereby signifying a future job. In the same way it happened after the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. On the day of Pentecost, when the disciples waited in Jerusalem the Holy Spirit descended upon them and began the work of the Church. Peter used the key of the Gospel that Jesus gave him, to open the Church for three thousand people to enter. This is how the Church began.

ITS CONSTRUCTION:

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| Foundation | - It is founded on Jesus Christ the Rock
(Matt. 16 :18, 1 Cori. 10 : 4) |
| Cornerstone | - Jesus Christ is the Chief Cornerstone
(Eph. 2 : 20 1 Pet. 2 ;6) |
| Foundation stones | - The apostles and prophets (Eph. 2 :20) |
| Building stones | - All believers, the lively stones
(1 Pet. 2 :5, Eph. 2 :22) |

The above explanations are given in comparison of the Church to a building. (It is further elaborated in the following lesson).

IT GROWTH:

After the day of Pentecost, the apostles and their associates went about preaching everywhere being filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. They fulfilled the commission of the Lord to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Those who received their word obeyed the Lord in baptism and were added to the Church. The Lord added to the Church daily those who were being saved and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly. Church is the living institution that God has appointed to provide the light of the Gospel to the world. It must grow in terms of member, spiritual standard and spiritual gifts (quantity and quality).

MEMBERSHIP:

What are the essentials qualifying an individual to become a member of the Church?

1) Rebirth : The following quotations from the New Testament makes quite clear that the rebirth is the basic requirement for an individual to be a member of the Church. "Having been born again, not of corruptible seed, in - corruptible through the word of God which lives and abides forever (1 pet. 1: 23, James 1:18. 1 Cor.4:15) Jesus Christ while talking to Nicodemus, assuredly said, "Unless one is born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." Now the question is how can one be born again? We who are born of our human parents are born in the flesh and are flesh. The flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Cori 15 ; 50). Therefore, a spiritual birth is necessary for entering the spiritual sphere. We can be born again through faith in Jesus Christ-faith in His substitutional death on the cross for our sins atonement as well as in His resurrection for our justification. When the Holy Spirit reveals the crucified Christ through the Word of God, a penitent sinner responds in absolute faith and commitment. This is how the **rebirth** takes place in a person. As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name. (Jn. 1: 12- 13) For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus (Gala. 3 : 26).

II) Baptism : The Bible tells as that Baptism is an essential element for entrance into the Church. The three thousand first converts on the day of Pentecost were baptized as declared by the Apostle Peter and were added to the church (Act. 2 : 41 - 42). The Eunuch the finance minister of Ethiopia made the confession of faith and was baptized by Philip the Evangelist (Acts. 8 : 37-38). After conversion, Paul was baptized by Ananias (Acts. 9:18). Paul the apostle has emphatically dealt with the subject of baptism in his epistles to Romans, Galatians, Corinthians, Colossians etc. "As many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death" (Romans 6: 3 - 4). " As many of you were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. You are all one in Christ Jesus (Gala. 3: 27- 28, 1 Cor. 12 : 13, Colo. 2 : 12).

The commandment of the Lord Jesus Christ regarding the subject baptism also is that those who believe must be baptized and received into the Church. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mtth. 28:19). "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mk. 16 :16). In the first century Church, there was none without the experience of rebirth and without being baptized.

The Code of The Church: (Sanctification and Separation)

The members of the Church who have fulfilled the above said requirements are called 'Saints'. (Roma. 1:3, 1 Cori 1:2, 2 Cori 1:1, Phil. 1:1) The saints are sanctified two ways. One is acquired sanctification and the other is required sanctification. It means that they have acquired sanctification at the time of Repentance and submission to Christ. Such saints are required to keep their life in holiness or sanctification (1 Pet. 1: 15 - 16, 2 :11-12). The members of the church are expected to be separated from sin and all practices condemned in the Bible and also be aloof from all evil companies (2 Cori. 6 : 14 -17, Acts. 2 : 40). The law regarding the temple of God is that all the surrounding area of the Temple must be most holy (Ezek: 43 :12, 1 Cori. 3 :17).

The Duties of The Church:

1) Worship: We have already seen that church is a holy royal priesthood offering up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God (1 Pet. 2:5). We must worship God (who is the spirit) in spirit and in truth (Jn. 4: 23-24) Only those who are born of heaven (born again) have the right to worship God. God alone is worthy of worship. Therefore we must not worship men, or angels or dead saints (Mat. 4: 10, Deut. 6:13, 10:20). Individuals must worship God and families must worship God. A lot of opportunities for collective worship (congregational) also must be found out under the Church auspices. Especially, Sunday the first day of the week was separated for the communion worship by the first century Church. Down through the centuries, the Christians have been worshipping God on Sundays. (Acts 20 :7) The most significant factor in the worship service is the institution of Lord's supper. It is observed in the memory of the agony and death of Jesus Christ for our sake. In meditation of the great love that Jesus showed on the cross we offer the sacrifice of praise and thanks giving to the Lord. What a Joy it is to worship him How blessed is the communion of the saints!

2) Gospel Work : The foremost duty of the church is to bear witness to the Lord. The risen Christ gave His disciples the last commission just before his ascension to heaven, that they must be His witnesses even to the uttermost part of the earth (Act. 1:8)

This commission of Christ to the church is found in many other parts of the scripture (Jn. 15: 26, Mk. 16:15-20, Matt.28, 18-20, Joh.

20:21). Not only the pastors must be involved in evangelistic work but all believers must be involved. But our witnessing does not mean mere preaching or teaching, it involves our personal commitment and exemplary life before the world. A true member of the church must feel the burden of the perishing millions of souls, be filled with the Holy Spirit and work with real Zeal and prayer. Submit yourself in the presence of God to be such a genuine member of the church.

EXERCISE -16

Answer the following questions

1. What is the meaning of "The Church"?
2. How many times is the Word Church used in the New Testament?
3. What does the Bible say about the 'Church'?
4. When and how did the Church begin?
5. Who are the foundation, corner stone, foundation stones and building stones of the Church?
6. When did the Church grow?
7. Who were added to the Church?
8. How must the Church Grow?
9. How does re-birth take place in a person?
10. Why is re-birth or spiritual birth necessary?
11. Who must be baptized?
12. Who are the Saints?
13. Which are the two ways of Sanctification of Saints?
14. How should we worship God?
15. Who has got the right to worship God?
16. What is the most significant factor in the worship services? Why is it observed?
17. What is the foremost duty of the Church?
18. What was Jesus' last commission to His disciples?