

Church

I believe . . .

- The Church is the community of believers united to Christ through the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 5:25). Jesus will build his Church (Matt 16:18) as her head (Eph 1:22-23). A wide range of metaphors describe the Church – family (1 Tim 5:1-2; Eph 3:14; 2 Cor 6:18), bride of Christ (2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:32), building (1 Cor 3:9), temple (1 Pet 2:4-8), God’s house (Heb 3:6), and body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12-27; Eph 1:22-23; 4:15-16). In a spiritual sense, the Church is the “new Israel” (Rom 2:28-29; 4:11-12, cf. vv. 16, 18), but on some future day physical Israel will believe in Jesus as God’s Messiah (Rom 11).
- Personal relations before Pentecost always existed between God and humanity, either personally (such as Adam and Eve) or to a family (Abraham’s family) or to a nation (Israel). Israel rejected the Anointed One (Messiah or Christ) when God sent him, and God turned to the whole world to give the opportunity to believe in the god of Israel and the gift of his son (Acts 2:36). Thus began a new entity called the body of Christ, the Church (Acts 1:8; 2:41; 10:34-43, 44-48; 11:15). FT and believers today will live together in the Kingdom of God (Eph 2:13).
- The local church, the visible church, is the representative on a smaller scale in a specific locale of the body of Christ (the invisible church; Acts 8:1; 11:22; Rev 2-3).
- The purpose of the church is multi-faceted. Ultimately, it glorifies God individually and corporately (ministry to God; Eph 1:5; 3:20-21; 2 Thess 1:12). In addition, it serves as the vehicle for ministering to the world and herself, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ and making disciples (evangelism; Matt 28:19), restraining the force of sin (Matt 5:13-16), edifying herself (Eph 4:11-16), and purifying herself (Heb 12:10; 1 Cor 11:22, 28-31). I.e., worship, nurture, evangelism and mercy.
- The Lord Jesus instituted two ordinances to be observed by a local church: believer’s baptism (Acts 2:41; 18:8) and the Lord’s supper (communion; 1 Cor 11:23-26). Baptism by immersion best symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, which is so significant for the Christian life (Rom 6:3-7). Communion is a memorial of Christ’s redemptive work (Luke 22:19-20).
- Each local church is a self-governing body under the lordship of Christ with all members sharing responsibility (Acts 13:1-3; 14:26-28) in a congregational sense (Matt 18:17; Acts 6:3-6; 15:22-23). Mutual doctrinal

agreement, care of the worldwide needs, and outreach may bind us for service at an international level (Acts 15; 1 Cor 16:1-3; 2 Cor 9:1-5).

- Leaders in the church include apostles (now expired), elders (overseers, pastors, bishops; 1 Tim 3:1-7; Tit 1:5-9), and deacons (1 Tim 3:8-13) and possibly deaconesses (Rom 16:1; 1 Tim 3:11). The Holy Spirit has gifted every believer for service to the body of Christ and the world (Rom 12; 1 Cor 12; Eph 4:7, 11-12; 1 Pet 4:10-11).
- The Kingdom of God is the rule of God as king and sovereign over all creation. When we proclaim the good news of the kingdom, people will come into the church and begin to experience the blessings of God's rule in their lives. The reign of God breaks into the present ("already here"; Matt 12:28; Rom 14:17), but it is "not yet" fully realized (Matt 25:34; 1 Cor 6:9-10). When Jesus returns, his kingdom reign will extend over all creation (1 Cor 15:24-28). Believers of every age will reign with him.
- True and false churches exist today (Rev 2-3). Luther and Calvin taught that two standards mark a true church – the Scripture is "rightly" or "purely" taught and sacraments are administered more rightly than wrongly (different wordings but same standards). Is the Roman Catholic church true or false? Are there false Protestant churches? RC church is too broad to make a blanket statement. Many liberal Protestant churches appear false in their works-righteousness and unbelief in Scripture teachings. Do they believe in the core of the Bible's teachings that faith in Christ alone saves people? Jesus taught that he will sort out the weeds from the wheat (Matt 13:24-30). Suffice to say we have false churches and true churches, some which are closer to God's revealed will than others.
- Although history demonstrates how difficult it is to maintain a unity in the church, we are only one body and someday we will have a unity forever (Eph 4:14-16).
- Related questions: spiritual warfare, authority (keys of kingdom), relation to state, discipline, women, differing forms of governance.