

RISE Part 1 – Week 2

The Church: Part One

(Female Edition)



By Pastor Ashley Evans -- March 2022

In America, between 40% and 60% of the people who went to church in 2019 were still attending church in 2022. Where did they all go? What happened? Sure, some drifted away because of the lockdowns, and others are still on their way back, but the truth is that years on, some people have dropped away because they don't have a biblical understanding of what the Church is, why the Church exists and how the Church was created. The reason? They were never taught effectively.

Common misperceptions about the Church:

- The Church is manmade.
- The Church was created by 12 lonely men who were sad that their friend Jesus had left them.
- The Church just evolved by accident to what it is today.

- The Church is just a manmade and man-run organization.
- The Church is something you don't need to be part of to be a Christian.
- The Church is separate from Jesus.
- You can love God without loving the Church.
- Jesus is important, but the Church is less important.

Ignorance and these misconceptions have led far too many people to leave the church.

WHY DID GOD CREATE THE CHURCH?

The book of Ephesians explains why God created the Church.

To understand the book of Ephesians, it's important to understand who it was written to and why. The book of Ephesians was written to relatively new Christians who were not Jewish. Remember that everything in the Bible up until the death and resurrection of Jesus revolved exclusively around the Jews. But with Jesus' resurrection, the message about Jesus spread around the world.

Since it had been a Jewish religion up until Jesus died and rose again, these new Christians in Ephesus were grappling with what this meant and how they integrated into it. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul wrote to these new believers to explain two things to them:

1. Why they are considered special by God and have as much access to the grace and favor of God as anyone else.
2. What this new entity called the Church is, why it was created, and why it is so important.

Paul writes this about the Church.

"When I think of all this, I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus for the benefit of you Gentiles. assuming, by the way, that you even know God gave me the special responsibility of extending his grace to you Gentiles. As I briefly wrote earlier, God himself revealed his MYSTERIOUS plan to me. As you read what I have written, you will understand my insight into this plan regarding Christ. God did not reveal this MYSTERY to previous generations, but now by his Spirit he has revealed it to his holy apostles and prophets. And this is God's plan: Both Gentiles and Jews who believe the good news share equally in the riches inherited by God's children. Both are part of the same body, and both enjoy the

promise of blessings because they belong to Christ Jesus. By God's grace and mighty power, I have been given the privilege of serving him by spreading this Good News. Though I am the least deserving of all God's people, he graciously gave me the privilege of telling the Gentiles about the endless treasures available to them in Christ. I was chosen to explain to everyone this MYSTERIOUS plan that God, the Creator of all things, had kept SECRET from the beginning. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord". (Ephesians 3:1-9, NLT)

The word 'mystery' Paul uses here appears 28 times in the New Testament. It's the Greek word *musterion*, meaning "something God has withheld from your realm of knowledge." It doesn't exist in your mind until He decides you should know it, and through the Holy Spirit, he opens your mind to grasp this idea that cannot be grasped by deduction. It's not a mystery that you can work out. You must receive it by revelation.

What is the mystery or *musterion* of the Church?

- The Church was God's idea from the beginning of time and is part of His redemption plan for humanity.
- The Church was a complete secret kept by God until the right time.
- The Church was deliberately kept under wraps by God.
- The Church showed the spiritual world of principalities and powers that God was not only concerned with the Jews, but He had been planning to reveal and share His grace with Gentiles by creating the Church. God had a secret plan that He kept hidden from the beginning.
- The Church was created on purpose by God through the death and resurrection of Jesus.
- The Church started the moment Jesus rose from the dead.

This is incredible. God had a plan all along to get his *grace* and *favor* to the Gentiles (non-Jewish people). And the way that God would make this possible was to create the Church, which would distribute God's grace to the world. In verse 11, he says that this plan was accomplished through the work of Jesus.

The mission for Jesus to come to earth was not just to redeem individuals, but also to create the Church.

Why would God do that?

God's purpose in all this was to use the CHURCH to display the manifold wisdom of God in its rich variety to all the unseen rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was his ETERNAL plan, which he carried out THROUGH Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Ephesians 3:10-11, NLT)

When the Church was birthed through Jesus' death and resurrection, everyone was shocked because they thought that the Jews were God's favorites, and everyone else was locked out. Jesus died not only so man could be redeemed but that the grace of God could reach non-Jewish people. He chose to create the Church as His **vehicle of grace** to you and me.

HOW IS THE CHURCH DESCRIBED IN SCRIPTURE?

The Bible describes the Church in many different ways. In this lesson, we will look at two of these descriptions.

1. The Church is the bride of Christ.

The Church is not an acquaintance, not a good friend, not even a fiancé -- the Church is the bride of Jesus.

“For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.” (2 Corinthians 11:2, ESV)

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This mystery is profound, but I am speaking about Christ and the church.” (Ephesians 5:31, NIV)

In **Mark 10:9**, Jesus says, *“Therefore what God has joined together, let no man separate,”* speaking of the union of marriage, Paul explains that the Church is joined in a sacred covenant with Jesus as His bride. It was God's plan and creation.

How much does Jesus love the Church?

Jesus loves the Church as his wife.

“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.” (Ephesians 5:25-26, ESV)

We should love the Church!

If Jesus loved the Church that much, we should love the Church with all our hearts, souls and minds.

Think about this: Jesus and the Church are one. You cannot separate them. Some people who feel hurt by the Church say that they love Jesus but can't stand the Church. However, the truth is that you can't love Jesus and not His wife. If they are one, then you can't like one and not like the other. If you love Jesus, you must love the Church, or you really don't love Jesus at all.

We should connect with the Church.

If your relationship with Jesus is healthy, He will tell you to connect with His bride.

You can't say you love your wife but only go home to see her once a year. Imagine if you got married but only went home to your house to see your wife once a year. How long do you think you would stay married? It's naive to think you can be married and stay in love with your wife if you never see her. And the same is true of God's wife, the Church. You can't keep your relationship with Jesus at a healthy level if you don't connect with His bride, and if you don't connect with the bride, you will fall out of love with her.

2. The Church is described as the body of Christ.

The second description is that the Church is the Body of Christ.

The Church is described as Jesus' body, and Jesus is described as the head. Just as your human body benefits indescribably from having a head, we, the Church, benefit from Jesus.

And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:22-23, ESV)

When we understand that Jesus is the head of the Church, the Groom, and we are His bride, we begin to understand that as we have a connection with Him, it means that we have authority too. As a result of Jesus' obedience and willingness to endure the cross, God put everything under His feet! If we are His body, that means everything is under OUR feet! God made Him head over everything FOR the sake of the Church.

There is another way to look at this. When we talk about the Church being the body of Christ, we are really saying the Church is the embodiment of Christ. When we are Gathered together, we embody Him.

If the Church is the embodiment of Jesus, it means that when you find the Church, you

also find Jesus. It's as if He's here. That's the role of the Church—to be the living representation of Jesus on the earth so people can experience Jesus.

When people find the Church, they find Jesus. It's so powerful to think of how God created language and concepts so we could fully understand the Church and its importance. If you want to see Jesus, you'll see him IN THE CHURCH. If you want to feel God's love, you'll feel it most in the Church.

For where two or three gather together in My name, there am I with them.
(Matthew 18:20, NIV)

HOW DO PEOPLE DAMAGE OR HURT THE CHURCH?

How a husband treats his wife can either enhance or detract from her beauty. He can either nourish her or neglect her. We, too, can hurt the Church and make her unattractive if we treat her badly. This can happen when:

- We stop loving the Church.
- We stop caring for her.
- We don't value her.
- We don't forgive those in the Church who hurt us.
- There is disunity, disregard, and a lack of attention.
- We use the Church just to fulfil our own needs.

When you read the Bible, you will understand that the whole of history will culminate in the marriage between the most incredible groom and the most incredible bride - JESUS AND THE CHURCH.

Because of the centrality of the connection and oneness of the Church to Jesus and Jesus to the Church, there continues to be an attack against the Church.

WHY DOES THE DEVIL ATTACK THE CHURCH?

The devil wants to do the following in regard to the Church.

- To destroy it and diminish its impact.
- To stop the Church from being the vehicle of grace to non-Jewish Christians.
- To destroy God's mission of using the Church to display Jesus to the world.

- To get Christians to undervalue the Church, so they don't fully engage, thus compromising God's mission.
- To get people to treat the Church as an optional extra so they don't get planted and involved and as a result grow

WHAT DOES THE CHURCH DO FOR YOU?

- The Church lifts you.
- The Church grows you.
- The Church protects you.
- The Church encourages you.
- The Church celebrates you.
- The Church empowers you.
- The Church frees you.
- The Church challenges you.
- The Church opens your mind to new possibilities for you.
- The Church brings faith to you.
- It brings God's Word to you.
- It creates a community of love for you.
- It rescues you.
- It shields you.
- It blesses you.
- It comforts you.
- It enables you.
- It corrects wrong thinking in you.
- It changes you.
- It offers a new path for you.
- It creates a legacy for you and your kids.
- It provides a haven for you and your family.
- The Church releases the gifts inside of you.
- It guides you.
- It gives life to you.
- It releases the destiny in you.
- It lifts you.
- It matures you.
- It gives you opportunities.
- It loves you.
- It cares for you.
- It enriches you.
- The Church changes attitudes in you.
- The Church releases you.
- The Church shows the meaning of life to you.
- It heals you.
- The Church prays for you.

- It works for you.
- The Church is critical to spiritual health and life in you.
- The Church was created by Jesus for you.
- The Church is God's vehicle of grace to you.



DISCUSS

What did you learn today about the Church that you didn't know before?

How does knowing that God intentionally created the Church through the death and resurrection of Jesus make you feel about the Church?

Why do you think people have such little understanding about the supernatural birth of the church?

How does the knowledge that Jesus and the Church are one impact how you will treat the Church in the future?
