What is a church?

Historical use of the word “Ecclesia” (We translate “church”)

- **MILITARY**: used in reference to calling an army to assemble.
- **POLITICS**: used to define the gathering of city citizens together in order to make judicial and political decisions.
- **OLD TESTAMENT**: referred to the Israelite people God had summoned together to enter into a covenant with himself and live according to his Law.
- **NEW TESTAMENT**: referred to the global people of God and also the local gathering of God’s people.

Note it never refers to a building.

What do you think about the statement, “You don’t have to go to church to be a Christian”?
The goal here is merely to provoke discussion. We will return to this question at the end of the study to see if opinions have changed.

Reflect on these scriptures to understand the significance and role of the church.

*Matthew 16:18 (NASB-U)* Jesus speaking to his disciples
I will build my church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

**Whose church is it?**
Jesus’ church

**How might that affect our view of the church?**
We should not take the church lightly. If the church is Jesus’ creation then it must have enormous significance and purpose. It is God’s plan for the message of salvation to be spread into the world. It is his only plan; there is no Plan B. The church is it.

**How might that affect how we speak about the church?**
We should be very slow to criticize the church and when we speak concerning it, it should be with reverence, respect and awe. This is true in spite of the fact that the church has flawed people who bring their baggage with them into it. The church, from God’s perspective, is his beautiful bride and grooms don’t like it when people speak negatively about their bride. Remember though, we are talking about the true church of Christ and not necessarily all representations of the institutional church.
How does that affect how the church is to be built?

Christ builds his church – not us. However, he does invite us to partner with him as he builds his church. He allows us to play a role under his leadership in this great adventure of rescuing people from judgement and death.

What does it mean when it says the gates of Hades will not overcome it?

The church will grow – and nothing will be able to stop it. Hades is a reference to the place of the dead. In other words, even death itself will not be able to stop the church. Christ proved this when he rose from the dead and proceeded to build his church. All believers who die will also conquer death and rise as the bride of Christ.

Ephesians 5:25-27 (NLT)

And you husbands must love your wives with the same love Christ showed the church. He gave up his life for her 26to make her holy and clean, washed by baptism and God’s word. 27He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault.

In light of the above verse, how important is the church to Jesus?

Jesus came to earth for the sole purpose of creating the church. It was of such intense significance that God himself was willing to limit himself as a man, come to earth, be rejected by mankind and die a horrendous death on the cross, all to make it a reality.

He then sent his Holy Spirit to indwell the church, give gifts to the church, lead the church, guard the church and mature the church until the day he returns.

He then entrusted to the church the sole responsibility of bringing the message of life and death to the rest of the world.

To say the church is of importance is an extreme understatement.

Colossians 1:18 (NLT)

Christ is the head of the church, which is his body. He is the first of all who will rise from the dead, so he is first in everything.

What is the significance of Christ being the head of the church?

Christ is the head of the church. It is not to be a democracy where the masses vote and come to their own conclusions. The church is to be guided and directed by Jesus Christ himself.
What’s the significance with regard to church leadership?

The church is to seek his will through the leading of the Holy Spirit and be obedient to what Christ calls it to do. With this being the case, there should never be power struggles, church splits, or disunity. We are not to strive for our own personal agenda, but to seek first Jesus and his will.

Some may argue that the word “head” merely means “source” and has no authoritative connotation to it whatsoever. Although the word may imply source, there is an understanding that the “source” always has a responsibility for what comes from it. (For example: Parents are the “source” of their children, but in so being, they also have the responsibility to care for them and the authority to lead them.)

According to the following verses, what are the purposes of the church?

Romans 15:5-6 (NIV)
May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Glorify God

Ephesians 4:11-13 (NLT)
He is the one who gave these gifts to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ, until we come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God’s Son that we will be mature and full grown in the Lord, measuring up to the full stature of Christ.

Equip God’s People to Build Up the Church

Unify God’s People

Spiritually Mature God’s People

Matthew 28:19-20 (NLT)
Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Make Disciples of All Nations
What is the future of the church?

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (NLT)
And now, brothers and sisters, I want you to know what will happen to the Christians who have died so you will not be full of sorrow like people who have no hope. 14 For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus comes, God will bring back with Jesus all the Christians who have died.

15 I can tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not rise to meet him ahead of those who are in their graves. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the call of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, all the Christians who have died will rise from their graves. 17 Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and remain with him forever. 18 So comfort and encourage each other with these words.

As a spiritual family we will be **UNITED WITH CHRIST**

Revelation 22:4-5 (NLT)
And they will see his face, and his name will be written on their foreheads. 5 And there will be no night there—no need for lamps or sun—for the Lord God will shine on them. And they will reign forever and ever.

As a spiritual family we will **REIGN WITH CHRIST FOREVER**

Ephesians 3:20-21 (NLT)
Now glory be to God! By his mighty power at work within us, he is able to accomplish infinitely more than we would ever dare to ask or hope. 21 May he be given glory in the church and in Christ Jesus forever and ever through endless ages. Amen.

As a spiritual family we will **BRING GLORY TO GOD THROUGHOUT ETERNITY**

Why do we need to be a part of the church?

1 Corinthians 12:7-11 (NLT)
A spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church. 8 To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another he gives the gift of special knowledge. 9 The Spirit gives special faith to another, and to someone else he gives the power to heal the sick. 10 He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and to another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to know whether it is really the Spirit of God or another spirit that is speaking. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, and another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. 11 It is the one and only Holy Spirit who distributes these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.
Why doesn’t the Holy Spirit give each of us all the needed gifts?
God delights in community and God delights in diversity. Even within the Godhead itself, God structured himself in such a way that the Father, Son and Spirit all play different roles that complement one another. God desires that we come together as a family and pour our lives into each other with love. We need each other and that’s precisely the way God designed it.

It also means that we have a special and unique role to play within God’s purpose. No one can say they don’t have a place of significance in God’s kingdom. As we carry out the purposes for which God has uniquely crafted each one of us, we grow in faith and maturity.

Ephesians 4:11-13 (NLT)
He is the one who gave these gifts to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ, until we come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God’s Son that we will be mature and fully grown in the Lord, measuring up to the full stature of Christ.

What happens if we cut ourselves off from the giftings within the local church?
- We will not be equipped to do God’s work
- We will not partner with Christ in building his church
- We will not become unified with other believers as God desires
- We will not grow in our knowledge of Jesus Christ
- We will not mature spiritually
- We will not become what God desires us to be.

What happens if I sit back and don’t use my giftings in the local church?
Others will not be equipped to do God’s work, etc. See above…

How would you respond now to the person who says they don’t need to be part of a local church to be a Christian?

HOME STUDY:

Read: Continue reading Exodus through to 2 Kings.
The goal is to gain an overview of the story of the Bible. When you come to passages detailing the tabernacle structures, laws, or rites, simply scan them for now and proceed to the next narrative section to pick up the continuation of the story.