

## LESSON X

# **The Church**

## CHAPTER I

### THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

Many people have a wrong conception of what the Church is. The Church, negatively, is not a body that exists for social or political motives. Neither is it a sect or an institution founded by man, or is it just an earthly building or gathering. We are left in no doubt whatsoever regarding the nature of the Church, since the Bible talks very clearly about what the Church is.

The Church is composed of a special kind of people. The Church is made up of saved people. We read in Acts chapter 2, verse 47, that the Lord adds those who are being saved to the Church. So we understand that the Church is a body of people who are saved. We have studied, before, regarding Salvation. We know that the saved or those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ and have decided to obey His Word. We have also studied that Salvation begins with faith in Christ, and repentance of our sin, and being immersed in the waters of baptism, to symbolize the death, burial and Resurrection of our Lord. When these terms of Salvation are met, God grants us His Salvation and adds us to His Body, His Church. Thus we can define the Church as the community of the saved or the community of all these who have been regenerated by faith in the Lord, and by obedience to Him. One good definition is, "The Church is the automatic fellowship of all those who have obeyed from the heart the Gospel of Christ." (William Gulick: Know Your Bible Tract Series). In this definition 'automatic' refers to obedience that begins when a person is baptized. So we come into the Church immediately when we are baptized for the remission of sins. (Acts 2:38). Again, by baptism we come into Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:27). And as John said in chapter 3 verse 5, we are, therefore, members of God's family (Kingdom of God), being born again.

We need to realize that this Church, therefore, is not of earthly institution. It is on earth made up of earthly people, but it was instituted by God Himself, who has rule over it. Therefore Jesus said in Matthew 16:17 & 18 that He would build His Church and even the powers of death shall not prevail against it. The Bible says that the Church is the Body of Christ; Christ Himself being the foundation (I Corinthians 3:11). Colossians 1:18 says that Christ is the head of the Church.

In understanding what the Church is, it is sometimes necessary to know how the Church began. Despite the fact that we do find words related to Church in the Old Testament, yet the Church itself originated only after the death of Christ. Christ promised that the Church would come, speaking in terms of the Kingdom of God. On the day of Pentecost which was approximately fifty days after the Resurrection of Christ and about ten days after the Ascension, the Apostles, obeying Christ's Command were together in Jerusalem. While they were in an Upper Room the Holy Spirit descended on them in a visible and audible manner. There were tongues of fire and the sound of a loud rushing wind. As a result these twelve men began to

speak in other languages. Many people heard the Gospel in their own language and as a result wanted to obey God. Peter acting as spokesman told them that if they repent and were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, they would get forgiveness of sins and the gifts of God's Holy Spirit. More than three thousand obeyed the Gospel in this way, and became the first group to make up God's Church. So the Church really began on the day of Pentecost, when people obeyed the Gospel of Jesus Christ through the preaching of these Apostles.

The Church continued in this manner through the preaching of the Apostles. Groups or congregations of the Church were formed in various cities of the New Testament world. After the death of the Apostles, the writing of the Apostles were available for instructions. Later these were put together to comprise the New Testament and was the chief source of instruction for the Church.

Through the ages the New Testament has continued. Many new institutions have come into being, calling themselves the Church. Many apostasies have risen in the name of the Church. But for the person who wishes to search for God's Church there are the marks of identification given in the New Testament. We can know whether we truly belong to God's Church or not, or whether any congregation is really part of God's Church or not, by seeing whether they follow God's plan and pattern for His Church, as given in the New Testament.

We know that God's plan and pattern has never been changed. Though times and circumstances are changed, God's basic plan remains unchanged, because He is an unchanging God. We see His Word today as relevant and therefore His plan for the Church is relevant. It is our duty to know God's Church and be a part of it.

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## CHAPTER II

### THE FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

By function, we mean the purpose for the Church's existence. Some of this could be understood by the meaning of the Greek word from which 'Church' was taken. The Greek word for 'Church' is **Ekklesia** (transliterated). This word means 'a called out assembly'. Therefore it can readily be seen that the Church is made up of people who are called out of a world of sin to live lives that are different from the world, and pleasing to God and consequently to live only for Christ.

The New Testament teaches that the Church is the agency on earth through which Christ makes the Gospel known to others. Or putting it simply, the primary purpose for the Church in the world is to teach the Gospel to men everywhere. We can see this in what is called the Great Commission. In Matthew's Gospel chapter 28 verses 19 & 20, Christ commissioned His disciples. And the commission falls on us even today. "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them

to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” (Matthew 28:19 & 20). So the people who make up the Church are commissioned to spread the teaching of the Gospel to all the world. We can see this also in other Scriptures. We can read in I Timothy 3:15, that the Church is the pillar and ground of the truth of the Gospel. Further we could see a record of the early Church in the book of Acts concerning this purpose of Evangelism. It is further understood from a standpoint of reason. God has made us His children through the blood of Jesus Christ. We are to serve Him. Our greatest service to Him would be to proclaim to others what He has done for us. As others hear it they could be converted and in turn tell other people about Salvation. So the on going of the Church is ensured by the working out of the primary purpose of God’s Church.

The Church has another purpose regarding its own members. It is the duty of every member to be concerned about the needs both material and spiritual of other members. In this way the Church fulfills its role as a brotherhood or a fellowship of people who love God and love each other. We find examples of this as in the book of Acts chapter 6 where the Church was concerned about the needs of widows. We also read of the Apostle Paul in Galatians chapter 2 verse 10, being mindful of the needs of those within the Church, but also of the needs of those within the Church, but also of the needs of those who are poor and downtrodden in general. But care should be taken not to make this the sole purpose for the Church’s existence.

The Church also exists to provide Christian fellowship for each other member. This is in keeping with the concern we have for each other. Spiritually, fellowship helps us to stand firm in the Truth. It helps us to admonish each other and help each other with spiritual problems. We have worship in corporate forms as congregations for this purpose. We cannot live successful Spiritual lives being isolated. Togetherness or fellowship helps the member of God’s Church to strengthen each other and to be strengthened.

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### **CHAPTER III**

#### **THE CHURCH – ITS ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION**

The Church is a Divine institution. It is founded upon Christ. Christ is its Head. It is made up of people who are saved by the blood of Christ and who have the hope of one day being with God. Yet, because it still is on the earth it is imperative that there be regulations to order the efficient fulfilling of God’s purposes by His Church. There regulations and ordinances are given to us by God in His Word. The early Apostles, inspired by God, instituted the practices of the Church and we have them for examples. Furthermore, writers of the New Testament, like Paul, were further inspired by God, to write down what God wanted as proper living by His Church.

Now this brings a very important matter into focus. Since God has spoken to us in His Word, and since God has revealed the pattern for His Church in the New Testament, then it is

definitely unnecessary, and consequently unscriptural, for man to make his own system of Church laws. God is our authority. His Word therefore is binding. And His Word concerning His Church is binding on us even today, as it was when it was first given. There are matters in the Church that do pertain to opinion. In such matters man's Christian opinion becomes valid. And this opinion might change from congregation to congregation. But where the Bible has found it necessary to speak in matters of Church doctrine, in particular matters of Church life, then we cannot add to it or subtract. We need to keep this clearly in mind, that the pattern for God's Church has been given to us in His Word. We could see this in many of the principles governing the Church. In Matthew's Gospel chapter 16:16 we read that Peter proclaimed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God and Christ in reply said that upon that statement of Peter would the Church be founded. II Timothy 3:16 & 17 says that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God to help make man perfect or pleasing in God's sight. Therefore in the Church for a man to be pleasing in God's sight he takes the Scripture as his basis of living the Christ-filled life.

**The Name of the Church:** A name is very important. Though we say, 'a rose would be a rose' regardless of what we call it, yet for somebody who never knew what a rose looked like, only its name could be its manner of identification. In the same way, since the Church is placed in a world full of evil and sin, the first identification mark, its name, should not be distorted. And the Word of God has given us various names pertaining to His Church. It is called 'the Church of God' (Acts 20:28). 'The Church of the Living God' (I Timothy 3:15). 'The Body of Christ' (Colossians 1:24). 'The Church of Christ' (Romans 16:16) and 'The Church of the First Born' (Hebrews 12:23). All these names honor God. All these names show ownership. And since the ownership of the Church belongs to Jesus Christ, the Church wears and should always wear His name.

The word Church occurs in the New Testament 114 times. And in 85 times out of the 114, it refers to a local congregation of God's Church. This means that in a town or a city there could be groups of faithful believers who make up His Church. These groups are called congregations. And these congregations too can be identified by their wearing the proper name of the Church. Similarly, the person who belongs to Christ, wears Christ's name to honor and glorify Him. The name 'Christian' means belonging to Christ, or a follower of Christ. To belong to Christ and not wear His Name cannot be right. We read in Acts 11:26 that the disciples were called Christians for the first time in the city of Antioch. Our concern should be to wear the name that most honors our Lord.

**Church Administration and Church Officers:** The New Testament Church was made up of people who were saved by the blood of Christ (Acts 2:47). So this is the only rule of membership. **Membership depends on Salvation.** In the eyes of God Church membership and salvation are synonymous. So for a person to belong to the Church of Jesus Christ he simply needs to come to Christ, believing that He is God's Son, and acting upon this belief in obedience. This obedience could be termed in terms of repentance and being baptized in the waters of immersion, upon confessing that Christ is God. These are the terms for Salvation as given to us in the Scripture and these are the conditions for Church membership. There is no more need for the Church membership. There is no more need for the Church to lay any earthly barriers to

Church membership. Similarly the Church should never relax on these terms of Church membership which are the terms of Salvation.

Now the Government of the Church in the New Testament was limited to local congregations. When the Bible talks about administration of the Church it talks about administration for local congregations. It follows then that there can be no overall control of the Church beyond that of the local Church's administration. There can be no overall hierarchy and it is entirely unscriptural to have any ecclesiastical organization beyond that of the local Church. So when we find Churches with area officers or district officers, then this is definitely beyond the teaching of the Scriptures. The Scripture only teaches of officers in a local congregation.

Christ is the Head of the Church Universal. And therefore, He is Head of every local congregation. But within the local membership the Church has as Officers primarily elders and deacons. An elder is a Scriptural overseer for the local congregation. In I Timothy chapter 3, verse 1-13 we can read concerning the duties and qualifications of elders and deacons. Again we find these duties and qualifications in Paul's instructions to Titus, in Titus chapter 1. The elders and the deacons are the only Church officers present today in God's Church. Together with these are the evangelists who proclaim the Word of God. An evangelist has the same sort of responsibility as an elder has though he is usually one who has set himself apart only for the purpose of the proclamation of the Word of God.

The word 'elder' in the New Testament is used synonymously with Bishop. Another word for elder in the New Testament is the word 'Presbyter'. All these words mean the same thing. A congregation is supposed to have more than one elder, always in plurality. Their task is to oversee the spiritual aspect of Church life and to feed the flock (Acts 20:28). There is no instance in the New Testament Church where a Bishop was considered to be head over more than one local congregation. In fact early Church history, i.e., apart from the New Testament also does not indicate that this was allowed. When it did start, we find that troubles arose in the Church and the Church began its pathway to apostasy. The practice of having a Bishop over more than one congregation is definitely unscriptural.

When the Church was new and the apostles were alive then the Church did have together with the elders and deacons, the apostles and some prophets to do the work of the establishing of the Church. But we know from the Scripture that the Apostles no longer exist and so the office of Apostleship does not exist today. We know also that the particular office of a prophet has ceased to exist and so the Church officers that are valid in today's Church, according to the Scriptures, are elders and deacons.

It is the duty of elders to see that the Word of God is proclaimed, in its truth. It is their duty to teach a local congregation to finance itself. The Bible talks about local congregations in Antioch taking care of those who were in need in Jerusalem. This proves that local congregations were taught to give and help others. "The Lord loveth a cheerful giver" the Bible says (II Corinthians 9:7), and it is the duty of every member in God's Church to help provide for its maintenance.

**The Ordinances of God's Church:** The Scriptures only speak of two ordinances and they are Christian baptism and the Lord's Supper. Christian baptism is immersion or the burial in water of the repentant sinner. He rises from this water to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4). Therefore baptism is of utmost importance in the Church. Baptism, however, can only be according to scriptural lines, that is, in response to repentance and belief (which implies an adult), and because the person wants to be one with Christ. To baptize only for Church membership as an entry to a physical organization is wrong. Baptism is administered as part of God's plan of Salvation and consequently a simultaneous entry into the Church of Jesus Christ.

The other Church ordinance, the Lord's Supper was instituted by Christ Himself just before His betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane. We find in I Corinthians chapter 11 verse 28 that the early Church observed this institution every Lord's Day. We can also read in Acts 27 that they gathered together on the first day of the week. This does not imply that we have the privilege of choosing which first week-day in the month, but rather it simply states the fact that they gathered on the first day of every week. It is wrong according to God's Word to have the Lord's Supper less times than this. The practice of certain religious organizations to have monthly or annual Lord's Suppers can never be pleasing in God's sight. The Lord's Supper on the Lord's Day is to honor our Lord and to show forth His death till He comes again (I Cor. 11:23-30).

It is the early Church's duty to gather together every first day of the week to meet the Lord around His Table (Lord's Supper); to exhort men to repentance and baptism; and to praise Him for all His goodness to mankind. Christian worship is essential and more so as a corporate event every Lord's Day. The Church that does not promote Christian worship every Lord's Day is not fulfilling the Lord's command, as given by the example of the early Church.

A greater understanding of our Lord's Church could be had by reading the New Testament in a careful manner. And learning for oneself what the Bible says concerning the Church. Let us not forget though that the Church has as its foundation and head Jesus Christ. Let us not forget that the Church is God's new Kingdom of life bought by the blood of Christ Himself. Peter tells us in his Epistle I Peter 2:5 that the Church is like a Spiritual Temple built up with living stones; it is made up of saved people. And with Christ as its Head and the New Testament as its means of knowing what is life should be, the Church of Jesus Christ on earth can be a powerful, Spiritual force. It is God's new creation.

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### **ARE YOU A MEMBER OF GOD'S CHURCH?**

This lesson would have shown you that the Bible speaks only of **ONE** church. This is a Biblical fact that cannot be contradicted. Hence it stands to reason that you are either a member of God's Church or not.

You can know for sure if you are a member of God's Church by checking yourself on the Bible's qualifications for church membership:

Have I believed in Christ as God's Son (Mark 16:6)? Have I obeyed in repentance, (Acts 17:30); confession (Matt. 10:32); and baptism (Gal. 3:27)? Do I know that salvation and Church membership are the same? (Acts 2:38), (Acts 2:47).

If you have followed God's Word in these things, then you are part of the Church of Christ. You can then check your local Church on these things:

- Does it wear and honor the name of Christ alone?
- Does it require rules of membership according to the Bible alone?
- Does it limit itself to the Bible ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper?
- Is its preaching centered on Christ?
- Does it follow, for all matters of faith and practice, the teaching of the New Testament, or something else?
- And, is its head Christ or someone on earth? (Col. 1:18).

In this way you can be sure of your own Spiritual status, and the position of your local church. Be sure that you are part of God's Church. God will never be pleased with man-made organizations that are used as a substitute for Christ's Church. For as Ephesians 5:25 tells us, Christ loved the Church and gave His life for it.

Now, if you do not have a Spiritual Church in your area, then it is your duty to gather together those, who, like you, have obeyed Christ, and to join with them in worship. This will make you a congregation of God's Church and you will be obeying His Word. God will surely bless you for being faithful to Him in all things.

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Name:.....

Student No.....

Grade.....

## QUESTIONS ON LESSON X

### THE CHURCH

**Note:** Answers to the questions below are found in the lesson material. Read the lesson carefully before answering. Try to answer in your own words, as much as possible. Wherever necessary, just fill in the blanks, or choose the correct word. Print out this page if you like. If you wish to send in the answers or to write further comments, or ask any questions yourself, do so on a separate sheet of paper and put your name and student number in a prominent place.

### CHAPTER I

#### THE CHURCH – ITS NATURE AND FUNCTION

1. Give a good definition of the Church.

2. Fill in the blanks:
- a) The Church is made up of \_\_\_\_\_ people.
  - b) The Church was instituted by \_\_\_\_\_.
  - c) The Church is the \_\_\_\_\_ of Christ.
  - d) \_\_\_\_\_ is the foundation of the Church.
  - e) \_\_\_\_\_ is the head of the Church.
  - f) The Church began on the Day of \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Where can we find a pattern for the Church? In other words, where can you search to find details of the Church and instruction for the Church?

## **CHAPTER II**

### **THE FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH**

1. Why does the Church exist? Give its primary purpose and other functions.



5. Are you a member of God's Church, or are you a member of an earthly Church? Give reasons for your answers.

6. You should be a member of God's Church! We can help you. Do you want to be part of God's Church?

Send answer sheets to:

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