

## “I believe in God, but not the church.”

Series: *The Christian Atheist*  
(Part 3 of 3)

**Open:** What words would you use to describe the ideal church?

**Explore:** Read Matthew 16:13-20.

Matthew is one of four biographies written on the life of Christ. It is full of powerful miracles, profound teachings, and incredible promises. One such promise concerning the church can be found in the sixteenth chapter of Matthew.

1. What broad, impersonal question did Jesus ask his followers (vs. 13-14)? What different answers did Jesus get to His question?
2. What pointed, personal question did Jesus ask next (vs. 15-16)? How did Peter respond to the question?
3. Why did Jesus say that Peter was blessed (vs. 17)?
4. What did Jesus promise concerning the church (vs. 18-20)? How have you seen this promise fulfilled in the church today?

**Reflect:** Review key points from the lesson before answering the questions.

1. The church is more than a building – it is the people who belong to one another. Share one way have you personally benefitted from being connected to a local church.
2. The Bible uses seven metaphors to describe the church, which of the seven had you never thought about before? ... which one resonates most with you?
3. Read 1 Peter 2:5. The church does not only exist *for* us, instead we exist *for* the church. How does it feel to be described as a “holy priesthood”? What do you believe it means to make “spiritual sacrifices” to God?
4. The key to spiritual growth is to have a relationship with Christ. The church must continue to abide in Christ if it is to bear much fruit. What does this verse say to us about prioritizing church attendance?
5. Why is it important that the church have a “family” atmosphere? How would you rate your willingness to welcome new people into God’s family? How can we continue to foster an environment that is loving and accepting?

**Apply:** Live it.

As a CARE Group: CARE Groups are an extension of the church. From the seven descriptions of the church, in which area is your group the strongest? ... in which area could your group use some help?

As an individual: Spend time thinking about your beliefs about the church. How will your attitude and/or your involvement in church change now that you have heard this lesson?

## Listening Guide Notes

### Seven Metaphors to describe the church...

1. A Bride = Prized and perfect.

<sup>[25]</sup> “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her <sup>[26]</sup> to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, <sup>[27]</sup> and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.” –**Ephesians 5:25-27 (NIV)**

2. A Body = Unified and cooperative.

<sup>[18]</sup> “God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. <sup>[19]</sup> If they were all one part, where would the body be? <sup>[20]</sup> As it is, there are many parts, but one body.” –**1 Corinthians 12:18-20 (NIV)**

3. A Building = Strong and resilient.

<sup>[20]</sup> “...built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. <sup>[21]</sup> In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>[22]</sup> And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.” –**Ephesians 2:20-22 (NIV)**

“You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” –**1 Peter 2:5 (NIV)**

4. A Plant = Growing and fruitful.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” –**John 15:5 (NIV)**

5. A Flock = Together and protected.

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” –**John 10:11 (NIV)**

6. A Kingdom = Saved and secured.

<sup>[12]</sup> “Giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. <sup>[13]</sup> For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, <sup>[14]</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

–**Colossians 1:12-14 (NIV)**

7. A Family = Loving and committed.

“You are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household.” –**Ephesians 2:19 (NIV)**