

# What Is Your Idea of "The Church"?

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There are many different ideas and conceptions of "the church" throughout Christendom.

1. Some believe that it is a great invisible body composed of all the denominations. Thus, we have the belief that "one church is as good as another."
2. Some believe that "the church" is primarily a social institution, and membership in it is a necessity for community recognition.
3. Some think "the church" is a recreational institution, having the responsibility to provide recreation for its members, particularly for its young people.
4. Others believe "the church" to be only a substitute for the physical kingdom that Christ supposedly failed to establish on earth.
5. Still others believe that "the church" no longer exists today, but that it has been succeeded entirely by denominationalism.

## What does the New Testament say?

For the careful Bible student, it is not difficult to learn the ideas and concepts present concerning the church in this Book of books. Since all that we can know about the original church we must learn from the New Testament, let us see what it says.

1. Christ promised to build the church—"Upon this rock I will build my church... (Mat. 16:18). Its congregations are called "the churches of Christ" by Paul (Rom. 16:16).
2. It consists of **unified** believers in and followers of the Lord and His will.

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgement" (1 Cor. 1:10).

Jesus' Church could not possibly be composed of hundreds of discordant warring sects.
3. The church **is** a social institution, being composed of men and women who have fellowship in common goals (Phi. 1:3-5). This is a **result** rather than the purpose of being a member of it, however. Its primary purpose is to support or preach the Gospel that others might obey it and be saved (1 Tim. 3:15).
4. The church is not a mere substitute for an alleged thwarted plan of God. Paul stated in Ephesians 3:10-11 that it is according to the **eternal purpose** of God that the manifold

wisdom of God might be made known by the church. This means that the church was/is a part of God's eternal plan for redeeming mankind.

5. Is it possible for the original church to yet exist over 19 centuries after its establishment? Yes, it is found today, just as it was in the first century, wherever there are souls who will not be shackled by the creeds of men, but who have obeyed the simple terms of the New Testament and who are continuing to follow them. A grain of corn, no matter where planted, if it unites with the soil under proper conditions will grow. It will not germinate into cotton, wheat, or anything else but corn. Jesus said that the "seed" of His kingdom is the Word of God (Luke 8:11). Therefore, the Gospel, when it unites with the heart of a person, will germinate and produce a Christian and nothing else. The Lord then adds this one to His church (Acts 2:41, 47).

### **How do they compare?**

When you hear the word *church* what picture do you form in your mind? Is it one of the first group of ideas reviewed or is it a New Testament concept? If your idea of the church does not agree with the ones above, who is wrong? Who needs to change his or her idea of it?

[**Note:** I wrote this article for and it was published in *The Encourager*, weekly bulletin of Church of Christ, Iowa Park, TX, June 23, 1960, of which I was editor.]

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