

THE CHURCH: GETTING INTO IT, LIVING IN IT






Your Church is bigger than you thought!

WHEN people use the word "church", they're usually referring to one of two things: either a physical building ("that big brick church on the corner") or a denomination ("the Baptist Church," "the Methodist Church," etc.) This lesson concerns itself with something different. Here we will examine what God's Word tells us about *the Holy Christian Church*, which is nothing other than all the people in the world who trust in Jesus as their only Savior from sin.

Pictures of the Church

ICON KEY

-  Introduction
-  Important point
-  For further reading

1. In the Bible, God gives us many beautiful pictures of His Church of all believers. Look up Luke 12:32. *In this passage, Jesus pictures the Church as a...?*

2. Read 1 Chronicles 28:8. *In this passage, David refers to the believers as...?*

3. Go to Acts 20:28. *In the first half of this verse, the Apostle Paul refers to the believers as a...*

In the second half of the verse, he calls them the...

4. Look up Ephesians 2:19-22. In this section, Paul's wants his hearers to appreciate their place in the Holy Christian Church. *In verse 19, what two phrases does he use to describe the members of this Church?*

5. From verse 20 - *the Church is like a building. On what is it founded?*

"LEARN FROM ME"

6. *Who is the Cornerstone of the Church?*

7. From verses 21-22, *what kind of building does the Apostle Paul call it?*

8. *Who lives in this building?*

9. I Corinthians 12:12-27 gives a different picture of the Church. *What is it (especially from verse 27)?*

10. Read Hebrews 12:18-24. Especially from verses 22-23, *write down at least four ways in which this passage refers to the Church of all believers:*

11. Look up and read 1 Kings 19:9-18. The prophet Elijah was going through a bad time. He was convinced that he was the only one left in Israel who believed in the true God. *What did God say that proved him wrong?*

12. Now skip to the New Testament and read Romans 11:2-5, and 2 Timothy 2:19. *We can't look into people's hearts. We can't see who the believers are. But who can?*

The Church - the assembly of all believers - is not visible to our eyes. That is why it is sometimes called the *invisible* Christian Church. But God sees into the hearts of people. "*The Lord knows those who are His.*" And He has promised that a remnant of believers will remain until the end of world.



How Do You Get Into This Church?

Surely all of us will want to be members of this glorious Church which our Savior set up. How does a person get into it?

13. Look up Isaiah 55:10-11. *WHAT does God USE to establish and build His Church on earth?*

14. Read Mark 16:16. *What does Jesus say qualifies a person for membership in the Christian Church?*

15. Return to Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, John 3:5. *Which Sacrament does Jesus urge for gaining entrance into God's kingdom?*

16. Read John 4:1-42. This is the account of how a sinful woman - and many of her neighbors - believed in Jesus and became members of the Christian Church. *Especially from verses 39-42, what caused them to believe in Jesus?*

17. Romans 10:17 says the same thing another way. Faith qualifies you for membership in the Church. *But how does faith come?*

18. In 1 Corinthians 1:2, *the Apostle Paul says that the Church of God is made up of PEOPLE WHO...(three things):*

"LEARN FROM ME"

19. As we learned in Lesson Eleven, one Person of the Trinity, especially, is at work when a person comes to faith and joins God's Church of all believers. Read I Corinthians 12:3. *What is the only way a person can believe in Jesus as his Lord and Savior?*

20. Read 2 Timothy 1:9. God has saved us and called us to be members of His holy Church. *How much did our good works have to do with our becoming members?*

21. *What was it that moved God to call us to be members of His Holy Church?*

22. Titus 3:5 says the same thing. *What is it that gets us into the Church, and into heaven? On the other hand, what will NEVER get us into either one?*

How Do Members of this Church Behave?

In the first two chapters of the book of Acts, we learn that a number of wonderful things happened shortly after our Savior died, rose again and ascended into heaven. Fifty days after His resurrection, on the day of Pentecost, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to endow His disciples with tremendous preaching power. The Apostle Peter preached a sermon which moved over 3000 people.

23. Read Acts 2:38-42. Especially from verse 38, *what two things were these people led to do as a result of hearing God's Word?*

24. Read verse 42 again. As new members of God's Church, *what four things did the believers in Jerusalem continue to do?*

Jesus Set the Example for Church Members

25. Read Luke 2:41-52. Even as a young boy, *where was Jesus found by his parents?*

26. Look up Matthew 12:9 and Matthew 13:54. *Where did Jesus regularly go?*

27. Read Matthew 26:55. Jesus spoke these words to the band of men who came to arrest Him in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus said it was strange that they should come out at night to search for Him. *Where could they find Him?*

Our Own Attitudes Toward Public Worship

28. Since we are now members of God's Church of all believers, we will want to take advantage of every opportunity to worship Him with others. Read Hebrews 10:23-25. *According to verse 25, what is one practice which a Christian will NEVER willingly give up?*

29. Look up John 8:31-32. *How can you tell who the real disciples of Jesus are?*

30. On the other hand, read verse 47 a little later in the chapter. Jesus told the hypocritical Pharisees that they were "not of God" *How did they show that they were not of God?*

31. Look up Ephesians 5:19-20. *What sort of activities do Christians customarily engage in? Where do we usually do such things?*

32. Read again Matthew 28:19. *What is one sacrament which is often administered in the public worship service?*

33. Now look at Matthew 26:26-28, and I Corinthians 11:23-26. *What is another sacrament offered during the public worship service?*

Those who Teach Falsely

We learn from Scripture that Satan always opposes God's work and will, and can lead people away from the truth. First he tries to get Christians to *tolerate* error along with the truth. Next the error is actively promoted. Finally the truth of God's Word itself is overturned and rejected. Sadly, this has happened again and again in the history of Christendom. Let us search the Scriptures to find out what the Bible says about false teachers, teachings, and worship.

34. You might think that it would be easy to tell a false teacher, or that false teachers aren't very dangerous. But read Matthew 7:15. *Why are false teachers hard to spot? And how dangerous are they?*

35. Look up Romans 6:16-17. From verse 17, *how did the Roman Christians find approval both from the Apostle Paul and from God?*

36. Most religious leaders in our day say that one should be willing to "overlook" differences in doctrine. They actively encourage people of different faiths to worship together. But read Romans 16:17-18. *What is God's command to us about people who teach and/or practice other than God's Word teaches?*

37. Read I Corinthians 10:14-22. *Which sacrament is the writer referring to in verse 16?*



When we receive the Lord's Supper together, one thing we're doing thereby is confessing the faith we share in the pure teachings of God's Word. The apostle points out how wrong it would be to partake of the Lord's table, and then turn around and join with those who do not share our faith and confession!

38. In olden days, farmers understood that you couldn't plow with a horse and a mule yoked together, or with an ox and a horse yoked together - it just wouldn't work! Paul uses the same picture in II Corinthians 6:14-18 to describe what happens when Christians try to join in spiritual activities with those who don't share their faith. There are five questions in verses 14-16. *What is the answer to all of them?*

"LEARN FROM ME"

39. Nowadays, Christians are being urged on all sides to overlook "little" differences in doctrine for the sake of unity with other Christians. But are there any "little" false teachings? Read Galatians 5:9 - *what is even the "littlest" false teaching similar to?*

40. In II Timothy 2:17, *the Bible says that false teaching is like WHAT?*

"antichrists" and The Antichrist

41. Read I John 2:18-19. We notice that the word, "antichrist" is here used twice – once capitalized and once not. While mentioning many "antichrists," Paul also names one special Antichrist. We will now study this section of Scripture in detail to identify the person to whom Paul is referring, for this person's complete identification, along with a 'great falling away,' is another sign that the Day of Judgment could now come at any time.

42. Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 for an overview of the whole subject.. Now let us take a closer look at these verses. It is fairly easy to name many of the forces which are anti- [against] – Christ. We may ask right away whether the Devil, Satan, is THE Antichrist. Read again verse 9. *Rather, this verse tells us that the "lawless one" we're looking for is...*

"...according to the *working* of... _____ ."

Who or what fits the picture drawn for us in these verses ? A number of answers come to mind . Communism promotes atheism and seeks to put service to the state in the place of faith in God. The Mormon and Jehovah's Witnesses religions deny that Jesus is both God and man. Allah and his prophet Mohammed are revered above the true God by millions of people on earth. Many self-styled "televangelists" claim to have special powers of divine healing which the Bible nowhere promises in our day, and draw attention to themselves rather than to the redemption we have in Jesus Christ. We note, in other words, that there are many antichrists.

But, as God has warned us in 1 John 2:18 [above], there is one great Antichrist to recognize and avoid. A word picture of the one great Antichrist has been given us in the section of 2 Thessalonians which we have read. Let us now see if we can put the name under the picture.

At the time Paul wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica some false teachers made a claim that the day of Judgment had already come and even tried to prove that this was also Paul's teaching. But Paul wrote to tell the Congregation that the final Great Day would not come until "the falling away" comes and "the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition." [v.3] To be able to recognize the Antichrist, therefore, is meant to be a sign for us that the end of the world is near.



Who is "the man of sin?" We believe, and the historic Lutheran Confessions [Smalcald Articles, Part II, Article IV] teach, that THE Antichrist is embodied in the Roman Catholic Papacy. There have been many Popes; but he is 'the man' who, throughout the New Testament era, heads up the whole system. What is the proof? Does he "fit the description?"

43. *From verse 4, where does this man of lawlessness sit?"*

44. *Does this passage say he comes from INSIDE or OUTSIDE of the Christian church?*

The Roman Catholic Church does teach that the God of the Bible is Triune [Three-In-One] and that Jesus is the Son of God. At the same time it teaches the exact opposite of what the Bible teaches about how we can be saved from sin and death forever. It teaches that people are saved in part by their own good works. We note some very strong words in the Roman Catholic "Councils And Decrees Of The Council Of Trent," the Catholic answer to the Lutheran Reformation:

From Session 6, Canon 12: "If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else but confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ's sake: or that this confidence alone is that whereby we are justified: let him be anathema." [= damned]

When one compares the above with the "whosoever believes in Him" of John 3:16, and the "by grace through faith" of Ephesians 2: 8-9 and the "justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law" of Romans 3:28, one can see just how important is Paul's warning concerning The Antichrist. The difference in this most basic Bible teaching between the Roman Catholic and the confessional Lutheran Church could not be clearer. The Roman Catholic teachings on penance, purgatory, the "re-sacrifice" of Christ in the Mass and the infallibility of the Pope reinforce its anti-Gospel message.



Certainly the context of the whole chapter [2 Thessalonians 2] show that the great "falling away" [v.3] is a spiritual and not, as some would have it, a political falling away. The Antichrist, according to vv. 6-7, was already at work in Paul's day, though held in check. The Antichrist is now at full power and operating out in the open. And where else does the Catholic Church try to gain additional credibility than from the very "power, signs, and lying wonders" of v. 9? The Roman Church has for centuries pointed to its pools of water which "heal" [Lourdes, France], to wooden statues of Mary which seemingly cry real tears, and to pictures of Christ which supposedly drip with blood at certain times. Let us be reminded why Paul warns us about thee Antichrist in 2 Thessalonians 2: the Church of the Antichrist now operates openly with power, fear, mystery and superstition—another indication that the great Day of deliverance is near.

Supporting the mission of the Church

45. Read Luke 10:7-8. Jesus gave some final instructions to His disciple before sending them out to spread the good news of salvation through faith. *What did Jesus say about accepting the gifts of the people among whom they worked and taught?*

46. Read 1 Corinthians 16:1-2. The Apostle Paul here lays down some guides for us to consider as we decide how much of what God has first given us we plan to return to Him? *What guidelines do you see in these words?*

47. Read Matthew 6:19-21. *Where does the Christian strive to invest the treasures with which God blesses him?*

48. Even as the somber notes of warning sound clearly in our hearts so that we do not lose any of His saving truths, our God has also revealed so many great and wonderful blessings that are ours in the Christian Church. Let us recall from Scripture just a few of such blessings. Read John 10:10. *What kind of life did Jesus come to bring us, i.e., the last word of the verse?*

49. Read Matthew 18:20. *What wonderful promise does our Savior make to those who gather together in His name?*

50. Read Romans 8:26-31. Here Paul speaks of "the saints," and "those who love God" and "the called," - - in other words you as a member of the Christian Church. *What does the Spirit do with our imperfect prayers?*

From verse 28, *what assurance is now yours in good times as well as in bad times?*

"LEARN FROM ME"

Reading in verses 29-31 about how your gracious God has led you from the cradle to the grave, *"What then shall we say to these things?"*

51. Read again John 8:31-32. *What wonderful assurances are yours as you continue in God's Word as a member of His Church?*

52. Read Acts 2:42. Name some of the privileges which, as a member of Christ's Church, you can begin sharing even here on this earth?

A. _____ B. _____

C. _____ D. _____

53. Read 1 Corinthians 9:8-14 and Galatians 6:6. *How can you help the pastor in his assignment to spread the saving Gospel publicly?*

54. 2 Corinthians 8 is a chapter of the New Testament which tells of the great privilege God gives us in being partners with Him in the work of spreading the saving Gospel message. *How were the Macedonian Christians able to give even beyond their means, according to verse 5 ?*

55. Read Luke 21, the Bible chapter listing the signs of the coming Great Day of Judgement. Conditions on this earth on that day for the unbeliever will be terrifying indeed. However, for the believer, not only is there nothing to fear, but *what does v. 28 encourage us to be doing?*



Additional Bible Readings

For more Bible reading on this subject, see. Genesis 12:1-3, Acts chapters 2 and 8-14.