

What Is the Universal Church?

Definition:

The Universal Church derives its definition from the baptizing ministry of the Holy Spirit. The key verse on this is 1 Cor. 12:13, "by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body." We see from this passage that the church is like the physical manifestation of Christ, i.e., his body.

Other passages which use the same imagery are Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:11,18,27. The point in all of these passages seems to be that anyone who has experienced this baptism is automatically a member of the body of Christ.

Words used for the church in the New Testament

Church

The word translated "church" in the English Bible is *ekklesia*. This word is the Greek words *kaleo* (to call), with the prefix *ek* (out). Thus, the word means "the called out ones." However, the English word "church" does not come from *ekklesia* but from the word *kuriakon*, which means "dedicated to the Lord." This word was commonly used to refer to a holy place or temple. By the time of Jerome's translation of the New Testament from Greek to Latin, it was customary to use a derivative of *kuriakon* to translate *ekklesia*. Therefore, the word church is a poor translation of the word *ekklesia* since it implies a sacred building, or temple. A more accurate translation would be "assembly" because the term *ekklesia* was used to refer to a group of people who had been called out to a meeting. It was also used as a synonym for the word synagogue, which also means to "come together," i.e. a gathering. "Body of Christ" Since believers have been united with Christ through spiritual baptism, they are sometimes corporately referred to as the body of Christ. (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:11,13,18,27; Col. 1:18; Eph. 5:30) The idea seems to be that the group of Christians in the world constitute the physical representation of Christ on earth. It is also a metaphor which demonstrates the interdependence of members in the church, while at the same time demonstrating their diversity from one another. (Rom. 12:4; 1 Cor. 12:14-17)

The Temple of God

(1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:21,22; 1 Pet. 2:5).

The Jerusalem From Above or The Heavenly Jerusalem

(Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22). Both of these terms (as well as "temple") illustrate how the Old Testament notions of outward sanctuary have been replaced with the literal dwelling of God in his people.

Bride of Christ or Christ's Betrothed

(Eph. 5:25-32; 2 Cor. 11:2). These titles refer to the love and loyalty existing between Christ and believers.