

CHURCH STUDY

The church is the body of Christ. God's church is not a building and it is not instituted by man, but by God. The church is precious to God because it is God's family. God is our Father, we are brothers and sisters. The members of the church function interdependently like the parts of a human body. God cares about the unity of the church and warns against division. Because of these truths, connecting with the body is our priority and lifestyle as a Christian.

OPENING QUESTION: Why is the church important to God?

1. The Head and the Body of Christ (*Colossians 1:15-19*)

- What is the "body" of Christ? Who is the "head" of the body, the one mediator to God?
- How essential is the church to our Christianity and our relationship with God?
 - The church is not a man-made organization—it is a God-made organism.
 - A right relationship with God = a right relationship with the body = church.
 - God's fullness dwells in Christ; we live that out as his body.
- Is the church a building?
 - The Greek word for church is "ekklesia" which literally means 'the called out' – called out of darkness (sin) and called out of the world to live like Christ.
 - "Church" in the Bible never refers to a building; it refers to people.

2. The Foundation and the Family of God (*Ephesians 2:19-21*)

- What analogy does Paul use to describe the church?
 - God is our Father; this makes us brothers and sisters... we all have the same Father!
- Who/what is the church built on?
 - Who: Christ is the "cornerstone" that the church aligns everything to.
 - What: The only true church foundation is the Word of God only – as taught by the apostles and prophets in the New Testament.

3. The Body Members (*1 Corinthians 12:12-27*)

- How does someone become a member of the body?
 - We are "baptized into the body of Christ," the church (*v.13 and Romans 6:3-4*).
 - Baptism is when we become a Christian, a son of God, and at that same point in time we become the church— members of the body and the family of God.
- How would you describe relationships in the body of Christ?
 - (*v. 15-21*) Essential: Every part of the body is needed, whether visible or not.
 - No one else is like you and can fill the needs around you like you can.
 - (*v. 21*) Interdependent: we need the body and the body needs us.
 - Only together with the other parts of the body we can be connected to God. We are not individually attached to the head!
 - We don't typically say to each other: "I don't need you!" But we can do that with our actions by not reaching out to help or receive help.
 - (*v. 25*) Unified: there is no division in the body
 - (*v. 26*) Connected: we have equal compassion and concern for each other
 - Equal concern: See a need; meet a need
 - *Analogy*: Thumb hit by a hammer: every body part feels hurt

4. One Body or Many?

- How many bodies does Jesus have?
 - *1 Corinthians 12:12-13* What does Paul teach about the "one body"?
 - *Ephesians 4:3-6* What does Paul say about unity and the "one body"?
 - *Romans 12:4-5* What does it mean that "we belong to one another"?
- What causes divisions in the body?

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- *1 Corinthians 1:10-13* Following personalities (“Peter, Paul, Apollos...”)
 - *Matthew 15:6-9* Following traditions from church leaders and their writings
 - Examples: Lutheran from Martin Luther, Methodist from John and Charles Wesley, Presbyterian from John Calvin and John Knox, Mormon from Joseph Smith, Catholic from equating the authority of church tradition with the Bible
 - *Romans 14:1ff* Emphasizing matters of opinion; moralizing political/social positions
 - *Principle:* Value unity over opinions in “disputable matters”
 - *Principle:* Read the Word of God for what God says within context
 - *Principle:* Where the Bible speaks, remain silent. Where the Bible is silent, you may speak.
 - What is the church called in the Bible?
 - *Matthew 16:18* “I will build my church”
 - *Romans 16:16* “the churches of Christ”
 - There are other names in the Bible... the point is the church belongs to no man
 - Is any church the only church?
 - *Principle:* Christians only, not the only Christians; balance conviction with humility
 - Expecting obedience to Christ’s teachings does not equate to self-righteousness
 - Jesus expected followers to align their life and doctrine to his Word (*1 Timothy 4:16*)
5. The Priority of the Church (*Hebrews 10:23-25*)
- Why is it so important to be connected to the body?
 - Fellowship keeps us unswerving in our commitment (v. 23) and encouraged (v. 24)
 - How can you stay connected to the body?
 - (v.24) Come to the meetings of the Body “*considering how*” we may meet others’ needs. If everyone comes giving, everyone goes away well fed. Ask people what you can pray for them for. As God answers our prayers, we grow in unity.
 - (v.25) Make meeting with the body your “*habit*” and priority! Do not miss church even when you travel!
 - *Analogy:* We don’t just check in with our family once a week, but at every opportunity! Opportunities to meet with the body include Sundays, midweek services, devotionals, house church services, Bible Talks, retreats, seminars, discipling times, etc.
 - Is there any change you need to make in your priorities to obey this scripture?
 - What will you do this week to be connected to the body?
 - What commitments need to change in your life to align your priorities with God’s?