



Lesson 2: The Church on Day One Studying the Start of the Church

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Text: Acts 2:38-47

In our last lesson we looked at what a church is. We sought to define the word “church” (Greek *ekklesia*) and found it was a word that secular Greeks used to describe democratic assemblies and that those who translated the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek used for general meetings or assemblies. While the word was used more generally outside of Christianity, the New Testament used it in a more technical sense. Paul describes the church of a house, a city, an area, and at times uses the word for all believers. We see a church is the people, because they are the church whether they are gathered or not, though it is assumed they are regularly gathering.

So far, then, we have seen that a church is group of Christians who regularly gather. But some fuzziness still remains. How did the church start? What does it take to join a church? What does a church do when they gather? To answer these questions, we need to see what the church was like on day one. Finding out how the church started will tell us much about what a church is.

When Did the Church Begin?¹

The church did not exist in the Old Testament. This can be seen from the fact that Paul calls the church “a mystery” (something previously unknown but now revealed) (Ephesians 3:6) and describes the church as a new man (Ephesians 2:15).

The church did not exist during Christ’s time on earth for two reasons: 1) Christ uses the future (“I will build my church”) in Matthew 16:18 and 2) The Spirit had not yet come (John 15:26) and the Spirit is the one who builds the church (Ephesians 2:21-22; 1 Corinthians 12:13).

The church began at Pentecost, when the Spirit first came upon the believers (Acts 2:1-4) and they first began living together in community (Acts 2:41-47).

What Does It Take to Join the Church? (Acts 2:38-41)

- 1. Repentance and Faith** – Only those who have made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ and repented of their sins may join a church (vv 38, 41).
- 2. Water Baptism** – Baptism is a symbol that visually displays the spiritual reality of regeneration (death, burial, and resurrection cf. Romans 6) and is an act of faith appealing to God for salvation (1 Peter 3:21). Baptism is a necessary before joining a church (v 41).
- 3. Spirit Baptism** – The Holy Spirit comes upon those who accept Christ and makes them members of the church.

¹ Much of this section was adapted from Robert Saucy, *The Church in God’s Program* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1972), 64-66.

This is not something a believer does, rather, it is something God does when a believer is saved (v 38, cf 1 Corinthians 12:13). We will examine the details of the connection and timing between water and Spirit baptism in a later lesson when we cover the topic of baptism.

What Does a Church Do? (Acts 2:40-47)

Evangelism (Acts 2:40-41)

Christ gave the command to the twelve to go and make disciples of all nations. That begins with evangelism and continues through edification. We see that the early church frequently shared the gospel, even in the face of great persecution, both to crowds (Acts 2, 3, 4, 5, 7) and to individuals (Acts 8:26-40; 1 Peter 3:15).

Edification (Acts 2:42-45)

This section begins with a word that should convict every modern day believer. These first century Christians were “devoted” to four main venues for living out their Christian faith. Are these things you find important? Are they things you are devoted to?

- 1. Studying Scripture** – The first thing these early Christians were devoted to was the teaching of the apostles. Although we don’t have apostles today, we do have their teaching. At the time, this would include both the words of Jesus (since the four gospels had yet to be written), their inspired interpretations of those teachings (John 16:12-15), and the Old Testament Scriptures that pointed to Christ. Today, this is what we call our Bible.

2. **Fellowship** – The Greek word for fellowship is *koinonia*, and refers to “close association involving mutual interests and sharing.”² This fellowship should be us sharing our time, money, energy, and hearts with one another so that we can together grow in Christ.
3. **Communion** – The Lord’s Supper was originally a full meal and was core to the life of the early church (Acts 20:7). We return later to delve deeper into this subject.
4. **Prayer** – Here and elsewhere in Acts we see the church gather together for prayer. Paul frequently requests prayer from the churches he serves. Prayer should play a major role in the life of a church.

Exaltation (Acts 2:46-47)

The church gathered together to give thanks and praise to God. Worship ought to be central in our churches, because worship is what we were created and redeemed for, and it is what we are destined for. God’s purpose in building the church is so that we would praise him (Ephesians 3:21; 1 Peter 2:9).

Definition of a Church

*A church is
a group of saved, baptized believers
who gather regularly
to evangelize the lost, build one another up, and worship God.*

² William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 552.