

Local & Universal Church

by Wayne Goff

The New Testament uses the word “**church**” in two senses: (1) **universally**, to refer to all the saved of all times and places; and (2) **locally**, of a group of Christians who meet in a certain place. The context in which the word is found will tell you which of these two is meant.

For example, when Jesus said He would build His church on the foundation of His Deity (Matthew 16:18), He was speaking of it in its universal sense. Likewise in Acts 2:47 when Jesus added to the church those who were being saved, He meant “the realm of all the saved.” Read carefully Hebrews 12:22-24 to get the biblical picture of the **universal** church. Jesus is its Head, and its Headquarters can be found only in heaven (Ephesians 1:22-23)!

Examples of **local** churches can easily be seen in the New Testament. Some of the epistles were written to local churches in Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and Thessalonica. Divine instructions given to these local churches two thousand years ago are equally binding on local churches today throughout the world! How do we know this? Consider Colossians 4:16: “*Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.*” There was not one set of rules for one local church and another set for another one! The same set of rules and instructions applied equally to all the local churches of the first century, and ever since then! “*For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church*” (1 Corinthians 4:17).

“*But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches*” (1 Corinthians 7:17).

There is “*one faith*” (Ephesians 4:4), which includes *specific* instructions to all local churches regarding their organization, work, and worship. It is important for us to study these instructions that we might do all things according to the pattern given to the Lord’s church (compare Hebrews 8:4-6).

Study the Scriptures carefully so that you may discern the truth regarding the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. The true church (kingdom) will be delivered up to God at Christ’s second coming (1 Corinthians 15:24).

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