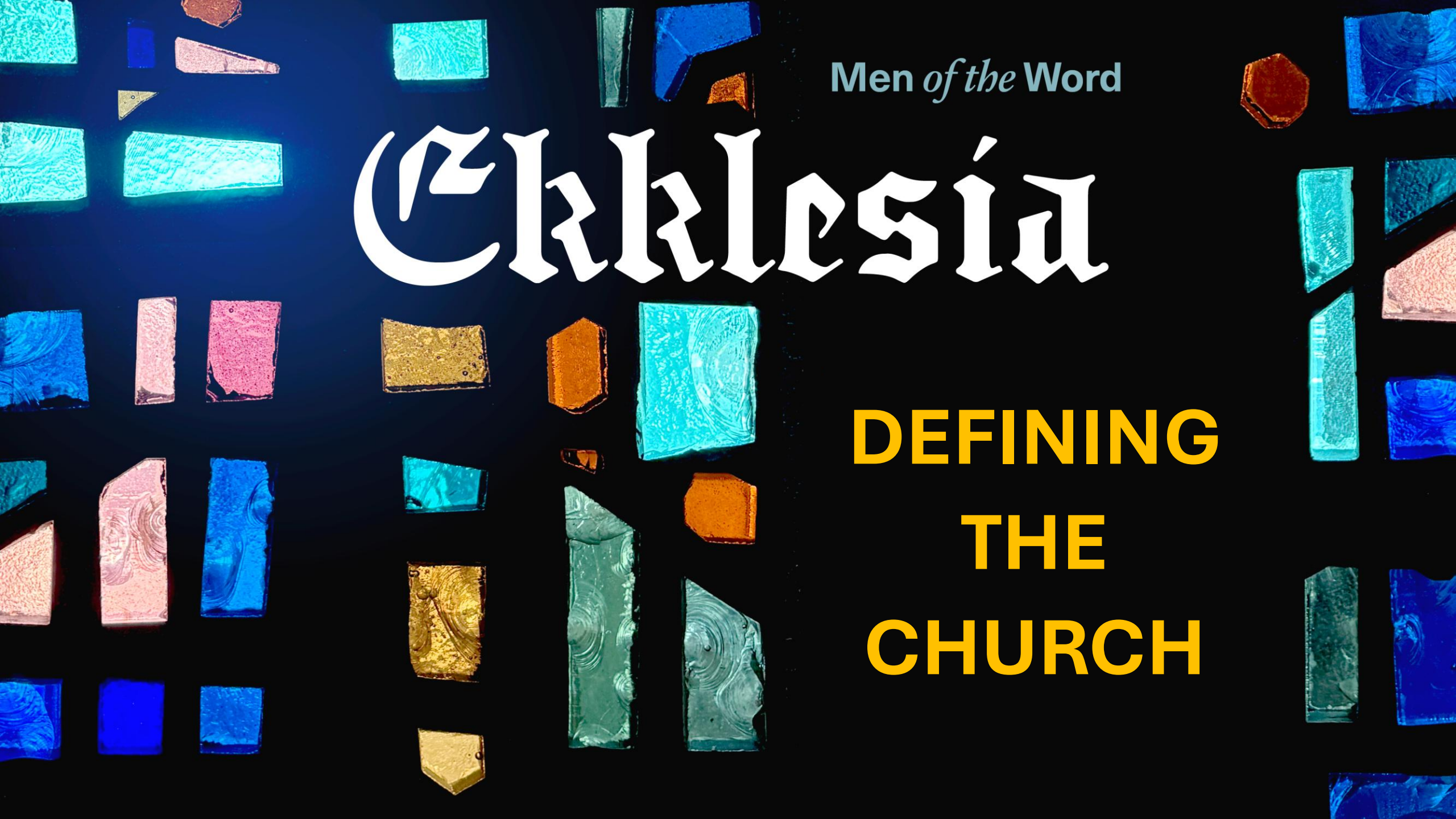




Men of the Word

Ekklesia

**DEFINING
THE
CHURCH**

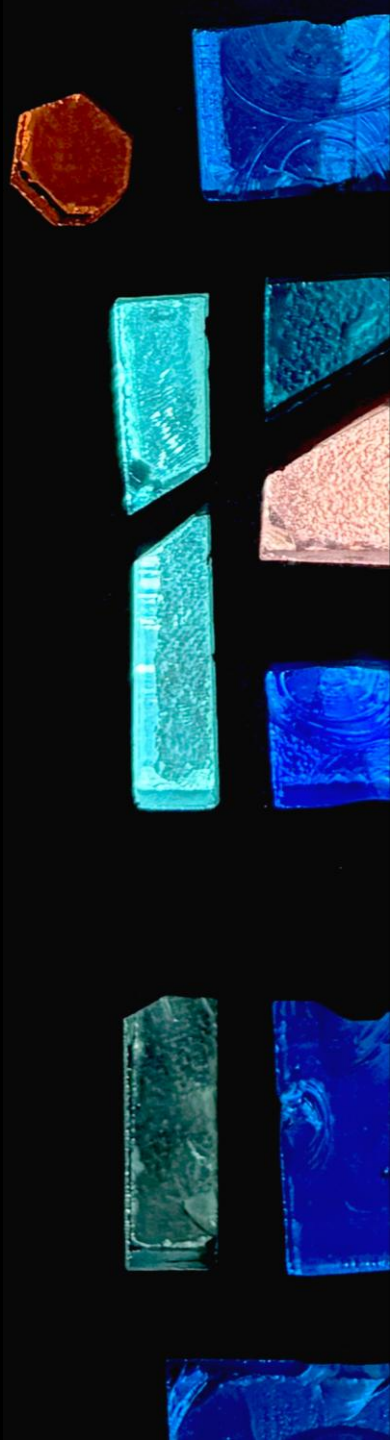
What is the church?

Common misconceptions:

1. The church is a building.
2. The church is a cultural institution or a national identity.
3. The church is a social club.
4. The church is a gathering of hypocrites.
5. The church is a platform for self-expression, a means to self-fulfillment.
6. The church is an optional aspect of the Christian life.

“The reality of the church as the instrument of God and as His primary concern today is met with skepticism and incredulity, not entirely without reason. Amid the blustering crosscurrents of our time, which have shaken all of man’s institutions down to the foundations . . . the church has not stood unscathed. That which bears the name of God has suffered confusion with the rest. The resulting widespread weakness and uncertainty have caused many to turn aside, rejecting with castigation the church as the locus of God’s activity. While it is true that certain forms of church life, accretions of time more than biblical patterns, may be rejected, the follower of Jesus Christ cannot profess allegiance to Him *and* deny His church.”

—Robert Saucy, *The Church in God’s Program*, 7



Εκκλησία



“I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints.”

—Apostles’ Creed

“We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.”

—Nicene Creed (AD 325)

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I. THE BIBLICAL TERM FOR THE CHURCH

- The word translated as “**church**” in the New Testament is the Greek term **ἐκκλησία** (*ekklēsia*), which means “**assembly**.”
 - The term *ecclesiology* is based off this term, and means “the study of the church” (ἐκκλησία, “church” + λόγος, “study”).
- The term ἐκκλησία (*ekklēsia*) is made up of two Greek words that together mean “to call out of”:
 - ἐκ (*ek*, “out of”) + καλέω (*kaleō*, “to call/summon”)
- But the term is more complex than the simple definition of “to call/summon out of.”

- The term originated hundreds of years before the New Testament in secular contexts, to refer to an “assembly of citizens summoned by the crier” (Robert Saucy, *The Church in God’s Program*, 12).
 - ἐκκλησία was used to describe city councils, legislatures, and civic gatherings—anything that required a purposeful assembly.
- The Greek translation of the Old Testament (began around 280 BC) used the term ἐκκλησία to translate the Hebrew word *qahal* (קהל) which also referred to any assembly, congregation, or purposeful gathering.
 - Usually, the nature of the assembly described by the Hebrew term was religious, but not always.

- In the New Testament, the term undergoes a transformation from its generally non-specific usage to its formal, technical usage to describe “the assembly of Christians.”
 - In its 114 occurrences in the NT, all but 5 refer to “the church.”
- The term is never used to refer to *church buildings*; it always emphasizes *a spiritual assembly* or *congregation* of disciples of Jesus.
- The term is used to express two dimensions of the church:
 - (1) **the local church**—an assembly of Jesus’ disciples in a particular geographical location (e.g., 1 Thess 1:1); and
 - (2) **the universal church**—the assembly of Jesus’ disciples throughout the church age, collectively (e.g., Acts 20:28).

“The church is primarily a body of people who profess and give evidence that they have been saved by God’s grace alone, for His glory alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. This is what a New Testament church is; it is not a building. The early Christians didn’t have buildings for almost 300 years after the church began. The collection of people committed to Christ in a local area constitute a church.”

—Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 135

“[The church] is Christ’s followers who (1) on a local level, worship, mature, and evangelize together as a particular church; (2) on a global level, constitute the universal church of all who embrace the gospel; (3) when deceased, become part of the heavenly church, enjoying rest from their earthly labors and worship the Lord face-to-face; and (4) long for Christ’s return and their participation in the wedding to the Lamb.”

—Gregg Allison, *The Church: An Introduction*, 51

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II. THE BIBLICAL METAPHORS FOR THE CHURCH

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A. THE PEOPLE OF GOD

- The church is not only made up of image-bearers (Gen 1:26–27); it is a people God has sovereignly chosen out of humanity for Himself.
- In the Old Testament, “the people of God” represented an ethnic group, the descendants of Jacob (“Israel”) who were redeemed out of Egypt (Exod 19:3–6); in the age of the church, “the people of God” represent a spiritual people, redeemed out of spiritual darkness (Col 1:13).



- **1 Peter 2:9–10** – “But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR *God’s* OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.”
- **Ephesians 2:14–16** – “For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into* one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is* the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, *thus* establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.”

- **Colossians 3:12** – “So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.”
- **Titus 2:14** – “who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.”
- **Romans 1:6** – “the called of Jesus Christ”
- **Romans 8:33** – “God’s elect”
- **2 Timothy 2:10** – “those who are chosen”

- IMPLICATIONS:

- God has sovereignly chosen those who make up His church; the church isn't a people which has chosen God.
- Those in the church aren't there because of their effort, worth, or wisdom; they are there because of God's grace.
- God has chosen the church to be *one people*, not an assortment of divided, polarized, tribalistic *peoples*.
- The church is to reflect the character and advance the mission of the One to whom she belongs.

B. THE BODY OF CHRIST

- The dominant metaphor in the NT for the church is “the body of Christ.”
- The *material realities* of our physical body vividly and effectively communicate many of the *spiritual realities* of the church.
- **Romans 12:4–5** – “For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”



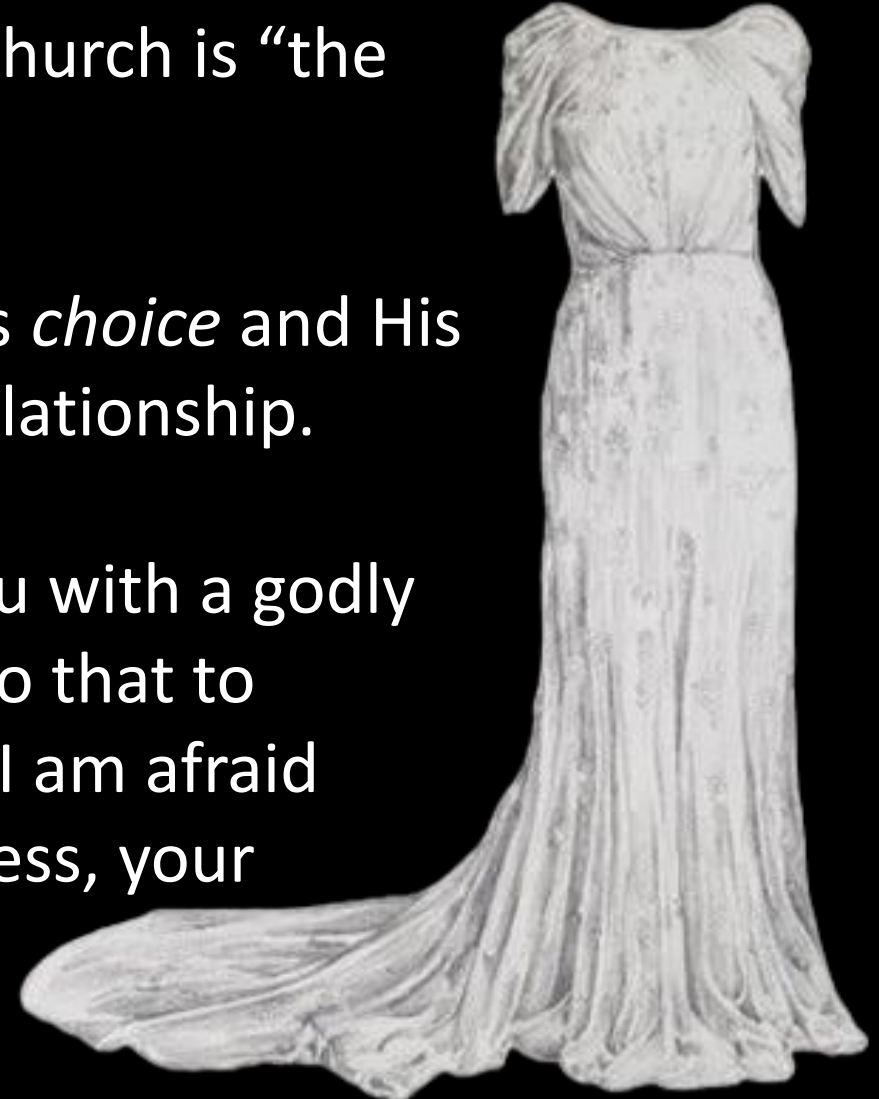
- **1 Corinthians 12:12–13** – “For even as the body is one and *yet* has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”
- **1 Corinthians 12:27** – “Now you are Christ’s body, and individually members of it.”
- **Ephesians 1:22–23** – “And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

- **Ephesians 5:23** – “For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself *being* the Savior of the body.”
- **Colossians 1:18** – “He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.”
- **Colossians 2:19** – Paul warns of the danger of legalism “and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.”

- IMPLICATIONS:
 - The church has one “head”—one Lord—to whom she submits.
 - Christ—the “head” of the church—is the exclusive source of the church’s vitality, direction, and harmony.
 - As there are many diverse components in the body, so there are many diverse members in the church.
 - But these diverse components are all necessary, mutually dependent, and equally reliant on Christ.
 - Division among these members is like an autoimmune disease.

C. THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

- Perhaps the most beautiful metaphor for the church is “the bride of Christ.”
- The metaphor combines the notions of Christ’s *choice* and His *cherishing* of the church, and their exclusive relationship.
- **2 Corinthians 11:2–3** – “For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you *as* a pure virgin. But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity *of devotion* to Christ.”



- **Ephesians 5:22–30** – “Wives, *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself *being* the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives *ought to be* to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also *does* the church, because we are members of His body.”

- **Acts 20:28** – “the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood” (the *dowery*).
- **1 Thessalonians 3:13** – “so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints” (the *presentation*).
- **Revelation 19:7–8** – “‘Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.’ It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints” (the *ceremony*).

- IMPLICATIONS:

- The metaphor reminds us of the cost Christ paid to seek and obtain His “bride,” the church.
- It pictures for us of the intimate nature of the relationship that exists between Christ and His church—a relationship of Christ’s nourishment and cherishing, and the church’s submission.
- It emphasizes the importance of exclusivity and purity; the church is betrothed to Christ and must appear spotless before Him at the culmination of the age.

D. THE TEMPLE OF THE SPIRIT



- Since the Greco-Roman era was the golden age of architecture and building, the New Testament commonly uses *building analogies* to describe the church.
- Moreover, in the Old Testament, the *temple* was the place where God *dwelt*.
- **Matthew 16:18** – “I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.”

- **1 Corinthians 3:10–11, 16–17** – “According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. . . . Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.”
- **2 Corinthians 6:16** – “Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, ‘I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.’”

- **Ephesians 2:19–22** – “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.”
- **1 Peter 2:4–6** – “And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For *this* is contained in Scripture: ‘BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER *stone*, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.’”

- IMPLICATIONS:

- As the “temple of God,” the church is the spiritual *dwelling place* of God Almighty—the place in which He particularly manifests His glory and goodness.
- The building of this “temple” is not an accomplishment of the building blocks. It is God/Christ who builds, and the members of the church are the construction materials.
- Since temples were built with the enduring materials of granite and marble, the church as “the temple” represents strength and endurance; what Christ builds hell cannot destroy.

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IMPLICATIONS FOR TODAY

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1. Join the church.
2. Love the church.
3. Labor for the church.
4. Pray for the church.



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Tonight's resources will be
posted on-line at
gracechurch.org/motw