

The Lord's Message: What Is a Church? Faithful in Fellowship

Date: January 18, 2026

Where: Tilghman Methodist Church

Scripture Reference: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

We are starting a new sermon series: What Is a Church? Most people think of church as a building with four walls, a steeple, and stained-glass windows. Churches can be anywhere. Churches can be in bars, bowling alleys, private homes, stores, stadiums, jails, VFWs, Elks Lodges, and many other places. Many churches do not have a steeple or stained-glass windows. Jesus explained what a church must have – Him, **Matthew 18:20**. So, what makes a church a church? That is what we are going to explore for the next coming weeks by looking at the Book of 1 Corinthians.

Let us pray.

First Corinthians was written to the congregation of the church in Corinth. Corinth was a busy port city in Southern Greece. The city was located on the Gulf of Corinth, on a narrow piece of land called the Isthmus of Corinth, on the other side was the Saronic Gulf. This peninsula joined to the mainland of Greece. Ships would come into the harbor of Corinth and be hoisted out of the water and placed on rollers. Then the ships would be rolled across on a roadway made of pavers for about 5 miles until the ships reached the Saronic Gulf. The estimated population in the city was over 100,000. The city was heavily fortified, and many wars were fought for it, going all the way back to Byzantine time. As with most Greco-Roman cities they worshiped a god. The god of the city of Corinth was Aphrodite, the goddess of love, lust, beauty, and passion. She was worshiped with many female and male prostitutes. The Corinthian people were known in the ancient world for their partying, drunkenness, and loose sexual morals. The Romans even had a word for them Korinthiazomai. Which means “to live like a Corinthian.

The Apostle Paul comes to Corinth sometime in winter of AD 55 and establishes a church. This would have been during his second missionary journey. In **Acts 18:1-4, 9-11**, we confirm this fact.

Let us open our Bibles to page 1771 to see what Paul says a church is. We do not know a lot about Sosthenes, except in **Acts 18:17**, we are told that he was the synagogue ruler that was beaten by a Jewish mob because the Roman overseer, Gallio, would not hear their accusations against Paul. It could be reasoned that Paul converted this Jewish synagogue ruler to Christianity and he became a leader in the church at Corinth.

In verse 2, it says “to the church.” We often think of a church as a Holy place. The ancient Greek word for church is ekklesiai. It simply means an assembly of people. A very non-religious word. But we come to how this non-religious word takes on religious application - “The church of God.” In **1 Peter 1:15-16**, God is Holy, so as followers of Jesus Christ we are called to be holy. The pew you are sitting in is made up of ordinary wood. This pulpit is made of ordinary wood. The altar is made up of ordinary wood. This sanctuary would just be a beautiful, but ordinary room, if it were not for God’s people who are, and have been over the years, assembled to worship Him. We find the first reason for what a church is. A church is made up of those people who are “sanctified in Christ Jesus.” The word “sanctified” means to be set apart. We are set apart from the rest of the world because of fully believing that Jesus came to die on a cross for our sins. His shed blood covered our filthy sins, past, present, and future. He died on that cross and three days later was resurrected from the grave by God the Father. He was on this earth after for 40 days and then ascended into heaven. One day, He will return to this earth to take all the believers home with Him to everlasting life with God. Sanctification does not mean that we are special in anyway. Only that we believe that Jesus is our Savior. We are simply sinners saved by Jesus. It has been said quite correctly, “The church is not a museum for saints, but a hospital for sinners.”

“Called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ-their Lord and ours.” The church in Corinth, this church, and all the churches everywhere are joined together by the head of The Church, who is our Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul repeats this fact in **Ephesians 1:22-23**. Everything done here at Tilghman Methodist Church is done for Jesus. He is in control of this church. He must be for this church, and any other church, to exist.

When Jesus is head of the church, we can have grace and peace in this church and in our lives from God the Father and Jesus the Son, verses 3 & 4.

In verse 5, Paul’s letter points out that the Corinthian church was a rich church, maybe not in wealth, but in speech and knowledge. God was working in them, and that work was producing great wealth in how they spoke, what they knew about God, and about their anticipation of Jesus’ return. This all came from God’s gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus says, in **John 16:5-15**, while Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane waiting for Judas to betray Him. When we open our hearts and allow Jesus to come in He brings with Him the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is always with us. The Holy Spirit continues to teach us about God. Also, in **Mark 13:11**, when we do not know what to say to a person, the Holy Spirit gives us the word to say. He continues to guide us in to knowing more

about God and speaking for God. The church in Corinth was rich in the Holy Spirit. For a church to be a church, the Holy Spirit must be present in the lives of the people.

In verse 7, the church does not lack any spiritual gifts. The Holy Spirit gives us many gifts, not just to know God and speak for God, but how we should live our lives for Him. If our lives do not reflect being set apart from the rest of the world, then we become hypocrites and people will not believe what we say or know. There is a list of these gifts in **Galatians 5:22-23**. As I read them off, think about which ones apply to your life and which ones you still need to work on. A warning comes in **Galatians 5:25-26**. We need to surrender all our gifts and our lives to God.

The great evangelist, Charles Spurgeon, put it this way, "Should it not show us that gifts are nothing, unless they are laid on the altar of God, that it is nothing to have the power of eloquence; that it is nothing to have learning, that it is nothing to have influence, unless they are all dedicated to God and consecrated to His service."

In verse 8, by applying these gifts to our daily lives, we are kept strong and blameless until Jesus returns. Every one of us must humble ourselves before the Lord. Every one of us is capable of falling from grace and into sin. Satan is working hard to bring us down. Peter put it this way in **1 Peter 5:6-9**. All of us are capable of falling into sin. We should humble ourselves to God and pray for each other.

In verse 9, we come to the ultimate goal of why a church is a church. It is because we desire to be in fellowship with God and Jesus. If you do not want to be in fellowship with God here on earth, why would you want to be in fellowship with God in heaven? The church is called to be the place of God here on earth until we are with God in heaven.

For the church to fulfill its role to be a church first Jesus must be the head of the church. Second, it must be separate from the rest of the world. Third, it is a place for sinners to become saints. Fourth, God has equipped it with the Holy Spirit. Fifth, the people in the church must apply the gifts of the Holy Spirit to their daily lives. Sixth, the people should pray for each other, because we are all capable from falling for grace into sin. Lastly, the church is the church because the people want to be in fellowship with God here on earth before they ascend into Heaven.

The church is the church where two or three people are gathered with Jesus, faithful in fellowship with God.

Let us continue to listen to God and do what He says. Amen.

