

What is the Church?

Matthew 16:13-18

Intro:

1. **v18 - The gates of Hades will not overcome it!**
2. The image here is an army marching against a fortified city.
3. **ILL: The Roman Legion marching shoulder to shoulder.**
4. The fortifications of Satan's domain (Hades) can't withstand the mighty army of God - the church!

I. What the Church is Not!

- A. It is not this building. "I'll be at the church in a few minutes!"
- B. It is not the worship on Sundays. "We'll be at Bible School & church tomorrow morning!"
- C. It is not me - or an institution in which I am the authority!
 1. The Roman Church.
 - a. This is the most popular concept today - fostered by the Roman Church for centuries.
 - b. There is a group of people, called clergy, that have been ordained by God to fully represent Him.
 - c. Through the years each generation of new clergy are ordained "by the laying on of hands" from the past generation - traced back to the Apostle Peter in Rome.
 - d. These clergy have exclusive ministries that only they can perform. They are "priests" mediating between God & ordinary people.
 - e. They also control all other ministry.
 - f. They operate within a rigid chain of command with the ultimate authority being their Commander in Chief.
 - g. They have canon law, an official interpretation of scripture, which may supersede the Bible text itself.
 2. Other religious organizations.
 - a. They focus around a charismatic leader who claims to speak for God - a prophet.
 - b. Some "churches" consider their preachers in this regard.

II. What the Church Is!

- A. The original word.
 1. **Church** (ἐκκλησία) = an assembly, those called out from a group for a purpose.
 2. The meaning developed in the New Testament:
 - a. To become God's house or household (**Eph 2:19-20; Heb 3:6**); a spiritual house (**I Pet 2:5**).
 - b. To become God's temple (**I Cor 3:16; 6:19**). "You" is plural.
 - c. You & I are "living stones" in this house (**I Pet 2:5**).
- B. In the New Testament, this original word was used for:
 1. A secular crowd.
 - a. The mob that gathered against Paul in Ephesus (**Act 19:32**).
 - b. Addressing this crowd, the city official said, **If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly.** - **Act 19:39**.
 2. The body of Christians throughout the world.
 - a. **Gal 1:13 - For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it.**
 - b. **Eph 5:23 - For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.**
 - c. **Heb 12:22-23 - You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.**

3. The church of a city, which may have been made up of one or several congregations.
 - a. The Church at Antioch (**Act 13:1**).
 - b. The Church of God at Corinth (**I Cor 1:2**).
 - c. The Church at Jerusalem (**Act 8:1**).
 - d. The Church at Ephesus (**Rev 2:1**).
 4. A local congregation usually meeting in a house.
 - a. **Rom 16:5 - Greet also the church that meets at their house.**
 - b. **Col 4:15 - Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.**
- C. So - the church is you & me! It is the gathering of people, called by God, to be His children.
1. We are the church whether we are together or separate because we are God's family.
 2. We don't have to meet in this building to be the church.
 3. We don't have to be a California not-for-profit corporation to be the church.
 4. We are called:
 - a. **Saints** (ἅγιος) = those who have been set apart (from the world), holy ones. (**Rom 1:7**)
 - b. **The Way** (τῆς ὁδοῦ) - God's way in contrast to the way of the world. (**Act 24:22**)
 5. The church obeyed & served God:
 - a. By witnessing to the world (**Act 8:4**).
 - b. By baptizing those who surrendered to the Lordship of Christ. (**Act 2:40-41**)
 - c. By making disciples of the new in faith. (**Act 2:42**)
 - d. By fellowshipping & agreeing together of the same mind & heart. (**II Cor 13:11**)
 - e. By encouraging, teaching & supporting one another on their Christian journey. (**I Thess 5:11**)
 - f. By helping the needy in practical ways with food, clothing & shelter. (**Act 2:44-45**)
 6. **ILL: Our experience worshipping with Korean churches.**

The Church:

1. The body of Christ.
2. The family of God.
3. The Way of truth.
4. The kingdom on earth; the Lord's rule in our hearts!

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