



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

CHRISTIAN LIVING

Fellowship and the Church

**Why Christians Need One Another and What It Means to
Belong to Christ's People**

The Short Answer

The church is Christ's people—called to worship, grow, serve, and love one another.

Opening Memory Anchor

The church is Christ's people—called to worship, grow, serve, and love one another.

Part One · 1. What Is The Church? When Many People Hear The Word Church, They Picture A Building. That Language Is Understandable. But The New Testament Meaning Is Much Richer. The Church Is Fundamentally People. Read Matthew 16:13-18. After Peter Confesses Jesus As The Christ, Jesus Says, “I Will Build My Church.” The Church Belongs To Jesus. He Builds It. He Sustains It. He Is Its Lord. A Building May Provide A Useful Place For Christians To Gather. But A Building Is Not What Makes The Church The Church. The People Belong To Christ.

2. WHAT DOES THE WORD “CHURCH” MEAN? The Greek word commonly translated church is *ekklesia*. It refers broadly to an assembly or gathering. Christians should be careful with popular word-study claims. You may sometimes hear that *ekklesia* literally means “the called-out ones.” That can become misleading if an etymology is treated as though it automatically determines how a word functions in every passage. The New Testament uses *ekklesia* for assemblies and, especially, for communities of believers. Its meaning must be learned from context.

3. JESUS BUILDS HIS CHURCH Return to Matthew 16:18. Notice the language: “I will build My church.” The church is not ultimately a human invention. Christians organize congregations, construct buildings, develop ministries, and establish denominations and institutions. Some can be helpful. Some can become unhealthy. But beneath every human structure stands a greater reality: Jesus is gathering a people for Himself. The church does not ultimately belong to a pastor, denomination, board, worship leader, family, donor, or influential members. The church belongs to Jesus.

4. WHO BELONGS TO THE CHURCH? In the fullest spiritual sense, the church consists of those who belong to Jesus Christ. Salvation is not received by joining an organization. It is received through Christ. **READ EPHESIANS 2:1-10, then Ephesians 2:11-22.** People are saved by grace through faith, and the gospel creates a people. **JESUS SAVES PEOPLE. JESUS BRINGS HIS**

PEOPLE TOGETHER. Church participation is a response to salvation. It is not the price of salvation.

5. IS THE CHURCH A BUILDING? Not in the primary New Testament sense. Early Christians frequently gathered in homes. **READ ROMANS 16:3-5.** A congregation meeting in a cathedral, school gym, home, or outdoors can be a church. A building can serve the church. It does not create the church.

6. WHAT IS FELLOWSHIP? Christians often use fellowship to describe spending time together. Those things can genuinely contribute to fellowship. But biblical fellowship is deeper than social interaction. The Greek word often translated fellowship is *koinonia*. Depending on context, it can communicate sharing, participation, partnership, communion, or having something in common. **READ 1 JOHN 1:1-7.** Christian fellowship is rooted first in shared relationship with God through Christ. Christians share Christ.

7. FELLOWSHIP IS MORE THAN FRIENDSHIP Friendship is a wonderful gift. But Christian fellowship can exist even between believers who would not naturally become close friends because fellowship is based on something deeper than compatibility. **READ GALATIANS 3:26-29.** Human distinctions do not determine a believer's standing before God or superiority within Christ's family.

8. THE EARLY CHURCH - ACTS 2

READ ACTS 2:37-47. After Peter proclaims the risen Christ, people repent, receive the message, and are baptized. Then they begin living as a community. Verse 42 highlights four commitments: THE APOSTLES' TEACHING,

FELLOWSHIP, THE BREAKING OF BREAD, and PRAYER. Their shared life also includes generosity, meals, worship, gladness, and concern for one another. The gospel was reshaping an entire community.

9. SHOULD EVERY CHURCH LOOK EXACTLY LIKE ACTS 2? Not necessarily in every detail. Acts describes what happened in the earliest days of the Jerusalem church. We should learn from it without automatically turning every detail into a universal church blueprint. Ask: What happened? What principles does the passage reveal? What does the rest of the New Testament command?

10. WHY DO CHRISTIANS GATHER? Because Christian discipleship includes responsibilities that cannot be practiced alone. Christians are told to love, encourage, serve, forgive, bear burdens, teach, admonish, pray, show hospitality, confess sins, and build one another up. You cannot meaningfully practice “one another” Christianity entirely by yourself.

11. CAN I BE A CHRISTIAN WITHOUT GOING TO CHURCH? A person is saved by Jesus Christ - not by church attendance. There are circumstances in which regular gathering may be extremely difficult. But intentionally following Jesus while permanently rejecting meaningful relationship with His people is difficult to reconcile with ordinary New Testament discipleship. **READ HEBREWS 10:19-25.** The goal is not perfect attendance. The goal is shared Christian life.

12. CHURCH ATTENDANCE AND CHURCH BELONGING ARE NOT EXACTLY THE SAME Someone can attend a church service without actually sharing life with other believers. Gathering matters, but biblical fellowship reaches deeper. The goal is not merely, “Did I attend church?” A better question is, “Am I learning to live as part of Christ's people?”

13. THE CHURCH AS A FAMILY

READ EPHESIANS 2:19 and 1 TIMOTHY 3:14-15. Christians are brothers and sisters. God is Father. Believers belong to His household. Church is not supposed to function merely like an audience gathered around a speaker. It is a household learning to live together under God.

14. THE CHURCH AS THE BODY OF CHRIST READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-27. Paul describes believers as different members of one body. Different believers have different abilities, roles, experiences, personalities, and gifts. Diversity is not a defect in the body. It is part of how God designed it.

15. CHRIST IS THE HEAD

READ COLOSSIANS 1:15-20. Christ is the Head of the body, the church. No human leader occupies Christ's place. Pastors, elders, teachers, and other leaders can be genuine gifts from God, but they remain members of Christ's body. Jesus alone is Head.

16. THE CHURCH AS LIVING STONES READ 1 PETER 2:4-10. Jesus is the living Stone. Believers are living stones being built into a spiritual house. God is joining His people together. The church is not merely a collection of independent Christians who happen to believe similar things.

17. THE CHURCH AS CHRIST'S BRIDE

READ EPHESIANS 5:25-32 and REVELATION 19:6-9. Christ loves the church. Christ gave Himself for the church. The church has enormous problems because it contains imperfect people. But Christ loves His people.

18. THE CHURCH IS IMPERFECT The New Testament letters exist partly because churches had problems: hypocrisy, conflict, complaints, doctrinal controversy, cultural tension, sin, and disagreement. The existence of problems does not automatically prove a congregation is false. But some problems require serious correction.

19. WHAT SHOULD I LOOK FOR IN A HEALTHY CHURCH? No church will be perfect. Look for biblical health. Is Scripture taken seriously? Is Jesus and the gospel central? Is the Bible taught in context? Is salvation presented by grace through faith? Are leaders accountable? Is prayer important? Are people encouraged to grow as disciples? Are baptism and the Lord's Supper practiced faithfully? Is there genuine care? Are

questions allowed? Is money handled responsibly? Are leaders servants rather than celebrities? Ask: Will this community help me faithfully follow Jesus?

20. WHAT DOES THE CHURCH DO WHEN IT GATHERS? The New Testament shows recurring elements: Scripture, teaching, prayer, singing, fellowship, the Lord's Supper, baptism, giving, service, encouragement, and mutual edification. Different Christian traditions arrange these differently. Christian gatherings should point people toward God, His Word, Jesus Christ, the gospel, and faithful life together.

21. WHY DOES TEACHING MATTER?

READ ACTS 2:42 and 2 TIMOTHY 4:1-5. A healthy church should help people understand Scripture rather than become dependent upon a charismatic teacher. Healthy teaching increasingly equips believers to open Scripture themselves.

22. WHY DOES PRAYER MATTER?

READ ACTS 4:23-31 and ACTS 12:1-17. Corporate prayer reminds Christians that the church does not operate merely through planning, money, leadership ability, marketing, technology, or human effort. Christ's church depends upon God.

23. WHY DO CHRISTIANS SING TOGETHER?

READ COLOSSIANS 3:12-17. Congregational singing is not simply a warm-up for the sermon. Songs teach, remind, encourage, and proclaim truth collectively. Individual voices become part of something larger.

24. WHY DO CHRISTIANS TAKE COMMUNION TOGETHER? READ 1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-34 and 1 CORINTHIANS 10:16-17. Communion points believers back toward Christ's death and has a deeply corporate dimension. The Lord's Supper reminds believers that they come to Christ together as people reconciled to God through Him. Christians disagree about important aspects of Communion; those differences deserve treatment in the dedicated 3Nails Communion study.

25. WHY DOES BAPTISM MATTER?

READ MATTHEW 28:18-20. Baptism is deeply personal, but not merely private. It publicly identifies a person with Christ and connects that confession with the community that bears His name. Christians disagree about who should receive baptism, the proper mode, and some aspects of its theological significance; those questions belong in the dedicated 3Nails Baptism study.

26. EVERY CHRISTIAN HAS A PLACE TO SERVE

READ EPHESIANS 4:11-16. Church is not supposed to consist of a small group of professionals doing ministry while everyone else watches. Church leaders equip God's people for works of

service. Much of the church's most important ministry never happens on a stage.

27. FELLOWSHIP INCLUDES GENEROSITY

READ ACTS 4:32-35 and 2 CORINTHIANS 8-9. Christian generosity should be willing rather than manipulated. Churches should never use guilt, fear, promises of guaranteed prosperity, or spiritual pressure to extract money from people. Giving can be worship. Manipulation is not.

28. FELLOWSHIP INCLUDES BEARING BURDENS

READ GALATIANS 6:1-10. Christian community means people do not always have to suffer alone. Bearing a burden may mean praying, listening, bringing a meal, providing practical help, giving financially, sitting with someone grieving, helping someone find professional assistance, or simply remaining present.

29. FELLOWSHIP INCLUDES ENCOURAGEMENT

READ HEBREWS 3:12-14. Biblical encouragement helps people continue trusting and obeying God. A healthy church should increasingly become a community of encouragers.

30. FELLOWSHIP REQUIRES FORGIVENESS

READ COLOSSIANS 3:12-15. Forgiveness does not mean pretending something did not happen, calling evil good, remaining in danger, refusing appropriate consequences, or automatically restoring someone to a position of trust. Forgiveness and reconciliation are related but not identical. Trust may require rebuilding. Safety may require boundaries. Serious wrongdoing may require outside authorities.

31. WHAT IF SOMEONE AT CHURCH HURTS ME? Some church hurt comes from ordinary human weakness and may require grace, conversation, and forgiveness. Other church harm is much more serious: abuse, sexual misconduct, financial exploitation, coercion, spiritual manipulation, cover-ups, threats, or misuse of authority. Serious wrongdoing should not be minimized as merely, "Christians need to forgive each other."

32. FORGIVENESS DOES NOT REQUIRE TOLERATING ABUSE Jesus commands forgiveness. Scripture also condemns evil and calls leaders to accountability. If someone is being abused, manipulated, threatened, sexually exploited, financially exploited, or endangered, protecting the institution's reputation is not the biblical priority. Seek safety. Involve appropriate authorities when laws may have been broken. Seek trustworthy help outside the immediate leadership structure when necessary.

33. WHAT IF I HAVE BEEN HURT BY A CHURCH? Church hurt can affect how a person sees Christian community, pastors, authority, Scripture, and sometimes even God. Healing may require time, distance from an unsafe environment, wise counsel, healthy boundaries, lament, forgiveness, professional help, and eventually experiencing healthier

Christian community. Healing may also include support from a qualified licensed mental-health professional, particularly when church experiences involved abuse, trauma, coercive control, or significant emotional harm. Christ is not identical to the people who represented Him poorly.

34. CHRISTIAN UNITY DOES NOT MEAN CHRISTIANS AGREE ABOUT EVERYTHING

READ EPHESIANS 4:1-6. Unity is not uniformity. Christian maturity includes learning which differences require separation and which require patience.

35. WHAT IF I DISAGREE WITH SOMEONE AT CHURCH? First determine what kind of disagreement it is: gospel, clear biblical teaching, secondary doctrine, church policy, personality, preference, politics, music, or misunderstanding. Different disagreements require different responses.

36. WHAT IF I DISAGREE WITH THE PASTOR? Pastors are not infallible. Neither are church members. Begin with humility. Healthy leadership should not be threatened by sincere biblical questions. Leadership that consistently punishes honest questions, demands unquestioning loyalty, or equates disagreement with rebellion against God deserves serious concern.

37. DO I HAVE TO BECOME A CHURCH MEMBER? The New Testament does not describe modern membership systems in exactly the form many churches use today, but it clearly assumes identifiable communities with leaders, responsibilities, care, discipline, and accountability. A membership commitment may include affirming core beliefs, participating regularly, pursuing Christian conduct and reconciliation, serving and giving as able, receiving appropriate pastoral care and accountability, and contributing to unity and mission. A membership covenant does not give church leaders ownership over a believer's life, conscience, family, finances, or ordinary personal decisions. Christ remains Lord.

38. WHY ARE THERE SO MANY DENOMINATIONS? Christian denominations developed for theological, historical, geographic, cultural, linguistic, governance, worship, and renewal reasons. Differences should be examined carefully rather than either exaggerated or ignored.

39. HOW DO I CHOOSE A CHURCH? Begin with truth rather than convenience. Ask what the church teaches about Scripture, Jesus, salvation, the gospel, leadership, money, failure, protection of vulnerable people, questions, community, and discipleship. Practical

matters matter, but they should not replace theological health.

40. WHAT IF I DON'T FEEL LIKE I FIT IN? Walking into a new church can be uncomfortable. Give relationships time. Attend consistently if the church appears healthy. Introduce yourself. Join a smaller gathering if available. Serve. Ask questions. Learn names. Allow people to know you gradually. Deep fellowship usually develops through repeated presence rather than instant chemistry.

Beginner Review

- 1. The church is fundamentally the _____ who belong to Jesus.**
- 2. Jesus said, "I will build My _____."**
- 3. Christian fellowship is deeper than merely _____ together.**
- 4. Acts 2:42 describes devotion to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and _____.**
- 5. The church is described as the _____ of Christ.**
- 6. Christ - not a pastor - is the _____ of the church.**
- 7. Christians are saved by _____ through faith, not by church attendance.**
- 8. The New Testament contains many "_____ another" commands.**
- 9. Forgiveness does not require tolerating _____.**
- 10. Healthy churches should point people toward _____ rather than creating dependence upon leaders.**

Beginner Review Answers

1. people 2. church 3. socializing 4. prayer 5. body

6. Head 7. grace 8. one 9. abuse 10. Christ

BEGINNER SUMMARY The church is not primarily a building. It is the people who belong to Jesus Christ. Christians are saved by grace through faith in Jesus - not by attending, joining, serving, giving, or participating in a church. But those whom Christ saves are called into life with His people. No church is perfect. Healthy churches remain accountable to Scripture. Healthy leaders point people toward Christ rather than toward themselves. Healthy Christian fellowship helps believers follow Jesus together.

Beginner Memory Anchor

Belonging To A Church Does Not Save Us. Jesus Saves Us. And Jesus Calls Those He Saves Into Life With His People.

Part Two · Want To Go Deeper?

41. THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH AND THE LOCAL CHURCH The New Testament uses “church” for specific local congregations and more broadly for the entire people of Christ. **READ 1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-2 and EPHESIANS 1:15-23.** The universal church should not become an excuse to avoid the local church.

42. VISIBLE CHURCH AND TRUE BELIEVERS Not everyone associated outwardly with a church necessarily belongs inwardly to Christ. **READ MATTHEW 7:21-23.** Church affiliation is not the same thing as salvation. The deeper question is: Do I belong to Christ?

43. KOINONIA - A CLOSER LOOK AT FELLOWSHIP Study **ACTS 2:42, 1 CORINTHIANS 10:16, PHILIPPIANS 1:5, PHILIPPIANS 3:10, and 1 JOHN 1:3.** Biblical fellowship involves shared participation in Christ, the gospel, burdens, resources, mission, and sometimes suffering.

44. THE CHURCH BEGINS WITH JESUS - NOT ACTS 2 ALONE Acts 2 is foundational, but the church cannot be understood apart from Jesus. Jesus gathers, teaches, dies for, rises for, commissions, and pours out the Spirit upon His people.

45. PENTECOST AND THE CHURCH

READ **ACTS 2:1-41.** Christian community is not simply a successful model of human togetherness. It is created by God's saving work and empowered by His Spirit.

46. THE HOLY SPIRIT AND CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

READ **EPHESIANS 4:1-6.** The Spirit creates a people united in Christ. Believers must live consistently with that unity through humility, gentleness, patience, and bearing with one another in love.

47. THE CHURCH AS GOD'S TEMPLE **READ 1 CORINTHIANS 3:16-17 and EPHESIANS 2:19-22.** Believers are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

48. THE CHURCH AS A HOLY NATION AND ROYAL PRIESTHOOD **READ 1 PETER 2:4-10.** God forms a people who display and proclaim His greatness. The church has both identity and mission.

49. THE CHURCH AS A FLOCK

READ JOHN 10:1-18 and 1 PETER 5:1-4. Jesus is the Good Shepherd and Chief Shepherd. Pastors shepherd Christ's sheep. They do not own them.

50. CHURCH LEADERSHIP - ELDERS, OVERSEERS, AND PASTORS Study **ACTS 20:17-35, 1 TIMOTHY 3:1-13, TITUS 1:5-9, and 1 PETER 5:1-5.** Christians disagree about exactly how offices relate, but the New Testament places enormous emphasis on character.

51. LEADERSHIP IS SERVICE

READ MARK 10:35-45. Jesus contrasts worldly domination with kingdom leadership. Christian leadership should increasingly look like service, sacrifice, humility, truth, and care.

52. HEALTHY AUTHORITY AND UNHEALTHY AUTHORITY Healthy church leadership points people toward Jesus, teaches Scripture in context, welcomes sincere questions, accepts accountability, admits mistakes, protects vulnerable people, respects boundaries, equips believers to mature, and seeks restoration when correction is necessary. Unhealthy leadership makes the leader indispensable, uses Scripture to control, punishes reasonable questions, avoids accountability, protects reputation over people, demands inappropriate access to private decisions, equates disagreement with rebellion, creates spiritual dependence, or uses discipline as retaliation. Healthy authority asks: “How can I faithfully help these people follow Jesus?”

53. SUBMISSION TO LEADERSHIP - AND ITS LIMITS

READ HEBREWS 13:7,17 and ACTS 5:27-29. Biblical submission is never unlimited obedience to human beings. No pastor has authority to command sin. No church leader may claim divine immunity from accountability.

54. WARNING SIGNS OF SPIRITUAL ABUSE Warning signs may include leaders who demand unquestioning loyalty, claim criticism of them is criticism of God, isolate members, control personal decisions beyond legitimate guidance, use confidential information as leverage, threaten spiritual consequences for leaving, hide financial information, cover up misconduct, protect powerful people at the expense of victims, discourage appropriate reporting, or treat themselves as spiritually indispensable. Patterns matter.

55. ACCOUNTABILITY SHOULD APPLY TO LEADERS TOO READ 1 TIMOTHY 5:19-22. The passage protects leaders from careless accusation while making clear that leaders are not beyond correction. Truth, evidence, justice, and appropriate process matter.

56. WHAT ABOUT WOMEN IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP? Faithful Christians disagree. Complementarians generally reserve certain governing or

teaching offices to qualified men while affirming extensive ministry by women. Egalitarians generally permit qualified women to serve in all church leadership offices. Major passages include Genesis 1-3, Acts 2, Romans 16, 1 Corinthians 11 and 14, 1 Timothy 2-3, and Galatians 3. This deserves its own careful study and should not be resolved by caricaturing either side.

57. CHURCH GOVERNMENT Major governance models are commonly described as episcopal, presbyterian, and congregational, with considerable variation. Church government matters because authority and accountability matter. No governance model can substitute for godly character.

58. WHAT ARE DEACONS?

READ ACTS 6:1-7 and 1 TIMOTHY 3:8-13. Practical service matters spiritually. Meeting tangible needs is not second-class ministry.

59. SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND THE BODY

READ ROMANS 12:3-8, 1 CORINTHIANS 12, and 1 PETER 4:10-11. Spiritual gifts are resources for serving others, not trophies.

60. DO ALL CHRISTIANS AGREE ABOUT SPIRITUAL GIFTS? No. Christians differ over tongues, prophecy, healing, and the continuation of certain gifts. Whatever position Christians hold, 1 Corinthians insists on love, truth, edification, and order.

61. UNITY AND DIVERSITY IN 1 CORINTHIANS 12 Different parts have different functions. Difference does not imply inequality of worth. This challenges celebrity culture within churches. The most visible people are not necessarily the most important.

62. THE “ONE ANOTHER” LIFE Study JOHN 13:34-35, ROMANS 12:10, GALATIANS 5:13, GALATIANS 6:2, EPHESIANS 4:32, COLOSSIANS 3:16, 1 THESSALONIANS 5:11, JAMES 5:16, and 1 PETER 4:9. These commands reveal what Christian fellowship actually looks like.

63. ACCOUNTABILITY WITHOUT CONTROL Healthy accountability respects appropriate boundaries, points toward Christ, and operates with humility. It does not create dependency upon another person's permission for ordinary adult decisions. Christians belong to one another. They do not own one another.

64. CONFESSION IN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

READ JAMES 5:13-20. Confession can break secrecy and isolation, but wisdom matters. Scripture does not require broadcasting every private struggle to an entire congregation. Serious crimes should not be handled merely as private spiritual matters when reporting is

appropriate or legally required.

65. CHURCH DISCIPLINE

READ MATTHEW 18:15-20 and 1 CORINTHIANS 5. Biblical discipline should seek truth, repentance, protection, restoration, and the integrity of Christ's church. It becomes abusive when used to punish legitimate disagreement, silence whistleblowers, protect leaders, control people, or retaliate against someone for leaving.

66. WHAT DOES HEALTHY CHURCH DISCIPLINE LOOK LIKE? Biblical discipline is corrective, not vindictive. Matthew 18 gives a pattern that may begin privately and involve others if repentance does not occur. First Corinthians 5 shows that persistent serious public sin may require gathered-church action. READ 2 CORINTHIANS 2:5-11. The goal is REPENTANCE, FORGIVENESS, RESTORATION. Healthy discipline seeks to recover people, not destroy them. Cases involving abuse, criminal conduct, credible threats, serious power imbalances, or immediate danger may require safeguards and civil authorities rather than private confrontation. Biblical discipline should never become a mechanism for concealing crime or protecting an institution.

67. MATTHEW 18 - READ IT CAREFULLY Matthew 18:15-20 should not be used simplistically. An abuse victim should not automatically be required to confront an alleged abuser privately. A crime may require civil authorities. A power imbalance may require safeguards. No biblical passage should be weaponized against the vulnerable by ignoring the rest of Scripture.

68. CONFLICT IN THE EARLY CHURCH Acts 6, Acts 15, Galatians, and Philippians show real conflict. Healthy conflict seeks truth without cruelty, unity without pretending, and peace without sacrificing essential doctrine.

69. ACTS 15 - DISAGREEMENT AND DISCERNMENT

READ ACTS 15. There is substantial debate. Testimony is considered. Scripture is brought to bear. A conclusion is reached and communicated. The church did not preserve unity by refusing to discuss theology. Truth mattered.

70. WHEN SHOULD CHRISTIANS SEPARATE?

READ GALATIANS 1:6-9 and ROMANS 14. Wisdom requires distinguishing gospel essentials, important secondary doctrines, matters of wisdom or Christian freedom, and personal preferences. Christians will not always agree about which category an issue belongs in; that requires humility.

71. WHY DENOMINATIONS ARE NOT ALL THE SAME Some denominational differences concern significant theological questions: baptism, Communion, church government, tradition, spiritual gifts, and

leadership. Christians should not pretend these questions are meaningless, but disagreement does not automatically mean everyone outside one tradition is outside Christ.

72. THE CHURCH AND ISRAEL

READ EPHESIANS 2:11-22 and ROMANS 9-11. Christians differ significantly over how Israel and the church relate within God's redemptive plan. Covenant theology commonly emphasizes continuity and the unity of God's redemptive plan. Dispensational traditions generally maintain a stronger distinction between Israel and the church and often expect a distinctive future role for ethnic or national Israel. Supersessionism is commonly used for views in which the church is understood to supersede or fulfill Israel's covenant role, but the term is used in different ways and should not be flattened. These are substantial questions. Romans 9-11 should be studied carefully before constructing conclusions.

73. THE CHURCH AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD The church and the kingdom of God are closely related but should not simply be treated as identical. God's kingdom refers fundamentally to His reign and saving rule. The church consists of people who belong to the King and bear witness to His kingdom.

74. THE CHURCH AND MISSION

READ MATTHEW 28:18-20 and ACTS 1:8. The church does not exist merely to maintain itself. Christ sends disciples to make disciples. A healthy church cares for believers and carries the gospel beyond itself.

75. PARACHURCH MINISTRIES AND INTERCHURCH COOPERATION Christians frequently work together through mission agencies, seminaries, campus ministries, Bible-study ministries, Christian charities, relief organizations, publishing ministries, and Christian media ministries. These can accomplish valuable work. READ 2 CORINTHIANS 8-9. But a Christian ministry should not automatically be confused with the church. A resource cannot fully replace embodied Christian fellowship. A CHRISTIAN MINISTRY CAN SERVE THE

Church Without Replacing The Church.

76. THE CHURCH AND CARE FOR THE VULNERABLE

READ JAMES 1:27, JAMES 2:14-17, and ACTS 6. Christian community should notice people the surrounding culture overlooks.

77. HOSPITALITY AS CHURCH LIFE

READ ROMANS 12:9-13 and 1 PETER 4:7-11. Hospitality does not require a perfect house or elaborate meal. Programs can facilitate community. They cannot manufacture love.

78. THE DANGER OF CHURCH CONSUMERISM Modern church culture can tempt Christians to approach congregations as consumers. Christian belonging eventually asks: How can I serve? The body metaphor assumes contribution.

79. THE DANGER OF CHURCH CELEBRITY CULTURE **READ 1 CORINTHIANS 1:10-17.** Gifted leaders can bless the church enormously. But when a ministry becomes built around the indispensability of one personality, danger increases. Jesus is indispensable. Every other leader is replaceable.

80. "TOUCH NOT THE LORD'S ANOINTED" This phrase is sometimes used to discourage criticism of Christian leaders. Its Old Testament context does not establish a doctrine that pastors cannot be questioned or held accountable. Using biblical phrases to create immunity from accountability is a misuse of Scripture.

81. HOW SHOULD A CHURCH HANDLE MONEY? READ 2 CORINTHIANS 8:16-24. Healthy financial practices may include multiple accountable leaders, clear records, appropriate oversight, reasonable transparency, and safeguards against conflicts of interest. Spiritual trust should not require financial carelessness.

82. CHURCH GROWTH IS NOT ONLY NUMERICAL Numbers can matter because numbers represent people, but numerical size alone cannot measure spiritual health. Biblical maturity also involves truth, love, holiness, discipleship, service, perseverance, generosity, and Christlike character. Do not confuse popularity with faithfulness.

83. WHAT ABOUT ONLINE CHURCH? Technology can be valuable for people who are ill, homebound, traveling, caregiving, temporarily unable to attend, or living where access is difficult. But watching a service is not identical to embodied Christian community. Digital resources can support Christian community; they should not casually replace it when meaningful local fellowship is possible.

84. SMALL GROUPS AND BIBLE STUDIES Small groups can provide space for prayer, questions, Scripture discussion, meals, accountability, and mutual care. They are tools and should serve the church rather than become competing churches within the church.

85. WHEN IS IT APPROPRIATE TO LEAVE A CHURCH? Legitimate reasons may include persistent false teaching on essential doctrine, unrepentant abusive leadership, serious misconduct being covered up, ongoing spiritual manipulation, lack of accountability, pressure to participate in wrongdoing, or unsafe circumstances. Other legitimate reasons include relocation, family needs, language, accessibility, or sincerely held theological convictions. Safety and truth matter more

than preserving appearances.

86. HOW DO I RE-ENTER CHURCH AFTER BEING HURT? Slowly may be okay. Observe how leaders respond to questions, speak about former members, handle disagreement, practice transparency, treat people who cannot benefit the church, respond when important people make mistakes, respect boundaries, and use Scripture. Healthy trust can grow gradually.

87. WHAT IF CHURCH HURT HAS MADE ME QUESTION MY FAITH? Sometimes church hurt shakes the foundations of what a person believes. People sometimes describe this as “deconstruction,” a word used in different ways. Questioning something you were taught is not automatically the same as rejecting Jesus. If a church misused Scripture, examining that interpretation may be necessary. Distinguish JESUS from people who misrepresented Jesus; SCRIPTURE from someone's misuse of Scripture; and THE GOSPEL from a church culture that may have distorted it. Bring questions to God. Read the Gospels. Look carefully at Jesus. Seek mature, trustworthy Christians who are not threatened by honest questions. Truth can withstand examination. Seeking qualified professional help when trauma or abuse has affected emotional or psychological well-being is not a failure of faith and does not replace bringing those wounds honestly before God.

88. THE CHURCH SHOULD MAKE DISCIPLES, NOT DEPENDENTS

READ MATTHEW 28:18-20. Healthy ministry helps people become increasingly mature in Christ. Good leaders should be delighted when believers read Scripture themselves, ask thoughtful questions, learn discernment, develop gifts, serve others, and help other disciples grow.

89. HOW DO WE KNOW A CHURCH IS “BIBLICAL”? Ask specific questions: How is Scripture interpreted? Are passages read in context? Does the church allow Scripture to challenge its traditions? Is difficult Scripture addressed? Are leaders willing to correct themselves? Is the gospel clear? Is Jesus central? “Biblical” should describe actual submission to Scripture, not merely branding.

90. FELLOWSHIP DURING SUFFERING READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:26. When one member suffers, the body suffers. When one member is honored, others rejoice. No member of Christ's body is spiritually irrelevant to the others.

91. FELLOWSHIP ACROSS DIFFERENCES

READ EPHESIANS 2:11-22. The gospel is powerful enough to create fellowship across genuine difference. Christian unity should display something the world cannot explain merely through common interests.

92. THE CHURCH AND POLITICS A church should teach what Scripture teaches about justice, human dignity, truth, sexual morality, care for the vulnerable, authority, life, money, partiality, violence, and neighbor love. But allegiance to a political party must not be made equivalent to allegiance to Jesus. No political party is the church. No nation is the church. No candidate is the Savior.

93. WHEN THE CHURCH FAILS Church history contains extraordinary faithfulness and grievous failure. Christians should not rewrite history to protect the church's reputation. Sin should be named truthfully. Repentance strengthens Christian witness more than denial. The church's failures do not prove Jesus failed. They prove again how desperately His people need Him.

94. WHY JESUS STILL LOVES HIS CHURCH

READ EPHESIANS 5:25-27. Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her. The church is simultaneously deeply loved and still being transformed. That should produce both hope and humility.

95. THE CHURCH IN REVELATION

READ REVELATION 2-3. Jesus sees faithfulness, suffering, compromise, false teaching, love, perseverance, and spiritual complacency. Jesus loves His church enough to correct it.

96. THE BRIDE AT THE END OF THE STORY

READ REVELATION 19:6-9 and REVELATION 21:1-5. Today's church is unfinished. One day Christ's redeemed people will be gathered without sin, division, abuse, death, grief, or competing loyalties.

97. A SIMPLE HEALTHY-CHURCH DISCERNMENT GRID Consider seven areas: **SCRIPTURE** - Is God's Word taught faithfully and in context? **JESUS** - Is Christ central?

GOSPEL - Is salvation clearly presented as God's grace received through faith? **LEADERSHIP** - Are leaders qualified, humble, accountable, and servant-hearted? **COMMUNITY** - Do believers genuinely care for and serve one another?

DISCIPLESHIP - Are people being equipped to grow rather than kept dependent? **MISSION** - Does the congregation look beyond itself toward the gospel and the needs of others?

98. A WEEK OF FELLOWSHIP **DAY 1** - Read Matthew 16:13-18. **DAY 2** - Read Acts 2:37-47. **DAY 3** - Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. **DAY 4** - Read Colossians 3:12-17. **DAY 5** - Read 1 Peter 5:1-5. **DAY 6** - Read Ephesians 4:1-16. **DAY 7** - Read Revelation 19:6-9 and 21:1-5.

99. WHAT THIS STUDY CONCLUDES Jesus Christ builds His church. The church is fundamentally the people who belong to Christ, not a building. People are saved by grace through faith in Jesus - not by church

attendance or membership. Those who belong to Christ are called into meaningful life with His people. Christian fellowship is shared participation in Christ and His gospel. Christ alone is Head. Healthy spiritual authority is servant-hearted rather than controlling. Healthy church discipline seeks repentance and restoration rather than humiliation or retaliation. Abuse, exploitation, manipulation, and cover-ups should never be protected under the language of Christian unity or forgiveness. Parachurch ministries can serve the church but should not replace embodied Christian community. The church should make mature disciples rather than spiritually dependent followers. Jesus loves His imperfect church and is sanctifying His people.

100. THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION A person can attend church, become a member, sing Christian songs, serve, give money, take Communion, be baptized, know pastors, and understand church culture - and still miss the most important question: DO YOU BELONG

TO JESUS? Christianity is not fundamentally about joining an institution. Sin separates human beings from a holy God. No church, pastor, denomination, or amount of religious participation can solve that problem. Jesus can. He lived faithfully, died for sinners, and rose from the dead. Salvation is God's gift received through faith. Then those who belong to Jesus discover they have been brought into a family.

101. RELATED 3NAILS STUDIES What Is Salvation?; Repentance, Faith, and New Life; Following Jesus - The Cost and Joy of Discipleship; Baptism; Communion; The Holy Spirit; Prayer and Access to God; Worship; Reading and Understanding Scripture.

102. CONTINUE STUDYING Jesus and His Church: Matthew 16:13-20; Matthew 18:15-20; Matthew 28:16-20; John 10:1-18; John 13:31-35; John

17. The Early Church: Acts 2:37-47; Acts 4:23-37; Acts 6:1-7; Acts 15; Acts 20:17-38. The Body of Christ: Romans 12:3-13; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:1-16; Colossians 1:15-20. Fellowship and One Another: Romans 12:9-21; Galatians 5:13-26; Galatians 6:1-10; Colossians 3:12-17; Hebrews 10:19-25; James 5:13-20; 1 Peter 4:7-11; 1 John 1:1-7. Church Leadership: Acts 20:17-35; 1 Timothy 3; 1 Timothy 5:17-22; Titus 1:5-9; Hebrews 13:7-17; 1 Peter 5:1-5. Church Discipline and Restoration: Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11; Galatians 6:1-2. The Church and Israel: Romans 9-11; Ephesians 2:11-22. The Church as God's People: Ephesians 2:11-22; 1 Peter 2:4-10. The Church as Christ's Bride: Ephesians 5:25-32; Revelation 19:6-9; Revelation 21:1-5. Churches Under Christ's Evaluation: Revelation 2-3.

103. QUESTIONS TO ASK AS YOU STUDY THE CHURCH Who is being addressed? Is this the universal church or a local congregation? What does the passage say about Jesus? What does it say about believers'

relationships? Is this a command, description, warning, promise, or example? Is this a unique historical event or ongoing practice? What responsibilities are given to leaders and the congregation? Does the passage establish a structure explicitly, or am I inferring one? What is clearly taught? What remains debated among faithful Christians?

104. A SIMPLE BIBLE-STUDY METHOD FOR CHURCH PASSAGES

OPEN YOUR BIBLE. OBSERVE: What actually happens or is stated? INTERPRET: What did this mean in its original context? CONNECT: How does this fit the larger biblical story and the New Testament's teaching about Christ and His church? RESPOND: What faithful response does this truth require? Do not begin with "What should churches today do?" First ask, "What was Scripture actually saying?"

105. FURTHER VERIFICATION AND STUDY For deeper verification, begin with Scripture itself: Matthew 16-18; John 10, 13, and 17; Acts 2-6, 15, and 20; Romans 9-16; 1 Corinthians 1-14; 2 Corinthians 2; Ephesians 2-5; 1 Timothy; Titus; Hebrews 10 and 13; 1 Peter 2 and 5; Revelation 2-3, 19, and 21. When investigating differences among Christian traditions, consult responsible primary sources from those traditions and then compare every human source with Scripture. **VERIFICATION PRINCIPLE:**

Read A Tradition'S Own Responsible Sources Before Relying Primarily On Its Critics. Then

Return To Scripture.

106. SCRIPTURE AND QUOTATION NOTE Scripture references throughout this study are provided to encourage direct Bible reading. Short biblical phrases may be included where helpful, while many passages are summarized or referenced rather than reproduced in full. Readers are strongly encouraged to open a complete Bible and read every cited passage in context. Do not depend on this study - or any commentary, pastor, teacher, tradition, website, denomination, ministry, or AI tool - as a replacement for Scripture. Use resources to help you study the Bible. Do not use them instead of studying the Bible.

107. FINAL REFLECTION Imagine Christianity with no other Christians: no one to pray with you, teach you, encourage you, correct you, serve, forgive, bear your burdens, celebrate baptisms, sing beside you, sit beside you in grief, rejoice with you, challenge you when you wander, or need the gifts God has placed in you. That is not the ordinary picture of Christianity found in the New Testament. Jesus did not merely rescue disconnected individuals. He is gathering a people. The church is sometimes beautiful and sometimes painfully messy. Sometimes

Christians will fail one another. Sometimes churches will fail badly. Some wounds should never be minimized. Some leaders must be confronted. Some situations require boundaries. Some churches may need to be left. Sometimes the damage is so deep that a person no longer knows what to believe. If that is where you are, you do not have to pretend the questions are not there. Bring them into the light. Return to Jesus. Read what He said. Look at how He treated wounded people. Examine Scripture carefully. Separate Christ from those who may have misrepresented Him. Human failure does not change the identity of the One who stands at the center. Jesus is still the Head. He is still the Good Shepherd. He is still building His church. He still loves His bride. One day there will be no unhealthy churches, abusive leaders, denominational divisions, theological confusion, hidden sin, loneliness, fractured relationships, grief, or death. Until then: FOLLOW JESUS TOGETHER. Learn together. Pray together. Worship together. Serve together. Carry burdens together. Tell the truth together. Forgive one another. Protect one another. Encourage one another. Make disciples. Welcome people. Care for the vulnerable. Use your gifts. Receive the gifts of others. The church belongs to Jesus. Christ has not finished with her yet.

Final Memory Anchor

The Church Is Not Simply A Place Christians Go. It Is A People Who Belong To Jesus.

Belonging To A Church Does Not Save Us. Jesus Saves Us. And Jesus Calls Those He

Saves To Follow Him Together.