I. Introduction?
   a. This is one of those areas that I mentioned at the beginning of the class where I personally don’t fully agree with Dr. Grudem. So with that said, how does Dr. Grudem define the church?
      i. The church is the community of all true believers for all time. That is, the church is made up of all the men and women who have been, are, or ever will be true believers in Jesus. When Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:25 that “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,” he was referring to all the people Christ died to redeem. He didn’t just mean those who were alive after Christ had died but also those who looked to God for their salvation before Christ even came to earth. All true believers, regardless of what time period they lived in, make up the true church.¹
   
   b. How else can you define the church (hint: it depends on when you believe the church began)?
      i. The whole body of those from Pentecost to the Rapture who through Christ's death have been savingly reconciled to God and have received new life. It includes all such persons, whether in heaven or on earth. While it is universal in nature, it finds expression in local groupings of believers which display the same qualities as does the body of Christ as a whole. (Ref. Erickson, p. 1034)
      ii. Therefore, the local church can be defined as: An assembly of confessing believers, locally organized, Holy-Spirit-united-and-empowered for the purpose of glorifying God through (1) evangelism, which includes proclaiming the gospel and baptizing new believers, (2) edification of one another, which includes ministry of the Word, participation in the Lord's supper, fellowship, and discipline, and (3) worship, which includes praise, song and prayer. (from G. Breashers, ETS, 1993)

II. The Invisible Yet Visible Church:
   a. How can the church be both “invisible” and “visible”?
      i. Because we cannot see the spiritual condition of people’s hearts, the true church, in its spiritual reality as the fellowship of all genuine believers, is invisible. Only God can see the condition of people’s hearts. As Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:19, “The Lord knows those who are his.” Therefore, the “invisible church” is the church as God sees it.

      But the church is also visible. While the invisible church is the church as God sees it, the “visible church” is the church as Christians on earth see it. Therefore, the visible church will contain genuine believers as well as others who do not truly believe or follow the claims of Jesus. But in making this distinction, we should not become overly suspicious regarding the status of those who appear to be true believers. Instead, with benevolent judgment, we should consider all to be members of the universal church who appear to be believers from their confession of faith and their pattern of life.²

III. Other Descriptions of the Church:
   a. What are some of the different types of groups of believers that the word church is used to describe in the New Testament?
      i. In the New Testament, the word “church” is used to describe different types of groups of believers: a small house church (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19), the church in an entire city (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1), the church in an entire region (Acts 9:31), and the church throughout the entire world (Eph. 5:25; 1 Cor. 12:28).  

   b. What are some of the metaphors used to describe the church in the New Testament?
      i. A variety of metaphors are also used to describe the church. One group of metaphors suggests that the church is a family and that the members of the church relate to one another as members of a larger family do. 
      ii. Another common image of the church is that of a body. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul refers to members of the church as members of one body. Members have their own special function and responsibility just like parts of the body do. In Ephesians 1:22–23; 4:15–16 and Colossians 2:19, the church is referred to as a body with Christ as its head, holding the entire body together and equipping every part to work as it should. 
      iii. There are many other metaphors used for the church, such as a new temple (1 Peter 2:4–8), a holy priesthood (1 Peter 2:5), branches on a vine (John 15:5), an olive tree (Rom. 11:17–24), and a field of crops (1 Cor. 3:6–9).  
      iv. (Also See Appendix)

   c. What is the danger of focusing on one metaphor too much?
      i. The wide range of metaphors used for the church should remind us not to focus too much on any one. An unbalanced emphasis on one metaphor to the exclusion of others will result in an unbalanced view of the church. Instead, we should consider each metaphor as a different perspective on the church, something that tells us a little more about the community of which God has allowed us to be a part.  

IV. What Makes a Church a Church?
   a. If a group of people meet together to discuss spiritual things, does that make them a church?
      i. No…a New Testament Church is more than just Christians congregating

   b. What makes a church, a church?
      i. I would hold that there are generally 4 activities that make a group of believers a New Testament Church
         1. Traditionally, many Christian writers have agreed that there are two major activities (or “marks”) that every church must exhibit in order to be truly considered a church. The first is correct preaching from the Bible. This mark has

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less to do with the form of the sermon than with the content of the sermon. If the sermons in a church continually contain false doctrine or conceal the true gospel message of salvation by faith alone, then the church in which those sermons are preached is not a true church.8

2. The second mark of a true church is the correct administration of the sacraments (or “ordinances”), which are baptism and the Lord’s Supper.9

3. Third, is that group should have some form of membership. Not necessarily like a secular organization, but some way of determining who is in the church and who is out.

4. And finally, for a group of Christians to be a full functioning New Testament Church, they must practice some form of Church Discipline. Grudem, breaks this out into 2 separate activities (purity & unity), but I believe they fall under this one heading.

   a. Among true churches, two further distinctions—as emphasized in the New Testament—can be made. A church can be more or less pure and more or less unified. The purity of the church is determined by its degree of freedom from wrong doctrine and conduct and its degree of conformity to God’s revealed will for the church. Christ’s goal for the church is “that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:26–27). Therefore, as members of the church, we should pursue its purity in all areas to the best of our ability.

   b. In addition, we should also pursue unity—that is, freedom from divisions among true Christians—to the best of our ability. When we do this, we are falling in line with Jesus’ prayer in John 17:21 for future believers “that they may all be one.” This does not mean that there must be one worldwide church government over all Christians, for unity can be manifested in other ways.10

V. What Is the Church Supposed to Do?

a. What is the church supposed to do?

   i. The church is supposed to minister to God, to its members, and to the world.11

      1. Ministry to God is done through worshiping him. In Colossians 3:16, Paul encourages the church to sing “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” Worship in the church is not merely a preparation for something else; it is in itself a fulfillment of a major purpose of the church, whose members were created to live for the praise of God’s glory (Eph. 1:12).12

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2. The church’s ministry to its members is done through nurturing and building them up so that the church can “present everyone mature in Christ” (Col. 1:28). As Paul said in Ephesians 4:12–13, the church’s gifted leaders were given “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

3. The church’s ministry to the world is done through preaching the gospel to all people in word and in deed. In Matthew 28:19, Jesus commands his disciples to “make disciples of all nations.” In Acts 1:8, the disciples were told to spread the gospel message “to the end of the earth.” And the pattern of preaching in Scripture is clear; the message is to be given in both word (through evangelism) and deed (through ministries of mercy).

ii. Here is also an answer I gave to the Church’s search committee regarding a very similar question:

1. I believe that the local church is not an organization or a building, but instead is an organism that is made up of the “called out ones” who are empowered and united by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of glorifying God. As the local church, we accomplish this through evangelism (proclaiming the gospel and baptizing new believers), edification of the body, and worship (which includes the dual ideas of collectively with praise, song, and prayer, and individually with a life submitted to Christ).

2. I mentioned in the first questionnaire that I often teach that the church gathers to worship and disperses to evangelize. This means that although we share the Gospel continuously, the Sunday service is primarily about worship and edification. When we are properly discipling the body, it will take the Gospel outside of the church’s walls to a lost world. I also mentioned the simple acronym WIFE, which I believe gives a quick summary of the church’s main functions:
   a. W—Worship
   b. I—Instruct or teach
   c. F—Fellowship
   d. E—Evangelize

VI. The Church’s Power to Fulfill Its Mission
   a. What is the power the church has to fulfill its mission (note: this is another area that I differ on the views held by Dr. Grudem)?
      i. When Christ promised to build his church, he gave his disciples the authority to do so. And when he left them, he sent them the Holy Spirit to empower them to build it (John 14:26; Acts 1:8). The Holy Spirit empowered Jesus’ followers with the gifts (“spiritual gifts”) required to do the ministry of the church, and the Holy Spirit empowers us to use these gifts to continue the ministry of the church today.
      ii. Dr. Grudem is not a cessationist. Which means that he does not believe that what we refer to as the “Sign Gifts” have not ceased. But I would hold that the Scriptures teach that the possession of particular miraculous gifts by individual believers was reserved for

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a particular time and particular purpose. The time was the creation of the New Testament Canon, that ended with the writing of Revelation. The purpose was to serve as a sign that these men (and women) spoke for the Lord. Once the Canon was closed, God no longer needed to empower specific believers with those miraculous gifts because the revelation of His Word was complete

1. That does not mean however that God does not still work miracles and answer the prayers of His children...because He does!

2. What it does mean is that no one today “possess” sign gifts. If someone prays for someone else’s healing, and God chooses to heal them, that is not a gift that person possess, it is the mercy and grace of God (note how the “sign gifts” of Peter and Paul operate in Scripture—Acts 3:1-10; 13:9-12; 14:9-10; 16:16-18; 20:8-12)

VII. Questions for Review and Application:
a. How is a church different from a Bible study or Christian retreat?

b. Why should Christians become members of a church? What are some of the dangers of not becoming a member of a local church?

c. Can you list some of the things a church is supposed to do? Can you name some specific examples of the Holy Spirit’s work empowering and blessing some of those things in your own church?

Appendix: What is the Church
(David L. Burggraaff, Ph.D., Th.M.)

I. What the Church is?
a. The whole body of those from Pentecost to the Rapture who through Christ's death have been savingly reconciled to God and have received new life. It includes all such persons, whether in heaven or on earth. While it is universal in nature, it finds expression in local groupings of believers which display the same qualities as does the body of Christ as a whole. (Ref. Erickson, p. 1034)

b. Therefore, the local church can be defined as: An assembly of confessing believers, locally organized, Holy-Spirit-united-and-empowered for the purpose of glorifying God through (1) evangelism, which includes proclaiming the gospel and baptizing new believers, (2) edification of one another, which includes ministry of the Word, participation in the Lord's supper,
fellowship, and discipline, and (3) worship, which includes praise, song and prayer. (from G. Breashers, ETS, 1993)

II. THE CHURCH IN GOD'S PROGRAM—The Beginning (and End) of the Church
Intro: When did the church begin? Different views as to when the church began are at times based on different concepts of church. (Acts 2 & 11—one looks forward to a beginning and the second looks back at the beginning)

a. Examples of various views.
   i. Reformed theologians, even Strong, define church as the redeemed of all ages; the whole body of those who through Christ's death have been savingly reconciled to God and have received new life; if Adam was saved, church began with Adam. Ref. Grudem, 854-55.
   ii. Some groups teach that the church began with John the Baptist, or with the choosing of twelve disciples, or at the Last Supper.
   iii. Most dispensationalists consider the church began when the Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost. See Saucy, ch. 4. Also ref. Erickson, 1058-59.

b. Indications which favor the beginning of the church at Pentecost.
   i. Although some would suggest the church existed in the Old Testament, an examination of the New Testament indicates the church is a peculiar New Testament entity that had not previously existed. In Matthew 16:18 Jesus declared, "I will build my church," indicating the building of the church was future. This point is important. It emphasizes that the church was not yet in existence when Jesus spoke these words. He was making a prediction concerning His future building of the church.
   ii. I Corinthians 12:13 identifies the manner in which the church is being built -- it is the work of the Holy Spirit in baptizing believers into the one Body of Christ. At the moment of regeneration, the Holy Spirit places believers into union with Christ (Somatic Union with Christ). Ephesians 1:22-23 identifies the church as the Body of Christ, stressing this union with Christ that all believers are brought into at the moment of conversion.
   iii. In Acts 1:5 Jesus stated, "You shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." (indicates a FUTURE work) This indicates the work of the Holy Spirit in placing believers into union with Christ had not yet begun -- but it was anticipated imminently. The context clarifies the event and indicates it began at Pentecost with the descent of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). When Peter reported what had happened in Cornelius' house in Caesarea he indicated to the Jews in Jerusalem that the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles just as He had on the Jews "at the beginning" (Acts 11:15). This latter phrase identifies the beginning point of the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit and thus identifies the beginning of the formation of the New Testament church. The church began at Pentecost (Acts 2).

c. Conclusion of the Church
   i. When does the church end? It seems best to conclude that the church ends at Christ’s coming. Argumentation for this position comes from textual implications (ie. Hb. 12:23: Eph. 5:27) and systematic theology.
   ii. "The fact that these blessings have been inaugurated in the church distinguishes the church from Jews and Gentiles of the past dispensation. But, only some of those
blessings have been inaugurated. Consequently, the church should be distinguished from the next dispensation in which all of the blessings will not just be inaugurated, but completely fulfilled (which fulfillment will be granted to the saints of all dispensations through the resurrection of the dead). . . . The church is precisely redeemed humanity itself (both Jews and Gentiles) as it exists in this dispensation prior to the coming of Christ.” (Blaising, **PD**, 49)

iii. Progressive dispensationalists see a “transdispensational continuity of Israel and the church as the one people of God” (Turner, **DIC**, 288; cf. Blaising, 50) in the millennium and eternal state.

iv. The Holy Spirit is the key to the New Covenant, replacing Jer. reference to the heart of stone, with God’s own heart

### III. THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

*(Kevin DeYoung book “What is the Mission of the Church”)*

**a. Biblical Imagery of the Church**

i. The nature of the church is far too broad to be exhausted in the meaning of the one word *ekklesia*. To describe its manifold meaning the New Testament writers employed numerous descriptive expressions. They explained the concept of the church both in literal terms and in rich metaphorical descriptions. This richness of description precludes a narrow concept of the church and warns against magnification of one aspect to the disregard of others.

1. Organism vs. Organization
2. Man is an organism like animals, but he was created in the image of God
3. The church is also an organism not an organization
4. Everyone has the connecting tissue of the Holy Spirit

**ii. Body**

1. A metaphor illustrating the unity and universality of the church is the word *body*. As the head has authority over the physical body and gives direction to it, so Christ is the head of the church, having authority over it and giving it direction (Eph. 1:22-23 & 4:11-16; Col. 1:18). The illustration of the body also emphasizes the unity of all believers in the church age because the church reconciles Jews and Gentiles into one body. There is no distinction; they are one in Christ (I Cor. 12:13; Eph. 2:16; 4:4). Moreover, Christ nourishes the church by giving gifted leaders to the church that it might grow to maturity and be built up as one body in Christ (Eph. 4:12, 16; Col. 2:19). The participation in the elements of the Lord's Supper illustrates the oneness of the church as Christ's body (I Cor. 10:16-17).
2. Thus, we should recognize that Paul in fact uses two different metaphors of the human body when he speaks of the church.
   a. The church as the whole body (Paul's earlier letters-- I Cor. 12:12-27; Rom. 12:4-5)
      i. In this metaphor, Christ is not viewed as the head joined to the body, because the individual members are themselves the individual parts of the head. Christ is in this metaphor the Lord who is 'outside' of that body that represents the church and is the one whom the church serves and worships.
      ii. Of a local congregation, at Corinth (I Cor. 12:12-27)
      iii. Of a group wider than Corinth, probably all believers (I Cor. 12:13).
iv. Individual believers generally in their relations with one another (scattered in Rome rather than in a particular congregation) (Rom. 12:4-5)

b. The church as the body, Christ as its Head--an organic relationship between each other with Christ as the authority and sustainer (Paul's later letters--Eph. 1:22-23; 2:15-16; 3:6; 4:4,12-16; 5:22-33; Col. 1:18,24-25; 2:18-19)
   
i. In these passages, Paul says that Christ is the head and the church is like the rest of the body, as distinguished from the head.

iii. **Bride** (Eph. 5:22-33; II Cor. 11:2)

1. The picture of the church as the bride of Christ is seen in Ephesians 5:23 where an analogy is drawn that compares the husband and wife relationship in marriage to Christ and His bride the church. The illustration is apt because it reveals the magnitude of Christ's love for the church (Eph. 5:2, 25). A second emphasis of the illustration is the exalted position of the bride.
   
a. As in the Oriental wedding custom, at the engagement (betrothal) the bride receives the promise of future blessing with her husband.
   
b. Similarly, the church today is an espoused bride, awaiting her husband's return from glory.

2. The second stage of the Oriental marriage was the wedding itself, when the husband came to take the bride to be with him.

3. In an analogous figure, the church awaits the return of Christ, when she will be espoused to her husband (John 14:1-3; I Thess. 4:16-17).

4. In Oriental weddings, the wedding feast followed; similarly the church, as Christ's bride, awaits the husband's return (Rev. 19:7-9) and the glory of the millennial kingdom to follow.

iv. **Building** (I Cor. 3:9-17; II Cor. 6:16-18; Eph. 2:20-22; I Pet. 2:5)

1. Paul has emphasized that Jews and Gentiles alike are one in Christ because God abolished the wall that separated Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:11-18). Now Paul describes the oneness of the church under the figure of a building. The church, a union of Jews and Gentiles, is built upon the "foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Eph. 2:20). "The Apostles" are collectively one of the foundational gifts, designed to equip the believers (Eph. 4:12) and bring the church to maturity (Eph. 4:13).

2. In the figure of the building, **Jesus Christ is the cornerstone** (Eph. 2:20; cf. I Cor. 3:11), which may refer to the "primary foundation stone at the angle of the structure by which the architect fixes a standard for the bearings of the walls and cross-walls throughout." In Christ the whole building, the church, is being "fitted together" (Gr. sunarmologoumene, Eph. 2:21), emphasizing Christ's work of constructing His church. As a building "grows" when under construction, so the church, as a living organism, is growing as new believers are added to the "building" (cf. I Pt. 2:5). There is also emphasis on the fact that God dwells within us.

v. **Priesthood**
1. In I Peter 2:5 the apostle combines the figures of a building and a priesthood, stating, "You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood" (mixing of two metaphors). The statement is reminiscent of Exodus 19:5-6 where God declared that Israel was "a kingdom of priests." In the nation Israel, however, only those of the tribe of Levi could serve as priests, whereas in the church, every believer is a priest. Peter indicates all believers are priests for the purpose of offering spiritual sacrifices instead of animal sacrifices.

2. The uniqueness of the New Testament priesthood is further seen in I Peter 2:9 where Peter refers to a "royal priesthood." Church age believers are both kings and priests (cf. Rev. 1:6). In the Old Testament it was impossible to combine both offices for one could only be either of the Levitical line or the kingly line, the line of Judah. The entire church functions as a priesthood, whereas in Israel only the Levitical line had that privilege. All church age believers have access to God through Christ, the church's High Priest; in Israel individual believers could approach God only through the Levitical priests. All church age believers may approach God boldly at any time (Heb. 4:14-16), whereas Israelites could approach God only during the particular offerings (Lev. 1-7). These contrasts indicate that while both Israel and the church are called a priesthood, Israel and the church are distinct entities.


1. A beautiful, tender image depicting the relationship of believers to the Lord is found in John 10:16 where the church is called a flock (cf. Acts 20:28; I Pt. 5:3). Israel had a relationship to the Lord as a sheep to a shepherd (Psalm 23) and was called a flock (Ps. 80:1; Jer. 13:17), but in the Old Testament that figure was restricted to Israel. The uniqueness about the church being a flock and Christ the Shepherd is that this flock is composed of both Jews and Gentiles. Jesus declared, "I have other sheep [Gentiles], which are not of this fold [Jews]; I must bring them also, and they shall hear My voice; and they shall become one flock [the church composed of Jews and Gentiles] with one Shepherd" (Jn. 10:16).

2. The image emphasizes that members of the church as the sheep of Christ belong to Him. Jesus emphasizes that the flock is "My sheep" (Jn. 10:26, 27) and that they are secure in His hand. Moreover, the sheep respond to the Shepherd's voice -- there is intimacy for the Shepherd knows His sheep individually, and they recognize His voice and respond to Him. Thus,
   a. This imagery originates in the Old Testament.
   b. This imagery refers to Christ's compassion, guidance, protection, and leadership over His people.
   c. This imagery has ramifications for pastors.

vii. **Branches**

1. In John 15 Jesus describes the close relationship church age believers enjoy with Him as being one of branches related to a vine. Jesus is the true vine (Jn. 15:1), while the Father is the farmer who tills the land in order that the branches may bear fruit (Jn. 15:4). Church age believers are the branches that draw their life from the vine because they are "in Him" (Jn. 15:4, 5). The branches receive their
life-giving nourishment in their attachment to the vine; as they remain in the vine, they are able to grow and bear fruit.

2. This relationship describes both union and communion of church age believers with Christ. Christ's exhortation to the church is to "abide in me." "Abide" (Gk. meno) means essentially "to remain," "stay," or "live." In this context it means to remain or continue in the realm in which one finds himself. The exhortation to abide in Christ is an exhortation to continue believing in Him (cf. I Jn. 2:22, 24, 28).

3. The purpose of the branches abiding in the vine is to produce fruit. Every branch that does not bear fruit he "lifts up" that it may bear fruit. The ones who continue with Christ will bear fruit (Jn. 15:5). To enhance the fruit-bearing process the branches are pruned that they may bear more fruit (Jn. 15:2). The figure of the vine thus demonstrates the vital relationship between the members of the church and Christ.