

Hartford Bible Students

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What Actually Is “The Church”?

A Place of Worship

You might say “the church” is the place believers go to worship. The Scriptures speak of the “church of the Thessalonians” (1 Thess. 1:1) or the “church which was in Jerusalem” (Acts 11:22). In Romans 16:5 it even calls the home where believers meet a church – “the church that is in their house.” So when Christians say they are going to church, we understand from the Scriptures that they are going to a place of worship, whether it be a massive cathedral or a humble home.

The Body of Christ

Another definition of “church” is the body of Christ. “Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church.” (Colossians 1:24). And Jesus is the head of the body: “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.” (Colossians 1:18).

It's not the building or place of worship that is the body of Christ but individual believers. Of course, we know that Christians aren't actually a part of the physical body of Jesus. Saying that we are the body of Christ is a metaphor, or a word picture, that helps us understand the difficult concept of our relationship with Jesus.

It's About an Intimate Relationship

Since Jesus's death and resurrection, he is no longer flesh. He is no longer a human being. He is a spiritual being. We have no relationship with spirit beings; so how could we figure out how to

unite ourselves to Jesus so closely as to become part of his body?

The Scriptures help us out by saying our relationship to Jesus can be compared to certain relationships we have with other humans – in particular, the marriage relationship. In Genesis 2:24 it says when a man and a woman unite themselves in marriage, they become one flesh, one body: *“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”* Again, this isn't literally true. It's a word picture to help explain this incredibly close relationship.

Jesus and the Church Become One Body Through Marriage

In Ephesians 5:22-33, it tells us that the ideal way that a married couple should love each other is as Jesus loves his church. He loved his church more than he loved his own life. He gave his life for his church, his bride. And we respond to Jesus's love for us by uniting ourselves to him so closely that we become one with him – one body, “the body,” “the church of Christ.” “For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.” (Ephesians 5:30)

The oneness between Jesus and his church is the most intimate of loves, and it is demonstrated by the willingness and the readiness of the one partner to live for the sake of the other.

The Mystery of Christ and the Church

So we see that the church is not the building where Christians meet. The church is the people themselves – those who have entered into such a close relationship with Jesus as to become not

literally but spiritually the body or Church of Christ.

Should We Meet at a Place of Worship?

We have a natural human desire to meet face to face with those whom we have close relationships – our families and our friends. We enjoy each other’s company. We help each other through hard times. We celebrate good times.

Those of us who are united to Christ through faith are part of his body. We benefit from and benefit others of this body when we meet together for the purpose of building up one another in our common faith. The Scriptures encourage us to meet together for our mutual benefit and encouragement. “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” (Hebrews 10:25)

We invite you to join us for Bible study on Zoom on Sunday mornings from 10:00 – 11:30 AM. For further information, please call 860-785-4959 or e-mail us at bibletruthkeys@gmail.com.

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