



THE CHURCH

BY KEN HORN

Editor's note: This final article in the series Theology in a Nutshell is on ecclesiology, the study of the Church.

“I don't need church,”

said the older gentleman, as I offered him my hand. It was Sunday morning, and I was standing in front of the tiny building that housed the first congregation I pastored. He quickly added, with an edge, “I can meet God in my backyard just as well as in your church.”

Our conversation continued. But you know what? He was right ... partly. You can meet with God anywhere. But going to church is not just about meeting with God; it's also about being with God's people.

Christians are the Church.

The English word *church* is similar to the Scottish *kirk* and its counterpart in other languages.

The Greek word *kuriakon*, “belonging to the Lord,” is the source. A building is not the focus of the church in the Bible.

Ekklesia is the New Testament word. The roots *out* and *call* are combined to mean “called-out ones.” It is translated “assembly” or “congregation.” In the Bible, the Church is always the people, never a building.

The Church began on the Day of Pentecost.

When Jesus said, “I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18), it was yet future. When the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), the Church began. This was the “beginning” Peter referred to in Acts 11:15.

There is really only one Church.

There are lots of church buildings and lots of denominations that call themselves churches. All of these together make up the *visible* church. The true Church (or *invisible* worldwide Church) is composed of all true believers. It is invisible because it is spiritual and only God can see it.

The Church is called the body of Christ, and Christians take different roles in that Body.

“And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His [Christ's] body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:22,23, NKJV).

“So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another” (Romans 12:5).

Members of the Body have been given gifts to be used to benefit the Church.

“As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10).

“There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. ... But the manifestation of the Spirit is

given to each one for the profit of all” (1 Corinthians 12:4,7; see 1 Corinthians 7:17).

Gifts are meant to be used.

People must not sit on their gifts. “For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Romans 11:29). They must be used.

Gifts well used will bear fruit.

Gifts and abilities entrusted to us (as stewards), if used, will bear fruit. If they are not used, not only what they could have produced will be lost, but often, the original endowment as well. (See Matthew 25:14-30.)

Some individuals have special gifts, offices.

Ephesians 4:11,12 lists apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

Pastors and deacons are the primary offices in the New Testament Church.

We also find words for elder (*presbuteros*), and for bishop or overseer (*episkopos*). Pastor is the Greek *poimen*, which is also translated shepherd. Despite the fact various groups have created different offices for these terms, in the New Testament they are synonymous: Pastor = elder = bishop or overseer. (See Acts 20:17,28.)

Pastors/elders lead, some paid and some unpaid, and some also preach and teach. First Timothy 5:17 says, “Let the elders who rule well be counted

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worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine." "Double honor" refers to wages, or income from the ministry (v. 18).

Christians go to church regularly.

Two fishermen sit in a boat on a Sunday morning. They have fished for a few hours with nary a bite when one says to the other, "Maybe we should have gone to church this morning."

"No," the other replies, "I couldn't have gone anyway. My wife's home sick."

Lots of things keep people from church. But it's clear that the norm for believers is to be in God's house on a regular basis — "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together" (Hebrews 10:25).

The Church has two ordinances.

An ordinance is an outward ceremony the Lord has directed the Church to observe.

Water baptism

Jesus commanded this for all who become disciples, followers of Christ: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

Baptism is for believers (Acts 18:8, et al). There is no instance in the Bible of anyone being baptized too young to have made a commitment to Jesus. In Acts 16:31-34, all the members of the Philippian jailer's household believed. Infant baptism has no precedent in Scripture.

Water baptism does not save in itself. It is a symbol or figure. First Peter 3:21 (NIV) puts it this way: "And this water symbolizes

baptism that now saves you also — not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." It symbolizes the initial baptism, which is spiritual, being baptized into the body of Christ: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27, NKJV; see 1 Corinthians 12:13).

It is also symbolic of:

- Identification with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus; as well as death to self and resurrection life (2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 6:3-11; Colossians 2:12).

- Washing away of sins (Acts 22:16).

- Lives immersed in Jesus (John 15:7; Galatians 3:27).

Water baptism is by immersion. The Greek *baptizo* always means to dip or immerse. Immersion also best portrays death and resurrection. The element, water, portrays spiritual washing.

When should you be baptized?

At your first opportunity after salvation (Acts 8:35-38; 10:44-48; 16:33). If you have not been baptized since receiving Christ, see your pastor right away.

A profession of faith must be made to demonstrate that true belief accompanies the act (Acts 22:16; compare with Romans 10:9).

Communion or the Lord's Supper

Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, also called Communion (1 Corinthians 10:16), the night before His crucifixion (Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:14-20). It consists of two elements — bread and the fruit of the vine. The bread symbolizes Christ's body and the cup His blood, both given as a sacrifice for sin.

The apostle Paul gave direction to the Church about the actual practice (1 Corinthians 11:23-30). Taking the symbols is a memorial of Christ's suffering and death (vv. 24,25), as well as a proclamation of His sacrifice (v. 26), and is to be done "till He comes" (v. 26). Thus it also serves as a reminder of His second coming.

It is intended for believers only, and even they must examine their hearts before partaking to make sure there is no unconfessed sin (vv. 27-30).

Though we celebrate it regularly, Communion must never be taken for granted. It is a high privilege — and an intimate experience — that is at the core of the Christian life.

The Church has purposes.

The Church exists to: evangelize the lost and disciple converts (Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:19,20; Mark 16:15,16); worship God corporately (1 Corinthians 12:13); and build up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Corinthians 14:12).

God's people do the work of the Church, but it is Christ who does the actual building (Matthew 16:18).

Welcome to the body of Christ. Now let's go to work. **tpe**

KEN HORN is the editor of *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*. This series has been adapted from the upcoming book *Theology in a Nutshell*.

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

ABCs OF SALVATION

To know God and be ready for heaven, follow these steps:

A. Admit you are a sinner.

"There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:10,23 (See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

Ask God's forgiveness and repent of your sins.

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13 (See Acts 3:19.)

B. Believe in Jesus (put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)

Become a child of God by receiving Christ.

"To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)

C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.

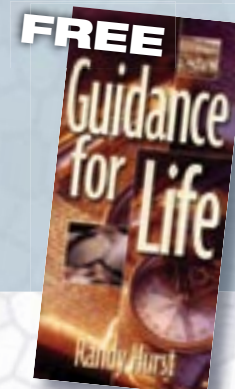
"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)

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