

Transcript 162

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. Today joining me is Gwen. She is the administrator for compellingtruth.org and also the supervisor of our volunteer question answering team. And also Nelson, who is our director of video content. So Nelson, Gwen, thanks for joining me today. We're going to be discussing the church. We get a lot of questions about the church and wide variety of questions from the theological to the the practical. So we are going to do a summary, basically answering the question of what is the purpose of the church?

Shea Houdmann

And to start off, I thought it'd be helpful if we just discussed what exactly is the church? In the New Testament, the word most often translated church is the Greek word *ecclesia*, which very literally means the called out ones. But that term actually was a very common Greek term that is referred to in the assembly or a gathering of people. So when you think of the church, far too often, people think of the the building where church takes place. And actually a First Baptist Church, or the Presbyterian Church referring to the building. In the Bible, the New Testament, *ecclesia* is always referring to the people. It's never used to refer to any sort of a physical structure. So I think that's a really good starting point for our conversation is that the church is the people. And the New Testament elsewhere refers to the church as the body of Christ, the Bride of Christ. The tool through which God wants to spread the gospel and make disciples. That is what the church is.

Shea Houdmann

There's some other important distinctions to make, and one of those is the difference between the what's called the Universal Church and the local church. So and Nelson, why don't you jump on that one. Just help us to understand how are these two terms used differently and what's the best way to understand them?

Nelson Domingues

Sure, the Universal Church, as many people should be familiar to, many Christians, the Universal Church really is the definition of all believers everywhere. And the Universal Church is truly comprised of only those who put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ and are saved. And so that's how we distinguish them. And they're spread out through the world through different languages and cultures and people, that's the Universal church. Everyone who has put their faith in Jesus Christ.

Nelson Domingues

The church local assembly, is a church body, a church local assembly that meets and gathers together in a certain place. Perhaps, where ever it might be. But it's just a gathering of people in a location is what I'm trying to say. If they they gather in a certain location, they're a group of believers that live in, live life together and they worship together. They take communion together. They worship the Lord in all sorts of different ways together. That's the local assembly. And so many of us are part of a local assembly, a church that we physically go to and and worship the Lord, and we serve at and maybe teach at and

participate in a lot of other ways. The Universal Church, everyone who's put their faith in Jesus Christ, they are part of this universal Church.

Nelson Domingues

Ephesians chapter one, verses 22 and 23 says, and God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. And so as we think about the Universal Church, the church is really the body of Christ everywhere in the world, learning, listening, worshipping, fulfilling the the mandates and and the commands of the Lord in the places where they are. And to do those things, they gather together in local assemblies and local gatherings as a local church, and they fulfill Christ's mission for them in the place where they are. And so they could be in Zimbabwe. They could be over in, in California. They could be anywhere in the world and they are gathered together as the local assembly to worship the Lord and to do their part in the place where they are. And so we can't meet everyone, everywhere. Not until heaven. But for now, we worship in our smaller gatherings, our local assembly. But it, wow, what a privilege it is to know that there is a universal church out there and wherever you go, any country you may land in and and visit, once you find the believer who's put their faith in Jesus Christ you and and and that person are our brothers and sisters in Christ. And you together are part of this universal church. And that's it's pretty great to think about that.

Gwen Sellers

And I think too that, you know, the Universal Church and local church is really helpful too in thinking about the purpose of the church. You know what first comes to mind for me when I think about the purpose of the church is the Great Commission, to go and make disciples, to teach them what Jesus taught to baptize them. And you know, like that is something that we as the church at large are all part of that mission. But then that's played out differently in our local context. And I think too of things like the church being a sign for unbelievers, you know, showing like this is what Kingdom life looks like. This is who God is. And we display that to the world. And that's both as believers at large and within our local communities.

Gwen Sellers

I think the local church, you know, still has that purpose. But one of the the purposes of the local church that that I personally find most exciting is equipping the Saints for the work of ministry. So Ephesians 4:11 through 6 says and he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelist, the shepherds and teachers to equip the Saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ until we all measure, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the son of God. To mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. So that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes. Rather speaking the truth and love, we are to grow up in every way. And to him who is the head into Christ. From whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped. When each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. And I think that's, you know, often what we're doing in the local church.

Shea Houdmann

And I think that focuses back on the people rather than the building which is, which is crucial. Survey after survey people first thing to think of the church is the thinking of the building while in the Bible the new test we're talking about the people and then specifically those people are called to certain things. But as you said Gwen, the Great Commission, to make disciples by baptizing and teaching. It's it's crucial. It's something that God calls all of us to, and a local body of believers serving alongside of another is the primary means through which that is to be fulfilled.

Shea Houdmann

I will fully admit that when I became a Christian, I wasn't that interested in going to church. I was interested in learning more about God and studying the Bible, but it took me a while to grow to the point I understood how important the church was, whether that's corporate worship, corporate prayer, doing things alongside other believers. But when you learned that spiritual growth occurs most when you are with other believers, where you're encouraging another, coming alongside another, rebuking one another, teaching one another, those are sorts of things that help us grow. So the church also in addition to the Great Commission, the Evangelism and discipleship aspect also has a spiritual growth component, which obviously is discipleship. But even for mature long time believers, we still need each other. So it's not just the church in the sense of going to a building one day a week for an hour or two. It is fellowshiping alongside those believers continually. Not as in 24/7. But being with other believers often to encourage another, to not forsake the gathering of yourselves together as Hebrew says. There's so much value the church has that we miss when we just think of it as a building or someplace that we go one day a week, or even two or three days a week. Even those who are at the church every possible service that is open are still missing out if they only view their worship of God, their service of others to be occurring when they're within those doors. Now the church is to be something we are all the time, not someplace that we go.

Gwen Sellers

Well, that community and fellowship thing was something that struck me as I was studying for this. I've I've just, I mean, it shouldn't surprise me that God is consistent. So you know, in Genesis 2 you read it was not good for the man to be alone. Like there is a need. Humans were built for community. And throughout the Old Testament, I mean Israel was called to gather together in corporate worship. And it was pointing out to me that the Psalms, I mean you think of Psalms 51, which is David's Psalm of confession after Nathan had confronted him about, you know, Bathsheba and Uriah. So seems intensely personal. And it's addressed to the choir master. I mean, it is meant for, like he shares that with all of Israel, and it's meant for all of them to corporately sing and pray to God together. And if you just do a search like in an online Bible for choir master, notice how many psalms are addressed to the choir master and how many of those are even about personal situations.

Gwen Sellers

And I also noticed, you know, sometimes the most personal situation one with David, he anticipates God's rescue and then it's and so that I can tell others, so that I can praise you in the congregation. In the New Testament you see, when Jesus gives an example prayer the Lord's prayer, it's our father. So there's this very family, communal feel, like the church is the family of Christ. It's designed to be together. And even when you look, you know all the way in Revelation 21-22. It's a city. God is among

the people, like all together. So just that sense of community really carries through the Bible. And the church is nothing less than a community.

Nelson Domingues

Yeah, I think so often some people tend to devalue the really, the goodness. And you know the the value of what is at the church and in gathering together. And they they missed the point. They really think about, you know, when I go to church, you know, I I don't really get anything, they might say. I'm not receiving anything. And they really have this mentality where they're going to a place, they're going to an event where they have a certain order of things happening and they're going to learn little, they're going to sing a little. They're going to say and see some people and and that's basically it. And then they call that church. And scripture, that's not what you see. Church isn't just checking the box and just showing up at some place just to hear just the teaching and and perhaps singing some songs. That's not what it is. It's really a gathering of believers who have one heart, right. The church is where Christ is the head and we are the body. So we are all participating in this thing, in this this living organism, which is the church.

Nelson Domingues

And so when we go, when we worship, we we sing songs that remind us of the goodness, the the greatness of God, sing songs that remind us about Scripture, remind us about sin and forgiveness, about grace and and mercy and all these different things. And now we we do that corporately because there's something to be said about the hearing and singing with other people and having their voices around you and and and just following along with songs that maybe you haven't chosen. I don't know how many times that I've been to a church service and there's just a particular song that that is is sung will play and it really, truly is something I needed to hear. I've learning from the worship and so it's not just to watch the show. It's not just to see how great the musicians are. There's something very special, something very life changing. And the fact that God speaks to us through his truth and his truth many times it's written right into these songs. And so that's an amazing part of what the church is. And so again hugely valuable thing that we participate in, not just go to.

Shea Houdmann

Big issue in my Christian growth was discovering a church isn't some place just to go to be fed, so to speak, to go to hear a good sermon, or even to participate in worship. Whenever I find myself being dispassionate for the church. Even today, I found myself it's when I'm not serving, when I'm just going to absorb rather than to proclaim. I'm not going to participate. I'm just just there for what can this give me. And you know, sometimes we need something like that. We we need to be fed, we need to be taught God's word. We need to have opportunities to worship God corporately, but when we start viewing church is something that's for us, well, that's the, that's not the right mindset. The church, yes, it is for us, but it's also for everyone else and for everyone else to worship and serve alongside each other together.

Shea Houdmann

That's when one of my favorite studies I've done this in Bible studies a few times is to go through the various one another's of Scripture. And I'll mention this briefly earlier, but the love one another passage. To encourage one another, to edify and spur one another on towards love and good deeds, all these one

another, it's require others in order to be fulfilled. In the church, the body not just talk about a Sunday service but serving, worshipping alongside other believers, is where those one anothers occur, how they take place, as how they are fulfilled.

Shea Houdmann

And to me, that's the mindset that I have to remember about the church is that it's not, it's not the building. It's not just something that, as Nelson was talking about this Sunday mornings from 9:00 to 11:00. It is our lifestyle. It is our family. It's our spiritual families of people we worship alongside, minister too, and are ministered by. It's God's call, not just for the Great Commission, but for every aspect of ministry, whether that's evangelism, whether that's edification, whether that's discipleship, whether that's worship, whether that's this engaging with the community, whether that's finding ways to serve. All of this is done through the church, meaning the people, not necessarily the building limited to any particular time frame. So it's again, this is a mindset change that I fully admitting I I struggle with this even I today, after two decades of knowing the Lord and being involved in churches in various ways, it's still very easy to fall into the mind set Sunday is a day, I go to church like, yes, Sunday is the day where we go to a location to worship with other believers. But that's not what the church is. We don't go to church like we are the church, and that has a dramatic impact. Remembering that has a powerful impact on how we live our lives and how we seek and serve God, worship him and minister to others.

Gwen Sellers

Well, I think that whole idea of looking at church not as a consumer good, but really as the body of Christ and as a family. I mean, so our the last time we were together on a podcast, we talked about spiritual gifts. And I mean, yeah, those are played out in the church, but not just like Shea saying, not just in the building, but, like among those people. And that mutual encouragement, Nelson. I loved what you were saying about the music and how that does encourage us to to sing and to join with other believers. And I think too of, you know, sometimes well, yeah I guess I've heard it said, like when somebody comes and you know, maybe they're they're not feeling it. Like those words, they know that they're true, but they don't feel true. But when you hear other believers singing it, it really does encourage you. And sometimes, yeah, like that's exactly how you feel. And what a joy to proclaim that before God with other people.

Gwen Sellers

I mean, I think of I really like to celebrate and you know, celebrations are better when other people are involved. When something is great, you want to join with other people. So what a gift to get to praise God together. And then for those people, yeah, who don't feel like praising what a gift to remind them, no, God is praiseworthy. Like this is the truth. So let's walk in it together. So yeah, I do think. I definitely think that church, you need to be spiritually nourished. Like if your church isn't speaking biblical truth. If it's not like if you are not being prompted to grow in God, like that's a problem. But as Shea is saying, it's also it's, you are, you are part of your church and supposed to be serving your church and helping build others up.

Gwen Sellers

Now I will say there are some people you know who that sounds overwhelming. I've got too much going on. How can I possibly add you know add one thing? And it feels like a guilt trip. And I just want to say

there are so many ways to serve. It doesn't mean that every single person has to be with kids. Every single person has to be an usher, every single person has to do this. Sometimes you really do serve those around you simply by consistently showing up and participating in the family. And you know it really depends on your season or like we were talking about last time on spiritual gifts. So it is, it's a place of belonging that should be feeding you, but that you should also be.

Nelson Domingues

Out of that idea, Gwen that you mentioned about, you know, celebrating is more fun with other people, because it's true. And and that's a lot what we do when we gather together. I mean it's, how many times have you run into someone that you did not know was a believer and and there's something about them and you realize and all of a sudden you figure out soon enough. Like wow, you know, they, they they loved Jesus Christ put their faith in him and you realize in that moment that you are believers and there's a joy that happens in that moment just realizing that your brothers or sisters in Christ and and that's a really amazing moment. Well, when we attend the service, when we attend the gathering of believers but people go to church, right, that's exactly what we're doing. We're we're gathering together with other believers to to celebrate together our passion and our love and what God has done for us in the week. And and so it is a moment to to glorify God and to worship God.

Nelson Domingues

And it also is a moment where we go to get help where we worked, tired and we're weak, and perhaps we stumbled in sin and and we we need teaching it and compassion and forgiveness. And and it's a place where we go to other believers that we trust and and love. And and it's a place where we can find God's word being poured over us. And it's it's an important thing and important part of our of every Christian lives. In fact in Acts chapter 2, verse 42, it says and they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to fellowship, and to breaking bread and to prayer. We know this verse really well, right? And a lot of people talk about diverse, you know what, they're just teaching of course and we listen to a sermon as fellowship when we gather together the believers. Breaking of bread, which, as you talking about communion and the importance of that. Of remembering and not forgetting the Lord's sacrifice on our behalf and its resurrection. And praying together, for each other. And and and and worshipping God in that. But there's a real devotion. It's it's not just when we feel good. It's not just when we're there. It's not just when we're around certain people. It's not just when we're doing a certain thing. There's a devotion to the Lord that happens all throughout our lives. And when we gather together in the church, that devotion should be there. But it should be everywhere else as well, because we are devoted to the teaching, and to fellowship, and communion, into prayer. And when we gather together in a local assembly, those things pour out naturally as well. They don't just happen in that place. It's a natural outpouring of what we normally ought to be doing on our own. And when we gather together, it's a celebration. It's it's a time where we can do that with other people as well.

Gwen Sellers

Well, I think that's so important. The devotion and you know and two separate levels of like, yeah, we we need to consistently be part of church. You know, again if it's a body, if it's a family, you don't just like sometimes use your hand and sometimes don't like it. It's always there. So that consistency is really what builds community. But I'm thinking it's devotion to the Lord, to the teachings of the apostles, like it's to truth. It's, you know, distinct. You can get this community feel from like a group exercise class at

the gym. But it's completely different when it's devoted to the Lord. Like when you are all following him and submitting to him and eager for the truth, and being taught the truth and pursuing it and pursuing a different way of living. So it matters. It's not so much like just community, but like, what is this community really about? And it's really about God and that's what makes all the difference.

Nelson Domingues

And it's also like almost like a a haven, right, a safe haven in that moment where we where we attend like a local assembly when we when we go, I mean just think about it throughout the entire week we are mixed with all sorts of other people and all sorts of different situations. You might be at the gym, you might be at work, you might be at home, you might be shopping at the stores or doing whatever you're doing. But you're out there in the world, and it can be tough. It's hard because a lot of times you might be alone doing whatever you're doing. And when you gather together as an assembly with a group of other believers, there's a moment of of relief almost because like wow this is a picture of what heaven is like, where I'm surrounded by other believers who believe what I believe, who want to worship God like I want to worship God, who have the same morals and values that they want to pass on to their children that I want to pass down to my children. And there's this camaraderie, there's this passion, there's this love and joint uniqueness that's together. And so it is a very special moment to gather together to be devoted to one another. Because you don't know how difficult someone else's week has been. Maybe they need a word spoken to them by you when they get there, and it's not just again, just attending something just to receive and to get or to check the box, there's, it's the place where we go, where we can surround ourselves with other like minded believers. And we can lift each other up. And we can praise the Lord together. And is a celebration. And the fact is we don't get to do that very often during our everyday lives, most of the time.

Shea Houdmann

Both raise excellent points. Like when Gwen mentioned spiritual gifts, which is a previous episode, the three of us did together. First Corinthians 12 talks about how the gifts are for the edification of the body. It's for to minister to one another. All the spiritual gifts designed to edify and encourage others. The church is the people where that takes place. Nelson mentioned the Lord's Supper, referred to baptism. The two ordinances of the church. Both have a corporate aspect to it. Baptism is a public testimony of your faith in Christ, following him. And how being baptized, pictures dying and being resurrected as a public testimony of your faith. And the Lord's supper that says do this and remembers me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death and you come to. Those you in that passage are plural, referring to you as a as in the body of Christ, the people of Christ, followers of Christ. Everything the New Testament talks about is the church. It is a corporate experience. The corporate body is things we do together alongside one another. The church is so vitally important, and it's so sad that I mean even the three of us have, at various times experienced negative associations with the church. And many, many people out there have had bad church experiences and we completely understand that. But don't allow those bad experiences to cloud what you picture the church to be, or your understanding of what the New Testament teaches. Because New Testament Jesus loves the church and one of the illustrations, as I mentioned earlier, that Jesus specifically refers to the church as his bride. So remember that when you're thinking about the church, this is the group of people that Jesus loves, whom he died for. And that should impact us greatly and how we view the church and how passionately we want to serve alongside and to Minister to other people in the body of Christ. The the

church is not a building, is not a location, is not something we do once a week. The church is who we are. And that's vitally important for us to remember.

Shea Houdmann

Maybe just in closing, Nelson and Gwen, just sure briefly share like how does the fact that the church is the bride of Christ and how much Jesus passionately loves the church, how does that impact you and how do you view the church?

Gwen Sellers

So I don't know that it always comes to mind for me specifically thinking that, you know, wow like, the church is the bride of Christ. Except what does come to mind are those passages about, I forget where it is, but it's Paul talking about wanting to present the bride pure before Christ. And I think that you know, really speaks to the importance of sound teaching and of living that out in practice. You know, like as the church, we do have this responsibility. But it's all, but it's leading toward the end of something that Christ cherishes. And I think too, you know, my church, always the benediction is always Jude 1:24 through 25. And it's Christ who's able to present us spotless and pure and blameless. So just thinking of wow the the love God has for his people. The love Jesus has for the church and really desires them, it really desires us does make me love other people.

Gwen Sellers

You know, every church is going to have people that are difficult to to deal with. And so when you think no, Jesus like he died for this person like he did for me. But he also loves this person and views them as part of his beautiful bride that he is eager to be with. I think it can help in those kind of moments of yeah, of struggle or or maybe if you yourself are struggling and feel like you know I don't belong, or maybe God doesn't really love me or feeling like you need to live up to something is like, no. If you're part of the bride of. Christ, like you are cherished. So yeah, it does just I guess change maybe my perception of God's view of me and of other people and just that reminder that it really is about him and his love.

Nelson Domingues

When I think about, you know, bride of Christ and how valuable it is to him, it reminds me in the moments where I think we've all had those moments where you wake up, perhaps and you don't want to go to the church service that morning, right? Or you don't want to gather together with other believers the fellowship or something along those lines. And we we I think we each have those moments where for some reason it seems more of a burden than a blessing to go and attend and be with other believers for whatever it is. And sometimes I found myself in in hard places and difficult spiritual situations where I've been hurt or I know that I'm in sin or whatever it may be, and it gets to be difficult to to attend something like that. And I'm reminded in those moments that Christ has ordained this institution, that he has called us out as believers to gather together with fellow believers regardless of how we feel, regardless of our situation, regardless of the fact that we've been a sinner or a saint the entire week, he wants us to gather together to confess our sin, to find healing, to pray, to worship. And he uses those moments and he uses this church body and the believers around us to draw Him, draw us to himself.

Nelson Domingues

And so I think about when I think about the bride of Christ, that's a tremendously valuable thing. And how dare I devalue something that Christ loves and that God loves so much. If he loves it that much, how could I ever not want to be a part of it? How could I ever want to be away? How could I ever speak bad against it? Right. I should be doing my part to lift up the church. I should be doing my part to to make the church, at least in my local context, a place of true worship and joy, a true devotion. Through me, and by helping others, I should be doing my part to make this thing as valuable as possible, because that's how Christ sees it as something dear to his heart. And I think it's a good reminder for us to remember that this is something special. It's his bride and he wants that bride to be to come to him with joy and cleanliness in his honor that he would even call us to do so. And so I'm reminded constantly, those moments that as I join a gathering of believers and it's not just going to a church building for a church service, can be to a small group or you meeting Christian, a group of Christian friends and remind that this is a special moment that I have the privilege of being a part of. Be joining together with other believers in like mindedness. And when we celebrate and do the things that a church does together, that is again just an amazing blessing for us and we know that God smiles upon that. And that should bring us great satisfaction and joy to be part of something so special.

Shea Houdmann

Well said, both of you. This conversation is such an important one because there's so many miss perceptions of what the church is. I thought would be really good for us to discuss, what is the church? What is the purpose of the church? Is it's a good reminder even for the three of us to remember Jesus loves the church. Jesus died for the church, and by saying that we're talking about the people, and that's what the church is to be all about the body of believers, fellow followers of Christ seeking to worship him, serve him and serve one another and alongside one another, all for the glory of God. So Nelson, Gwen, thank you for joining me today. This has been the Got Questions podcast on what is the purpose of the church? Got questions? The Bible has answers and we'll help you find them.