

What is the Church?

By Craig Savige.

The Church is made up of the saints of God. “Unto the church of God ... to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours” (1 Corinthians 1:2). It is also known as “the body of Christ” (see 1 Corinthians 12:27,28). Recognition of the various members that make up the body shows that God has placed them in the body for a purpose. “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.” (1 Corinthians 12:18). “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:10). “Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body” (Ephesians 5:23b). The Church is important to Christ since He is building it (see Matthew 16:18). “For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, *ye are* God's building.” (1 Corinthians 3:9). God uses some within the Body of Christ to plant and others to water in order that there be increase in the Church. (see 1 Corinthians 3:5-11). Christ is the foundation of all work in the Church. “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 3:11).

The Church is to be edified as seen in the gifts given by Christ in Ephesians 4:11. “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12). The offices in the Church are for and towards the body of Christ and its work in the Earth. The Bible, as the very words of God, must be used to feed the people of God (see Matthew 4:4). “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind” (1 Peter 5:2). The ministers of God, who fulfil the various Church offices, must be filled with the Spirit (see Ephesians 5:18b). “Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and *that* no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.” (1 Corinthians 12:3). The various operations of the Spirit within the Church include the use of ministers in its edification through the Spirit.

Much of the New Testament was written for the local churches and deals with many issues in the churches. This means that specifically there must be structure within the Church, so that things can be done in order. “Let all things be done decently and in order.” (1 Corinthians 14:40). All believers should be part of a local church since this is the design and will of God. “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” (Hebrews 10:25). “I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD.” (Psalm 122:1). “Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God.” (Psalm 92:13). Biblical fellowship in churches is vital for the spiritual health of a Christian. “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” (Acts 2:42).

Ordination (or placing into a Church office) is done by a senior minister, such as a pastor, bishop or apostle. Elders have a role in ordaining others. Elders should be ordained “in

every city” (see Titus 1:5) and “in every church” (see Acts 14:23). They have spiritual rulership in the church. “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.” (1 Timothy 5:17). A church must rightly have elders that feed the flock, teach and preach, as well as administratively care for the members (see Acts 20:28). Those in the Church should be obedient to Biblical direction from the elders (see Hebrews 13:7, 17). The senior Pastor in a church can rightly be understood as the “elder of the elders”, a shepherd of the flock and the one who imparts a vision for the Church. “And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.” (Jeremiah 3:15). Spiritual gifts through the ministry may be given through the laying on of hands and prayer (see 1 Timothy 4:14). Another name for the leadership of the local Church is the “presbytery”. Deacons are those who administer help for the eldership in the church, including the help with the teaching of the Word of God (see 1 Timothy 3:8-13).

Ministers must be called of God (see Romans 1:1; 1 Corinthians 1:1), have a charge by God (see 1 Timothy 1:18), and commit work into the hands of others. “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” (2 Timothy 2:2). Ministry is on the basis of God’s enabling and calling. No-one should accept a Church ministry office unless they have both calling and enablement by God. See also 1 Timothy 1:11; 6:20. “That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.” (2 Timothy 1:14). “But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour” (Titus 1:3).

A teacher is one called to minister in the area of teaching specifically, usually with a particular anointing to expound a certain area of Scripture, such as Biblical prophecy. The ability to teach is, of course, a requirement of other ministers.

An apostle is a minister that does pioneering work in the Church. “And they wrote *letters* by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren *send* greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia” (Acts 15:23). “And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem.” (Acts 16:4). “And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.” (1 Corinthians 12:28).

A bishop is a “pastor of pastors”, so has jurisdiction over a region or city, generally with oversight over several congregations. “Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons” (Philippians 1:1). The office of a bishop is also known as a bishoprick (see Acts 1:20).

A prophet is one with a specific prophetic gift for the body of Christ (See 1 Corinthians 12:28). Note that a prophet is not a substitute for the leading of the Spirit in a born again believer. The New Testament prophet has an overall ministry to the Church as a whole and specifically can operate in the local churches.