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## **What is a Church?**

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To many, a church is a building. They may refer to the church on the corner, or the church downtown, or the church out in the country, meaning a building with a sign that says church. It may be handy as a landmark, for giving directions, or identifying the location of a given event, but little else.

To others, it may be a social organization. "Our church is going on a picnic", "our church will have a bazaar", "our church will sponsor a boy scout troop", etc. It is treated just as any other social or civic organization, a gathering place, a group of friends and acquaintances.

All of these are legitimate uses of the word church according to the dictionary. But, when the word is used in the Bible, what is a church?

The word translated church in the New Testament is a Greek word which means "the called out." As such it always refers to a group of people, not a building. With one or two exceptions, the word is applied only to a group of people called out by God through Christ to be separate from the rest of the world; not separate in a monastic sense, but separate in terms of relationship to God.

To give a better understanding of this called out people, the Holy Spirit through the writers of the New Testament applied many figures and analogies to this group of people. Jesus used a structural analogy when He said, "I will build my church." Matthew 16:18. This same image was also used by Paul (1 Corinthians 3:11; Ephesians 2:20) and Peter (1 Peter 2:5). Another image was that of a house or household. This we find in Galatians 6:10, Ephesians 2:19, Hebrew 3:6 and 10:21. It is also called a kingdom (Matthew 16:19; Acts 8:12; 20:25; 1 Corinthians 4:20; Colossians 1:13; 1 Thessalonians 2:12). A most important image is that of a body. See Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 1:23; 2:16; 3:6; 4:4, 12, 16; 5:23, 30; and Colossians 1:18; 3:15.

These images, together with the basic meaning of the Greek word, emphasize that the church is a group of people called out by Jesus to be reigned over by Him under the Fatherhood of God. Since Jesus is king, only He can make the laws under which this group is to operate. Only He can determine how one becomes a part of this group of called out people. As a body, they are tied together to build one another up; the pain or weakness of one affects them all. Since God is the Father, all in the group must be in submission to Him. Anyone who does not submit to Him is not part of Jesus' called out. As God's household (family), there is a joy in being together, in working together, in caring for and supporting one another. They are not content to only see each other once or twice a year. They are proud to wear the name of the Christ who built the church and bought it with His blood.

This is God's concept of the church as it is described in His word. If this isn't what you think of when you think of a church, shouldn't it be?