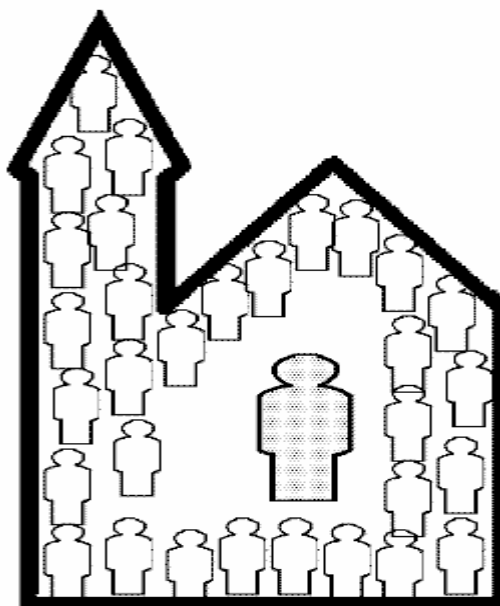


*"You, like
living
stones, are
being built
into a
spiritual
house"
1 Peter 2.5*



THE CHURCH

When a person is baptized for the forgiveness of his sins, he is washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus (1 Corinthians 6:11). Every sin that a person has ever committed is washed away by the blood of Jesus (Revelation 1:5). He also has become a child of God because of his faith and obedience to the gospel (2 Thessalonians 1:8).

"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:26-27).

A Christian is a *"new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new"* (2 Corinthians 5:17). Remember, the Christian died to sin (old things have passed away); the sinful man has been put to death and has been born again (John 3:1-7).

"Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4).

The question most frequently asked at this point is, "But what happens if I sin now? Must I be baptized again?" The answer is that a person must repent of any sin which he commits and confess it to God Who is *"faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9). We do have the important responsibility to make sure that we are trying our best to obey God in all things.

"But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

In other words, once we come in contact with the blood of Jesus (at baptism), it continues to cleanse as we make every effort to please God--to walk according to His truths in loving obedience.

An additional blessing is that the Lord adds the saved person to the church (Acts 2:47). What is the church? It is NOT a man-made organization. The Bible presents it as the body of Christ. Jesus died to obtain this body of redeemed people; He *"purchased it with His own blood"* (Acts 20:28). It is so precious to Him that He nourishes it and cherishes it (Ephesians 5:29).

The book of Ephesians discusses the church and its relationship to Jesus. Paul writes that God *"put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body. . ."* (Ephesians 1: 22-23). Paul also writes that Jesus is *"the head of the church"* and *"the Saviour of the body"* (Ephesians 5:23). Paul then mentions several other things about Christ and the church.

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having any spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:25-27).

It is easy to see that Jesus not only loved us enough to die on the cross for our sins; He also wants us to grow and mature as Christians. It is also easy to see how many churches there are: there is *one* head and *one* body (church). Paul states that very truth in Ephesians 4:4--*"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling."* This description makes perfect sense; after all, each of us has one head and one body.

Jesus is head over the entire church. In the New Testament the word *church* is used in two senses: it is used in the sense of the entire body of believers (as we saw it in the book of Ephesians); and it also refers (most of the time) to a local congregation of God's people, such as *"the church of the Thessalonians"* (1 Thessalonians 1:1). All the individual congregations of God's people make up the church as a whole. But each one is Christ's church in one particular geographical area.

How many different kinds of churches are there? The Bible speaks of only one. Remember, Ephesians 4:4 says that there is *"one body."*

In any area today, however, one will find a number of churches--all with different names. These religious groups did not come from the Bible; some man (or group of men) started them. The Lord is head over just one body. Paul wrote: *"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free--and have all been made to drink into one Spirit"* (1 Corinthians 12:13).

When we are baptized for the remission of our sins and the Lord adds us to the church, we may bring with us many ideas and practices that are false. We must learn the truths that are taught in the Bible, and our goal must be to *"be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment"* (1 Corinthians 1:10). When Christians began to divide themselves into separate groups in Corinth, Paul accused them of being carnal (fleshly) rather than spiritual.

For when one says, *"I am of Paul,"* and another, *"I am of Apollos,"* are you not carnal? (1 Corinthians 3:4). Those who are saved by the blood of Christ are all in *one* body--His body. Unity is what Jesus prayed for (John 17:20-21), and it is what all true believers want. We have not been placed in separate spiritual bodies that hold conflicting views; there is one body, one church. Even Jews and Gentiles (who hated one another) are both members of the one body. Consider the following test.

"Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh--who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands--that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of division between us" (Ephesians 2:11-14).

Now all men everywhere (rich or poor, black or white, male or female) can all be one in the church (Galatians 3:27-28). Paul goes on to say that the church was a mystery which was hidden in ages past but now is made known to all (Ephesians 3:1-7).

What a privilege to be part of the church of Christ, a spiritual kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). *"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the children of God!"* (1 John 3:1). We have several responsibilities in return.

First of all, having been cleansed of sins, we must do everything we can to keep ourselves pure (1 John 3:3). Second, having been born again, we must grow spiritually (1 Peter 2:2).

During that process we will learn that the whole body (the church) is "*joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share. . .*" (Ephesians 4:16). If you have already obeyed the gospel, you are blessed indeed to be part of the church. In the last two lessons, we will discuss worship and the Christian walk.



WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED



FILL IN THE BLANKS WITH THE PROPER ANSWER

1. The Christian confesses his sins to _____.
2. We come in contact with the blood of Christ at _____.
3. The church is the _____ of Christ.
4. Jesus nourishes and cherishes the _____.
5. The word *church* sometimes refers to the _____ body of believers, and sometimes it refers to the _____ congregation.
6. "For by one _____ we were all baptized into one _____."
7. Christians should be "perfectly joined together in the _____ mind and in the _____ judgment."
8. When Christians are divided, it is a sign that they are _____.
9. As Gentiles we were without _____; we had no _____.
10. We must keep ourselves _____, grow _____, and be sure that in the church we are a part that does its _____.
11. The church was prepared from the _____ of the world.

MARK THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS TRUE OR FALSE

1. There are some sins that the blood of Jesus cannot cleanse. _____
2. Through baptism we put on Christ. _____
3. When a Christian sins, he must be baptized again. _____
4. The Lord adds a saved person to a man-made denomination. _____
5. The church has one head and several bodies. _____
6. There is only one church with Jesus being its one head. _____
7. Jesus has broken down the middle wall of division between us and made both Jew and Gentile one. _____
8. All men and women of all races can be one in the church. _____
9. Being a Christian is a great privilege involving great responsibilities. _____

Please use the space below for any questions or comments you may have concerning this study.

Please Note:

You can e-mail your answers to the above questions to mike@greatbarrchurchofchrist.com for marking and I will happily send you your mark and the next lesson in this series.

We also have a number of different studies for all levels; a certificate of achievement will be awarded to those who complete any of our studies.

May God bless you as you strive to understand our God and His word.