

Chapter 13

CHRIST'S CHURCH

At salvation the Holy Spirit places each of us into the church of Christ (1 [Corinthians 12:13](#)). This is a great promise and is a part of the results of our belief in salvation by faith alone in Christ. God administers his people in this current age through the church.

The form of the church into which we are placed by the Spirit can be called, in theological terms, the ***church universal***. This form of the church roughly can be described as the following:

- 1 IT IS THE UNION OF ALL BELIEVERS WORLDWIDE WHO FORM THE COMPLETE BODY OF CHRIST.**
- 2 ITS HEAD IS CHRIST WHO SITS AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD THE FATHER AND CURRENTLY LEADS HIS CHURCH.**
[Colossians 1:17-18](#); [Hebrews 8:1](#); [Ephesians 1:20-23](#)
- 3 SCRIPTURE DOES NOT INDICATE THAT OUR MEMBERSHIP CAN BE REVOKED FROM THE CHURCH UNIVERSAL.**

THE LOCAL CHURCH

The practical outworking of the church universal is multiple organized bodies of believers often called the local church.

- However, in our current age, church might be virtual (online) as well. Further, para-church organizations (e.g. independent missions or college ministries) function within the church universal but also perform some functions similarly as the local church. Scripture gives broad definition to how churches are organized which allows great flexibility to serve Christ in various times and cultures.
- The concept of the universal church, noted above, is controversial. For example, some Baptist churches may not accept the concept of a 'universal church' and recognize only the local church (1).

Being members of one another and needing to complete all the tasks of a healthy functioning body of Christ, we each have different functions within the church (1 Corinthians 12:13-27; Romans 12:4-5).

- However, our different functions in the church should not limit our spiritual growth and function (please see Christian walk section of the Resource Center) as we are each instructed to be holy as God is holy (1 Peter 1:16).

EKKLĒSIA

The word 'church' is used specifically by the writers of the epistles to signify either the local assembly or the universal body of believers of Christ. Also, the word is used twice in Matthew (Chapters [16](#) and [18](#)). Here it does not necessarily mean the church since the concept had not yet been introduced.

The word church comes from the **Greek word *ekklesia* (ἐκκλησία)** which means generally in secular Greek "an assembly, usually political" (2). We have no information that the church existed in the Old Testament.

BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH

When the church begins in the Bible, it is controversial as some believe it is present mysteriously in the Old Testament (3). The church most clearly is described as beginning in Acts Chapter 2. Regardless, the church began to be visible and function in Acts 2, when:

- Christ ascended into heaven (Acts 1:9; Luke 24:51; Mark 16:19).
- He sat down at the right hand of God the Father to become the head of the church (Hebrews 8:1; Ephesians 1:20).
- The Holy Spirit descended and filled believers (Acts 2:4; John 14:15).

UNITY

Harmony in the church is vital to its being an effective service to God (Ephesians 4:1-6; Philippians 2:2-3; Romans 15:5-6). The Ephesians 4 passage expresses church unity based on the two following important premises:

- Attitude (v1-3) – These verses indicate the value to God of our Christian calling is based, at least partially, on the unity we develop with other believers. This is characterized by humility, bearing with one another, love, and peace. The process is active and not left to chance.
- Doctrine (v4-6) – Further, we demonstrate unity around the central doctrines of the faith including regeneration, faith in salvation provided by Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the recognition that there is one God.

Based on these two elements of unity **we are to be of one mind, giving glory to God** ([Romans 15:5-6](#)).

Therefore, as Christians, we strive to maintain unity between individuals, in the local church and in the universal church. The body of Christ cannot maintain an efficacious service to God if it is distracted by conflict. Arguments between Christians can easily destroy social relationships, but church-wide disagreements may create conflicts that split institutions or denominations. Such disputes among individuals and within institutions invariably distract us from not only loving each other but keep us from ministering God's word to other Christians and to society that needs to hear the gospel.

As members of Christ's Church, we should seek actively to love one another, keep the peace, and guard the central doctrines of the godhead and salvation, so we are free to be Christ's servants with a clear conscience.

CHURCH FORMATION

The fundamental work of the church is to serve under its head Jesus Christ ([Colossians 1:18](#)). In performing this service, church activities can be divided generally into two general types, those that (1) promote the maturity of the believer, and (2) the sacraments.

MATURING THE BELIEVERS

METHODS - Activities that promote the believer's growth in Christ play a vital role in the church. These activities, like about everything in the church, can be controversial. I use a 5-step approach to mature our relationship with God which helps us access additional benefits to our wellbeing. I call this method the **'5 tools to maturity'** and they are taken from [Acts 2:42](#) and [47](#). They are as follows:

- 1 PRAYER**
- 2 PRAISE**
- 3 FELLOWSHIP**
- 4 BIBLICAL LEARNING**
- 5 OUTREACH TO OTHERS WITH BIBLICAL TRUTH**

These five tools describe the activities in the very first church in Jerusalem and provide a model to us today for what actions individuals and the church should perform routinely. Importantly, these five activities are confirmed in later verses in the epistles ([Ephesians 6:18](#); [Romans 15:11](#); [1 John 1:3](#); [Colossians 3:16](#); [Romans 10:14-17](#)).

CHURCH PARTICIPATION AND WELLBEING

Why are the 5 tools important? When implemented consistently, and in balance with each other, these activities develop godliness in our character and manner of living. Further, Teleios also has found that Christians who are more adherent to their faith, using what we describe as the five tools of maturity ([Acts 2:42,47](#); praise, prayer, fellowship, spiritual service, and biblical learning) have better well-being than less adherent believers (6,10). This was shown again in this survey, specifically for biblical fellowship, prayer, and praise.

Other studies in peer-reviewed medical journals have demonstrated that Christian belief generally is associated with good well-being more than in those who do not believe (6,10). Better well-being among Christians is most often linked to church attendance, postulated to be from socialization and studying the Bible (8,9,13,14). Additionally, in prior studies, a number of other wellbeing markers have been noted including forgiveness, gratitude, hope, and kindness (15-17).

THE CHURCH AND WELLBEING; SURVEY OF YOUNG CHRISTIANS

The church is important to the Christian walk as well as to society. Teleios recently performed a study evaluating well-being. There were 1186 responses. The majority of responses were: female (68%), <30 years (76%), and primarily from the United States (40%) and Europe (16%). The respondents identified themselves as evangelical Christians (33%), social Christians (29%), Christian seekers (5%) and non-Christians (33%).

Interestingly, personal well-being was better among evangelical Christians (4.6, on a scale of 0-6 with 6 being the highest) compared to social Christians (4.1), Christian seekers (4.0), or non-Christians (4.3, $P=0.001$). The findings for wellbeing were also supported by further results that evangelicals were more content ($P=0.001$), at peace ($P>0.001$), and joyful ($P=0.002$) than the other groups. No differences between groups were observed in feelings of guilt ($P=0.426$).

This is the first survey, to our knowledge, evaluating the well-being of young Christians versus non-Christians. These findings make sense based on prior research. *In summary, Christianity may help well-being by giving confidence in both day-to-day living and hope for eternity.*

CHURCH LEADERSHIP AND CONGREGANT WELLBEING

Teleios also has evaluated links between a believer's well-being and their perception of their church and its leadership on the Instagram account, *Instapray*. We had 884 mostly all evangelical and adolescent or millennial participants. Of the total, 43% were ex-US. Church leadership best helped participants' wellbeing by:

- Bible-based teaching and preaching (75%)
- Encouraging Bible-based speech (51%)
- Powerful biblical vision for the church (44%)
- Supporting church programs (31%)
- Effective pastoral care (30%)

Interestingly, the effect of church leadership on well-being did not differ among the international regions represented in our survey: the USA, Canada, Asia, and commonwealth countries ($P>0.05$).

SUMMARY

The church is God’s chosen administrative tool to manage people during this age to carry out His will, specifically as related to nurturing believers. The church can have a profound impact on believers not only in spiritual growth but in wellbeing as well. In a subsequent section we will cover the sacraments.

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