

"You and Your Beliefs"—Ecclesiology—part 2

Jesus said, "I will build my church (Matt. 16:18)." And that is what He has been doing since He sent the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

But there's an important question that is more difficult to answer than one might first think. The question... *What is a church?* Which of the following is a local church?

- 10 college students meeting for a Bible study in their dorm lounge
- 150 college students meeting for a Bible study with singing in the college student center
- 50 Christian businessmen from the community meeting for a prayer meeting at a local restaurant
- The same 50 Christian businessmen meeting for a prayer meeting in our auditorium
- 225 Senior High campers and counselors with a pastor preaching to them from God's Word at a chapel service at Scioto Hills Camp

So back to the question... *What is a church?* Here is a good working definition, taken from the *GARBC Articles of Faith* (and each of the phrases, if broken apart, have biblical support):

"We believe that a local church is an organized congregation of immersed believers, associated by covenant of faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the ordinances of Christ; governed by His laws; and exercising the gifts, rights and privileges invested in them by His Word; that its officers are pastors and deacons, whose qualifications, claims and duties are clearly defined in the Scriptures..."

Review: From last time...

I. The Identity of the Church: What is the Church?

A. The Universal Church (Matt 16:16-19; Eph 1:22; 4:4)

1. The Right Profession (16) "Thou art the Christ"
2. The Right Person (18) "On this ROCK..." (=Christ)
3. The Right Purpose (19)

B. The Local Church (Rom 16:16; I Cor 1:2; Gal 1:2)

II. The Functions of the Church: What does the Church do?

What does God intend for the church to do? Four functions...

A. Exaltation

B. Edification

New Material: That's where we left off last time...

C. Evangelism

Acts 1:8 "And ye shall be my witnesses..."

Matt 28:19 "...make disciples..."

Evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where he found bread. Our task is not to hoard the great blessings we have in Christ, but to share them with others. He is the Bread of life. We must proclaim Him to a world that is hungry.

Discuss: What happens to a church that fails to give attention to evangelism?

But it doesn't stop there. In our day of "Mega-churches" we need to see a fourth function...

D. Extension

Extension is the establishment of other local churches throughout the world. God wants us to have a heart for needy people in the next community, and in the next country. We must look on the fields whitened unto harvest.

Acts 1:8 "...unto Judea... Samaria ...uttermost parts of the world."

So to sum it up, that's what God expects the church to do: Exaltation, Edification, Evangelism, Extension. That's God's design.

Yes, the Church is important to Christ.

Problem: The Church is not as important to a lot of people these days. The church has received a lot of bad press. Many people have a "take it or leave it" view of the church.

Objection: "I'm a Christian. I'm going to heaven. I've got my Bible, my TV and Radio preachers, so I don't really need the church. Anyway, the church is full of hypocrites anyway!"

Is the Church optional to a Christian? Can he/she "take it or leave it?" Let's look at the Images used in the Bible to illustrate the Church, to clear up this confusion.

III. The Biblical Images of the Church: What is the Church like?

A. The Body of Christ (Rom 12:4-8)

What are Christians likened to? Parts of a Body

The Church is the Body of Christ. In Eph 5, Paul says Christ is the what? Head

B. The Temple of God (Eph 2:21)

In the OT, God taught the Israelites about His holy character by designing the tabernacle, and then the Temple for their place of worship. The Temple represented His presence, His dwelling place.

Where does God dwell today?

Eph 2:21 "In whom all the building fitly framed together ... into an holy temple..."

We are the Temple of God .

I Cor 3:16 "Know ye not...ye are the temple of God ..."

I Cor 6:19 "...your body is the temple..."

C. The Household of God (I Tim 3:15; I Pt 2:5)

Where is God's House?

I Tim 3:15 "...the house of God which is the church..."

I Timothy was an "instruction manual" for conduct in the church.

I Pt 2:5 "You also as living stones..."

Key: The Church is God's Temple . Christians are the building blocks.

Illust: The importance of every block in a building...

D. The Bride of Christ (Eph 5:25-27; II Cor 11:2)

Eph 5:25ff "...Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it..."

As believers, we are betrothed to Someone...

II Cor 11:2 "For I am jealous over you...that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ."

Discuss: What does this image signify about the church?

Since we are Christ's Bride, we must be...Loyal to Him, Looking for Him.

E. The Flock of God (Ps 23; Jn 10:14, 16)

Jn 10:14 "I am the good Shepherd...and other sheep have I..."

What is our responsibility as sheep, acc to 10:27? "Hear...and follow..."

F. The Family of God (Rom 8:14-17)

Rom 8:14, 15 "...sons of God...Abba Father..."

G. The Vine and the Branches (Jn 15:1ff)

Jn 15:1 "I am the True Vine...ye are the branches..."

What does this image teach us about the church?

Sum: The Church is like a Body, a Temple, a Household, a Bride, a Flock, a Family, and Branches in a Vine.

Discuss: Why is it contradictory for a person to say he/she loves Christ, and yet disdain and avoid the church?

If that's what the Church is, why does it exist?

IV. The Mission of the Church: Why does the Church exist?

A. The Great Commission (Mt 28:19-20)

Discuss: State in your own words the G.C.

How can we keep our mission straight? Since we're prone to forget, the Lord gave us to visible, tangible ordinances.

B. Ordinances

What are the 2 ordinances established in the NT?

1. Baptism (Mt 28:19)
2. Communion (I Cor 11:23ff)

These 2 ordinances are visible reminders of what we're all about as a church.

C. Our Mission Statement at WBC

Review our mission statement: "We are WBC..."

V. The Organization of the Church: How does the Church Function?

A. Leadership

According to Eph 4:11, Christ gave His Church gifted individuals to the Church (Apostles, Prophets, etc).

What does the Lord expect of Church Leaders? They are to...

--Equip the Saints (Eph 4:12)

--Lead and Feed (I Pt 5:2)

Key: Jesus Christ expects His Church to be pure and distinct from the world. He has appointed leaders to feed, protect, and direct local churches. Two offices are highlighted in I Tim 3, and Titus 1:

--Pastors/Elders/Bishops

--Deacons

B. Denominations

Why are there so many denominations? Bruce Milne (pp. 241ff) points out that much of it has to do with Organization. There are 4 general patterns of church organization:

1. Episcopalian

This is government by bishops ("episkopoi"). It is the order pursued by Anglican, Lutheran, and with modification, Methodist churches. Such churches have:

- a. Bishops
- b. Priests (clergymen over individual churches)
- c. Deacons/deaconesses

Key: Only bishops may ordain others to ministry. They trace their succession back through the centuries.

2. Presbyterian

This is government by elders ("presbyteroi"). This is seen in Reformed and Presbyterian churches throughout the world, and with certain modifications, Methodism. Usually the elders unite in a national assembly.

Local churches are ruled by a group of appointed leaders (elders). The congregation does have a say in the selection of ministers.

3. Congregational

This is government by the whole local congregation (Baptist, Congregational, Pentecostal usually, and other independent churches).

4. Roman Catholic

Essentially an expression of episcopalianism. Different in that it recognizes the primacy of the Bishop of Rome. Who is that? The Pope.

Also: Orthodox churches, some Anglicans

Discussion Questions:

1. Can a church cease to be a church, and if so, when does that happen?
2. What are the non-negotiables that must be present in order for a 'church' to be a real church?

[\[1\]](#) These unedited notes were prepared for use in a Wednesday evening, discussion-oriented Bible study at Wheelersburg Baptist Church in Wheelersburg, Ohio. Although the notes are in draft form, I trust the seed thoughts contained will be used by our gracious God for your edification. –Pastor Brad Brandt