

ECCLESIOLOGY: GOD'S PLANS AND PURPOSES FOR HIS CHURCH

WEEK 1: WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- When the word “church” is mentioned, several different things may come to mind.
 - Is it an event?
 - A building?
 - Local, universal??
 - What about a college campus ministry– what is that?
- We want to explore what Scripture says about the nature and purposes of the church.
- This class will study the topic of the church, explore the distinctions with Para-church ministries and Israel and the world.
- We will also discuss the importance of leadership, ordinances, and marks of healthy churches.
- As we desire to plant and revitalize churches, we should understand, “When is a church a church?” and “When is a church in good health?”
- Our goal in this class is to develop a proper biblical view of the Bride of Christ, the Body of Christ, THE CHURCH.
- **Class Schedule:**
 - **September 7: Introduction and the Nature of the Church**
 - September 14: Parachurch Ministries and Missions Agencies
 - September 21: The Beginning of the Church and Distinctions with the World and Israel
 - September 28: Descriptions, Purpose, and Mission of the Church
 - October 5: What Defines a Healthy and Faithful Established Church?
 - October 12: The Leadership of the Church
 - October 19: Ordinances and Worship

INTRODUCTION

- “Nothing in the world is dearer to God’s heart than his church; therefore, being his, let us also belong to it, that by our prayers, our gifts, and our labours, we may support and strengthen it. If those who are Christ’s refrained, even for a p 740 generation, from numbering themselves with his people, there would be no visible church, no ordinances maintained, and, I fear, very little preaching of the gospel.”¹
- **Why is it so important to have the right understanding of the church?**
 - **The church is designed by God so we must understand what He wants from it**
 - **The church is central to God’s purposes in this age**
 - **Christ died for the church**
 - **Christ is head of the church**
 - **Our ability to function within the church depends on our understanding of it**
 - **Much more is at stake in the church than we realize!**

Ephesians 3:8-10 ~ To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.

- So what is a church?

THE DEFINITION OF THE CHURCH

- The English word *church*, the Scottish word *kirk*, and the German word *kirche* come from the Greek word *kuriakon* which means “a place belonging to the Lord, or the Lord’s house”
- The word *ekklesia* in classical Greek (i.e. pre–New Testament times) meant “**assembly**”
- Before New Testament times, there was never any special religious significance to the word
- The Greek world uses *ekklesia* for a popular assembly
- The Greek word *ekklesia* comes from 2 words: *ek* - “out” and *kaleo* - “to call”
- The word “church” (Gk. *ekklesia*) simply means “a called-out group.”
- It is most often used in a technical sense of believers whom God has called out of the world as a special group of His own.

¹ Charles H. Spurgeon, “The Best Donation,” sermon no. 2234, preached April 5, 1891, in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit: Containing Sermons Preached and Revised* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 1975), 37:633, 635.

DEFINITION OF THE CHURCH

- You may have noticed the short list above.
- Before Pentecost when the church was born, the word *ekklesia* only occurs twice.
 - Matthew 16:18 ~ “...I will build My **church**...”
 - Matthew 18:17 ~ “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the **church**; and if he refuses to listen even to the **church**, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”
- After Pentecost, the New Testament has 112 uses of *ekklesia*.
 - Some are only referring to a general gathering/assembly
 - Jewish Assembly: Acts 7:38
 - Secular Assembly: Acts 19:32
 - Israel’s Assembly: Heb 2:12 (quoting Ps. 22:22)
 - All believers who are spiritually united with Christ
 - **Ephesians 1:22-23** ~ And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.
 - **Ephesians 5:23** ~ For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.
 - Local believers who are spiritually united with Christ
 - **Acts 13:1** ~ Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.
 - **1 Corinthians 1:2** ~ To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours:

WHAT THE CHURCH IS NOT

My own mind is my own church...All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit. -Thomas Paine in *The Age of Reason*

- **BUILDING:** The most common understanding of the nature of the church is probably the **building**.
 - This makes sense because we often refer to a part of something as the whole or the whole to refer to the part: “The white house decided...” = president and “I’m just a hired hand” = worker.
 - But it isn’t! The building is simply a blessing; a familiar and recognized place we gather, a place that even the world recognizes as the place where believers in Christ meet.
- **EVENT:** Are you “going to church?” is a common phrase we use in our vernacular.
 - But when we gather together, that is not all that church is. It does not stop and start on a Sunday morning.
 - The NT church is described as persecuted (Acts 8:1-3), having people belonging to it (Acts 12:1), praying for others (Acts 12:5), gathered together (Acts 14:27), and made up of people (Acts 15:22).
 - Events can’t do this.
- **INSTITUTION:** The organization and hierarchy does nothing for anyone.
 - It is not a mere human organization, but an organism, made up of people with a life of its own.
 - It is formed into a body, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit.
- **CLUB:** Many will treat their local church like a club, being a member, but not very active.
 - One of the outcomes of religious clubs is that the leadership do most of the ministry, the membership pay the fee and receive the benefits.
 - Another outcome is that the focus shifts from Christ and his gospel to man and temporary benefits.
- **THEATER:** Where productions are staged, the star(s) of the show shine, and the audience is mesmerized.
- **FORTRESS:** A place to retreat and hide from the world. Escape till He returns...
- **MUSEUM:** A way to showcase significant events and figures of history while ignoring present faithfulness.
- **SOCIAL HUB:** A way to network and meet new people. Gain social capital, popularity.
- **DATA COMMAND CENTER:** Fill the brain with facts and figures. Obedience and Boldness optional.
- **EMOTIONAL GAS STATION:** *Come fill up till next week. Recharge with the Holy Spirit.*

THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

God's Perspective: Universal and Invisible

- Definition – All true believers in Christ from Pentecost until the Rapture
 - Grudem – “The church as God sees it” (pg. 855)
- There is a distinction to be drawn between the church as we humans see it and as God alone can see it
- This is the historic distinction between the “visible church” (local church) and the “invisible church” (universal Church)
- Invisible means, *not that we can see no sign of its presence*, but that **we cannot know** (as God, the heart-reader, knows) **which** of those baptized, professing members of the church as an organized institution are inwardly regenerate and thus **belong to the church** as a spiritual fellowship of sinners loving their Savior

2 Timothy 2:19 ~ Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, “The Lord knows those who are His,” and, “Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness.”

- Jesus taught that in the visible local church there would always be people who thought they were Christians and passed as Christians, some indeed becoming ministers, but who were not renewed in heart and would therefore be exposed and rejected at the Judgment
 - Matthew 7:15-27; 13:24-30; 36-43; 13:47-50; 25:1-46
- The “visible-invisible” distinction is drawn to take into account the fact that some in the visible church are not truly a part of the invisible church
- It is not that there are two churches but that the visible community regularly contains imitation Christians whom God knows not to be real
- All true believers are baptized into the body of Christ and are thus a part of the universal church
- 1 Corinthians 12:13 ~ **For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body**
 - Believers do not have a choice as to whether they will be in the universal church or not
 - Entrance into the church is through the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit who places believers into union with Christ and with other believers
 - The baptizing work of the Spirit occurs simultaneously with saving faith, is non-experiential, and includes all believers, regardless of class or social position
 - All true believers, at the moment of conversion, are baptized into or identified with the universal church through the baptism of the Spirit
 - “were all baptized” – in aorist tense – once for all action
 - no command to be baptized in Spirit

- no evidence it's a repeated experience,
- not an extra endowment with super power above normal Christians

Man's Perspective: Local and Visible

- Definition – A local group of professed believers, organized and meeting for the purposes outlined in the New Testament
 - Grudem – “the church as Christians on earth see it” (pg. 856)
- This refers to the local church when a particular assembly of believers in a given location at a given time is intended
- While most of those in a local church are probably believers, not all are (wheat and tares)
- Frequently, Paul referred to individual, local/visible churches:

2 Corinthians 1:1 ~ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, **To the church** of God which is at Corinth **with all the saints** who are throughout Achaia:

Galatians 1:2 ~ and all the brethren who are with me, **To the churches** of Galatia:

Philippians 4:15 ~ You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, **no church shared with me** in the matter of giving and receiving **but you alone**;

Colossians 4:15, 16 ~ Greet **the brethren** who are in Laodicea and also Nympha **and the church that is in her house**. When this letter is read among you, have it **also read in the church of the Laodiceans**; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea.

2 Thessalonians 1:1 ~ Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, **To the church** of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Revelation 1:4 ~ **John to the seven churches** that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne,

- Most of these were probably city churches or refer to several churches that each gathered across a region
- There was probably initially only one church in a city that gathered together at times, yet on a continual basis gathered together in homes (**Acts 20:20** ~ **I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house**)
- Not until doctrinal controversy and false teaching did there become more than one church in a city

- The New Testament assumes that all Christians will share in the life of a local church, meeting with it for worship (Heb. 10:25), accepting its nurture and discipline (Matt. 18:15-20; Gal. 6:1), and sharing in its work of witness

Other categories of the Church: Beginning and End. Organization and Organism. Being and Doing.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Implications: What changes when we miss the mark?:

- Our Foundation:
 - Temptation to think that we can do or be what we want if we base the identity of the church on reason, emotion, pragmatism, politics, common interests, social standing, or affluency (wealth).
 - The church is the church because of what Christ founded (Matthew 16:18) and purchased with the blood of Jesus Christ (Acts 20:28).
 - There is no other reliable foundation (1 Cor. 3:11; 1 Peter 2:6-7) It matters how we think about it!
- Our Head:
 - Christ is our Head of the Body (Col 1:18), giving direction and caring for every provision (Eph. 4:15-16)
 - When we substitute the authority of the church for someone or something else, we will lack the proper provisions we need.
- Our Leadership
 - Pastors must help their people to grow and this takes place only when they are fed the Word of God well
 - Pastors must guard the flock and must ensure that true believers are being baptized, becoming members, partaking of the Lord's support
 - Elders must lead, teach, and live exemplary lives. They will give account for how they lead the church
 - **Hebrews 13:7 ~ Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.**
 - **Hebrews 13:17 ~ 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.**
- Our Membership and involvement in the life of the Church
 - The demands of the Gospel must be made known and be made concrete in the local church to guard against false conversion and nominal Christianity
 - 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 a clearly identifiable church membership exists, leaders know who they are accountable for leading, believers know who they are to serve with their spiritual gifts, and the one anothers can be properly practiced
- A right ecclesiology raises the priority of church participation, healthy relationships, corporate worship, etc.
- Our Worship of our Glorious God!
 - No other activity of the church, including preaching, missions, equipping, transcends its ultimate priority of worship!
 - A right ecclesiology is essential to God receiving the glory in the church!

Ephesians 3:21 ~ to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

- Our Structure and Governance
 - 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, 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; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock**
 - A failure to have a sound ecclesiology results in a failure to understand God's design for how His body is to be shepherded and cared for
 - Leadership is a gift from God!....Rejecting leadership as God designed it (plurality of male elders) deprives the church of Christ's gift and hinders the church from fulfilling its purpose
- Our Church Culture
 - Bad doctrine yields bad action. Bad theology produces bad praxeology.
 - A right ecclesiology impacts the culture of a church in that it creates an atmosphere of discipleship, mentoring
 - A right understanding of the church should promote intentionality in helping fellow believers grow in Christ-likeness and maturity

Sound Doctrine

- We are committed to being a pillar and support of the **truth** by holding fast to **sound doctrine** as found in the **Word of God** (1 Tim 3:15; 1 Tim 6:3-4; Tit 1:9)