

Chapter 2

Redeemed Together

In the last chapter, you were encouraged to write out your testimony of salvation. If you have placed faith in Jesus, you have a unique story of your spiritual journey and how God drew you to himself and to faith in Jesus. You are not, however, the only one whom God has saved. Redemption is about so much more than merely the forgiveness of sins for individual people. God is creating for Himself a people (a church) who are being put into right relationship with God and into right relationship with each other. When Jesus died on the cross he reconciled us to Himself, and he reconciled us to each other as well.

One day, there will be a multitude of people from every tribe tongue and nation singing praises to the God of our salvation. Each will have their own God-glorifying testimony of God's grace to them and there will be a great mosaic of testimonies that lift high the name of Jesus. The local church is an earthly manifestation of this heavenly reality – a community of saved people joining together to lift our praises to God! While the Bible does not give us one simplistic definition of the church, the Scriptures provide us with an array of word pictures that describe the local church.

The Church is the _____ of Christ

One of the most stunning word pictures that the Bible uses is the comparison between the marriage relationship and the Christian church.

Ephesians 5:22-32 22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. 25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. 28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, 30 because we are members of his body. 31 "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." 32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

The above passage is often used to describe the ideal marriage relationship, but rarely do we pause and wonder at the incredible picture this paints of the church. A man's wife is the most precious relationship that he has. The husband seeks her good, protects her, sacrifices for her, and cherishes her. No other human being is of more importance to a husband than his wife, and so it is with the church and Christ. Jesus Christ loves the church and gave himself up for the church.

How should this word picture affect the way we view the church?

The Church is the _____ of God the Father

1 John 3:1 See what kind of love **the Father** has given to us, that we should be called **children of God**; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

Romans 8:15-16 15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the **Spirit of adoption** as sons, by whom we cry, "**Abba! Father!**" 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit **that we are children of God**,

(Heb. 12:7-11; Gal. 6:9-10; Eph. 5:1; Jn. 1:11; Mk. 3:31-35; 1 Tim. 5:1-2)

How does thinking of God as your Father affect how you view your relationship with Him?

If you were to view the local church as your spiritual family, how does that affect how you relate to the church?

The Church is the _____ of God the Son

1 Corinthians 12:14-26 14 For the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, 24 which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, 25 that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together

JOINING TOGETHER

This analogy for the church carries with it many implications. What are some of the implications for the church functioning like a body?

Each member of the body of Christ is unique in personality and in spiritual gifting. The variety of members work together strengthening one another where the other is weak. You can find more information on spiritual gifting in 1 Cor. 12:8-10; Rom. 12:4-8 and 1 Pt. 4:11.

The Church is the _____ of God the Spirit

Ephesians 2:18-22 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 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.

2 Corinthians 6:16 16 What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people

When the Bible refers to us as the temple of God, it is important to remember back to what the Old Testament temple was and what purpose it served.

The passage below describes the majesty of the Spirit-filled Old Testament temple.

2 Chronicles 7:1-3 As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and **the glory** of the Lord filled the temple. 2 And the priests could not enter the house of the Lord, because **the glory** of the Lord filled the Lord's house. 3 When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and **the glory** of the Lord on the temple, they bowed down with their faces to the ground on the pavement and worshiped and gave thanks to the Lord, saying, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever."

The temple was a place where God's glory was displayed for the world to see.

JOINING TOGETHER

If we are to be the temple of God the Spirit and fulfill the purpose of the temple in the world, what implications does that have for us as the church?

Notice that many of these analogies for the church carry the idea of putting God on display to the world. This is a theme that is seen repeatedly throughout the Scriptures and throughout this course on church membership.

The Purpose of God's Church is to Display God to the World

This grand purpose is one of the reasons why church membership should be taken very seriously. When one becomes a member of a local church, they become official representatives of not only that church but of God.

How are these concepts of the local church different from your previous experiences in the local church?

We should not grow discouraged with the local church because we have had bad experiences. The church will always be full of sinners and will always be messy. In fact, much of the New Testament letters were written because of the very fact that churches were having difficulties living out these truths.

A MEMBERSHIP CLASS FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH

But what if a community of people truly committed to one another and embraced their identity together as the bride of Christ, the family of God the Father, the body of God the Son and the temple of God the Spirit? Would you want to be a part of that community?

This type of community does not just happen by attending Sunday morning services. It takes humility, transparency, obedience, perseverance and hard work.



WEEKLY CHALLENGE – BE THE CHURCH

This lesson has brought to light just how important the church community is. We are connected to one another and we are responsible to one another as God's redeemed people. What are some barriers that would keep you from living your life in the close community of the church? Are you shy? Is your schedule too hectic with things of lesser importance? Write out some of these possible barriers and make plans to overcome those barriers. Make a connection with another person in our church this week or as soon as you are able. This may just mean inviting someone from our church for coffee or lunch, or it could be as easy as sending a note of encouragement to someone.