

Fundamentals of Our Faith

What Forms The Church?

Church (*ekklesia*) = assembly, gathering, congregation.

From (*ek*) “out from” and (*kaleo*) “to call”...

The church comprises those who are called out and called together by God.

The Bible speaks of two kinds of assemblies: One in heaven and many on earth.

- Universal/Invisible church = The heavenly and eschatological assembly of everyone (past, present, and future) who belongs to Jesus. The total body of believers whom God calls out from the world and into His eternal kingdom (all of the elect). When someone becomes a Christian, they are and always will be part of this church. (1 Pet 2:10, Eph 5:25, Eph 2:1-7, Eph 3:10, Col 3:1-3, Heb 12:22-24, Rev 7:9, Matt 16:18)
- Local/Visible church = A present and earthly community of Christians who regularly gather in Christ’s name to officially affirm and shepherd one another’s membership in Jesus Christ and His kingdom through gospel preaching and gospel ordinances (baptism and the Lord’s Supper). The universal church was not intended to be an abstract idea, but by design becomes visible and shows up in the local church. (Acts 14:27, Matthew 18:17, 1 Cor 1:2, 1 Cor 11:18, Hebrews 10:25, Rev 1:4, 1 Pet 5:1-2, 1 Cor 7:17, Heb 13:17)

1. The church (invisible/universal) is formed when Christians are formed. Christians are formed by the gospel when the Holy Spirit “calls them out” through the instrument of the word.

- a. John 17:20... those who believe (the church) will believe through the apostle’s word
- b. Romans 10:13-17... Faith comes from hearing the message
- c. Ephesians 1:13... Believers are sealed in Christ with the Holy Spirit when they listen to the message of truth (the gospel of your salvation) and believe that message.
- d. John 6:44, 63... No one comes to Jesus unless the Father draws them. It is the Spirit who gives life.
- e. 1 Corinthians 2:9-14... God reveals the truth through the Holy Spirit. The natural man does not accept the things of God and cannot understand them.

The church (universal) is formed when the Holy Spirit uses the instrument of the Word to regenerate and call the elect.

- f. The church cannot be formed apart from the Holy Spirit effectually calling God's people through the message of the gospel. Discuss the implications for how we as individuals and as a corporate body should be thinking about the fulfillment of our mission. What should be prioritized? What should not be prioritized?
- g. What is the message of the gospel? What content needs to be believed in order for the church to be formed?

2. The local/visible church is formed when Christians commit to be a church together. That commitment is made through baptism, the Lord's supper, and the regular proclamation of the gospel that united them in Christ.

- a. Matthew 28:18-20... A local church is formed when Christians commit to the proclamation of the *gospel*.
- b. Matt 28:18-20, Acts 2:41-42... a local church is formed when believers are *baptized*.
- c. Acts 2:42, 1 Cor 10:17 ... a local church is formed when believers partake of the Lord's *Supper*.

If you remove the preaching of the gospel, baptism, and the Lord's supper, you would not have the elements that God intended for the local church to be recognized by and therefore, if you had a community of people who gathered without them, you might have Christians (universal church), but you would not have *a* church.