

CHURCH - THE NATURE OF “baptized into one body”

Key question

What is the church from a Biblical and historical perspective?

Key text

I Corinthians 12:13

“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”

Key Definition

The Church

The church is that spiritual organism of which Christ is the Head, composed of all regenerate people from Pentecost to Rapture.

Introduction

1. While we are individually reconciled to God through Christ by faith, it is important to realize that we are also part of a community that is of special significance to the plan of God.
2. God is not only redeeming individuals from sin, He is building a community of shared faith and Spirit that is to function as a continuation of the incarnate ministry of the living Christ. It is His Body.
3. The Scripture speaks often of the corporate or communal dimension of the Christian life in terms of the church or body of Christ.
4. The word “church” is used in many ways, compounding the confusion concerning its meaning and nature.
 - a. A building.
 - b. A local congregation.
 - c. A denomination.
 - d. The corporate sum of all believers everywhere on earth.
 - e. The sum of both the living and dead believers.
5. Denominational concepts of the church.
 - a. **Roman Catholic** - “it is a divinely constituted society consisting of members from every race and nation, all holding one faith, all using the same sacraments as means of holiness

and salvation, and all governed benignly by the successor of St. Peter, the Vicar of Christ, the pope . . .” C.B. Pallen, “Catholic Church,” *The New Catholic Dictionary* pp 180-1 Note: The Vatican has recently reiterated the official position that the Roman Catholic Church is the only instrument for the salvation of all humanity, that all other Christians are deficient and not churches in the proper sense.

- b. **Anglican** - “the visible church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments are duly ministered according to Christ’s ordinance . . .” Article XIX of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England
- c. **Reformed** - “The catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect. . . The visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel, consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children . . .” Westminster Confession chap. XXV
- d. **Baptist** - “the church is a company of visible saints, called and separated from the world by the Word and Spirit of God, to the visible profession of the faith of the Gospel; being baptized into that faith” Article XXXIII of the Baptist Confession of faith of 1646

6. **Three views of the church.** (from *Life in the Spirit* by Thomas C. Oden p263-4)

	Pietistic	Orthodox	Activist
Model	Coetus Electorum	Corpus Christi	Communio Sanctorum
Typical historical expressions	Evangelical Revivalism Pietism	Liturgical Eastern, Roman, Anglican Catholic orthodoxy	Liberal “Mainline” Protestantism Political theology
Focus of common life	Conversion Discipline of regenerate life Religion of the heart	Sacramental life Unity of apostolic teaching Religion of the book	Social action Relevant service in the world Religion of the people
Key values and achievements	Vitality Inner life	Authority Correct doctrine	Solidarity Social change
Teaching concentration	New birth The individual Personal regeneration	Authoritative doctrine and catechetics The eternal Apostolic authority	Reconciling base communities The social Social action
Church and society correlation	Christ against culture	Christ of or above culture	Christ transforming culture
Heterodox tendency	Gnosticism	Neoplatonic idealism	Pelagian pragmatism
Focus of human predicament	Sin	Heresy	Injustice
Key mark	Holiness	Apostolicity	Unity

A. **The meaning of the word “church.”**

1. The English word “church” is derived from the Greek word KURIAKOS, meaning “belonging to the Lord.”
2. The New Testament (especially Paul) uses the term EKKLESIA, meaning “called out” and translated “assembly.” There is a similar word used in the Old Testament (book of

Numbers especially) to describe the nation Israel as it gathered before the tent of meeting in the desert.

3. Paul and Luke use the term “church” to describe several levels of Christian community.
 - a. **All** believers. Eph.1
 - b. All the Christians in a **region**. Acts 9:31 “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up.”
 - c. The believers in a **city**. I Cor.1:2; II Cor.1:1;I Thess.1:1; Rev.1-3; Acts 5:11; 13:1
 - d. The believers who met in a **house**. Rom.16:5; I Cor.16:19
 - e. The word is sometimes used to describe a secular assembly. Acts 19:39,41
 - f. In Acts 7:38 the word is used to describe Israel assembled to receive God’s Law through Moses.
4. It is used 100 times in the LXX (Greek O.T.)
5. It is used 119 times in the New Testament of:
 - a. **A secular mob** — Acts 19:32,39,40
 - b. **People of Israel** — Acts 7:38; Heb.2:12
 - c. **Synagogue assembly** — James 2:2 with 5:14
 - d. The **“Body of Christ”** (16 times) — Col.1:24 -
 - e. **The local Christian congregation** (98 times) — I Cor.1:2, 16:19. A group of professing believers in a certain place who have been baptized and organized for the purpose of building up the Body of Christ, worshipping Him, and spreading the Gospel.
 - f. **Several congregations as a unit** — I Cor.6:4

B. **The church and the Kingdom.**

1. George Ladd’s conclusions:
 - a. The church is not the kingdom.
 - b. The kingdom creates the church.
 - c. The church witnesses to the kingdom.
 - d. The church is the instrument of the kingdom.
 - e. The church is the custodian of the kingdom.

2. Distinctions

The Kingdom of God	The Church of God
This is the reign of God over all Creation and time.	This is a specific realm of God’s reign – the bride of His Son.
The focus is on the King and His rule.	The focus is on those under the rule of the king.

3. Views of how the Kingdom is manifest today

Applied in full to the self	Applied in full to the state	Applied in part to the church
Health and Wealth theology Victorious life theology	Liberation theology Postmillennial theology	Salt and Light in the world Premillennial theology

- The prophetic description of the Messianic age in Isa.12 is illustrated in Acts 2.

Isaiah 12	Acts 2
Conviction of sin - vs.1	pierced to the heart - vs.37
Comfort of grace - vs.1	baptized - vs.41
Freedom from fear - vs.2	Saved from this generation - vs.40
Nourishment in spirit - vs.3	Apostles teaching - vs.42
Thankfulness in worship - vs.4	Gladness of heart - vs.46
Joy in witness - vs.5-6	Praising God, added daily - vs.47

C. The church and Israel.

1. Similarities

- Neither represents the totality of God’s program.
- Both share in the larger Kingdom program of God.
- Both are designed to glorify God, though in different ways.
- There is continuity between the two entities.

2. Natural Israel and the church are distinguished in **I Cor.10:32** “Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God;”

3. In **Ephesians 2:14** Paul suggests that Jew and Gentile became one in the church. “For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,”

4. In **I Cor.12:13** we read, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”

5. **Rom.11** seems to suggest that God still has a plan for national Israel.

6. In **Matt.16:18** Jesus tells us that He “will build” His church. This suggests that the church did not exist at the time of His speaking.

7. In the N.T. natural Israel and Gentiles were contrasted after the church was clearly established - Acts 3:12; 4:8,10; 5:21,31,35; 21:19.

8. The Old Testament and New Testament Church

Old Testament	Pentecost	New Testament
“Church of the Lord” Judges 20:2	“I will build my Church” Matt. 16:18	“Body of Christ” Col.1:24, I Cor.12:13, Acts 2:1-4, 11:15-17

9. Distinctions between Israel and the Church (Traditional Dispensational distinctions).

	Israel	Church
Relation	Relationship based on physical birth	Relationship based on spiritual birth
Headship	Abraham	Christ

Nationality	One nation	From all nations
Divine Interaction	National and individual	Individual salvation but relationship in the body of Christ.
Dispensations	From Abraham on	Restricted to this age only
Governing Principle	Embodied in the Mosaic covenant (in the future, the new covenant)	A grace system that includes law
Covenant	Mosaic (Old Covenant)	New Covenant

D. **The visible and invisible church**

1. Distinctions

The Visible church	The Invisible church
the institution	the individual believers
Viewed by Roman Catholicism as prior to the invisible church	Viewed by pietists as the only church that matters.
organization	organism
structured	informal

- The “parish” view represents an intermediate view. This view accepts all people who wish to identify themselves with the church as members but it recognizes that within that “visible” body there is a remnant of “true believers.”
- The influence of American revivalism played an important part in shaping the American evangelical church’s impulse to value the “invisible church” above the “visible church.” The two Great Awakenings generated a distinction between:

The rationalist	The revivalist
Main line denominations of the North	Evangelicals of the South
Spirituality is a process, communal, objective, subject to church authority, and intellectual	Spirituality is subjective, emotional, individualistic, anti-authoritarian, and anti-intellectual
Shaped after the political culture of Europe	Shaped after the political culture of the American Revolution
Head over heart	Heart over head
Denominational loyalty	Non-denominationalism
Creedal,	No creed but the Bible
Respect for historical traditions	Little respect for traditions

E. **The church - militant and triumphant.**

The Militant church	The Triumphant church
Actual	Ideal
Believers struggling on earth	Believers already in heaven

F. **The local and universal church.**

1. **The Church universal** - The Body of Christ is that spiritual organism of which Christ is the head, and is composed of all regenerate people from Pentecost to the Rapture (Col.1:18,24; I Cor.12:28, 15:9; Heb.12:23).
2. **The Local Assembly** - A group of professing believers in Christ who have been baptized and who have organized themselves for the purpose of doing God's will (I Cor.1:2,11:18, 14:19,28,35; Acts 5:11, 11:26)

Local	Universal
Membership: saved and lost	Membership: saved only
Only currently living people	Both dead and living in Christ
Many local churches	Only one universal church
Differing denominations	No single denomination
Part of the body of Christ	The entire body of Christ
Differing types of government	Christ the only head
Ministering the ordinances (or sacraments)	Ordinances fulfilled (e.g., 1 Cor.11:23-26; Rev.19:9)

G. **The inception of the church**

1. There are several reasons why it is proper to regard the church as having begun at Pentecost.
 - a. In Matt.16:18 Jesus points to a future time in saying "I will build my church."
 - b. Luke never uses EKKLESIA in his Gospel but employs it 24 times in Acts after Pentecost.
 - c. Pentecost is referred to as "the beginning."
 - d. The baptism of the Spirit seems to be key to the nature of the church as the body of Christ.
 1. It is linked with basic blessings of the Christian life.
 - a) The promise of the Father: Ezek.36:25-27; Jer.31:31-34; II Cor.3:7-8; Luke 24:49 (Acts 2:33,39)
 - b) Living water: John 7:37-39 (16:7, 13)
 - c) The Body of Christ: I Cor.12:13; Eph.4:4-5
 - d) The removal of sins: Titus 3:5; Acts 2:38; II Cor.3:8-9
 2. Two passages seem to state clearly that the reception (baptism) of the Spirit is a universal experience among believers. Romans 8:9, I Cor.12:13
2. Were the disciples Christians, in the New Testament sense (born again from above, having received the Spirit) before Acts 2?

From our study of the Scriptures, we are compelled to believe that they were not Christians (in the New Testament sense of that word) before Pentecost. The following points are offered in support of that conclusion:

- a. The disciples did not have the promise of the Father before Pentecost, for Jesus said, And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:49). This promise was the Spirit (Gal.3:14; Acts 2:38,39; Joel 2:32) and was fulfilled at Pentecost (Acts 2:38,39).

- b. When the disciples met with Jesus just before Pentecost, they were yet blind to some very basic spiritual truths (Acts 1:6; cf. John 3:5), suggesting that the Spirit who was to be their teacher (John 16:13) was not yet in them (John 14:17).
- c. Before Pentecost, the disciples did not have the power of God in their lives (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8), a power that is the possession of every born again believer today (Eph.3:20; Phil.4:13; Col.1:12). The indwelling Holy Spirit was to witness to Christ (John 15:26-27), but the disciples did not have this power to witness to Christ before Pentecost (Acts 1:8). They did have it after Pentecost (I Thess.1:8).
- d. Every son of God (regenerate believer) is guided by the Holy Spirit (Rom.8:14). The disciples did not seem to have this guidance before Pentecost (Acts 1:26).
- e. Peter explains that before Pentecost the disciples were in the same state that Cornelius had been in before he heard the message by which he was saved (Acts 11:14-15).
- f. John's description of regeneration corresponds to the Pentecostal experience recorded in Acts 2 (John 3:5).
- g. The coming of the Spirit, that is the indwelling of God the Father and God the Son in the believer, was impossible while Jesus was physically present (John 14:23; 16:7).

H. **Biblical images of the Christ and the church.**

1. **The People of God** - The community belonging to God.

- **II Cor.6:16** "God said, 'I will live in them and move among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.'"
- **Ex.15:13,16** "Thou hast led in thy steadfast love the people whom thou hast redeemed, thou hast guided them by thy strength to thy holy abode . . . Terror and dread fall upon Edom, Moab, and the inhabitants of Canaan; because of the greatness of thy arm, they are as still as a stone, till thy people, O Lord, pass by, till the people pass by whom thou hast purchased."

2. **The Body of Christ** - The human body is in view.

- **Eph.4:10-16** "10 He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) 11 And He gave some {as} apostles, and some {as} prophets, and some {as} evangelists, and some {as} pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the **body of Christ**; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all {aspects} into Him, who is the head, {even} Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to **the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body** for the building up of itself in love."
- **Eph.1:22-23**, "He has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."
- **I Cor.12:27** "Now we are the body of Christ and individually members of it."

Note these implications

- a. Union with Christ. Col.1:18,27; 2:19; Gal.2:20

- b. Christ is the head. Col.1:16,18; Eph.1:10
- c. The church is a Unified community. I Cor.1:10-17; 3:1-9; I Cor.11:17-19; I Cor.12:12-13.
- d. Church members have Fellowship with each other. I Cor.12:26 “If one member suffers, all suffer together.”
- e. Believers enjoy a Universal connectedness that transcends culture. Col.3:11, Rom.11:25-26,32; Gal.3:28; Eph.2:15.
- f. The church is an Extension of Christ’s ministry. Jn.14:12 “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father”.

3. **The Temple of the Holy Spirit** - In this image a building is in view as a model.

- **Eph.2:19-22** “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of **God’s household**, having been built upon the **foundation of the apostles and prophets**, Christ Jesus Himself being the **corner {stone}**, in whom the whole **building**, being fitted together is growing into a holy **temple** in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a **dwelling of God** in the Spirit.”
- **I Pet.2:5** “a spiritual house”
- **I Cor.3:16-17** “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you/ If any one destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. God’s temple is holy, and that temple you are.”

Note these implications

- a. Christ is the corner stone and believers are building stones.
- b. The building process and the central place of worship in the church’s life are in view.

4. **The bride of Christ** - In this image a husband wife relationship provides a model.

- **Eph.5:22** “Wives, {be subject} to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as **Christ also is the head of the church**, He Himself {being} the Savior of the body. But as the **church is subject to Christ**, so also the wives {ought to be} to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless. . . . This mystery is great; but **I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.**”

Note these implications

- a. The self-sacrifice of the husband (Christ) and the submissive receptivity of the wife (believers) are in view.
- b. The role of the church is to respond to the leadership of Christ.

5. **Metaphors of Christ and the church.**

Christ	Church	Reference	Terminology
Head	Body	Col. 1:18a	“And he is the head of the body, the church.”
Cornerstone	Temple	Eph.2:20-21	“...Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.”
Beloved	Virgin	II Cor. 11:2	“I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might

			present you as a pure virgin to him.”
Bridegroom	Bride	Rev. 21:9	“Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”
Ruler (implied)	City	Rev.21:9-10	“He...showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.”
Owner	People	Titus 2:14	“...to purify for himself a people that are his very own.”
Shepherd	Flock	I Pet. 5:2-4	“Be shepherds of God’s flock...And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown...”
Firstborn	Household	Eph. 2:19 Col.1:18b	“...members of God’s household.” “He is the beginning and the firstborn.”
Creator	New Man	Eph.2:15	“His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two.”
Founder (implied)	Chosen People	I Peter 2:9	“You are a chosen people...a holy nation, a people belonging to God.”
High Priest	Royal Priesthood	Heb. 4:14; I Pet.2:9	“We have a great high priest...Jesus the Son of God.” “...a royal priesthood...”
Heir	Inheritance	Eph. 1:18	“...his glorious inheritance in the saints.”

I. **A fresh way of looking at the church.**

1. The church can be viewed as a God ordained and designed social environment made up of confessing and baptized disciples of Christ that functions as an incubator for personal spiritual formation, community development, and cultural impact in terms of the Kingdom of God.
2. It does this by facilitating and not frustrating certain Biblical (Kingdom) principles.
 - a. Vital **relational** connections between believers that are based on speaking the truth in a posture of grace and caring interest in the welfare of each individual soul.
 - b. Vital **worship** experiences that express and reinforce an enlightened hope and peace that trumps the despair and cynicism of a dark world.
 - c. Vital **learning** experiences that involve careful exposition of Scripture, personal mentoring of character, and community reinforcement of values.
 - d. Vital **ministry** experiences that respect the diversity of the body and the need for a supportive community for each individual’s unique contribution.
3. It is not only “leaders” that are needed, but also “body parts” that have a vision of how they fit into what is to become the bride of Christ.
4. There are two popular but questionable models of spiritual formation.
 - a. **The Roman Catholic view** – divides the church between the “religious” (clergy class) and the non-religious (laity class). The reformers challenged this “spiritual class system.”
 - b. **The evangelical Protestant view** – sees every believer as a potential leader, equating spiritual maturity (to which every believer is called) with leadership. It fails to see that leadership is one of many gifts. Some will be mature and may not be leaders. The leader is a pastor – teacher - vision caster who is skilled and committed to directing the building of healthy churches.

J. **For a description and critique of the Emergent Missional Church go to theology file #109.**

Questions that you should be able to answer.

1. Specific facts you should know.

- a. What does the word “church” mean?
- b. How is the word “church” used in the New Testament?
- c. What is the meaning of the term “church militant”?

2. Issues that you should be able to discuss.

- a. How is the church distinct from Israel?
- b. How is the local church distinct from the universal church?
- c. What is the significance of the motifs used of the church in Ephesians?
- d. What evidence is there to support the idea that the church began at Pentecost?

3. Questions you should wrestle with.

- a. How are the people of God in the Old Testament related to the church in the New Testament?