

# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning to Our Roots

### STUDY NINETEEN

## God's Body-Building Program

*Matthew 16:13–18; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27*

*God is involved in two worldwide projects—reaching the lost and then equipping those who come to know Christ in a building project called His church.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**T**HE first mention of *church* in the Bible appears on the lips of Jesus. “I will build my church,” He declared, “and all the powers of hell will not conquer it” (Matthew 16:18).

The setting was *Caesarea Philippi*, an ancient site of paganism where people had worshipped false gods for centuries. At this epicenter of idolatry and demonic darkness, Jesus launched His unconquerable movement to carry the hope of the gospel to the world.

The Greek word translated “church,” *ekklesia*, means, “called-out ones,” which aptly describes the assembly of believers called out from the world into the body of Christ. The foundation of the church is Christ Himself, of whose identity Peter proclaimed, “‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God’” (Matthew 16:16).

Through Peter, whose name means “rock,” God revealed the rock-solid reality about Jesus’ divine nature and messianic mission. On this bedrock of truth, Christ would build His church. His building program continues to this day and will continue unhindered until He returns.

Let’s look deeper into Peter’s confession and Jesus’ announcement of the church, marvel at the church’s astounding growth, and discover six vital signs of a healthy church body—all discussed in this *Searching the Scriptures* study.



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## God's Body-Building Program

*Matthew 16:13–18; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27*



### PREPARE YOUR HEART

Every time you open God's Word, pray for the Spirit to illumine your mind and help you apply the truth to your life.

*Father, through Your Spirit, reveal the meaning of Your Word so that I can respond appropriately. Your Word is "a lamp to guide my feet" and "I will not stop obeying your instructions" (Psalm 119:105, 109). In Jesus' name, amen.*



### TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Matthew 16:13–18*, noticing how Jesus narrows His questions from *general* to *personal* and then how Jesus caps the interchange by announcing the church. This passage about Jesus is the center point of Matthew's gospel—indeed, the truth it declares is the culminating point of human history.



### Observation: Question, Confession, and Announcement

Each line in Matthew 16:13–18 is important, so observe the verses carefully as you take in the significance of this passage.

#### General Question—Matthew 16:13–14

How did Jesus begin His conversation with the disciples in *Matthew 16:13–14*, and how did the disciples respond?



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Jesus didn't fit the popular messianic mold of a Jewish warrior-king, so the Jews cast Him in a lesser role as a teacher, prophet, or forerunner. Hearing their answer, Jesus turned to His disciples.

### Personal Question—Matthew 16:15–16

“Who do you say I am?” Jesus asked (16:15), using a plural form of *you*. Although Jesus addressed all the disciples, Peter alone spoke up.

Read aloud Peter's confession in [16:16](#) as you imagine nearby pagan worshipers offering sacrifices at their temples and bowing to Caesar as son of god. How did each word of Peter's confession of the authority and divinity of Jesus contrast the setting?

### Jesus' Announcement—Matthew 16:17–18

Jesus was now ready to announce His church. But first, He had a *blessing* for Peter: “You are blessed, Simon son of John” (16:17) According to [Matthew 16:17](#), why was Peter blessed?

After blessing Peter, Jesus made His announcement in the form of a promise in 16:18:

*“Upon this rock I will build my church.”*



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First, observe the ownership of the church. To whom does the church belong . . . and *not* belong? Who is ultimately responsible for the church's survival and growth?

Second, observe the process—"will build." When? With what materials? What does "building" imply about the process?

Third, observe the name, "church." He didn't say, "churches." To what was He referring? How was Jesus' *church* unique among all the sects and religions of the world?



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Then Jesus sealed His promise with a guarantee in Matthew 16:18:

*“and all the powers of hell will not conquer it.”*

The text literally states, “gates of Hades” (16:18 NASB). Jesus was saying that even if Satan himself flung open the gates of hell and sent his entire battalion of demonic forces to attack Christ’s church, they could not crumble its walls. How did this promise embolden Jesus’ disciples then . . . and now?

*The church is not the work of the pastor or the elders. It’s not the work of a denomination or the pope. Christ alone is our boss. He holds the patent on the church. It was His genius that originated it and deposited into it the truth of heaven, which Peter and all His disciples ever since proclaim. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Interpretation: Definition of “Church”

We can knit together the concepts from Matthew 16:13–18 into a helpful definition of the church:

The church is the ever-enlarging body of born-again believers who comprise the universal Body of Christ over whom He reigns as Lord.<sup>1</sup>



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Let's divide this definition into parts. What biblical truth from our passage is reflected in the phrase, "ever-enlarging body of born-again believers"?

What biblical truth is reflected in the phrase, "universal Body of Christ"?

What biblical truth is reflected in the phrase, "over whom He reigns as Lord"?



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Reflect on the following central ideas about the church and explain each concept in the space provided. The church is . . .

- 1) *Universal in scope:* \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) *Continually in process:* \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) *Exclusive in membership:* \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) *Impervious to destruction:* \_\_\_\_\_

As a follower of Christ, you are part of this remarkable, divinely inspired, powerful, undefeatable movement of God!

*The longer I live, the more I believe in Christ's universal program called the church. I admire what God has done, and I want to be involved in it until my last breath. It is the most exciting thing! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### **Correlation: Growth and Signs of Health**

The church Jesus instituted was born on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon the believers in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1–12). Filled with the Spirit, Peter went into the streets and preached what he had confessed at Caesarea Philippi, that Jesus was “both Lord and Messiah” (Acts 2:36). As a result, 3,000 people believed and were added to the church that day (2:41).

The rest of Acts chronicles Christ's building project in Jerusalem and beyond. Read the following verses, and write down some of the phrases that describe the church's remarkable growth: [Acts 5:14](#); [6:7](#); [11:19–21](#); [12:24](#); [19:18–20](#).



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As the young church grew, the apostles nourished the body of Christ with a balanced spiritual diet. The charts below list six signs of a healthy church from *1 Corinthians 12:12–27*. Notice how the principles balance each other. As you read the passages, explain the principles in the space provided.

Principle	Scripture	Explanation
<i>Presence of unity and harmony</i>	12:12	
<i>Absence of favoritism, status, and prejudice</i>	12:13	
<i>Emphasis on individual value and mutual variety</i>	12:14–20	
<i>De-emphasis on independence and self-sufficiency</i>	12:15–24	
<i>Support of others</i>	12:25	
<i>Exaltation of Christ</i>	12:17	

Think of the sequence of events in the launch of the church. Peter boldly confessed Jesus’ identity, which prompted Jesus to institute His church, which led to the empowerment of the Spirit at Pentecost, which resulted in the miraculous growth of the church. What’s our role in God’s ever-growing mission?

 **Application: How Healthy Am I?**

How can you contribute to God’s body-building program? First, commit to boldly confessing as Peter did that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Second, use the six signs of a healthy body to evaluate your own spiritual health.

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Prayerfully reflect on the following list of questions and, in the space below, write down what you do well and what you could do better.

- 1) *Do I pursue unity at church or do I favor people of status or even show prejudice?*
- 2) *Do I value each member, or do I value only certain, high-profile people?*
- 3) *Am I using my gifts and seeing them as vital?*
- 4) *Do I support others who are hurting and give honor to those who deserve praise?*
- 5) *Do I exalt Christ above all?*

As believers, we are part of a divine movement that is much bigger than we may realize. Church is not a source of Christian entertainment. It's the ever-enlarging, worldwide body of Christ in which He reigns as Lord and through which His name is proclaimed. The church is the greatest force for good in the world, and no evil can overcome it! May we never lose sight of the glory of Christ's church.



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, thank You for the body of Christ, for building it up, for gifting individuals to serve, and mostly for Your Son, the head of the church. Use me at my church to build up others in love and give strength to the needy as I exalt Christ. In His name, amen.*

#### ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Growing Deep in the Christian Life: Returning to Our Roots* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1986), 339.