

**Twelve Lessons**

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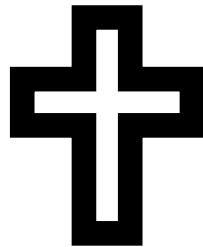
***The Doctrine of the Church***

*Compiled and Written*

*by*

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## **THE NATURE, ORIGIN, AND FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH – LESSON 1**

### **Introduction:**

#### **Lesson Goals:**

1. To study the character of the Church in her symbols.
2. To investigate life of the Church as an organism.
3. To examine the beginning of the Church.

#### **Definitions of Important Terms and/or Phrases:**

1. Ekklesia – Throughout the Greek world and right down to New Testament times (compare Acts 19:39), ekklesia was the designation of the regular assembly of the whole body of citizens in a free city-state, "called out" (Greek ek, "out," and kalein, "to call") by the herald for the discussion and decision of public business. (International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia).
2. Household – Household is also used in a spiritual or symbolic sense. United by God's election and salvation through Jesus Christ, Christians are included in God's household of faith (Gal 6:10; Eph 2:19). (Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary).
3. Foundation – The strong, stable base on which a building is built. Jesus talked figuratively about foundations in the Sermon on the Mount, teaching that believers should build their faith on the strong foundation of practicing His teachings (Matt 7:24-27). The apostle Paul also referred to Christ as a foundation for believers (1 Cor 3:11). (Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary).

**I. THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH** – I Peter 2:1-5; Ephesians 2:19-22; I Corinthians 3:16 – The church is important. The importance of the church is not based primarily on what it does, but upon what it is. A right understanding of the nature of the church will give an honest Christian good reason to support his local church. Your church should be important to you because it is important to Christ. The Bible declares in Ephesians 5:25, "...Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." Paul used the Greek word "agape" here. It is the word used to describe the love of God for His only begotten Son, John 17:26. It is the word used to describe the essential nature of God. I John 4:8 – "...God is love." It means (1) A deep and constant concern for the welfare of another (2) The unselfish devotion of the best interests of another (3) A readiness to serve another with no thought of personal profit. It is reasonable to think that Christians would love the church as Christ does.

#### **A. HOW DOES CHRIST LOVE THE CHURCH?**

1. Christ loves the church sacrificially, giving His life for it. Ephesians 5:25 – "*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also love the church, and gave himself for it.*"
  - a. Christ gave all that He had for the church. Matthew 13:44 – "*Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath and buyeth that field.*" We are the treasure!
  - b. Acts 20:28 – "*Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.*"
  - c. I asked, "How much do you love me, Lord?" and He said, "This much," and he lifted up his arms and died.
2. Christ loved the church purposefully, to cleanse and to sanctify it. Ephesians 5:26-27 – "*That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.*"
  - a. Christ is cleansing His church through the ministry of His Word. John 15:3 – "*Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.*"
  - b. The church today is not perfect; it has spots and wrinkles. Spots are caused by defilement on the outside, while wrinkles are caused by decay on the inside.
  - c. James 1:27 – "*Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*"
3. Christ loved the church profitably. It is nourished by feeding on Him. Ephesians 5:29-30 – "*For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.*" If we are really His, we will love the church as Christ loves it!

#### **B. THE CHURCH IS A LOCAL BODY.**

1. Our English word "church" is the translation of a Greek word, "ekklesia." It means "a called out

assembly.” The word is used with both a secular and a religious application. The word “ekklesia” is used 115 times in the Greek New Testament with primary reference to the local congregation of believers. At least 90 times the word refers to a local church. Three times the word has an institutional meaning. The term is in the plural 35 times.

2. Christians should not become confused about the teaching of an invisible, universal church. This is a spiritual body made up of all those who are saved, but this body is distinct from membership in a church.
3. The term “church” should not be applied to that spiritual body. That body is the family of God, made up of all the children of God, but it is not the church.
  - a. The family of God is that group of redeemed from all generations whether or not they ever join a church.
  - b. The church is a particular congregation of Christians who have identified themselves by union as the body of Christ in their particular locality. The emphasis of the New Testament is on the local congregation.

### **C. THE CHURCH IS A SPIRITUAL BODY.**

1. The church is different from all other organizations in the world. The church may be organized with a membership roll, officers, a time and place of meeting, and a planned program to follow; but it is more than an organization. It is a spiritual organism.
2. The church is “The Body of Christ.” Colossians 1:18 – *“And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.”*
3. As a spiritual body, the church is subject to spiritual error. I Peter 2:1 – *“Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings”* The church is to take care to rid itself of all ill will and deceit which will mar its fellowship.
  - a. As a spiritual body, the church must grow on a spiritual diet. I Peter 2:2 – *“As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.”* As we grow in the Word, we find that the Word contains meat as well as milk, and the Word of God remains our spiritual diet. Hebrews 5:14 – *“But strong meat belongeth to them that are full of age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”*
  - b. As a spiritual body, the church performs a spiritual ministry. I Peter 2:5 – *“Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.”*
4. The sacrifice of the believer-priest is prayer, praise, and our bodies.
  - a. Hebrews 13:15 – *“By him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.”*
  - b. Romans 12:1 – *“I beseech ye therefore, brethren, by the mercies God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”* The church is more than an institution, more than an organization. The church is a living spiritual body with a spiritual ministry to perform.

### **D. THE CHURCH IS A HOLY BODY.**

1. Every born again member of the church shares a mutual citizenship and each one belongs to the household of God. Ephesians 2:19 – *“Now, therefore, ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.”*
2. There is a divine person living in the church. Each member of the church is indwelt by the Spirit of God. I Corinthians 3:16 – *“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”*
  - a. The members indwelt by the Holy Spirit form a glorious temple where God dwells in a special way by His Holy Spirit.
  - b. Ephesians 2:22 – *“In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.”*
3. The church is an important body.
  - a. The Holy Spirit indwells permanently in each Christian and the corporate body of Christians in the church. The church is the dwelling place of God.
  - b. It is possible to desecrate the temple of God, the congregation of believers. The person who ruins one of God’s churches will be ruined by God. That solemn warning calls for a guard against anything that disrupts the fellowship, weakens the witness, dilutes the doctrine, or wounds the spirit of one of God’s churches.
  - c. God’s temple is sacred to Him. Each member of the church, as part of God’s temple, is important to Him. Take care of your attitude and conduct toward any of God’s churches.

## **WHAT MAKES A CHURCH?**

Not soft seats and subdued lights  
but strong, courageous leadership.  
Not the sweet tones of the organ  
but the loving, caring persons, that  
somehow reflect the Christ.  
Not tall towers with chimes and bell,  
but a lofty vision of its people.  
Not a big budget, but big hearts in  
big people who serve and sacrifice.  
Not the large membership, but God's  
presence and direction and power.  
Not the amount of money received,  
but the amount of service rendered  
in Jesus' name.  
Not what it has done in the past,  
but what it is doing now and will  
do tomorrow.

**II. THE ORIGIN OF THE CHURCH** – Matt. 16:18 – When was the church instituted? Some hold that the church began on the day of Pentecost. There is not the slightest reference anywhere in the Bible that Pentecost was “the birthday of the church.” The New Testament Church was fully organized before the day of Pentecost. (1) They had a place of meeting (Acts 1:13), (2) They had a church roll (Acts 1:5), (3) They had a business meeting (Acts 1:15-26), (4) They observed the church ordinances (John 4:1-2 and Matthew 26:26-29), (5) They were instructed in church discipline (Matthew 18:15-18), (6) They had a treasurer (John 13:29), (7) They had already received the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20). The New Testament Church was instituted during the personal ministry of Jesus. (Matthew 16:18) *“Upon this rock I will build my church.”* Jesus began assembling the church while He was here and He has continued it ever since. A New Testament Church is a local congregation of baptized believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, meeting together to carry out the Great Commission.

### **A. WHY WAS THE CHURCH INSTITUTED?**

1. The church was instituted to be a depository of the truth of God in Jesus Christ. I Timothy 3:15 – *“But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”* The church is the pillar and ground (buttress) of the truth. This literally means “the church is to support and maintain the truth in all the opposition to it.”
2. The local New Testament church is built upon the Lord Jesus Christ who is the truth. John 14:6 – *“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth ...”*
  - a. According to I Timothy 4:1, some local churches do turn from the truth and compromise their ministry. *“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.”*
  - b. Sometimes pastors must take a militant stand against sin and apostasy. This does not make them popular but it does please the Lord.
3. The church was instituted to be God's agency for missionary evangelism.
  - a. The church has been given spiritual power in the person of the Holy Spirit. Acts 1:8 – *“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”*
  - b. The church has been commissioned to be the witness of Christ all over the world. Matthew 28:19-20 – *“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...”*
  - c. “We’ve a story to tell to the nations, that shall turn their hearts to the right. A story of truth and sweetness, a story of peace and light.”
  - d. Mark 16:15 – *“And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”*

4. The church was instituted to aid believers to grow in grace. Ephesians 4:11-13 – *“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets: and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”*
  - a. No one grows to spiritual maturity alone.
  - b. Each needs the ministry of every other believer in the body of Christ.

### **III. WHAT KIND OF CHURCH WAS INSTITUTED?**

**A. Jesus instituted a unique church.** The church is different from every other institution or organization in the world because the church belongs to Christ.

**B. Christ is the foundation of the church.** I Corinthians 3:11 – *“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”*

1. The church is the household of God. Ephesians 2:19 – *“Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.”*
2. The people down at the church are God’s family. Be careful how you treat them.

**C. Jesus instituted a regenerate church.**

1. Any church that knowingly accepts unsaved people into its membership, forfeits its right to be called a church.
2. Acts 2:47 – *“Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”*

**D. Jesus instituted a baptized church.** There is not one account in the book of Acts or any of the Epistles of any one being saved and not being baptized.

1. Acts 2:41 – *“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.”* The new birth puts one in the family of God; baptism puts one in the local church.
2. Jesus commanded the continuation of the baptism of converts through all ages. (Matthew 28:19-20)

**E. Jesus instituted a doctrinally oriented church.** A true New Testament church is identified by the doctrines it holds and obeys.

1. Acts 2:42 – *“And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”*
2. I Timothy 4:13 – *“Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.”*
3. Romans 16:17 – *“...mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.”*
4. Teachers of false doctrine are to be accursed. Galatians 1:8 – *“But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.”* The right kind of preaching will get the right kind of people in the church and keep the wrong people out.
5. The doctrine of the church was and is the heart of her spiritual life and service.
  - a. They were charged to *“teach no other doctrine:”* (I Timothy 1:3). The goal was to have a whole congregation reflecting its leadership in doctrine which was uncorrupted.
  - b. A church divided in doctrine can only result in confusion!

**IV. THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH** – I Corinth 3:9-11 – The church is a congregation of “born-again” believers in Christ, meeting together to carry out the great commission. The church is not the building where Christians meet. That is the church house. However, the Bible uses the figure of a building to picture the church. (1) (I Corinthians 3:11) *“For other “foundation” can no man lay than is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”* (2) (I Peter 2:5) *“Ye also as “lively stones”, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.”* (Ephesians 2:21) *“In whom all the building fitly “framed” together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord.”*

We need to remember that of the 115 times the word “church” is mentioned in the New Testament, 90 times it refers to a local congregation of baptized believers covenanted together as the body of Christ, but He is the foundation of this church, and every other New Testament church.

**A. A DIVINE FOUNDATION** – I Corinthians 3:11 – *“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”* Jesus is the foundation of the church. Not just because He gathered the first members and instituted her organization, but because He is the life of the church.

1. The church would still be the church if it had no buildings. But, if it had no faith in Jesus Christ as the divine Son of God, it is not a church regardless of its ornate buildings.
2. What can be said of Jesus as the foundation of the church?

- a. Jesus is the sole foundation of the church. I Corinthians 3:11 – *“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”*
  - (1) Jesus is not one among others in the foundation of the church; He is One separate and apart from all others.
  - (2) The Pope is not a foundation of the church. The head of the Mormon Church is not a foundation. Christ is the ONLY foundation of the church.
- b. Jesus is the living foundation of the church. I Peter 2:4 – *“To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious.”*
  - (1) Jesus is not dead and helpless as the cornerstones of our buildings, but alive and powerful.
  - (2) Many religious leaders today, and many so-called churches reject Jesus as the cornerstone of the church. But, Psalms 118:22 says, *“The stone which the builders refused is become the headstone of the corner.”* Literally “He becomes their Judge.” All who do not receive Christ as their Lord in this life must some day stand before Him as their Judge.
  - (3) John 5:22 – *“The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.”*
3. Jesus is the foundation of the church because of His relationship to God.
  - a. Jesus is one with God. John 1:1 – *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”*
  - b. Jesus is the “only begotten Son of God.” John 1:18 – *“No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.”*
    - (1) Jesus is the same nature as the Father, so he that hath seen Him, hath seen the Father.
    - (2) John 14:9 – *“...he that hath seen me hath seen the Father.”*
4. A foundation is laid with the intention of building a structure upon it. Jesus Christ has been laid as a foundation because of the divine intention to build the church upon Him.

#### **B. ONE FOUNDATION**

1. I Corinthians 3:11 – *“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”*
2. Martin Luther said it well in the great hymn, “The Church’s One Foundation is Jesus Christ Her Lord.”
  - a. Any rejection of Jesus Christ as the foundation of the church is a rejection of Bible revelation and an act of rebellion against God.
  - b. God will not accept as a church any congregation that is built upon any foundation other than the Lord Jesus Christ.
  - c. To those who accept Christ, He is the foundation to build upon. But to those who reject Him, He is a cause for stumbling. I Peter 2:8 – *“And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient; whereunto also they were appointed.”*
  - d. Judgment is appointed for all who neglect or reject Christ, not because God desires it, but because unbelievers choose it. God is *“not willing that any should perish”* (II Peter 3:9). But if a man of his own volition chooses perdition, his way will be one of stumbling and hardship. Proverbs 3:15 – *“Good understanding giveth favour: but the way of transgressors is hard.”* There is no place of satisfaction apart from Christ. It is important that we know Him as the One who is “precious” rather than “the rock of offence.”

#### **C. A SUFFICIENT FOUNDATION**

1. There is a blessed unity which joins those who are built upon this foundation. I Corinthians 3:9 – *“For we are labourers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building.”*
2. Paul’s work as a wise master builder was to lay the foundation of the church at Corinth by preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Others add to the spiritual building by their ministries, but no one can add to the foundation.
  - a. Each builder is to be careful how he builds upon this foundation, because one day his work will be tried by the fire of God’s judgment. (I Corinthians 3:12-15)
  - b. There will be no confusion, disappointment, or cause for shame among those build upon Jesus Christ. I Peter 2:6 – *“Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.”*
  - c. Blessings and confidence awaits those who trust Christ, but shame and misery await those who reject Him.
  - d. Are you saved? If you are saved, are you living worthy of the One who died to save you?
  - e. If you are not saved, now is the time to trust Christ, and become part of the family of God, and be baptized, and become part of the church of Jesus Christ.