

Hints and Helps

Some Christians don't think much of the local church. These people gather in all kinds of Christian groups outside the church, but seldom are they loyal to a local church. They are something like the world traveler who never got to know his own family.

When we speak of church, we might refer to the "universal church," which includes all the people (from Acts 2 until the coming Rapture) who have confessed their sins and embraced Christ as Savior. Although the universal church is real, we cannot see it. If I am hurt, I cannot go to the universal church for consolation. If I need counsel, I can't speak with the pastor of the church universal, as there is no such person. Thus "church" primarily refers to a local body of believers, of which we all need to be a part.

The church is people who love God and who have admitted their need of His saving work in their lives. The local church is also made up of leaders and officers, beginning with the pastor. The Bible likens believers to sheep and the pastor to a shepherd who oversees the flock.

In the book of Ephesians Paul used three illustrations to teach us what constitutes the universal church. First, Ephesians 1:22 and 23

refer to the church as a body. Every body has a head, or center of control. Christ serves as the head of the church body.

Second, in Ephesians 2:19–22, Paul described the church as a building. A building has a foundation, and the church has its foundation—the apostles and prophets. Under the inspiration of God, they wrote the instruction manual, the Bible, for the church. This analogy of a building describes Christ as the chief cornerstone. In ancient Middle Eastern times, buildings were designed so that a chief cornerstone held a whole building together. If someone were to remove the chief cornerstone, the entire building would fall apart. Likewise, Christ is central, or integral, to the church. Without Him it would dissolve into nothingness.

The third analogy in Ephesians 5:22–33 pictures the church as a bride, the wife of Christ. Christ serves as the bridegroom, or husband. The church is to be subject to Christ. Christ as the husband loves the church. He gave Himself for her.

A local, visible church should represent Christ and the universal church in a community. It should stand as a lighthouse of the gospel for people who need Christ. Furthermore, the local church should be a vital place of communion, fellowship, and instruction.

As we read the book of Ephesians, we understand that Christ loves His church—and we should too. We should submit to its leadership, love and aid in its ministry, and help advance the cause of Christ through it.

Verse to Memorize

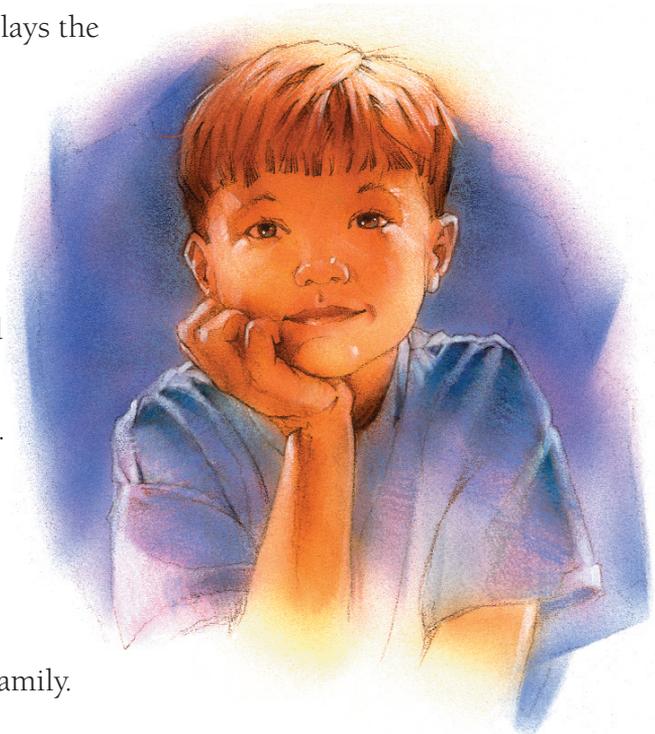
Ephesians 5:25: “Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.”

What Is That Building with the Spike?



Hi! My name is Topher. Really my name is Christopher, but my friends call me Toph or Topher. I'm eight. I like to ride my bike and play T-ball, soccer, and basketball. I have two sisters, Megan and Bobbie. Megan is ten and plays the piano all the time. She takes lessons. Roberta is four. We call her Bobbie. She's fun to tease, but she drives me nuts, always asking, "What's that?" or "What does this mean?" Mom and Dad say she'll grow out of always asking questions, but I doubt it.

Megan, Bobbie, Mom, and I were on our way to the library when Bobbie asked one of her famous questions. Well, at least they're famous in the Schmidt family.



“Mom, what’s that building with the point over there?”

By the time Mom could see where Bobbie was pointing, we had passed the building. “That’s okay, Mom. There are lots of those pointy things around. I’ll show you a different one.”

“What pointy things are you talking about, Bobbie? Do you mean a spike?”

Megan was acting really smart that day. School had gotten out just a few days before, and she had won an award for being the best student in her class.

Mom was trying to remember the buildings they had just passed. “Do you mean the museum?” she asked Bobbie.

“No, the fancy one with the poi—spike! Sometimes the spikes have sticks on top, but sometimes they don’t. Sometimes they have windows, and sometimes they don’t have windows.” Bobbie was trying to explain the buildings, but it wasn’t helping Mom. “There’s another one, Mom, right there.” Bobbie pointed out the window again.

Mom couldn’t look that time. “Bobbie, I want to answer your question, but you keep waiting until we’ve passed the building before you point it out to me. Remember that I’m driving and need to look out the front window to keep the car moving safely.”

Bobbie kept staring out the window. She pointed out the next pointy thing sooner. “There’s another one, Mom. What’s that spike thing?”

Mom finally saw one. “Oh, that’s a church steeple. It’s tall and white and points to the sky to remind people that God is much greater, higher, and holier than we. The sticks are actually a cross. Some churches have a cross there to remind people that Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins. The windows are just to make it pretty.”



“Does a church have to have a steekle?”

“It’s ‘steeple,’ not ‘steekle,’ Bobbie, and many churches don’t have steeples. Some churches don’t even have buildings. In parts of Africa and South America, people love God and belong to His church without having a building of any kind. Some places have warm weather all year, so buildings aren’t as important there. The people who love God just have a special meeting time when they all get together. It’s fine to have a fancy building to remind us how beautiful and big God is, but that doesn’t make a church. People do. You only have to have people

who love God and have asked Jesus to save them from their sins to have a church.”

The children were quiet for two whole blocks. That’s a long time for them. Then Megan asked, “Does everyone at church love God? What about the people who don’t know about Him but want to learn?”

“Anyone is welcome to go to church—the building or the meeting. Church is a great place to learn about God. In fact, many people who just visit eventually decide to be in God’s family.”

That night at dinner, Dad asked what the children had done that day. He asks them that all the time. Megan told him about the talk they had had about spikes and churches and God’s family.

Then Bobbie asked some questions. “Dad, are you in that family? Am I in the family? Am I the church?”

“Bobbie, I’ll have to think about that and answer you later. I have been thinking about some of those things for a while now. Maybe it’s time to make up my mind. I think maybe we’ll visit the ‘spike place’ this Sunday.”

Verse to Memorize

Acts 2:47: “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR CHILD



1. *Why do steeples point to the sky?*
2. *What is a church?*
3. *Are you a part of the church?*