

WARM-UP

- Have you ever had an exclusive membership? How did you join or apply? What are the benefits?
- Is there a particular group or community (e.g., band, sports team, book club) you belong to? Tell us about what binds you together.
- How do you usually relate with someone you don't necessarily like or agree with?

WORD *¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are **fellow citizens** with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰built on **the foundation of the apostles and prophets**, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into **a holy temple** in the Lord. ²²In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. **EPHESIANS 2:19-22***

(Read also **EPHESIANS 2:11-18.**)

When we hear the word “church,” we usually think of temples, buildings, or places where people go to pray and worship. But in the Bible, it wasn’t used this way. “Church” comes from a Greek word which means “the called out ones.” In Jesus’ time, it was not primarily used as a religious word, but was more political in nature. It meant a group of people who were called out of their homes or places of business to discuss things that were important to the public. It was from this understanding that Jesus chose to use the word to describe His people. As we are part of our local church, all believers belong to the body of Christ, which is the Church. In this lesson, we will study three characteristics of the Church and how God shapes His spiritual family.

1 | The Church is holy.

. . . ²¹*in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into **a holy temple** in the Lord.* ²²*In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

EPHESIANS 2:21-22

(Read also **1 PETER 2:9**.)

“Holy” means “to be set apart.” This means that the Church is the group of people God has called out of the world to be His own and set apart for His purpose. As a holy people, the Church is called to a holy life, showing the world what God is like through the way they live. The Bible also shows us that God no longer lives in physical buildings, but now dwells among and within His holy people who are His temple. How does this affect how you see yourself and how you live?

2 | The Church is universal.

*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but **you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God** . . .* **EPHESIANS 2:19**

(Read also **EPHESIANS 2:17-18** and **GALATIANS 3:28**.)

In the Bible, the word “church” may refer to a specific group of people at a particular time and place. However, it can also refer to the entire community of believers in all places and at all times. The Church is one or universal, because it transcends race, gender, age, social status, denomination, place, and time. All true believers, both alive on earth and those in heaven, are spiritually united together and are part of one body, the Church. What does this truth mean for how

you should treat other Christians in your local church and from other churches who believe in the gospel?

3 | The Church is apostolic.

*¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰built on **the foundation of the apostles and prophets**, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone . . . **EPHESIANS 2:19-20***

(Read also **ACTS 2:42-43**.)

The ones Jesus originally sent out to represent and testify about Him were His apostles. Aside from them, there were others like Matthias, who replaced Judas Iscariot, and Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. The Church being apostolic means that its teachings and practices are built upon the testimony and teaching of the apostles, which are recorded and preserved in the New Testament. The Bible also contains the writings of the Old Testament prophets, which are foundational to the faith we received. Why is it important that every believer receive sound biblical teaching? What happens when they don't?

Ultimately, Jesus is the Head of the Church and the cornerstone of its foundation. He holds the Church together and it will continue to grow. He gave His life for the Church and will continue to sanctify and prepare His Church for Himself. Jesus is the builder of His Church and it will ultimately prevail against the forces of death and darkness (Matthew 16:18).

APPLICATION

- Are you part of a community of believers? In what ways can you be actively connected and participate in God's universal Church?
- What does it look like for the Church to be holy and set apart? How can you take part in being the holy people and temple of God?
- How can you grow more in your knowledge and understanding of the teachings in the Bible? Who can you also help in his or her walk with God and other believers?

PRAYER

- Thank God for making you a part of His Church, set apart for Himself and for His purpose.
- Ask God to give you grace as you relate with fellow believers, keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
- Pray for God to strengthen the Church and your own spiritual family as you walk together and pursue His mission.



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