

# We Must Have A Sound Understanding of The Church

## INTRODUCTION.

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- Today, many people want to study Eschatology or Angelology, but not many are interested in or see the importance of the study of Ecclesiology.
- The study of the church is thought by many to be more of a side note because it really doesn't matter.
- The fact is, nothing could be farther from the truth. The doctrine of the church is of utmost importance.
- The church is the most visible part of Christian theology, and it is vitally connected with every other part of theology.
- The greatest need for the church today is to understand its role in God's economy and function as a healthy body in order to fulfill that role. Unfortunately, the church in the west (including America and Europe) is seriously unhealthy.
- Now, you may say, "Well, not the true church." We will discuss all of that as we go on in the class. We will look at the visible vs. the invisible church. We will discuss the nature of the church including the definition and beginning.
- For right now it will suffice to say, the church today is unhealthy and has simply become a reflection of the world. Why is that?
- There are a few different reasons. But I would say the primary reasons have to do with Hermeneutics (Tools of Biblical interpretation).
- In other words, how the Bible is interpreted will determine how healthy the church is.
- If scripture is interpreted as, and understood to be divinely authoritative, inerrant, infallible, God breathed (**1 Tim. 3:16**), then the church will be healthy in their doxology.
- If they have a subjective, spurious Hermeneutic that holds the interpreter's whims, feelings or impulses as being authoritative rather than being subject to the text and guided by the principles of a grammatical-historical perspective, then the church will be unhealthy at best, and heretical at worst. A monumental example of this can be seen in the presentation of the gospel.
- Let me ask you this, who does the church consist of? (we will talk more about this later) Believers, right? How did they become believers (**Rom. 10:14**). They heard the gospel and believed. So, the church arises out of the gospel, correct?
- If the gospel is distorted or deformed due to a poor Hermeneutic, then the church will be distorted or deformed. Let's look at a real life example.

- **Example:** The health wealth and prosperity gospel. If you listen to any of the preachers of this “False gospel” you will see very quickly the distortion of the gospel. In an interview with Paula white, Larry Huch when talking about the fact that Jesus is the first born of all creation **Col.1:15**, actually says these words, “Jesus is not the only begotten Son of God.” This is heresy friend. There is no way around it. We would obviously say that this man and all like him are not part of the church, but this is the kind of teaching that millions flock to and would claim their teaching to be right in line with orthodox Christianity. They say they are part of the church.
- So, we can see how a distorted hermeneutic which result in a distorted gospel results in an unhealthy church. But what amazes me is that thousands believe this is okay. They believe this is perfectly fine. They do not have a robust understanding of the Church. As I studied this I have found several other biblical reason understanding all aspects of Ecclesiology is so important to us so let’s look at them.

## **Biblical Reasons why Understanding the Church is Important.**

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### **1.) The Church is Designed by God.**

- If we are going to understand how the church is to function best, we need to consider God’s plans and purposes for it.
- Since He is the author and creator of the church, it only stands to reason that He is the one who determines the purpose and priorities of the church, not us.

### **Colossians 1:25-27,**

<sup>25</sup> of this church, I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,<sup>26</sup> the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. <sup>27</sup> To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

### **2.) The Church is Central to God’s Purpose in this Age.**

#### **Matthew 16:18,**

<sup>18</sup> I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

#### **Matthew 28:19-20,**

<sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

- We can see these promises (I will build my church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it, Go and make disciples, baptize them, teach them), we see these fulfilled in the book of Acts as the apostles not simply won people to Christ (which is essential) but they also assembled them together into Church. We see this in Acts 14:21-23.

**Acts 14:21-23,**

<sup>21</sup> After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch,<sup>22</sup> strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and *saying*, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” <sup>23</sup> When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

So, as we study the church, we need to understand that:

- The church (not parachurch organizations) is the primary means by which God intends to work in this age.
  - Parachurch may do good things for the kingdom, but God makes no promises to maintain them.
  - These organizations don’t have the mechanisms of baptism, the Lord’s supper, and church discipline for drawing sharp distinction regarding who the people of God are.
  - There is a huge distinction that exists between the church and the parachurch – the parachurch meets specific needs while the church is for all believers.

We also need to understand that:

- The word of God is to be taught through the church.
- Believers are shepherded through the church.
- The families of saints are ministered to through the church.

So, Biblical reasons we need to understand the Church include,

1. The Church is Designed by God,
2. The Church is Central to God’s Purpose in this Age.

**3.) Christ Died for the Church.**

- That is amazing. The Church is so precious to Christ that He gave His life for it.

**Acts 20:28,**

<sup>28</sup> Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

- You see, he is even more concerned and interested in the church than we are we see that in that He sacrificed himself to purchase it.

### **Ephesians 5:24-27,**

<sup>24</sup> But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives *ought to be* to their husbands in everything. <sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, <sup>26</sup> so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, <sup>27</sup> that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.

- So, understanding the church is essential for having a proper understanding of where Christs' affections truly are. The fourth Biblical reason is because:

#### 4.) **Christ is the head of the Church.**

- Understanding that Christ is the head of the church ensures that we will look to Him for cues on how to shepherd His body. Let's look to scripture to see him as the head.

### **Colossians 1:18,**

<sup>18</sup> He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

### **Ephesians 1:22-23,**

<sup>22</sup> And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, <sup>23</sup> which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

- If we do not understand the headship of Christ, it will lead to attempts to “do” church apart from the headship of Christ.

## **Practical Implications of Understanding the Church.**

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### 1.) *Implications for Church Leadership.*

#### **Hebrews 13:17,**

<sup>17</sup> Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

- Do you see that? Pastors will give an account for how they lead the Church.
- We are commissioned with the heavy responsibility of guarding the flock from false teachers, we are to “keep watch over their souls.”
- To do this we need to have a robust understanding of Ecclesiology. We cannot be unclear or weak in our understanding of the Church and its role in the life of the believer.

### 2.) *Implications for Church Members.*

- The demands of the Gospel must be made known and be made concrete in the local church to guard against nominal Christianity or false conversion.
- Being a member of a local church should be the normal expectation such that believers are not only committing themselves to that church and its leaders, but also to each other.
- When clearly identifiable church membership exists, leaders know who they are accountable for leading, and believers know who they are to serve with their spiritual gifts, and the one another's can be properly practiced.

### 3.) *Implications for Church Structure.*

- A right doctrine of the church should affect its structure, carefully reflected in a plurality of elders who lovingly lead, serve and shepherd the body of Christ.
- God has placed leaders within the body to teach the Word, direct the church, and model godly conduct.

#### **1 Peter 5:1-3,**

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, <sup>2</sup> shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; <sup>3</sup> nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.

The fourth implication we see is the,

#### 4.) Implications for Church Culture.

- A right ecclesiology impacts the culture of a church in that it creates an atmosphere of discipleship and mentoring.
- This should all promote intentionality in helping fellow believers grow in Christ-likeness and maturity.

#### **Ephesians 4:11-16**

<sup>11</sup> And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; <sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. <sup>14</sup> As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; <sup>15</sup> but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Now, the last but surely not the least of the implications is the,

#### 5.) Implications for the Glory of God.

- A right Ecclesiology is essential to God receiving the glory in the Church.

#### **Ephesians 3:20-21**

<sup>20</sup> Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, <sup>21</sup> to Him *be* the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

So, as we dig into the subject of the Church over the next 5 weeks, It is my hope that this is a profitable study for you. Next week we will be starting off by looking at the Nature of the Church. Within this we will look at the definition, inauguration and possibly the purpose of the church.

**Let's Pray.**