

**Lesson #1, "Realizing the Importance of the Local Church"**

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What common attitudes do you encounter towards the church of Jesus Christ? How important do most people (including Christians) think the church is?

Consider the following twenty descriptions of the church:

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| 1. The kingdom of God             | 11. The witnesses of God                     |
| 2. The assembly of God            | 12. The beloved of God                       |
| 3. The family/household of God    | 13. The branches of the Vine                 |
| 4. The body of Christ             | 14. The building of God                      |
| 5. The bride of Christ            | 15. The field of God                         |
| 6. The temple of God              | 16. The holy nation of God                   |
| 7. The flock of the Good Shepherd | 17. The royal & holy priesthood of God       |
| 8. The chosen/elect of God        | 18. The special people of God                |
| 9. The holy-ones/saints of God    | 19. The heirs of God/joint heirs with Christ |
| 10. The faithful of God           | 20. The city of God                          |

- What exactly are these twenty descriptions describing?
- How does this one catholic and apostolic church manifest itself in time and space (visibly)?
- Is this the church that Jesus Christ is building? See Matthew 16:13-19

**Turn to 1 Timothy 3:14-15 - consider how the church is described here...**

**1. The HOUSEHOLD of God**

- God's Dwelling Place
- God's Family

**2. The Church OF the Living God**

- The Originator and Owner = the triune God

**3. The PILLAR of the TRUTH**

- As it relates to God's Inspired Revelation (to whom is the Word given?)
- As it relates to the Proclamation of the truth (by whom is the Word officially proclaimed?)
- As it relates to Organic Organization (where else do we find this?)
- As it relates to Protection from error (Matthew 18:17-18)
- "Our own relationship to God and His truth is in mortal danger if church does not occupy its intended place in our lives." (27)

**4. The MAINSTAY of the Truth**

- The gates of hell will not prevail against her.

### Application:

1. Why is it important to remember that the church in Scripture is not a building, a denomination, or an activity, but rather is a group of people? What are the dangers of forgetting this?
2. Is the church as important to you as it is to the Lord?
3. Is it possible to move closer to God and farther away from His church?
4. How can you make sure that the church holds its rightful place in your lives and ministries?
5. Are there ways that you should change and improve your relationship to Christ's church?

### Four Quotes from Church History

"But because it is now our intention to discuss the visible church, let us learn from the simple title 'mother' how useful, indeed how necessary, it is that we should know her. For there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast.... Furthermore, away from her bosom one cannot hope for any forgiveness of sins or any salvation, as Isaiah and Joel testify." (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Bk. 4.1.4, John Calvin, 1559)

We believe, since this holy congregation is an assembly of those who are saved, and outside of it there is no salvation, that no person of whatsoever state or condition he may be, ought to withdraw from it, content to be by himself; but that all men are in duty bound to join and unite themselves with it; maintaining the unity of the Church; submitting themselves to the doctrine and discipline thereof; bowing their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ; and as mutual members of the same body, serving to the edification of the brethren, according to the talents God has given them. And that this may be the more effectually observed, it is the duty of all believers, according to the Word of God, to separate themselves from all those who do not belong to the Church, and to join themselves to this congregation, wheresoever God has established it, even though the magistrates and edicts of princes were against it, yea, though they should suffer death or any other corporal punishment. Therefore all those who separate themselves from the same or do not join themselves to it act contrary to the ordinance of God. (*The Belgic Confession*, Art. 28, 1561)

[Outside the Church of God There Is No Salvation] But we esteem fellowship with the true Church of Christ so highly that we deny that those can live before God who do not stand in fellowship with the true Church of God, but separate themselves from it. For as there was no salvation outside Noah's ark when the world perished in the flood; so we believe that there is no certain salvation outside Christ, who offers himself to be enjoyed by the elect in the Church; and hence we teach that those who wish to live ought not to be separated from the true Church of Christ. (*The Second Helvetic Confession*, chpt. 17, 1566)

The visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation. (*The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 25.2, 1646)

See also:

**The Westminster Confession of Faith –[Chapter 25, Of the Church](#)**