

INAUGURATION AND PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

Introduction

Definition: The Church is the New Covenant Community of God as it exists in this dispensation between the events of Acts 2 (Day of Pentecost) through the rapture of the Church prior to the Day of the Lord.

INAUGURATION OF THE CHURCH

Disagreement as to when the church began.

- 1.) Some say it began with Adam.
- 2.) Some say it began with Abraham.
- 3.) Some say it began with the earthly ministry of Jesus.
- 4.) Some say it began on the day of Pentecost.
- 5.) Some say it began during the ministry of Paul.

- How do we know if the statement concerning the inauguration of the church, that is in our definition, is correct?
- We look to the Bible. If we look to Luke's usage of the word "*ekklesia*," we see that he used it to indicate believers gathering together after the earthly ministry of Jesus, not during or before. We can also look at its usage in [Matt. 16:18; 18:17](#).
- When we do this, we can clearly see that the first three choices are incorrect. So, the next question is, how do we determine if the church as we know it began at Pentecost or during the ministry of Paul?
- Well, first let's consider the view that says the church began with the ministry of Paul. This view is known as:
 - **Hyper or ultra-dispensational view**. This view sees the church in Acts as a "Hebrew" or "Jewish" church, separate from the "mystery" church to which Paul wrote his Prison Epistles. This idea was first seen in the 1800's by an Anglican clergy man named ***E. W. Bullinger***.
 - Bullinger stated that the four Gospels were for Jews only and had / have no bearing on the church. He believed that the books of Peter, James, Jude, Hebrews, the epistles of John and even Revelation are all addressed to the Hebrew church, which is different from the "body of Christ."

Some Major Issues:

- 1.) It rejects the ordinances of the church. They hold that water baptism and the Lord's Supper were for the "Hebrew" church, not the "body of Christ."
- 2.) If you believe the hyperdispensationalist reading of Acts, you have to consider the "church" that Paul persecuted according to Acts 8:1 to be unrelated to the church whose elders he admonished in Acts 20:28 (to whom Paul had preached the gospel of grace – Acts 20:24). In this thought the Acts 8 "church" was the Jewish church that Jesus called "My church" and the Acts 20 "church" was supposedly something entirely different. So, is that possible?

Problem:

- This change of meaning is not signaled by anything Luke wrote. In fact it never happened. The church to which God added Jews in Acts 2, Samaritans in Acts 8, God-fearing Gentiles in Acts 10, and Gentiles from Asia minor in Acts 20 is the same "church."
 - The hyperdispensational claim that the church under Paul is some different entity **is false** and constitutes a very poor reading of Acts. Such a revolutionary change would have been explained in the text had Spirit-inspired Luke knew it happened.
 - The church to which God added members early in Acts is the same church that Paul calls "the body of Christ."
- So, we can see that the inauguration (beginning) of the church took place at Pentecost. Scripture clearly supports this. It can actually be proven 2 different ways from the Bible.

The Church Began at Pentecost.

1.) It is proved by the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

- Without spirit baptism there can be no body of Christ.
- Acts 1:5 → Acts 2:4 → Acts 11:15 → 1 Corinthians 12:13

The pouring out of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost is the means by which the body of Christ was formed. As believers are placed in the sphere of the Spirit, they are fused into the spiritual body which is identified as the church.

PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

Purpose = To glorify God through worship, edification of the saints, and the evangelization of the world.

This is essentially a three-legged stool regarding the purpose of the Church. Glorifying God is the top of the stool while worship, edification of the saints, and evangelism of the world are the 3 legs. Let's go ahead and take each leg and discuss it. The first leg shows us that part of the purpose of the church is to facilitate:

I. The Worship of God.

- Worship can take place corporately and individually. For the purpose of this class we are looking at the corporate side of worship. So, what are the essential elements of corporate or assembled worship?

Assembled Worship Elements:

- First of all, we need to realize that it is prescribed by God and should be directed by God's Word. Right? I mean our guide for worship should not come from the world or man but from Scripture. A good summary of the contents that should be included in corporate worship can be captured in this phrase.
 - "Read the Bible, Preach the Bible, Sing the Bible, Pray that Bible, and See the Bible."
-Ligon Duncan.
- 1) **Read the Bible:** Christians are commanded to "read" the Bible when gathered together in corporate worship. Paul exhorts Timothy in **1 Tim 4:13** to "Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture." When we come together as a congregation, we should make sure there is some kind of public reading of the Word of God. Not just a random verse thrown up on the screen or some popular verse taken out of context and printed in the bulletin. No, there should be a clear verse by verse chapter by chapter, book by book reading of the Word.
 - 2) **Preaching / Teaching the Bible:** Yes, the Scripture has a perspicuity to it (generally easy to understand), but, God gave some men the gift of preaching / teaching which is to be utilized for the glory of God within the corporate assembling together to explain and apply the text to the congregation. Look at **Romans 10:14-17**.

Romans 10:14-17.

⁴ How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? ¹⁵ How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!" ¹⁶ However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?" ¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

2 Timothy 4:2-5

² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. ³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, ⁴ and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. ⁵ But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

- So, there needs to be both a reading of God's Word and a preaching of God's Word. It is not one or the other but both. Now, as we see in **2 Tim**. Here, this preaching is to include certain aspects. It is not to be a preaching that is full of ear tickling myths, not a preaching that strokes one's ego or inculcates warm fuzzies into the minds of the hearers. It is not to simply be a pep talk or motivational speech that is done only because that's what people want to hear.
 - No, Paul tells us here that the preaching of the Word in the church is to be done when its popular and when it is not, and it is to be done with great patience. The preacher is to reprove, rebuke, exhort and instruct. He is to be sober in all things, to endure hardship and to do the work of the evangelist. Only when these things are done can it be said that the preacher is fulfilling his ministry. If someone is in a "church" and this is not taking place, then the body that gathers together, wherever it may be, is not participating in a complete corporate worship. Don't call it a worship service, call it something else but not church.
 - So, there is a reading element (Read the Bible), a preaching/teaching element (Preach the Bible), next we see there is a singing element (Sing the Bible),
- 3) **Sing the Bible**: The duty of singing God's word is urged upon Christians in Scripture, we see it by example if we look in **Matthew 26:30** or **Mark 14:26**, here Jesus and the disciples are singing a hymn after the last supper. So, we see it by example, but we also see it by way of a command. If we look at **Ephesians 5:19-20**, Paul exhorts the Ephesians when he says they should be:

Ephesians 5:19-20

⁹ Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; ²⁰ always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;

- If you think about it, the reality is that the praises of the Christian assembly on earth, is just a foreshadowing of the praises which will be offered in heaven, **Revelation 5:9-14**. That is a wonderful truth.

- Okay so, the essential elements of corporate worship so far can be summed up by, Read the Bible, Preach the Bible, Sing the Bible, and next we see we are to:

4) **Pray the Bible**: So, what does that mean? Well, when we pray, we are to be mindful of scripture. Prayer for what Paul or David prayed for, pray for sanctification, pray for God's will to be done. In other words, pray according to God's will which is found in the Bible. When we do this, we glorify God. This happens in a number of ways. Through prayer we make known our reliance on Him, we demonstrate obedience to His command to pray, we show that we remember God's faithfulness to answer previous prayers, and we show that we are relying on God's kindness in the fact that we are praying for still more.

- In corporate prayer, God is magnified while the church is edified and encouraged. We see Jesus teaching His followers to pray in a corporate fashion in **Matthew 6:7-15; Luke 11:1-4**. Here he tells them to begin with "Our Father who is in heaven." Or in James, (**Jam. 5:16**) James urges the church, "confess you sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."

- The book of Acts is full of prayer. In a corporate setting, it tells us in **Acts 2:42**,

Acts 2:42

⁴²They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

- So, we need to make sure that prayer is a part of the corporate service. It is essential to the church.
- The final element of assembled or corporate worship is that within this context we are able to:

5) **See the Bible**: This refers to the celebration of baptism and the Lord's supper, which depict the gospel. They depict the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, they remind us of what Christ did for us. These ordinances need to be apart of the corporate worship service.

Now, with all of that being said, what is behind the assertion that Christian worship must consist of these God-prescribed elements? It is the Protestant understanding of the sufficiency of Scripture. The idea that the Scriptures sufficiently reveal everything God's people need for salvation, perfect trust, and perfect obedience. This is the conviction that scripture should regulate the way God's people approach worship. This principle has often been referred to as the "Regulative" principle.

Regulative Principle = Congregations should conduct worship based on these elements that are clearly found (by command or example) in Scripture. Holds strongly to *Sola Scriptura*. This is where we want to land.

- Another principle sometimes used by churches is known as the normative principle.

Normative Principle = Congregations may incorporate any activity into worship as long as there is agreement within the general practice of the church and no clear prohibition in scripture.

- This opens the door for almost anything, we should steer clear of this kind of principle.
- Now, what about other issues? What about the time and place of corporate Christian worship?
 - Well, this is not clearly prescribed in the New Testament. We see both public places like the temple or a riverside, as well as private meetings like in individual homes.
 - As far as the time (as far as the day we are to meet) there are several reasons the Church meets on Sunday.
 1. Christ was raised on Sunday. **Matthew 28:1-2.**
 2. The risen Christ first met with the disciples on Sunday. **Matt. 28:8-10.**
 3. The pattern in the NT for Christians points towards Sunday meetings. **Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2.**
 4. This pattern was quickly established in the language of, “The Lord’s Day.” **Revelation 1:10.**
 5. It is appropriate to give the firstfruits of the week to God in order to acknowledge his ownership of the whole, just as one does with income.
- So, the purpose of the Church is to glorify God, and that is done corporately through 3 avenues. If we go back to the 3-legged stool example, we would say to glorify God is the top or seat of the stool, and it is supported by the 3 legs. The legs of worship, edification of the saints, and evangelization of the world. Today we looked at the leg or worship and we saw that this worship should be guided by Scripture. We hold to the regulative principle, basing our worship on Scripture alone. When we do that we come up with 5

elements that should be included in our worship. And these elements can be remembered with the following phrase:

“Read the Bible, Preach the Bible, Sing the Bible, Pray that Bible, and See the Bible.”

-Ligon Duncan.