

# A Short Systematic Theology for 21st Century Christians

## Part 6 – The Church

### Section 1 Introduction, names and nature of the Church

*Why is the church the most joyful group of people on earth?  
What impediments are there to this joy being complete?*

The Church is most joyful group of people on earth. It is the body of Christ and His bride, the apple of His eye. He suffered extreme rejection, excruciating physical, emotional and spiritual pain and much more just to win Her for His own: Hebrews 12:2 says “For the joy that was set before Him He endured the cross”. So if the joy is so great, the church must be able to claim a place of extreme bliss, in love with Him and one another! She must shine brilliantly like a light on a hill, like stars in the universe, giving great glory and joy to Her creator.

**It's Not Just My House**



Louis Berkhof dedicates over 100 pages and Wayne Grudem over 200 to this great theme, so trying to condense it into a few leaflets is not easy! We've tried to produce a balanced summary which we hope will inspire you to dip

into their more lengthy Systematic Theologies.

#### **Definition:**

*“The church is the community of all true believers for all time”* states Grudem. The original word in Greek is ἐκκλησία (Ekklesia) which means the Assembly of God's people called out of the world, though the English word “Church” comes from *kuriakos* which means “belonging to the Lord. So we can say that “the church is all those true believers who are called out of the world and now belong to the Lord.” However, being called out doesn't mean that we don't mix with the world. For in order to be salt and light, to preach the gospel and to see others saved, we need to “go into all the world” (Mk 16:15).

In the Old Testament the Children of Israel were the equivalent to the church. They were called out of Egypt to worship the Lord. He miraculously saved them, guided them through the wilderness and took them into the Promised Land. However, mainly because of their immature hearts, they took forty years to reach the Promised Land. There are many parallels here for the church down the ages.

### **How many people constitute a church?**

The main use of the word church in the New Testament is the local gathering of Christians in homes and in the open air. How many people constitute a church? Jesus said in Matt 18:20: "Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I among them". So we can say that if they constitute the sum total of believers in that locality then they are the church there. We must also state however that they are not a church unless they are under the covering of Apostles, prophets, pastors and teachers (1 Cor 12:28, Eph 4:11, etc). However, the Church is also universal or "Catholic" as the term means. It constitutes all those in the world who have truly believed in their heart. In the New Testament the Church is never a physical building but always the gathering of God's people.

Why is the Church a place of such joy? Because the God of love is in the midst of Her, and Christ is working in Her today "to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless." (Eph 5:27)

The doctrine of the church follows on from Soteriology as now that Christ has saved us, we become members of His family.

Jesus declares His purpose on earth in Matthew 16:18: "I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it". She was to be based on the foundation of faith that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the living God (Mat 16:17-18), and despite great opposition she will be victorious.

### **The Names of the Church:**

**The body of Christ.** This is by far the most common name given to the Church. The church is God's ultimate creation and He has made the human body to be the perfect analogy to teach us how we relate to Him and each other. At the last supper He broke bread and gave it to the

disciples to eat. “This is my body which is broken for you” He declared (Lk 22:9). By this we are to remember that his great sacrifice on the cross was so that we could now belong to Him and each other (Rom 12:4,5). Our bodies have a great many different members: feet, hands, eyes, ears, etc, so the church has many functions. (1 Cor 12:12-31) Its feet are those who take the gospel to every household, its hands those who heal and serve, its eyes those who keep careful watch for the Enemy, and its ears those who hear direction from God.

**The Bride of Christ.** All of “his-story” is building up to the climax of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. (Rev 19:7-9). We are being prepared for this great event by His spirit working within us; he is preparing us like a bride’s garments, to be without spot or wrinkle (Eph 5:27). Marriage is created to show us the kind of love He wants the church to have for Him. It is not individuals that are the Bride of Christ but the whole church, so developing our unity and love for one another becomes the most important way we can prepare ourselves. Working daily at loving those we live with, members of our congregation and Christian neighbours is the best way we can hasten the coming of our Lord.

**The Temple of the Holy Spirit.** 1 Peter 1:4-10 lovingly sums this up: “As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.....You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 1Pet 1:4-10

**The visible and invisible character of the Church:**

The visible is what man sees as the church: organisation, leaders, buildings, meetings, etc. What God sees however is invisible: all those who have repented and whose hearts are in love with Jesus. Being part of the visible church without having Jesus in our hearts is like being a wolf in sheep’s clothing. It has no reality about it whatsoever and being part of a church without eventually coming to know the Lord has no eternal value whatsoever. However, the converse is also true, that saying that we are

Christians without being part of the Church cannot be correct as His purpose is to join us together as one.

## **The purpose and activity of the church.**

Grudem defines three main purposes of the Church:



**1 To minister to God.** This we do principally in praise and worship, “singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Col 3:16). We also minister to Him in our daily activity as we “live for the praise of His glory” (Eph 1:12).

**2 To minister to the believers.** We have an obligation to build each other up to the maturity of the faith.

**3 To minister to the world.** Jesus set us the example by befriending, healing, preaching and teaching. We are particularly exhorted to “remember the poor” (Gal 2:10, Acts 9:36).

## **Conclusion**

The church is God’s ultimate creation on earth. The best use of our time is to spend it in building up the church. As with Jesus, all our activity should revolve around this one main purpose, to see God glorified through her.

## **Songs:**

We are being built into a temple  
Fit for God's own dwelling place  
Into the house of God which is the church  
The pillar and the ground of truth  
As precious stones that Jesus owns  
Fashioned by His wondrous grace  
And as we love and trust each other  
So the building grows and grows

For I’m building a people of power; We are His Family.

Hymn “The church’s one foundation”

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