

THE STRUCTURE AND MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH

The word ‘Church’ is not found in the Old Testament. The New Testament (Greek) word for Church is Ecclesia. It means a formal assembly of individuals sharing a common purpose and bond. Below is an example of how the word Ecclesia is used in Scripture:

“The **Church** throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened, and encouraged by the Spirit, it grew in numbers, with all living in the fear of the Lord.” (Acts 9:31)

The gift of the Church

The Church is God’s gift to this age. Jesus came, died, and rose again so that the Spirit could come (at Pentecost) and establish the Church (Acts 2). In Matthew 16, Jesus noted that Peter’s statement, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God” would be the foundation stone (truth) upon which the Church would be built. Jesus is, in fact, the cornerstone of the Church (1 Peter 2:6; Isaiah 28:16). The establishment of the Church has come at great cost and is the result of a divine work. To be called to share in His Kingdom’s work is a great privilege—to be called to lead in ministry is a profound honor.

The work of the Church has been entrusted to humans and thus has not been without blemish over the centuries. However, the ministry and purpose of the Church are sacred. The Church is a gift of God, birthed by the Holy Spirit and designed to provide an organizational structure for believers to effectively carry out the ‘Great Commission’ of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, the Church is to be respected and supported. Note what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

“He intends that through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known.”

Ephesians 3:10

The Mission of the New Testament Church

The mission of the Church is to accomplish the Great Commission noted in Matthew 28:18-20.

“Go...and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

This passage reveals the three-fold mission of the church

- 1. The Church is to make disciples:** Through the ministries of the Church, believers should grow to be the disciples God calls them to be through involvement in service, Christ-centered worship, fellowship, witnessing, giving, loving, forgiving, and prayer.
- 2. The Church is to teach:** Through the ministries of the Church, believers should learn the Word and be equipped to share and teach others about the love and will of God. Believers should know what God has done, is doing, and promised to do in the days to come.
- 3. The Church is to baptize:** Certainly, the Great Commission refers to the act of being baptized, but it also points to the Church's mission to facilitate change in hearts and lives. One piece of evidence of having a spiritual impact in one's mission field is witnessing the public testimonies (baptisms) of those who have made new commitments to live for Jesus.

The structure of the Church

The structure of the New Testament Church originates with God, not man. Scripture notes that it is God Himself who, by the Spirit, draws individuals to His Church. The Head of the Church is Jesus Christ. Pastors serve as undershepherds, but Jesus is the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4). In Scripture, believers comprise the "body" (1 Cor. 12:27), but Jesus is the head. The body of Christ is also referred to as the Church and the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2-3; Rev. 19:7).

God, through the Spirit, draws individuals to the Church and equips them for service in His Church.

"But in fact, God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be." (1 Cor. 12:18)

God invites individuals to come to faith and become a part of His Church. The Holy Spirit then equips and enables (gifts) believers so that they are positioned to effectively carry out their personal calling and the 'Great Commission' work.

The gifts the Spirit gives, and the leadership roles the Spirit undergirds, are designed to help the Church accomplish its mission. A general profile of the mission of the Church follows:

- Be a "light" to the world (Matthew 5:14).

- Be “salt” (Matthew 5:13).
- Teach, reach, and baptize (Matthew 28:18-20).
- Preach the Gospel/Aggressively share the truth of God (2 Timothy 4:1-2).
- Follow Jesus’ example (1 John 2:6; John 13:15).

Jesus spoke of our mission in John 15:16. There we read: “...*I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.*”

Christian fellowship is nice; worship is nice; being inspired and encouraged is nice; prayer is nice. However, the Church must also be known as a place where its members bear fruit—fruit “that remains.” According to Scripture, Christians, all Christians, must engage in service, give, share their faith, pray with and for others, and leave “fruit” for those who will come after them

I believe this verse supports the FUTURE MISSIONS / post-rapture reach focus.