



## *Lesson 7: God's Plan and Our Part*

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Why did God create the church? What is his purpose for us as his people? Why did Christ decide in Matthew 16:18 to build his church in the first place? What does God require from us? In this lesson we will examine God's plan for the church, and then we will see we get to play a part in that plan.

### **God's Plan for His People**

#### ***God's Plan for Israel***

To understand God's plan for the church, one must first understand God's plan for the nation of Israel. Because there is much confusion about the overlap and difference of Israel and the church, it will be helpful to look at what God is doing with and through Israel before looking at what God is doing with and through the church.

**The Past** – God chose Israel to be a nation for himself, and he did so for several reasons:

1. God wanted to fulfill his promises to the patriarchs (Deuteronomy 7:6-8).
2. God desired to bring the Messiah into the world (Genesis 3:16; 12:1-3, 2 Samuel 7:12-16).
3. God wanted Israel to be an example to the nations (Exodus 19:5-6; Deuteronomy 4:6-8).

Unfortunately, Israel was unfaithful to God, and broke the covenant that he made with them. Rather than quitting on them (Jeremiah

31:35-37), though, God prepared to make a New Covenant with them (Jeremiah 31:31-34). This is the New Covenant Christ initiated when he died for our sins (Luke 22:20).

**The Future** – Unfortunately, Israel as a nation rejected God’s Messiah and continues to do so. The question is then raised, is there any future hope for national, ethnic Israel? Paul answers that question for us very clearly in Romans 11:25-31. God will one day save “all Israel” and finally fulfill the very specific promises he made to them in the Old Testament (Isaiah 2:1-4; Zechariah 14; Joel 3:17-21). This will take place during the thousand year reign of Christ on earth during the millennium (Revelation 20).

### ***God’s Plan for the Church***

The church is not Israel, and Israel is not the church. While some terminology used of Israel is used to describe the church, nowhere in the New Testament is the church ever called Israel. In fact, Israel and the church continue to be different entities (1 Corinthians 10:32). So why did God create the church? What was his purpose in doing so? Scripture gives us two very closely related reasons. As with all that God does, God created the church to bring himself glory by. . .

- 1. Creating unity (Ephesians 2:13-18)** The church is described as a mystery. In the New Testament, a mystery is something that was once hidden but now God has revealed. The mystery of the church is that both Jews and Gentiles have been brought together into a new entity, the church (Ephesians 3:6). This unity goes beyond just Jew and Gentile, however, for all nations, social classes, and even genders have in a sense been made one in the church (Galatians 3:28).
- 2. Revealing his wisdom (Ephesians 3:9-10)** God desires to bring himself glory by showing the angels and demons his wisdom in what he is doing through the church. In bringing together people who previously had been in almost complete opposition and making them one he did something that only God could do.

3. **Displaying his holiness (1 Peter 2:4-10)** God also desires to bring himself glory through the church, as through Israel, by having a people who live distinctive lives reflective of him.

## **Our Part in the Church**

If all of this is true, if God is seeking to bring himself glory showing his wisdom in uniting Jew and Gentile to live as a holy community in this new, unique entity, what does that mean for us today? As we close this study on the church, we must ask the question, “So what does God expect of us in regard to the church?”

### ***God Expects Us to be United in the Church***

As we saw at the end of Ephesians 2 and the beginning of Ephesians 3, God wants to unify the church. It is no surprise then, that as Ephesians transitions into the applicational half of the letter, the first area to be addressed is the unity of the church (Ephesians 4:1-6).

Over and over Scripture reminds Christians to be unified. Indeed, this was part of Christ’s great prayer for the church before he died (John 17:20-21). Paul hits on this theme repeatedly in his epistles, not just Ephesians, but Romans (15:5-7), 1 Corinthians (12), Philippians (1:27; 2:1-11; 4:2), and Colossians (3:15).

This means that we must strive to be unified as a church. While we should separate from those who hold to heresy and error, those are the **only reasons** we should separate. Division in the body of Christ over personalities, misunderstandings, or sin that has not been dealt with will great hurt the church’s unity and will keep the church from living up to her God-given task of displaying God’s glory.

### ***God Expects Us to Love in the Church***

Christ sums up the whole point of Christianity as loving God first and foremost and loving Christians second (Matthew 22:37-40). The most common “one-another” command given in Scripture is the command to “love one another” (John 13:34-35; 15:12, 17; Romans

12:10; 13:8; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; 4:9; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12; 2 John 5). In fact, many of the other “one another” statements are in reality simply ways to live out loving our brothers and sisters. This includes lovingly correcting them (Galatians 6:1), bearing their burdens (Galatians 6:2), having strong friendships with them (Romans 12:10), bringing others into our homes (1 Peter 4:9); and greeting each other warmly (Romans 15:7; 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Peter 5:4). These are not suggestions or recommendations; they are biblical commands that we disobey when we fail to follow them.

### ***God Expects Us to Serve in the Church***

1 Corinthians 12 teaches that all believers have been given at least one spiritual gift which they are expected to use for the good of the body (7, 11). Paul then goes on to make the argument that every Christian is necessary, just as every single body part is necessary (12:21-26). This means the church needs you! You have a vital role to play, and when you fail to play that role, the whole church suffers!

### ***God Expects Us to Fellowship in the Church***

One of the things the early church devoted themselves to was “fellowship” (Acts 2:42). This fellowship involved a sharing of financial resources (Acts 2:44), but beyond that, a sharing of gospel ministry (Philippians 1:5), gospel blessings (1 Corinthians 9:23), gospel suffering (2 Corinthians 1:7), and gospel glory (1 Peter 5:1). We are one, and because of that, we should live our lives together as one.

***A church is a group of saved, baptized believers that gathers regularly to evangelize the lost, edify believers, and exalt God.***

God himself created and is building the church, and the work he does today he does primarily through his church. The question then, is whether we are going to participate in what it is Christ is trying to do, or whether we are foolishly going to miss out on this incredible blessing and biblical requirement.