



What's church all about?

Part 008 Defining The Local Church "WHAT ARE WE BUILDING?"

INTRODUCTION

Question:

What unnecessary items are typically added to people's working definition of the church?

I. THE DIFFICULTY OF DEFINING THE CHURCH

Churches can be very different from one another. Note the following observations:

- Some churches meet in large buildings. Some churches meet in small buildings. Some churches do not meet in any building. Some churches meet in homes.
- Some churches meet one time a week. Some churches meet two times a week. Some churches meet three times a week. Some churches meet just about every day of the week.
- Some churches have a man who preaches. Some churches have a man who just talks. Some churches have a man who teaches like in school.
- Some churches seem to be fun to be in. In some churches no one smiles.
- Some churches have active services, with people moving around and responding verbally to everything that happens. Some churches have very quiet services in which most of the people sit quietly and listen.

QUESTION:

TAKE SEVERAL MINUTES AND TALK AND ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS. FOR QUESTION 3 USE THE SCENARIOS BELOW:

1. **WHEN IS A GROUP OF PEOPLE A CHURCH?**
2. **WHAT ARE THE CRITERIA FOR DECIDING WHETHER IT IS A CHURCH OR NOT ?**
3. **RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING SITUATIONS. IS EACH A CHURCH? WHY OR WHY NOT?**

Scenario 1

Eight believers in Wingate meet every Tuesday night for Bible study and fellowship. They have no official pastor although one man facilitates the gathering. They have been doing this for years. Some of the participants also attend a church on Sunday.

Scenario 2

In a medium-sized city, there is a beautiful historical church building with a rich history of great preachers and community involvement. On tours of the church which are offered twice a day, one can learn about the unique architecture and history.

Scenario 3

An evangelist has led 10 young people to Christ in the past year. He would like to see these new believers assimilated into an existing church but the nearest one is 50 miles away. Instead, they meet in his apartment every Sunday evening for worship and Bible study.

Scenario 4

A man and his immediate family are the only believers in their city. The family takes time every Sunday morning to worship the Lord.

II. EXAMPLES OF CHURCH DEFINITIONS

QUESTION

DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING DEFINITIONS AND ANSWER THE RELATED QUESTIONS.

A. Example #1

The following definition is an attempt to define the church by using only specific references from Scripture that describe how God's people are to relate to one another. This definition emphasises the relationships that *should exist between believers*.

"A church is a group of people who are devoted and give preference to one another (Ro 12:10), accept one another (Ro 15:7), care for one another (1Co 12:25), carry each others burdens (Gal 6:2), forgive one another (Eph 4:32), encourage and build up one another (1Th 5:11) spur each another on to love and good deeds (Heb 10:24), confess their sins to one another (Jas 5:16), pray for one another (Jas 5:16), serve one another (1Pe 4:10), and love one another (1Jn 4:11)."

- **How would this definition enhance or hinder the church growth and planting?**
- **What kind of a church would be produced by a group of people who subscribed to this definition?**
- **Is this definition adequate? Why or why not?**

B. Example #2

"A New Testament local church is an organised assembly of baptised believers, in which the unique presence of Jesus Christ dwells; who gather regularly for worship, instruction, fellowship, the Lord's Supper, and baptising new believers, under the obedience to the Word of God, supervised by elders who are assisted by deacons putting into action the equipping gifts that God has given its members to build up that local congregation, resulting in a Gospel witness locally and world wide."

- **How would this definition enhance or hinder church growth and planting?**
- **What kind of a church would be produced by a group of people who subscribed to this definition?**
- **Is this definition adequate? Why or why not?**

C. Example #3

The following definition is much more traditional and may be the definition you would hear from the average non-believer on the street.

"The local church is a building where people gather to receive religious services from professional ministers who have been specifically trained to lead meetings each Sunday morning as well as the other activities for the people such as weddings and funerals."

- **How would this definition enhance or hinder church growth and planting?**
- **What kind of a church would be produced by a group of people who subscribed to this definition?**
- **Is this definition adequate? Why or why not?**

D. Example #4

"A local church is an organised body of baptised believers, led by a spiritually qualified shepherd, affirming their relationship to the Lord and to each other by regular observance of the Lord's Supper, committed to the authority of the Word of God, gathering regularly for worship and the study of the Word, and turned outward to the world in witness."

- **How would this definition enhance or hinder church growth and planting?**
- **What kind of a church would be produced by a group of people who subscribed to this definition?**
- **Is this definition adequate? Why or why not?**

Did we decide if any of these were adequate alone?
If we combine elements from all of there do we find an adequate definition?

QUESTION:
HOW CAN BUILDINGS HELP OR HINDER THE GROWTH OF THE CHURCH?

III. GUIDELINES FOR DEFINING THE CHURCH

A. Avoid prescribing forms, structure and programs in the definition of the church

Question
Why is it wrong to focus on forms when defining the local church?

B. Stress the biblical functions that the church must perform

IV. WRITING YOUR DEFINITION OF THE CHURCH

Write the principles in the space provided. Use other biblical references if you believe they are helpful.

Ac 2:42-47, Ac 11:26, Ac 14:23, Ac 20:7, Ac 20:28 1Co 1:2, 1Co 12:28, 1Co 14:33, Eph 1:22, Eph 4:11-16, Eph 5:27, 1Ti 3:15, Heb 10:24-27

In the space below write your definition of the church.

Consider the following questions concerning your definition:

Is it understandable?

Is it compatible with Scripture?

Is your definition basic enough to describe all churches everywhere and at all times?

Does your definition allow for a church that is reproducible?

Share your definition with others and carefully note their reactions.