

The Church of God

Abstract

This article defines the word “church” from a biblical perspective and distinguishes the three churches named in Scripture: the church in the wilderness, the church in Jerusalem, and the church which is Christ’s body. The central conclusion is that the phrase “the church of God,” used by the apostle Paul, encompasses the kingdom church and the church the body of Christ, showing the larger fellowship of God’s mystery and the harmony of His dispensational dealings.

Purpose & Scope

The purpose of this article is to put forth the doctrinal argument on the distinctions between the three biblically named churches.

Foundational Premise

First let’s define “church”, the secular definition is a place of assemblance, but using the Bible definition it is a called out assembly or a chosen congregation of people called for a purpose.

There are three different churches named in scripture, all under different dispensations, each one operating under different doctrine.

Overview of the Three Churches Named in Scripture

Church	Primary Identification	Dispensational Setting	Key Emphasis
The church in the wilderness	Israel as the called-out assembly under Moses	Direct leadership of God, then the written law after Sinai	God leading and governing Israel as a congregation
The church in Jerusalem	The kingdom church / Peter’s little flock / believing remnant of Israel	The gospel of the kingdom	The remnant to whom the Father gives the kingdom
The church the body of Christ	The mystery revealed to the apostle Paul	After Christ ascended and after Israel rejected God the last time	New doctrine now dispensed by God

I. The Church in the Wilderness

The church in the wilderness:

Acts 7:38 This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us:

This church operated under two dispensations, between Egypt and mount Sinai they operated under the direct leadership of God, then God dispensed something new; the written law, after Sinai they operated under the written law.

Leviticus 4:13 ¶ And if the whole congregation of Israel sin through ignorance, and the thing be hid from the eyes of the assembly, and they have done somewhat against any of the commandments of the LORD concerning things which should not be done, and are guilty;

Leviticus 8:4 And Moses did as the LORD commanded him; and the assembly was gathered together unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

II. The Church in Jerusalem

The church in Jerusalem:

Acts 11:22 ¶ Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.

This is what I call the kingdom church because they were operating under the gospel of the kingdom, this is Peter's little flock, this is the believing remnant of Israel. The phrase "kingdom church" does not appear anywhere in scripture, it's just a label to help explain the differences between it and "the church the body of Christ" which doesn't appear in scripture either.

Luke 12:32 Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

This is the church Saul was persecuting.

III. The Church the Body of Christ

The church the body of Christ:

1 Corinthians 12:27 Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

Ephesians 4:12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

Ephesians 1:22-23 And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

This is the mystery revealed to the apostle Paul, and a key point to grasp and understand is; this new doctrine was given to Paul after Jesus Christ had ascended into heaven and after Israel had rejected God the last time. God is now dispensing something new.

IV. The Church of God

The church of God:

This phrase is used in scripture 8 times and all by the apostle Paul, no other apostle used this phrase, it had not been revealed to them what this church is, this church includes the all three of the above named churches.

Matthew 16:18-19 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven:

This is the church of God that Jesus is speaking of but none of the apostles or the princes of this world understood because the new church had not been revealed yet.

This is how you can know that the church of God covers all the churches:

Acts 8:1 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judæa and Samaria, except the apostles.

Galatians 1:13 For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it:

1 Corinthians 15:9 For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

This is the kingdom church Saul was persecuting.

Now look at who else Paul is calling the church of God:

1 Corinthians 1:2 Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:

2 Corinthians 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia:

Integrated Summary & Conclusion

Paul calls both the kingdom church and the church the body of Christ, the church of God, so the church of God encompasses both churches. This is the fellowship of the mystery, the kingdom of God which encompasses the kingdom of heaven and the body of Christ all in perfect harmony.

Ephesians 3:9 And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: