

Essentials of Christianity (pt 28)
9/26/2010

Introduction _____

Good morning saints of God. I'm very excited about the territory we're moving into today. It's time for us to look at the subject of **Ecclesiology: The doctrine of the church.**

The study of soteriology (doctrine of salvation) was the perfect primer to prepare us for this study. A person who receives salvation becomes part of the church. And so it is fitting for us to now talk about the church.

What is essential for us to know about the church? The fact is, a lot of things are!

To begin, I'd like us to look at a quote together.

There is a great need today to understand the essential nature of the church from what Scripture teaches and not firstly from the role some claim she ought to play in society. We cannot continue to define the church existentially, that is, by the way she interacts with the world and the resultant changes she undergoes. We must begin with the word of God in order to get a sense of the kind of entity she is, and from there we can decide on the kind of tasks she ought to be engaged in.

I wanted us to begin this way because there certainly is a vast array of opinions and philosophies about the church and how it should function.

Think of all the models there are on how churches should be patterned. What I would like us to look at is how does the Bible direct the church? What patterns are there for the proper functioning of the church of Jesus Christ?

Ecclesiology: The Doctrine of the Church

What is the church? Our English word for church is derived from the Greek NT word for church εκκλησια. This is where the theological word **ecclesiology** comes from.

In a nutshell the word ekklesia means "*the called out people.*"¹

That is really a marvelous way to think of the church. We have been called out of darkness into light. We have been called out of the dominion of Satan to the kingdom of his beloved Son. We have been called out to be citizens of another age and yet we are still in this age in order to make a difference and penetrate it.

In the New Testament it is clear that the term ekklesia is sometimes used of local churches.

For example, there was a church in Jerusalem, in Asia Minor, in Rome, in Corinth, in Galatia, in Thessalonica, and in the home of Philemon (Philem. 2).

But also the term ekklesia is used of what might be called the universal church. While the local church views the church as a group of believers gathered together in a particular locality, the universal church views all those who have been born of the Spirit

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of God and have by that same Spirit been baptized into the Body of Christ.

Thus, though there are many local “churches,” there is really only one church (Eph 4:4; Heb 12:23).

This leads naturally to the idea that the church is both visible and invisible. It is invisible in that God knows who is truly a Christian and who is not. It is visible in that there are local expressions of it to which Christians commit themselves.

It was this corporate group of believers that Christ promised to build; it was this Body for whom Christ died, and He is the head over it, and provides its direction.²

In order to organize our efforts in covering this material, let’s begin by looking at some features of the church universal before we focus on the local church.

It will be good to look at some of the characteristics of the invisible (universal) church first to establish what the Lord intends for it. Then we can look at the local church to see how these things are carried out.

Let’s talk about the **nature of the church.**

The Nature of the Church.

What are the defining elements of the nature of the church of Jesus Christ? Let's consider some of these. **Turn to Matthew 16:13-20.** Seems like we’ve looked at this several times throughout the course of this study.

²Ware; Bible.org

1. Christ is Lord of the Church.

Beginning to read...

NAU Matthew 16:13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

¹⁴ And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."

¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

¹⁷ And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

¹⁸ "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.

¹⁹ "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

²⁰ Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ.

Matthew 16:18 Jesus said, "I will build my church." And there is no question but that the most central idea that we need to understand in relation to the church is that Christ is her Lord.

Think of the various metaphors that are used to describe the church in the NT and Jesus' relation to the church.

First, in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 she is corporately referred to as the body of Christ, and in Ephesians 1:22-23 she is the body and Christ is the head.

It is clear from the way that the New Testament develops this that the headship of Christ indicates his lordship, rulership, that he is the one who is over the church and the body of Christ indicates both our connection to that head, our following the lead of that head, our dependence upon that head but also the interdependence of the body on one another (more on that later).

Turn to Ephesians 1:15-23: read

^{NAU} Ephesians 1:15 For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints,

¹⁶ do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers;

¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.

¹⁸ I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,

¹⁹ and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might

²⁰ which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,

²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

²² And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church,

²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

The church is the bride of Christ, while Christ is called the bridegroom.

We are told in Scripture that the marriage relationship, was from the very beginning meant to portray as the husband loves the wife and the wife submitted to her husband, this was to demonstrate the reality of Christ in his relationship with the church.

This is the way Christ and the church relate together. Christ is the head of the church, he is the authority over the church, the church submits to Christ, carries out the will of Christ, and so she is in a sense the helpmeet for Christ.

This metaphor reaches a climax in **Revelation 19: 7-8**

^{NAU} Revelation 19:7 "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready."

⁸ It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

The church is called a building, Christ is the foundation and the cornerstone of that building.

^{NAU} 1 Peter 2:4 And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God,

⁵ you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

⁶ For this is contained in Scripture: "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER stone, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."

⁷ This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, "THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER stone,"

The church is Christ's flock, and He is the shepherd of the flock.

^{NAU} Hebrews 13:20 Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord,

^{NAU} 1 Peter 5:4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Through these and other metaphors, we see clearly that Christ is the central figure, the heart and the one who provides for and moves and directs and governs, leads and rules over his church.

We really ought to avoid the language that indicates individual local churches are, as it were, the possession of certain people whether they be pastors or others and realize that any local church that really is a church is owned and ruled by Christ; he is Lord of the Church.³

Incidentally, Rome's understanding of the rock being Peter (rather than the Christ) is quickly discounted when we take into account **1Corinthians 3:10-11**.

^{NAU} 1 Corinthians 3:10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it.

¹¹ For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Moving on to the next defining element:

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2. The Church is formed by the Spirit.

Here we're referring to the fact that the church of Jesus Christ came about in Acts 2 where the Spirit came upon the disciples who were waiting in Jerusalem and at that point they were given power to become witnesses of this gospel and go into the world and present the gospel and make disciples of all the nations as Jesus had commanded in Matthew 28.

The church is a by product of a new covenant, it is not to be confused with Israel of the old covenant. It is a new entity.

There is a sense in which the church is unlike the people of God that existed before. And part of what distinguishes the church is the fact that now these believers have been given under the New Covenant, not the Old Covenant that was under Moses; not what was enforced for the people of Israel.

The book of Hebrews 6 through 8 indicate that the Old Covenant has passed away and the New Covenant has come. In 2 Corinthians 3 Paul refers to himself as a minister of the New Covenant. Jesus spoke of the cup that represented his shed blood as the cup of the New Covenant in Luke 24 and 1 Corinthians 11.

^{NAU} 2 Corinthians 3:5 Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God,

⁶ who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Now, under the New Covenant, God's people are given the Spirit by which that law becomes internalized and that the law of God, and the Spirit of God will work in the hearts of people so that we are transformed to become more like Christ by the Spirit and we are enabled and empowered by that Spirit to be witnesses of Christ.

So the church is very clearly a community of those who have received and are living in the power of and are witnessing by the enablement of the Spirit.

Having said that, though.... moving to the third defining element.

3. Jew and Gentile Are United.

The church is a new community of people that is not ethnic, it is not national but it is rather made up of both Jews and Gentiles and in ways that Paul will talk about in the book of Galatians; slaves and free, male and female, all are brought together as one in Christ.

So the Jew and Gentile union in the church clearly is a distinctive new reality where our identity is not ethnicity, it is not nationality, it is not even the Jewish heritage per say, although, that has been formative in bringing the church to where it is, but we are identified together, whether Jew or Gentile, as followers of Christ, we are united in one body in him.

^{NAU} Ephesians 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,

^{NAU} Ephesians 2:18 for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household,

²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,

²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord,

²² in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

4. The Church is a Worshipping Community. We can see a wonderful picture of this in **Acts 2-- turn to Acts 2: 42: read.**

As a living organism birthed by the Spirit, the church is to maintain its commitment to being a worshipping community by assembling for the purpose of:

* Corporate prayer, praise and adoration to the Lord.

* Biblical instruction from the word of God.

God gave the Scriptures for the purpose of teaching people and bringing them to maturity (2 Tim. 3:16–17). Teaching is the antidote to false doctrine (1 Tim. 1:3); it produces love among believers (1 Tim. 1:5); it provides spiritual nourishment (1 Tim. 4:6); godliness (1 Tim. 4:6–16); submission (1 Tim. 5:17; 6:2); and a proper focus on life (1 Tim. 6:17).

* Fellowship.

The word fellowship means “sharing” and emphasizes the unity and oneness of the church. Fellowship takes place in a variety of ways. The early church met together for the fellowship of breaking bread and prayer. Fellowship also emphasizes the fact that believers belong together.⁴

* Ministry.

The local church is also involved in ministry. This involves evangelism toward unbelievers in the world and a variety of ministries toward believers in the church fellowship.

⁴ Paul P Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Moody, Chicago, 1989).

It involves the exercise of spiritual gifts in ministering to one another and, by that token, serving others, giving to the needs of others, showing mercy, and helping others.

Ministry also involves the exercise of church discipline. Ministry must also involve the care for the needy in the church, particularly widows and fatherless.

* Ordinances.

The church was commanded by Jesus to practice the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

* Organization.

The church was also given a specific instructions for organization. Roles of leadership to help implement many of the things we've discussed already.

Next week we'll look at the subject of the local church and how it is supposed to respond to these things.

