

## The Church: Three Relationships

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by Wayne Goff

### Christ's Church

In Matthew 16:18 Jesus promised to build His church: *"Upon this rock I will build My church..."* He purchased it with His own blood, Acts 20:28: *"...the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."*

This church is also called *"the body"* (Eph. 5:23) of which Jesus is the Savior. With every fiber of His being, He brought forth the church and loved it as His own body. Faithful members of the body of Christ, of the church of Christ, speak and work for Christ as they follow His inspired instructions in the New Testament (see Galatians 2:20). They are Christ's church.

### God's Church

The apostle Paul referred to *"...the church of God which is at Corinth"* (1 Cor. 1:2; see also 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:13; 1 Tim. 3:5, 15). The church is God's in one sense because Jesus obeyed the Father's will in all things while He was upon the earth. Therefore, that will of the Father was to purchase the church with the sacrifice of His only begotten Son! God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16). *"And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them"* (John 17:10).

### The Church of the Firstborn

*"To the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, ...,"* (Heb. 12:23). *"Church of the firstborn"* refers to the church's composition — saved people. The word *"firstborn"* is **plural** in the Greek, and should be rendered *"firstborn ones."* The saved are in **a figurative sense** God's *"firstborn"* because they have the birthright and inheritance of God's children. So the church is the church of the firstborn because they are the ones who comprise the church. Notice the following description also: *"...who are registered in heaven."* The saved (plural) have their names registered in heaven, and thus the context bears out the point.

Though the apostle Peter uses a different description, he also points out that the church is composed of the saved. In 1 Peter 2:5 we read, *"You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."* So the church is not a building but a living organism, composed of "human stones" as it were!

In 1 Thessalonians 1:1 we read *"...To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:..."* The point is not that the church *belongs* to the Thessalonians but that the local church was *composed* of Christians from the city of Thessalonica.

### The Application

Those who claim to make up the church that belongs to Jesus Christ must first realize that His blood is only applied to the sins of the penitent believer in Him. The Ethiopian in Acts 8 was allowed to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ *only* if he believed in Jesus with all his heart (v. 37). Upon that confession of faith, he was baptized and added by the Lord to His church (cf. Acts 2:47). Dear reader, do you belong to Jesus Christ by virtue of your faith in Him and your baptism into Jesus Christ for the remission of sins?

Secondly, if you are a child of God, you are a Christian. They are one and the same person. *"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ"* (Galatians 3:26–27). Baptism into Christ makes one a son of God, and thus part of the Church of God.

Finally, if you have been added by the Lord to the church there you are part of *"the church of the firstborn."* You are an heir of God, blessed to receive the inheritance of God. *"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together"* (Romans 8:16–17).

Dear reader, does this describe you?!

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