

# HOME STUDY COURSE

## THE CHURCH

### THE LORD'S CHURCH

The church is the "body of Christ" (Ephesians 1:22-23) and Jesus is the Head of the body, the church (Colossians 1:18). As "Head," He directs everything the body does. As our bodies respond to the commands of our head, the church should respond to His commands. It is the Lord's church (Matthew 16:18).

Jesus has "all authority" (Matthew 28:18-20). Our Savior is our Lord. When Saul understood Who Jesus really was, he responded by saying, "Lord, what will You have me to do?" (Acts 9:3-6). That must be the attitude of any sincere individual - You are my Lord, I will do anything You tell me to do! Later, having become the Apostle Paul, he would tell the Philippian Jailer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 16:31).

1. What does it mean for Jesus to be "Head" of the church? \_\_\_\_\_



2. What is the difference in believing in Jesus and believing He is the Lord? \_\_\_\_\_

**"Upon this rock I will build My church" (Matthew 16:18)**

#### In This Lesson:

The Lord's Church	1
The Organization of the Church	1,2
One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism	2
The Worship of the Lord's Church	3
Why Are There So Many Churches?	3,4
Church Membership	4
Choosing the Right Congregation	4

### THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH

***Jesus is the Head of the Body, the Church...Colossians 1:18***

When our Lord commissioned His Apostles in Matthew 28:18-20, He directed them to "make disciples" (students, followers) by His authority, by baptizing them (:18-19). They were to then instruct them to "observe all things that I have commanded you" (:20). This is the simple organization of Jesus' church. He is the sole authority and His disciples submit to Him.

The Lord's church has no hierarchy. Jesus is its single authority - the Head of the church. All members are equally part of His body. The Apostles were sent by Him to instruct all disciples to follow His every command. Today, elders (Pastors, Bishops) "oversee" His flock to ensure they are properly fed His instructions (1 Peter 5:1-3). Evangelists (preachers) teach the Word of the Lord Jesus Christ, regardless of popular sentiment (2 Timothy 3:16-4:5). Every member contributes to the growth, the edification (building up) of the body of Christ, their goal being to honor the Lord with everything they do (Ephesians 4:11-16).

#### THE CHURCH:

- The church is the body of Christ; Jesus is its Head
- The church is the kingdom of God; Jesus is King
- The church is His flock; He is the Chief Shepherd
- The church is the temple of God; He is High Priest
- The church is the bride of Christ; He is the Bridegroom

Therefore, there are no positions of authority within the Lord's church; no one "rules" within the church except through Him, following His rule and authority. No individual members are to be served, revered, worshipped or glorified by their fellow members. Such is reserved for Jesus alone!

This is the simple organization of each "autonomous" (self-governing) congregation. Local churches are not under the rule of any hierarchy or denominational governing body. Each local church is built and maintained on the foundation of Jesus Christ, according to instructions delivered through the Apostles and Prophets of the New Testament, as the Apostle Paul told both the Ephesians (Ephesians 2:18-22) and the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 3:5-11). It is the responsibility of every member to follow exactly what the Lord wants and to govern themselves so that they do.



***We are the Body of Christ, and Members in Particular... 1 Corinthians 12:27-28***

Members of the church recognize that no one part of the body is greater than another, and that each has its part, its function to serve (see 1 Corinthians 12:14-28; Romans 12:1-16; and Ephesians 4:7-16). Each brings his or her individual talents and abilities to the church to serve the Lord. There is no division within the body - no one is higher or more revered. Once we are baptized into the body, we join our individual efforts to those of all other members. Together we are the Lord's church, His body (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). All members strive to stand for and follow the Lord's will, helping each other to do so.

1. What is a "disciple" and how does a person become one? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Why does the Lord's church not have any hierarchy of leadership or denominational organization? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Describe what an "autonomous church" does: \_\_\_\_\_
4. According to the Lord's plan, what is the place of each individual member? \_\_\_\_\_

**"Upon this rock I will  
build My church"  
(Matthew 16:18)**

## ONE LORD, ONE FAITH, ONE BAPTISM

***Endeavoring to Keep the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace...Ephesians 4:3***

How do we achieve unity? Many would suggest that we must either "come to agreement" or "agree to disagree." Yet, if we simply "agree to disagree" we are still in dis-agreement and that is not real **unity**. The Lord's plan was for us to be "one" (John 17:20-22), and so He prayed that we would be as united as He and the Father! Is this possible? Consider how Jesus said it was to be achieved. It would come through the Word, the Truth (:17, 19, 20). It would come by each believer submitting to the Word (:20). Because each disciple would have the Word of Christ in them, they would all share the same thing (:20, 21, 23). This is the what Paul pleaded with the Corinthian church to have - "by the Name (authority) of the Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you speak the same thing, and that there be no division among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Corinthians 1:10). Now, that's unity!

God's plan is simple. There is to be "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4:5). Jesus is the only Lord and so it naturally follows that His Word would be the only "faith." All creeds, etc. vary from the original faith once delivered by Jesus through those He sent to do so (Jude 3). Many different baptisms - methods, reasons, purposes - are taught by various ones; but, there is only one original baptism taught by the Lord. Likewise, as there is one Lord, one Head of the church, there is only one body (Ephesians 4:4). The church does not have many Heads (only Jesus) and He is not the Head of many bodies (churches, 1:22-23), only one.

*Since there is only one Lord, why does it naturally follow that there is only one church, one faith and one baptism:* \_\_\_\_\_

## THE WORSHIP OF THE LORD'S CHURCH

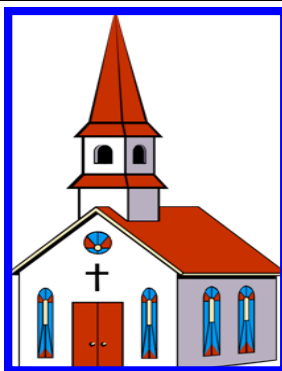
*True worshippers must worship in spirit and in Truth...John 4:23-24*

True "worship" must consist of both the truth (found in that "one faith") and the spirit of the individual responding to it. The one without the other (truth or personal spirit) is not worship. As Paul said, he served God with his spirit in the Gospel of His Son (Romans 1:9). To acceptably worship God requires the truth and spirit (mind, heart, soul and strength) of the individual (compare Mark 12:30).

This is God's simple approach to worship; He wants us personally involved. The Law of Moses in the Old Testament was a shadow of the Law of Christ in the New. It had many physical things which could be seen or touched - like the Temple in Jerusalem, the Ark of the Covenant wherein was a copy of the Law, animal sacrifices, mechanical instruments of music, the burning of incense, feast days, etc. Their parallels in the New Testament are predominantly "spiritual" in nature - the temple is the Christian's body (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19-20); the Law of God is written into his heart (Hebrews 8:10); he offers spiritual sacrifices (Romans 12:1; 1 Peter 2:5); he sings praises to God, making the melody in his heart (Ephesians 5:19); incense rising up to God is his prayers (Revelation 5:8); etc. His one special day of worship is Sunday, the first day of the week, the day on which Jesus rose from the dead (Luke 24:1-3). He meets with other Christians on this day to remember the body and blood of his Savior, and to do those simple things the Lord wants in worship to Him (e.g. Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23-29; 16:1-2). The Christian's worship is simple. It is in Truth (according to the truth); and, in spirit, in which the Christian is deeply and personally involved in each act. Collectively, Christians are the Lord's people who worship God in the spirit (Philippians 3:3).

1. What is necessary for "worship" to be "true worship," acceptable to the Lord? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Compare the worship in the Old Testament with that of the New. What stands out as the main difference? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is the one special day for Christians? \_\_\_\_\_

## WHY ARE THERE SO MANY CHURCHES?



Given that the Lord's instructions are so explicit regarding what He wants, **Why** are there so many different churches? We might answer this simply. Historically, man has attempted to approach God from the basis of personal preference. Since we each have our own personal preference(s) about most things, it is not hard to understand how we might have so many churches.

Thus, we might observe that most people base their approach to religion, to "choosing a church," on their personal likes and dislikes. Of course, our main concern should be, "What does the Lord want?" "What are His likes and dislikes?" Yet, most people are guided by what they want. Our likes, dislikes, choices and beliefs are likely shared by others; and, this is how most people choose to congregate with one another.

From the time of Cain and Abel, there has been a departure from what God wants in deference to what man would rather do. Like Abel, we should offer our worship "by faith" (Hebrews 11:4). This is what Jesus was saying in answer to the Samaritan woman in John 4, when He said, "True worshippers worship in spirit and in Truth" and God "seeks such to worship Him" (:23).

For the Christian, there is "one Lord" and He has all authority. He alone has the right to determine what He wants in worship. No religious leaders may supplant His authority and all personal preference should yield to His commands. There is likewise "one faith"; one original plan delivered by those the Lord chose to do so. All creeds, confessions, faiths, and standards which came later are revisions to the original. There is "one baptism," originally commissioned by the Lord and taught on the day the church began. Christians are members of "one body," the Lord's church, in which they serve "one God and Father," and, endeavoring to keep

the unity of the "one Spirit," walking worthy each day in the "one hope of [their] calling" (see Ephesians 4:4-6, 1-3; 1:22-23; Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 2:30-42).

1. *Why are there so many churches?* \_\_\_\_\_
2. *How do most people "choose a church"?* \_\_\_\_\_
3. *What was Jesus' answer to the "doctrinal differences" cited by the woman in John 4?* \_\_\_\_\_

## CHURCH MEMBERSHIP



Church membership, in the New Testament, is based purely on obedience to the Lord. From the Day of Pentecost, the Apostles taught people this is what they must do to respond to the Lord (Acts 2:36-38). When one is baptized he is simply added by the Holy Spirit to the body of Christ (Acts 2:41, 47; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13). Baptism, being "born again...of water and the Spirit" (John 3:3, 5) to a new life in Jesus Christ (Romans 6:4) is how one becomes a child of God (Galatians 3:26-27).

There is no vote or church action necessary for membership in the Lord's church.

1. *How does one become a "member of the church"?* \_\_\_\_\_
2. *What does it mean to be "born again"?* \_\_\_\_\_

## CHOOSING THE RIGHT CONGREGATION

One of the most important decisions we make is where to worship. It should be based on what will please the Lord, where He would want us to be. Since we want to "worship in spirit and in truth," we must determine if the congregation we are considering will provide a good environment in which to do so.

Being part of a local church is necessary to personal growth (Ephesians 4:7-16; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27). Christians "congregate" (gather together) to "edify one another" (build each other up in the faith). God brings us together, each of us with our various abilities, so that we may provide help to each other. As one body - the Lord's church - we work together under the direction of our Head, the Lord Jesus Christ.



**"Lord, what will You have me to do?"**

**Do you have a question about anything in this lesson that you wish to discuss with someone? Please feel free to contact us and someone will be glad to assist you.**

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