

## THE CHURCH

**The one which belongs to  
Jesus Christ**

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## THE CHURCH THE ONE WHICH BELONGS TO JESUS CHRIST

### **To which church do you belong?**

This question was not relevant in the apostles' times.  
The notion of "church" was different from what it is now.

At the beginning of the Christian era, the Holy Scriptures simply mentioned about the CHURCH without adding anything to it unless it had to refer to 'local churches' hence the mention of the town's name to the word 'Church' : 'Church of Jerusalem', 'Church of Ephesus', 'Church of Antioch', etc.

**The Church needs to be redefined according to the New Testament teaching.**  
It is so easy to get lost in the maze of all its current designations.

In JERUSALEM, at first there was only ONE church of several thousands of Christians gathered under the apostles' spiritual leadership. Nowadays in this town, Christianity is represented through a diverse range of churches: Orthodox Church, Roman Catholic Church, Greek Catholic Church, Coptic Church, Armenian Church, Maronite Church, Uniate Church, Baptist Church, Adventist Church, Anglican Church, Methodist Church, Messianic Community, etc.

## **Which church is the true one?**

I often heard this statement: "I have MY religion!". Some people say: "I was born Catholic" or "I was born Protestant". Therefore there is no choice to be made! Individuals generally cling to their parents' religion.

In our contemporary language, the biblical term 'church' no longer has the same meaning as in the first place. Other words like: 'religion', 'denomination', 'community', 'movement', 'mission' etc replaced it.

CHURCH is not « a religion ».

To know what the "TRUE CHURCH" is -**THE ONE WHICH BELONGS TO JESUS CHRIST**- we just have to go back to the past and return to the School of the Apostles.

They were the ones who were told by Jesus, the Master, to teach EVERYTHING He had commanded:

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey EVERYTHING I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)

**Therefore, there is a way clearly marked out in the Bible. It enables us to discern if we belong to the true Church founded by Christ himself.**

What's important is not the designation but the teaching: is it conform to the biblical one?

## **THE CHURCH OF JERUSALEM OR THE MOTHER-CHURCH**

The church of Jerusalem is considered as the ideal church, a model and a reference for the church of all times.

### **How did it start ?**

On the Ascension Day of the Lord Jesus, the apostles were with him on the Mount of Olives. Before He left them to ascend to heaven: "He gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about." (Acts 1:4)

After they saw him disappear into a cloud, they went down the Mount of Olives, went across the Kedron brook and travelled to Jerusalem where they went "upstairs to the room where they were staying." (Acts 1:13)

Nowadays we could call this upper room 'meeting room'.  
It was a big room where approximately 120 individuals gathered.  
Apart from the apostles, there was Mary, Jesus' mother as well as Jesus' brothers and other women. (Acts 1:14)

They prayed with one accord. They were waiting in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them just as Jesus had told them to.

**On the day of Pentecost, the upper room windows opened up to the world – when the disciples got baptised in the Holy Spirit.**

The gospel message took off and touched the heart of a multitude so that on that day 3.000 souls accepted Jesus Christ as their Saviour after Peter's preaching.

Then the Church started to move.

## **The book of Acts Is the Genesis of Church History**

Jesus told his apostles: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

On the Pentecost day, as soon as they were clothed with the power of the Holy Spirit, they began to testify boldly. (Acts 4:33)

"With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all."

Jesus' message was thus spread out in Jerusalem (Acts 5 :28) in the whole of Judea, in Samaria, Galilee and beyond Israel, across the Roman Empire, in Asia and Africa.

The church lengthened its cords according to Christ's command :

"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." Mark 16:15

All those who recognised Jesus the Messiah as the Saviour and received from Him the forgiveness of sins, used to gather around the apostles. They were a big family and persevered in the apostle's teaching. They were together in the same place. (Acts 2:44)

## **The Jewish roots of the Church**

Christianity was born in Israel and it is there in its original context that we need to study the links between the Church and Judaism.

The Church of Jerusalem was made up entirely of Jewish nationals. It was led by a Council of twelve Jewish apostles joined by elders or pastors, deacons and Jesus brothers. James, one of Jesus brothers took over its spiritual leadership after the apostles had finished.

They did not break away from some Judaic practices. They kept on going to the temple to pray. They continued observing the Sabbath and did not eat blood or the impure animals described in the Old Testament (Acts 10:14)

Later, when the apostle Paul went to Jerusalem to meet the other apostles and go to the Temple (Acts 9:26-28). He strongly asserted his Israelite origin:

“I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin.[...]” (Romans 11:1). In every town, at any given opportunity, he would go to the synagogue where he demonstrated through the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah (Acts 17: 1, 3 & 10, Acts 18:4)

However, the Greek speaking Jews called Hellenists, considered the Temple Of Jerusalem as being useless for them. This resulted in persecution against them from the Saduccean authorities who fiercely defended the Temple Orthodoxy they controlled.

In the midst of this emerging church whose majority of members mainly came from poor backgrounds and lived clustered on the edge of the West Hill of Jerusalem, a conflict arose between the Hebraic Jews and Hellenistic Jews. It is under the authority of the apostles and thanks to their wisdom that the problem has been solved through the appointing of the first deacons. (Acts 6:1-6)

The converts were called “Gentiles”, that –is- to say non-Jewish individuals who had adopted Judaism, been circumcised in order to become authentic members of the Israelite people. The church also included a lot of priests who were obedient to the faith in Christ and kept their zeal for the Tora. (Acts 6:7 and 21:20)

Many of those who believed in Jesus demanded the Gentiles’ circumcision as well as the observance of the Law of Moses (Acts 15:4-5).

As a result the elders and the apostles had to gather together to give direction and Peter reminded them that it was by the Lord Jesus’ grace that they were saved and not by the yoke of the Law. (Acts 15:9-11)

The Gentiles converted to Christ only had to be required to observe the principles given to Noah: i.e rejecting idolatry and immoral relationships - that were mentioned in the book of Leviticus- as well as abstaining from eating blood. (Acts 15:20)

In the Roman Empire and beyond, the instructions on how to run the Church were given according to the Jews of Jerusalem and to those who –at that time- were settled in each town where people used to read the Book of Moses on every Sabbath day in the synagogues. (Acts 15:21)

## How did the Church live its faith?

From its first days, this ideal church had been impacted by an unending spiritual unity:

“All the believers were one in heart and mind. [...]” (Acts 4:32)

It was the blessed time of Revival. That’s the way things are for any revival when the fire of the first love burns.

At the beginning of the Pentecostal Revival in Le Havre, in 1935, I experienced this brotherly atmosphere and the sharing of this joy in Christ. “In our area, a brother told me, we were about 30 converts. When we were going to meetings we used to fill up the tramway and used to sing songs until we arrived to the closest station to the meeting place. When we were going back home, at around 11 pm, we would sing again. People arrived at 6.30 pm for the 8.00 pm meeting. They waited in the queue. They brought their sandwiches while waiting for the meeting and ate outside in the street, sitting on folding stools. As soon as the doors were opened, they rushed in to enter the room.”

### **The four areas In which the first Christians persevered**

The new spiritual life the first Christians of Jerusalem received from Christ immediately resulted in four areas where they persevered;  
Acts 2:42

#### **They persevered in:**

1. The teaching of the apostles
2. The fellowship of the apostles
3. The breaking of bread
4. Prayer

#### **1. They persevered in the teaching of no one else but the apostles...**

What the apostles said was the rule. They did not discuss about the teaching. They believed in it and lived it. Their hearts were like the good soil Jesus speaks about and which allows the good seed to grow and produce fruit.

The apostles imparted what the Lord had taught them just like the apostle Paul said: “For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you [...]” (1 Corinthians 11:23)

The church which belongs to Jesus Christ does not persevere in human traditions but in the apostle’s teaching.

Jesus Christ entrusted the apostles with the mission of teaching the Church and telling everything that had to be practiced. Observing something else than what He said implies wandering away from the model Church.

The Church of Jerusalem is an example given for the Church of all times, of every nation and tribe.

**One of the criteria to recognize the Church which belongs to Christ is to check if its teaching is the one shared by the apostles in the Holy Scriptures.**

We must not forget that the disciples who wrote the divine instructions by the Spirit are all Jewish individuals who believed in Jesus as the God sent Messiah to save the lost.

**2. Brotherly fellowship** was not there for a temporary moment.

A very strong brotherly bond united them. It was a union, a spiritual fellowship demonstrated in joy and simplicity.

This exceptional community life lasted until the assault of the town of Jerusalem by the Romans, a siege which ended up in the destruction of the town and its Temple.

According to New Testament external sources such as Eusebius and Epiphanius, some members of the Church had apparently been warned by prophecy to leave the town before its destruction when the siege had been raised by Vespasian who left to get himself elected as the Roman Emperor. They took refuge in Pella, in Jordan where a group of Christians hosted them. These Christians who were fervent keepers of the Tora, rejected Paul's teachings who then called them "false brethren" (NASB, Galatians 2:4)

The Church life is normally stimulated through love, nurtured by words of kindness and mercy and against slander. The price to pay for this fulfilment is "brotherly fellowship". In principle, the Church is a big family of brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.

**3. The breaking of Bread** which is now called "Holy Communion" was the sign of the unity and gathering of the Church.

Since it was not possible to take a meal in the Temple, the breaking of bread was practiced in homes.

Several families joined together to eat the Passover meal. Thus Jesus gathered his apostles around him when he established the "Holy Communion" to remind them of his death and his coming again by sharing bread and wine.

"Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, [...]" (Acts 2:46)

This gesture of breaking bread was the sign by which they demonstrated their faith in Salvation through the offering of Christ's body. (Hebrews 10:10)

The Church only exists through the Cross. Without Christ's sacrifice on Calvary, there would be no Church. During the Holy Communion, the redeemed people gathered to remember the grace that had been offered to them in Christ Jesus.

The Church which belongs to Christ perseveres in reminding of Christ's death, their Saviour and does not stick to traditions but to the apostle's teaching which passed on these words of Jesus:

"This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." (Luke 22:19)

4. Their prayers demonstrate their dependence on God.

"They all joined together constantly in prayer, [...]" (Acts 1:14)

"One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer [...]" (Acts 3:1)

"[...] he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying." (Acts 12:12)

"praising God [...]" (Acts 2 :47)

The Church cannot exist and thrive without praise and prayer.

Prayer is not a temporary and casual practice which becomes fervent only in difficult times.

The Church has a constant prayer life. The first Christians persevered in prayer for they were conscious they had to rely on God.

Sometimes they raised their voices together in prayer to God. (Acts 4:24)

The Church is a big "House of Prayer", like a beehive where one can hear the continual noise of the bees.

Even during the times of persecution, thanksgiving and praise accompanied prayers: the Holy Scriptures tell us that "About midnight Paul and Silas *were praying and singing hymns to God*, [...]" while they were in prison. (Acts 16:25). And they were delivered miraculously.

## THE CHURCH'S FOUNDER

Jesus told the apostle Peter :

"[...] I will build MY church, [...]" (Matthew 16:18)

He simply mentions « I » and no one else, neither Peter nor Paul.

**Christ is the one who builds and founds the Church. He is the owner. The Church belongs to Him and He only has ONE Church. He did not say “MY” Churches but “MY CHURCH”. He is his HEAD (Ephesians 5:23) and represents the cornerstone.**

“Jesus is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’” (Acts 4:11-13, Mark 12:1-11, 1 Peter 2:4-7).

“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with CHRIST JESUS himself as THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE.” (Ephesians 2:20)

It was JESUS HIMSELF who “added to their number daily those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:47)

This is the reason why the Church built by Jesus is only made up of SAVED souls. **He is the Church’s SAVIOUR** (Ephesians 5:23).

The apostle Paul said to the jailer of Philippi: “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be SAVED—you and your household.” (Acts 16:31)

If you believe that Jesus Christ died for you, that he has taken your place on the cross and that His shed blood has ransomed you at a great price, then you BELONG to HIM (1 Corinthians 6:20)

The Church of saved individuals does not belong to men but to CHRIST.

**No man can say: “The Church IS MINE.”, only Christ has the right to do so.**

We can carry out different roles or activities in the Church however the Church is Christ’s.

“And God [...] appointed him to be HEAD OVER everything for the church [...]” (Ephesians 1:22)

“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.” (John 10:14)

This Church is universal since it includes all the saved individuals from all times and every corner of the earth since Christ granted his GRACE to sinners through his atoning death. Nothing nor anyone will ever be able to destroy it. It will remain despite all opposition until Jesus Christ- its founder- returns; the one who said:

**“I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” (Matt 16:18)**

## **THE FOUNDATION**



Jesus Christ is at the same time the Church's builder and its foundation.

"For no one can lay any FOUNDATION other than the one already laid, which is JESUS CHRIST." (1 Corinthians 3:11)

Without Christ, there is no saved individuals and therefore no Church.

Every church member's life is built on the person of Christ: God's son, His Work and teaching. Walking away from this basis is actually walking away from the Church.

The prophets announced Christ's coming whereas the Apostles who lived with Him taught : "That [...]which we have HEARD, which we have SEEN with our eyes, which we have LOOKED AT. [...]" (1 John 1:1)

This is why the apostle Paul wrote to the Christians of Ephesus:

"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the FOUNDATION of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the CHIEF CORNERSTONE." (Ephesians 2:19-20)

The Church is then pleasing to God when it is based on this foundation by constantly referring to these teachings.

## ILLUSTRATIONS ABOUT THE CHURCH

In the Bible, there are different pictures about of the Church helping us to better understand its nature and mission.

- **A living body**

"And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is HIS BODY, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way." (Eph 1:23)

This comparison of the Church to a body outlines:

1. Christ's union with the Church
2. The dependence of the Church on Christ.
3. It's nature: The Church is an organization which lives by Christ's life and not by an organization with a human headship. Anyway, is Christ not the head of all men? (1 Corinthians 11:3)

"And he is **THE HEAD OF THE BODY**, the Church, [...]" (Colossians 1:18)

This text illustrates in a remarkable way that the Church's DIRECTION belongs to Christ and it owes Him total submission.

“Now as the church submits to Christ,[...]” (Ephesians 5:24)

Every church member is called to obey spontaneously and joyfully the instructions of Christ -the only Master. Did he not say this? :

“But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have ONE TEACHER, and you are ALL brothers. “ (Matthew 23:8)

“ALL BROTHERS”! They are joined together in **ONE BODY** through a life in the Spirit becoming all “**MEMBERS OF HIS BODY**”. (Ephesians 5:30)

They form a COMPLETE BODY where every member has got his place and part to take:

“Now you are the **body of Christ**, and EACH ONE OF YOU IS A PART OF IT.” (1 Corinthians 12:27). No one is rejected, neglected or despised.

“[...] For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest.” Jesus said in (Luke 9:48): an invitation to be humble for every member.

- **A bride**

“I promised you to **one husband**, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.” (2 Corinthians 11:2)

In Israel, the Jewish custom encouraged couples to call themselves husband and wives as soon as they were engaged. For this reason, Joseph was called “Mary’s husband” even though they were only engaged. (Matthew 1:18-19)

This picture intensifies the principle of commitment, faithfulness and strengthens this idea of a **covenant** which cannot be broken.

The Church, a pure virgin who is already called Bride, belongs to her husband Jesus-Christ who gave his life for her. Hence, the parallel used by the apostle Paul when he speaks about marriage to the Ephesians:

“For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup> After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking **about Christ and the church.**” (Ephesians: 23-32)

Engagement lead to a wedding.

Those who belong to Christ and consequently to the Church- which belongs to Christ- will take part in the feast called “wedding feast” and revealed to us by the apostle John:

“Let us be glad and rejoice and let us give honor to him. For the time has come for **the wedding feast of the Lamb**, and **his bride** has prepared herself. She has been given the finest of pure white linen to wear.” (Revelation 19:7-8)

### **Christ only has ONE BRIDE, one Church!**

He came on earth to offer up his life and give birth to the Church His bride and He is preparing her for this glorious day of marriage.

### **. A family**

“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also **MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD**, [...]” (Ephesians 2:19)

All those who are saved, have **God as a FATHER** since all of them are born of God after they have believed in Jesus Christ and received him as the Saviour in their lives.

“Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”(John 1:12-13)

The Church is not a family of newborn individuals but of **BORN AGAIN** brothers and sisters. No one is perceived as a stranger. There is no barrier between black and white, rich and poor people anymore.

**What a grace to belong to the FAMILY OF GOD and to have Jesus Christ as a BROTHER since he is not ashamed to call us “his brothers”.** (Hebrews 2:11-12)

The word « brother » is often mentioned in the New Testament:

“ [...] the **brothers** and sisters received us warmly.” (Acts 21 :17)

“There we found some **brothers** and sisters who invited us to spend a week with them.” (Acts 28:14)

“ [...] as for our **brothers**, they are representatives of the churches and an honor to Christ.” (2 Corinthians 8 :23)

## . A spiritual House

” [...] you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God,[...]”

God’s house is neither a stone nor a brick Church with a bell tower, it is neither a Temple with its cross nor a place dedicated to the believers’ gathering.

**GOD’S HOUSE IS ALIVE and built with LIVING STONES**, like the apostle Peter said:

“ [...] you also, like living stones, are being built into A SPIRITUAL HOUSE to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 2:5).

Stones can only be fixed if the cement adheres to it. The cement is the House of God, it represents Love. If there is no love then there are quarrels and animosities, as a consequence the house collapses.

Christ “dwells in our hearts through faith”. Then these hearts form God’s house and love is poured out into it through the Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 3:17 – Romans 5:5)

“Moses was faithful as a servant in all God’s house, bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. But Christ is faithful as the Son over GOD’S HOUSE. And we are *his house*, [...]” (Hebrews 3:5-6)

We are HIS HOUSE. He only has ONE HOUSE.

The temple of Jerusalem was called “God’s house” and a High Priest used to go into the Holy of Holies to plead to God in favour of his people.

Now the House of God is the Church. Jesus is established there as a High Priest. He intercedes for it before God. (Romans 8:34-Hebrews 9:11 and 24-28)

## . A people

“ [...] Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself A PEOPLE THAT ARE HIS VERY OWN, eager to do what is good.” (Titus 2:14)

“ But you are [...] GOD’S SPECIAL POSSESSION, [...]” the apostle Peter said (1 Peter 2:9)

“Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a PEOPLE for his name from the Gentiles.” This what James,- the leading pastor of the Church of Jerusalem- said in front of the apostles and elders ‘ gathering. (Acts 15:14)

**What a privilege to know that we have now become members of the elected people of God, that-is-to-say the Church which belongs to Christ, through our faith in Him! (1 Peter 2:10)**

## **LOCAL CHURCHES**

“This morning, I’m going to the worship service in ‘my’ church!”

The Christian individual who uses this phrase talks about the local church he is linked to and meets with other Christians to worship the Lord.

What does the word ‘Church’ mean?

It originates from the Greek word ‘ekklesia’ which represented among the Greeks a legal assembly exclusively made up of citizens selected among a big multitude of individuals to run the public affairs.

It corresponds to the Greek word ‘Sunagoge’ used by the Jews to speak about an assembly of Jews who met to pray and worship God.

These words ‘ekklesia’ and ‘sunagoge’ are sometimes translated by the word ‘assembly’ instead of the word ‘church’ :

“Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.”(ekklesia) (Acts 5:11)

“If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.” (ekklesia) (1 Corinthians 14:35)

“Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in.”(sunagoge) (James 2:2)

“So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and inquirers or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?” (ekklesia) (1 Corinthians 14:23)

“He says: “I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters; in the assembly I will sing your praises.”” (ekklesia) (Hebrews 2:12)

It is in its most noble sense that the word “ekklesia” is used in the New Testament to designate the Assembly of Christians who gathered to pray and worship God together.

## Why do we have local churches?

Beyond the meaning of the word 'church', one has to make the distinction between two facts:

1. The spiritual existence of the Church which belongs to Jesus Christ and in which He brings us when we are SAVED through our faith in Him.
2. The physical reality of the "Assemblies" of believers in diverse places.

When the Scriptures say that the Church enjoyed a time of peace throughout Judea, Samaria and Galilee (Acts 9:31) it means that there is only one and the same Church of the "redeemed" called "saints" (Acts 9:32)

It is only later in Antioch that the "saints" have been called "Christians" for the first time. (Acts 11:26), that it has been spoken about the "assemblies" (Acts 11:26, Darby version) and then about the "churches" (Acts 15:41 and 16:5)

The mother Church of Jerusalem started to expand. Groups of Christians developed in Israel and beyond. Archeological excavations allowed us to find some "houses" where the local churches used to gather from the first century in Capernaum, Nazareth, and Bethlehem...

From town to town, village to village, throughout the Asian, European and African countries, the Gospel spread. Everywhere, those who believed in Jesus and were baptized in water would meet and form assemblies called "churches" and these churches bore the names of the local towns or areas of settlement:

The Church of Antioch (Acts 11:26), the Church of Cenchreae (Romans 16:1), the Church of Laodicea (Colossians 4:16), the Church of the chosen ones in Babylon (1 Peter 5:13), the Church of Ephesus, of Smyrna, of Pergamum (Revelation 2:3), the Church of God in Corinth (1 Cor 1:1), the Churches in Galatia (Galatians 1:2), the Churches of Macedonia (2 Cor 8:1), the Churches of Asia (1 Cor 16:19)

All these local churches followed the apostles' teaching. They were bound together by the same faith, the same Saviour, the same Spirit and represented the CHURCH, Jesus Christ's people.

At the beginning of the word "ekklesia", there is "ek" which means "out of". The Church is separated from the world and the unbelievers. It is set apart. It is made up of all those who CAME OUT of darkness, were delivered from sin and brought into God's presence by grace.

This separation is confessed publicly when the SAVED individual is baptized in water.

All the local churches or "assemblies" of the first century were exclusively made up of believers who were baptized by immersion.

We are saved **by our faith in Jesus** and it is Jesus Himself who adds us to the Church which belongs to Him.

We join the local church **through the Baptism in water** just like it happened at the apostle's times.

Being isolated is not normal, except in the case of illness, infirmity or non-existence of other Christians in the place where we live.

**The Lord wanted His disciples to gather together. In fact, He laid out the basic foundation of the local church when He said:**

"For where two or three GATHER in my name, there am I with them." (Matthew 18:20)

Jesus Christ is the living Lord, always present in the Church among his people.

Every Christian normally joins a local church as the apostle James specifies it to his scattered Jewish brothers in writing: "YOUR assembly" (James 2:2 NASB)

Let us not neglect our own assembly and let us be in conformity with this recommendation of the Hebrews' epistle by not forsaking it, since it complies with the apostle's teaching. (Hebrews 10:25 NASB)

## **THE MEETING PLACES OF THE LOCAL CHURCHES**

The members of the Mother Church of Jerusalem used to meet either in houses, or in the Temple.

"Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts." (Acts 2:46)

"When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying." (Acts 12:12)

At the times of the apostles, there were many churches in houses. These houses were not churches and these churches were not houses. It was the Christians who gathered in these houses who represented the churches.

The word "church" has never been used in the New Testament to designate a building. The words "chapel", "cathedral", "basilica" do not exist in the Holy Scriptures.

For this reason when you say: "I'm going to Church", you are actually going to the place where the Church is meeting.

You also do not find in the Bible the words “cell”, “parish”, “prayer circles”, etc but we read this:

“Greet also the church that meets at their house.” (Romans 16:5)

“Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house.” (1 Corinthians 16:19)

“Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.” (Colossians 4:15)

“[...] and to the church that meets in your home” (Philemon 1:2)

The apostle Paul rented a house in Rome where he held meetings (Acts 28:30). He had previously taught frequently in houses (Acts 20:20). On one occasion, he celebrated communion in an upper room located on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of a house (Acts 20:07-12)

This does not mean that churches should now meet exclusively in houses, but that churches need a place to gather for “How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!” (Psalms 133:1)

## **THE CHURCH AND ITS ORGANIZATION**

When Jesus walked across the towns and villages of the Holy Land, He entrusted his twelve apostles with tasks like dealing with the finances or finding accommodation, preparing the meals, etc.

We cannot live on earth without a minimum of practical organization.

From the start of the Church, difficulties arose in Jerusalem concerning the distribution of food to the poor and as a consequence, the apostles had to establish deacons who would take care of it (Acts 6:1-6).

Nowadays, the practical organization varies according to countries and churches.

In France, some assemblies are set up according to the laws of the country and called “religious associations”: these assemblies require a president, a treasurer, a secretary and committee members. But what really matters is to examine how the Church was organized on a SPIRITUAL level because it is valid for every country and every people.

The Church is mainly a LIVING ORGANIZATION enlivened by the Spirit of God; it is not an association or a company ruled by human laws even though these are necessary in our modern times for practical reasons.

**The Church represents a perpetual MOVE of the Spirit and not a fixed monument.**

The life of the Spirit manifests itself through the church members who have different roles. Every man and woman can take part in prayer, worship, testimony and mutual exhortation (1 Thessalonians 5:11- Colossians 3:16) so that they form a holy priesthood (1 Peter 2:5-9).



However the Lord's desire was to establish ministries in the Church and to enliven it through the spiritual gifts:

"There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord." (1 Corinthians 12:4-5)

## The ministries

"And he gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of **ministering**, unto the building up of the body of Christ [...]" ( Eph 4:11 – 1 Cor. 12:28 American Standard Version)

"Ministering" is the translation of the Greek word 'Diakonia' which means "service", "office of a servant". On an etymological basis, it could be translated by: "the one who kicks up dust when running, the one who is prompt to obey."

"But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry (diakonia) of the word." The apostles said in Acts -: 4 (NASB)

Thus, God establishes men who are in charge of the **ministry of the Word**. They are rightly called "ministers of God".

The verb "diakoneo" means to be "a servant, attendant, domestic, to serve, wait upon to minister to another, to be served."

"Diakonos" resulted in the English word "deacon" which means: "a servant".

There are different ministries in Christ's Church however there is no hierarchy.

Those who serve the Lord by sharing the Word are the leaders and examples to the flock (1 Peter 5:1-3); they should be respected and honored as such: (1 Timothy 5:17-3 John 6-8).

At the apostle's time, there was no TITLE like: "My Lord", "Archbishop", "Cardinal", "Patriarch", or "Pope", but there were only MINISTRIES.

**THE APOSTLE:** This word comes from the Greek word "apostolos" which means "one sent forth with orders" and it corresponds to the word "missionary" derived from the Latin word "mission". The Apostle is the one SENT BY GOD to announce the Word and implant the Gospel where it is still unknown by establishing local churches. He is a pioneer.

**THE PROPHET:** He is the MESSENGER or God's spokesman. He gives exhortations, encouragements to the churches and He sometimes announces events to come by revelation.

**THE EVANGELIST:** He is the PREACHER OF THE GOOD NEWS to lead souls to Salvation.

**THE PASTOR/TEACHER:** He is the SHEPHERD or leader of the local church. He takes care of it, instructs it and feeds it with biblical teachings.

**THE DEACONS (MEN & WOMEN):** They are those who take care of the practical tasks and social and charity works in the church (Acts 1-6, Acts 9:36-39).

“I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae.” (Romans 16:1)

## **Spiritual Gifts**

“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” (1 Corinthians 12:7)

“[...] eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit [...]” (1 Corinthians 14:1)

The local church is in itself a small scale reflection of the Global Church. It is part of the UNIVERSAL BODY but is also a distinct body where every Christian should normally be active and form a “Holy priesthood”. (1 Peter 2:5 & 9)

“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” (1 Corinthians 12:27)

**The proportion of everyone’s activity can be different however every gift received should be used to serve others:**

“**Each of you** should use whatever gift you have received to **serve others**, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.” (1 Peter 4:10)

The spiritual gifts are listed in 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 & 28-30).

These gifts represent “THE MANIFESTATION OF THE SPIRIT”. They are given for the common good.

**The local church which complies with the New Testament teaching is enlivened by this manifestation of the Spiritual life.**

The gifts should be desired to strengthen and consolidate the Church in its faith:

“[...] When you come together, [...] Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.” (1 Corinthians 14:26).

The members are useful when they are joined to the body and not when they are isolated. (1 Corinthians 12:25)

It is in the “whole church” (1 Corinthians 14:23) that the Spirit works for the benefit of everyone. Order, submission, balance and wisdom are essential spiritual rules to the building up of the Church (1 Corinthians 14:23-33)

## THE GROWTH AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH

“Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. (day of Pentecost)”. (Acts 2:41)

“But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.” (Acts 4:4)

“So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly [...]” (Acts 6:7)

In Jerusalem, thousands of Jews were counted as disciples of the Lord; the converts had believed in the message of grace announced by the apostles.

They were still respectful of their Jewish roots and customs and Paul said this to the pastors of Jerusalem including James, Jesus’ brother: “[...]all of them are zealous for the law.” (Acts 21:20)

The apostles and the other disciples obeyed Christ’s command and went preaching the Gospel beyond Jerusalem and Israel, in the entire Roman Empire.

According to some historic sources, the apostle Thomas even went to India.

In this country, one can find the St Thomas Church located on a hill just after leaving the town of Madras and going towards the South on the right.

He was buried there after being pierced by a spear. Mark apparently went to Egypt, in Alexandria and others went to Armenia. Paul went to Rome, etc.

The Gospel which had first been announced to the Jews had then been preached to the Greeks and every other people group.

The apostles’ successors who are called the “Apostolic Fathers”, kept on spreading their faith and from then on, from generation to generation, throughout the centuries, the Word of God has been proclaimed.

Unfortunately, some heresies and dissidents appeared.

However, some Christians kept faithful to the Word of God by drinking from the Biblical Source.

The Church’s mission is to constantly obey Christ’s orders:

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations [...] and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19)

“[...] Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.” (Mark 16 :15)

**Jesus Christ’s Church has a “missionary” vision. She must take part in the spreading of the Gospel (Philippians 1:5), and be a witness to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8)**

Nowadays, the return to basics like the Word of God turns into a deep thirst in many believers and God pours out his Spirit on all flesh once again, in these last times. Local churches where the Holy Spirit moves like in the first century churches emerge here and there.

**In the past, “Through the help of the Holy Spirit it (the church) was strengthened and grew in numbers, [...]” (Acts 9:31, Good News Translation). It cannot work in a different way today. There cannot be a Living Church without the Holy Spirit’s action.**

This action is always in harmony with the Word of God. **The Word and the Spirit are inseparable.** The Holy Spirit-led Church submits itself to the instruction and authority of the Word. It is good to examine through the Word if the teachings given in the church are conformed to the Biblical thought, just like the Berean Christians did. (Acts 17:11)

The CROSS and the CHURCH work together but unfortunately many “churches” have moved away from the cross and become apostate.

“but we preach Christ crucified. [...]”(1 Corinthians 1:23).

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:18)

The Church expansion does not result from divisions. Her growth is due to a multiplication of local churches.

On a spiritual basis, **Christ’s Church is ONE** even if its members are physically scattered across the face of the earth.

There are more than 4 billion inhabitants on earth. A quarter of them, that-is-to say 1 billion call themselves Christians. How many are saved out of this billion and truly belong to Christ?

When I went to Antioch in Syria, I only saw minarets from which words of the Koran were broadcast every morning over loudspeakers.

However, at the time of Paul the apostle, there was a lively and flourishing church. (Acts 11:19-30).

In a period of 19 centuries, the world has been invaded by false prophets’ teachings like Mohammed and atheistic ideologies. Anti-christs and seducers have not stopped appearing and spreading doctrines of demons. (1 John 4:1-3, 2 John 1:7, 1 Tim 4:1)

**Nevertheless, there are millions of men and women who are saved by Jesus Christ, baptized in the Holy Spirit and whose faith is founded in the sole authority of the Word of God across the earth. The Church keeps growing by the Holy Spirit’s help.**

# THE CHURCH'S STRENGTH

There are three main points which appear in the life of the model Church of Jerusalem:

Prayer

Testimony

Brotherhood

**Prayer:** it is a sign of reliance on God. Without this vertical relationship, the Church may become a human, social, or intellectual organization, a system.

The first disciples prayed:

1. *With perseverance.* A prayer of waiting and trusting in the fulfillment of Christ's promise. "[...] many people had gathered and were praying." (Acts 12 :5-12)
2. *With solidarity.* They prayed for one of their member who was imprisoned. They gathered for this reason: "When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God." (Acts 4:24)
3. *In one accord.* This unity in prayer gave them confidence to face difficulties. "[...] they lifted their voices to God with one accord [...]" (Acts 4:24, NASB)

**If the value of prayer meetings is neglected, then the Church weakens.**

**Testimony:** It was given "with great power" (Acts 4:33), "everywhere" (Acts 8:4, Good News Translation), "To the Jews and Greek" (Acts 14:19). The apostles said: "We are witnesses. [...]" (Acts 5:32).

Moreover, Christ said: "you will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8)

They testified verbally with boldness and without shame. **The Christians' testimony is one of the Church's driving forces. Light has to really be displayed according to Jesus' words.**

**Brotherhood:** The "saved" Jews used to gather in the name of Jesus and were "in one heart and mind" (Acts 4:32). They used to live their faith "with one accord" (Acts 1:14, American Standard Version)

**If there is a vertical relationship that-is-to say an intense fellowship with God through prayer, then it normally results in a horizontal brotherly relationship with brothers and sisters in Christ.**

Brotherly love represents a great essential force in the Church's walk and proves that its members are authentic disciples of Christ!

"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:35)

PRAYER, TESTIMONY, BROTHERLY LOVE are three strong threads of a normal and blessed Church Life.

A church is weak when there is a lack of love and when the assembly is being infiltrated by worms such as gossip, negative criticisms and slanders which destroy the spiritual harmony.

This was what the apostle Paul feared about concerning the members of the Corinthian Church: “[...]I fear that there may be discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder.” (2 Corinthians 12:20)

The Church is strong when the fleshly works are dead and when Love: a fruit of the Spirit abounds in every heart. (Galatians 5:16-25)

## THE HOPE AND DESTINY OF THE CHURCH

The Church era is coming to an end. It will end up on Christ's return who as the Head of the Church made this promise to his disciples:

“I will come back and take you to be with me” (John 14:3)

This hope of Jesus Christ's very imminent return gives a motivation, a priority and emergency to the Church: To share the Gospel to every creature.

“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, [...] and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be **caught up together** with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. [...]” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)

The whole people of God will soon be gathered around Christ, their Saviour beyond the visible world.

The biblical texts are precise on this topic:

“**We will be caught up together** with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”

**WE!** Who are they?

1. **The dead in Christ.** Who are they? Those who believed in HIM and lived their faith in his redemptive work until the end of their earthly life. All those who have been to say like the apostle Paul: “[...] I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, [...]” (2 Timothy 4:7-8)
2. **We, who are still alive.** Paul addresses his letter to the members of the Thessalonian Church who turned to God to “wait for HIS SON from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.” (1 Thessalonians 1:10). The “living” ones are “those who belong to Christ when he comes”. (1 Cor 15:23)

What a meeting this will be! What a wonderful convention this gathering of EVERY REDEEMED on the clouds will be!

They will all be clothed with a white garment just like the one the angels who appeared to Mary Magdalene wore on the Day of Resurrection:

“As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels **in white**, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.” (John 20:11-12)

“At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.” (Matthew 22:30)

“These in **white robes** — who are they, and where did they come from? [...] These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, “they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. [...] For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; ‘he will lead them to springs of living water.” (Revelation 7:13-17)

“The one who is victorious will, like them, **be dressed in white**. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels.” (Revelation 3:5)

**THE CHURCH which belongs to Christ** is a people made of individuals who are victorious over sin and Satan through Jesus Christ.

“But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 15:57)

“ [...] in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” (Romans 8:37)

The church will soon take part in Christ’s victory over death when the dead in Christ will be resurrected and when all the “redeemed” who are still alive at Christ’s return will be transformed instantly.

“When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” (1 Corinthians 15:54)

“the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.” (1 Corinthians 15:52)

“the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be LIKE his glorious body.” (Philippians 3:21)

This miracle will occur “ in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye.” (1 Corinthians 15:52) and THE CHURCH clothed with “fine linen, bright and clean” (Revelation 19:8) will meet Jesus Christ, her Saviour, “in the air.” (1 Thessalonians 4:17)

Such is the GLORIOUS HOPE of the Church which belongs to Jesus Christ who redeemed it.

The Lamb of God was “slain, and with his blood he purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.” (Revelation 5:9)

The whole of the redeemed who are called the CHURCH, will soon be gathered around Christ and form “A KINGDOM OF PRIESTS to serve their God, and they will reign on the earth.” (Revelation 5:9-10), WITH CHRIST (Revelation 20:6), then they “reign FOR EVER AND EVER.” (Revelation 22:5)

While it is waiting for his return, Christ recommends HIS CHURCH to “Be always on the watch, and pray [...]” (Luke 21:36). He orders every member of His Church to be like the wise virgins who were on the watch and waiting for the arrival of the bridegroom in the night with a portion of oil in their lamps (Matthew 25:1-13)  
“Therefore KEEP WATCH, because you do not know the day or the hour.”

**How marvelous this will be for the Church of the redeemed to see Him coming back in ALL HIS GLORY, surrounded by thousands and thousands of angels clothed in white!**



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