



D.J.G. Study

what is the church?

Lesson one - church history

Acts

What is the Church anyway?

I want you to think for a few minutes about the church. What do you know about how it started? Who was responsible for starting it? When did the first church service meet? What type of a service did they have? Did they sing Amazing Grace at that service? Take a minute and rack your brain – See how much of this you can come up with on your own. How much can you remember about how the church started – but no Bibles!



How it got started

Well let's take a few moments and investigate the Scriptures, shall we? Where did Jesus say He was going to build a church? Twice! Both in Matthew. Matthew 18.16, 17 and 16.17, 18.

Matthew 16.17, 18(read in the NLT, the NIV, and The Message)

Jesus did not come to set up a collection of buildings and groups. The church is simply a name ascribed to the body of Christ. There are smaller gatherings that make up the church, but the church as a whole includes all Christians across all time.

Jesus chose to use Peter and the other Apostles to build the church as we know it now. In fact, the Catholics believe that Peter was the very first Pope. The church was started by Christ. But what is the Church really?

The church was a gathering of fellow Christians together. But what did they do when they gathered together? Let's explore this idea a little closer. Look up Acts 2.42-47 for me.



42They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. 44All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 46Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

So here we have a brief look at what the early church looked like, what they did. There are three things that the early church did together when they gathered.



They listened to the Apostle's teachings. But they didn't just listen, they devoted themselves to the teachings. This means that they took them home, and actually lived like the Apostles taught them to! They devoted themselves to each other, lifting each other up and calling each other out when they were wrong. They pooled their resources. They ate together. They praised God together.

These were people who did not just come to the Temple and hear a sermon and go home. These were people who sacrificed everything, time, money, lifestyle, money, food, money, comfort, and money! They were people coming together to glorify God and did not hold onto anything in their own lives as being more important. And in the end, many, many, many of these Christians were killed for what they believed in.

They met in houses, basements, caves outside the city. A lot of the time they had to hide because they were being persecuted. Paul, author of most of the New Testament, persecuted, hunted down and killed many Christians before He became one himself.

But did the Church start with Jesus? No. The church started with Adam. Christianity grows out of Judaism, which is what was around since forever. The church is simply a more formalized look. The church is the gathering of all Christians. Early Christians called themselves "The Way."



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How it has looked throughout the ages

So what happened after the first century? Well, around the 3^d century, Christianity became the "official" religion of the Roman Empire, the largest world

power at the time. It was no longer a "secret" religion. And it has remained a strong power since then. Wars were fought in the Church's name (the Crusades, anyone?), minorities were marginalized in the Church's name, people were murdered in the Church's name. But people were saved from disaster in the Church's name. People were fed, clothed, given homes in the Church's name. People were taught how to read by the Church. The church has gone through a tumultuous time since it started. And next week, we'll look at how it looks today.



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