

ECCLESIOLOGY
THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH
Lesson 1

Introduction to the Universal Church

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Why Study the Church?

1. God is doing something new in this age. He is building a church (Matt. 16:18), and calling out a people for His name (Acts 15:14). Since God is doing something different under the New Covenant, a Christian ought to be aware of it.
2. The church is related to salvation (Eph. 5:25). Christ died to provide salvation for the church. He died to provide salvation for the elect in every age and the Old Testament saints were put into the church at Pentecost.
3. Paul thought the church was important. He claims to have persecuted the church (1 Cor. 15:9) and after his conversion he was willing to suffer for it (Col. 1:24).
4. To avoid error in understanding. Some deny the local aspect of the church (Roman Catholics). Others play down or minimize the universal church (some Baptist groups). There are some who see the church beginning with Adam and Eve and made up of the elect throughout time until Christ returns (Amillennialists). Some would play down the institutional aspect of the church (Plymouth Brethren).
5. SUMMARY: The truth of the church is one of the most neglected areas of study. The church in reality is little known to the Christian world today. This lack of knowledge of the church may be one of the reasons for the slackness in the church at this present time.

B. The Meaning and Usage of Church

1. The Greek word church (*ekklasia*) literally means *a called out assembly*.
 - a. The non-Christian meaning was *an assembly of citizens* called out of their homes to conduct the business of the state (Acts 19:32, 39, 41). Non-technical usage.
 - b. The technical usage and primary meaning of this word church in the New Testament is *a called out group of people for salvation called the church of Christ, His Body*.
2. The Usage of the Term Church
 - a. A convened secular assembly to carry out government affairs (Acts 19:32, 39, 41).
 - b. An assembly or congregation of Jewish people in the Old Testament (Acts 7:38). Here the word is used in its non-technical sense of congregation.
 - c. The universal church, the body of Christ (Matt. 16:18 cf. Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18).

d. The local church (1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1).

3. CONCLUSION: The church is God's convened assembly, having both a universal and local aspect.

C. Two Phases of the Church

1. The universal church includes all those who have trusted in Jesus Christ from the Day of Pentecost (includes all Old Testament saints) until the Second Coming of Christ. This phase of the church is called the Body of Christ and Christ is the Head. Every person in this aspect of the church is a true believer. The universal church is sometimes referred to as the invisible church, an organism, true church and the real body of Christ.

2. The local church is a group of professing Christians and their children, gathered in one locality to do the will and work of God. The local church is sometimes referred to as the visible church, an organization, professing church and the representative body of Christ.

D. Contrasting the Universal and Local Church

Universal Church

1. Includes all Christians (Eph. 1:22-23).
2. Only Christians belong to this Body (Eph. 5:25-27).
3. Perfect forever positionally in Christ (Heb. 10:14).
4. Held together by Christ whose building we are (Eph. 2:19-22).
5. No Christians ever excluded (John 17; Eph. 1:4, 7, 13).

Local Church

1. A group of organized Christians (Rom. 16:1; Acts. 8:1).
2. Should include only Christians and their children (1 Cor. 1:2) but no guarantee all are regenerate (1 John 2:19).
3. Not perfect and are constantly exhorted to Christian growth (1 Cor. 1:11; Phil. 3:12-13).
4. Held together by mutual consent and certain articles of agreement, hopefully from the Bible.
5. Fellowship withdrawn because of sin (2 Thess. 3:14; 1 Cor. 5:13).