



# WEEK 1

## WHAT IS THE CHURCH?



*“Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).*

### **Day 1: The Church of Jesus Christ**

*Matthew 16:16-19; 1 Corinthians 1:1-9*

*Matthew 16:16. And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

*17. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.*

*18. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

*19. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*

*1 Corinthians 1:1. Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,*

*2. Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, 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:*

*3. Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*4. I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ;*

*5. That in everything ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge;*

*6. Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you:*

*7. So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:*

*8. Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*9. God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.*

### **Human Beings Need Each Other**

God created man as a social being. A person needs the company of others for his normal development. God said of Adam, "It is not good that the man should be alone." The truth in this divine statement includes more than just the need for male and female. Men and women need the company, association, and the help and sympathy of others in order to be happy and to grow into useful people. God implanted in us the desire for human companionship for our own good. As Paul wrote, "None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself." Numerous ties connect us to others and to society.

A human spends a large part of his life being dependent on others. Among the animals, the young are dependent on the parents for only a short time. The partly mature youngsters soon begin to make their

own way in life, and the family group ceases to exist. With humans, the young are more helpless at birth and require longer care before they reach maturity. The first decades of life are spent under the direct care of parents and teachers. Growth and development are not only physical, but also mental and moral. Prolonged teaching and training are needed to bring a child to maturity and responsibility, and for this training he is dependent on others.

Since man is a religious being, the question arises: What provision has been made for his social instinct in his religious and spiritual life? He can no more grow to religious maturity and usefulness by himself than he can develop in body and mind without others. God planned a divine society in which His redeemed children can live and grow spiritually.

### **Thinking Through the Scripture**

Jesus Christ spent a few years of His brief earthly life teaching a small group of men who would carry forward His work after He returned to the Father. They were with Him day after day. They watched Him minister to needy people. They saw Him heal diseases and forgive sins. They heard Him pray. They listened to and absorbed His teachings and saw His sympathy and compassion. They came to realize He was God's Son, with divine authority and power.

Once, after they had been with Him for some time, He asked them who they believed He was. Peter spoke for himself and his fellow disciples when he confessed, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." The Lord commended Peter for his frank confession. Then He went on to say, "Upon this rock I will build my church."

This was the first record of Jesus mentioning the church. He spoke of it as His church. He would build it on a rock, a solid and lasting

foundation, and it would never fall or be destroyed. Those who confess faith in Jesus Christ and follow Him become a part of His church, the divine society of the people of God (1 Peter 2:5).

### **The Heart of the Matter**

Christ, the Son of God, is building His church on the foundation of a living faith in Himself. The church is the community of those who are united to Him by faith. Thus united to Christ, they have many things in common: joys, hopes, aspirations, problems, and aims. They live in close fellowship with and receive encouragement and strength from each another. The church provides the right atmosphere for the converted soul to grow in Christian character. That is because other believers are with him, God's Holy Spirit is in each of them, and His Son is their controlling Head.

**A Divine Society.** The word *church* denoted originally an assembly of people united for a common purpose. Christ's followers together make up the church. In this society is the right atmosphere, soil, surroundings, and associations to promote spiritual growth in the members. This special society is one of the ways God works to influence individual souls. Man's inner life is often best reached through relationships. God's Spirit uses the testimony and influence of others to help us grow.

The Apostle Paul addressed the Christians at Corinth as people who were sanctified (set apart). He called them saints; that is, holy ones who were separated from society and gathered into His society. He addresses the group at Corinth as the church of God. But he also says that wherever people call upon Jesus as Lord, there too is the church.

The Christians at Corinth were not perfect—far from it, as Paul's first letter to them shows. Still they were saints, called of God, people

whose lives were enriched by God's grace in many respects. They were the church of God because they were united with Jesus Christ by faith and served Him as Lord. Notice how the apostle emphasizes the place of Christ in the church by mentioning Him in nearly every verse.

### Related Ideas

**Societies and Associations.** It is quite natural for people with the same occupation, trade, profession, or hobby to get together to exchange ideas. They learn from each other and increase their skill and efficiency. They find help and encouragement in talking about things they have in common. People have formed all kinds of societies and associations for all kinds of interests: from scientific studies to hobbies, and from worldwide conventions to family reunions.

The church is the society of those who have a common interest in Christ and in the things of God. But in reality, the church can scarcely be compared to organizations formed by men for mutual advantage or interest. Christ, not man, established the church. He adds to it continually those who are saved through repentance and faith. He gave its constitution and by-laws, and He controls it. It is His church.

**Not Invisible.** "In view of the regrettable imperfections in the church, it is sometimes said that the true church exists invisibly within the professing church, and that this invisible church is in a literal sense 'without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.' It is an obvious fact, however, that not even believers who lead consistent Christian lives are faultless in the eyes of the Lord, except in the sense that Christ's righteousness is imputed to them. In other words, even the so-called 'invisible church' cannot lay claim to the predicate of perfection. . . .

"Is not 'invisibility of the church' a self-contradictory term? Needless to say, true conversion and walking in newness of life do not result