

Essentials of Christianity (pt 29)
10/3/2010

Introduction _____

Good morning on this beautiful Lord's day. I pray that the Holy Spirit ministers to our hearts as we lift up the name of Jesus by discussing how He manifests Himself through the church.

Ecclesiology: The Doctrine of the Church

Last week we began a survey on the subject of **ecclesiology: the doctrine of the church**. The English word **ecclesiology** comes from the Greek word εκκλησια .

Last week we talked about *what* the church is, and *who* the church is. We talked about the church universal/invisible. The universal church is all those who have been born of the Spirit of God and have by that same Spirit been baptized into the Body of Christ. Regardless of where they assemble in a local church, there is the invisible church--known by God.

He knows who belongs to Him.

We spent the bulk of our time last week talking about the nature of the church universal. Things that are characteristic of the invisible church.

By discussing first what is characteristic in the universal church, this shows the ideal or the identity of really what the church is to be.¹

¹ Ware

Then we can take a look at local churches, understanding that any church that really is a local church needs to live out the identity of what Church is supposed to be.

Today, and probably next week, we're going to talk about how these things are fulfilled through the local church.

When Jesus said in Matthew 16, "*upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,*" He was referring to the church--universal. However, it is **through** the local church that this is accomplished.

It is through the local churches that Christs' purposes are fulfilled. The bulk of Paul's epistles were written to **local** congregations (who, for the most part, met in homes).

His doctrine was binding on the church universal, but was carried out through local assemblies-- like the churches in Rome, Ephesus, Colossae, etc.,

It was to the local churches that Paul said this,

^{NAU} 1 Timothy 3:14 I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long;

¹⁵ but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.

^{NAU} 1 Corinthians 11:16 But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.

Customary for the church universal; yet providing specific direction for the local church.

The universal principles are to be lived out practically in the various fellowships. The invisible church: known to God, finds physical expression, not just in individuals connecting with God, but in His people assembling all over the world.

It is not enough to say, “I am a believer, God knows my heart; I don’t have to go to church to show I’m a Christian. The church is not a building it’s a people. Or, my worship of God is a private thing between He and I.”

It is true, the church is people and not a building. But the church is a group of people that are to assemble in central locations to live out the things we’ll be addressing in a few moments.

So let’s back up and look at the defining elements of the nature of the church that we looked at last week, and see how each of these play out practically.

1. Christ is Lord of the Church. Remember we covered this?

^{NAU} Ephesians 1:19 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.

Jesus is the Commander and Chief of the church. How is this carried out practically in the local churches? There's one primary way.

Since Jesus is Lord of the church, then His doctrine must shape the church. His Lordship means He's providing direction.

This is precisely why we have spent the last 6 1/2 months going over the essentials of the Christian faith. What defines the character of the church is what it believes.

We form ourselves around a system of beliefs. This is why churches typically have statements of faith.

Too many splinter groups of the professing church are seeking to be identified more by what **they do** than by what **they believe**

It may seem weird that this should even be problematic, but I'll explain why by way of an illustration.

Last Friday I read a description of a book that came out a few years ago that I thought was very telling of the kind of trend that is becoming popular among many evangelicals.

Here's the quote:

A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey
Brian D. McLaren,

Summary:

A New Kind of Christian's conversation between a pastor and his daughter's high school science teacher reveals that wisdom for life's

most pressing spiritual questions can come from the most unlikely sources. This stirring fable captures a new spirit of Christianity--where personal, daily interaction with God is more important than institutional church structures, where faith is more about a way of life than a system of belief, where being authentically good is more important than being doctrinally "right," and where one's direction is more important than one's present location. Brian McLaren's delightful account offers a wise and wondrous approach for revitalizing Christian spiritual life and Christian congregations.

I happen to know a little bit about where the author is coming from, so that's why this paragraph raises a lot of red flags.

What we have in this paragraph is the fruit of a paradigm shift that we're facing in the church.

1. This book is seemingly advocating personal daily interaction with God as *more important than institutional church structures*.

Kind of sounds like **relationship over religion, right?**

2. *Faith is more about a way of life than a system of belief.*

Does the Bible gives us a system of beliefs that forms our way of life?

3. ... where being "authentically" good is more important than being doctrinally "right."

While I'll be the first to admit that it's more important to "do" the right thing rather than "winning" an argument; that's not the same as what this is saying.

Question: can you be “authentically good” without knowing *how* to be good? How can you know how to be authentic if you don’t know what *is* authentic?

What is happening with many professing believers is that the notion of doctrine, statements of belief and creeds are viewed as secondary at best, of little value at worst.

This mind set says, “look, let’s just forget all this doctrine stuff and start doing something. There’s babies to save, widows and orphans to take care of, prisoners to visit...

... let’s not get all hung up over what people **believe**, let’s get busy helping people.”

That may sound compelling. But anyone can step up to that call. Mormons hate abortion and believe in reaching out to the poor. So do Muslims, JW’s. Even atheists believe in trying to do good to their fellow man.

But the church is to follow their commander and chief. And Jesus cares **first and foremost** about what His people believe.

^{NAU} John 6:28 Therefore they said to Him, "What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?"

²⁹ Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent."

What we believe will determine whether our works please God. And so the church is to submit to its Head, by **holding to** and **holding forth** His decrees.

For it is written: turn to **1Timothy 4:13-16: read**

NAU 1 Timothy 4:13 Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.

¹⁴ Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery.

¹⁵ Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all.

¹⁶ Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.

We are charged: turn to 2Timothy 4:1-5: read

NAU 2 Timothy 4:1 I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom:

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.

Our beliefs are to shape and form our behavior, not the other way around. Otherwise, everyman is just doing what is right in his own eyes.

NAU Proverbs 14:12 There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.

2. The Church is formed by the Spirit. This is another defining element of the universal church. There are several ways in which the local church is to respond to this.

A. First of all the local churches must resist the influence of anyone who tries to bring it back under the Law. In order for the church to show it is formed by the Spirit it must not bring its members back to the shadow's and types (feast days, dietary restrictions, etc...) (Col 2) **Maybe turn to.**

The church has the fullness, and this is demonstrated by the fact that the Spirit is at work in the church.

NLT Hebrews 8:13 When God speaks of a "new" covenant, it means he has made the first one obsolete. It is now out of date and will soon disappear.

It was the constant fight of the apostle to keep the Jews from making Jews out of the Gentiles.

Let's turn to Galatians 2:1-21: read

NAU Galatians 2:1 Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also.

² *It was because of a revelation that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but I did so in private to those who were of reputation, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain.*

³ *But not even Titus, who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.*

⁴ *But it was because of the false brethren secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage.*

⁵ *But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you.*

⁶ *But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)-- well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me.*

⁷ *But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised*

⁸ *(for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles),*

⁹ *and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.*

¹⁰ *They only asked us to remember the poor-- the very thing I also was eager to do.*

¹¹ *But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.*

¹² *For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision.*

¹³ *The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.*

¹⁴ *But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, "If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?"*

¹⁵ *"We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles;*

¹⁶ *nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.*

¹⁷ *"But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be!"*

¹⁸ *"For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor.*

¹⁹ *"For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God.*

²⁰ *"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.*

²¹ *"I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly."*

B. Because the church is formed by the Spirit, it is imperative that the local churches allow themselves to be fed by the Spirit.

^{NAU} *1 Corinthians 14:1 Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.*

^{NAU} *1 Thessalonians 5:20 do not despise prophetic utterances.*

²¹ *But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good;*

So we accomplish the preservation of the Spirit's work by making sure the gifts operate and are not quenched. But also, that they're not abused.

^{NAU} *1 Corinthians 14:37 If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment.*

C. We protect the church as a work of the Spirit by not letting the Spirit be grieved.

Turn to:

^{NAU} *Ephesians 4:30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*

³¹ *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.*

³² *Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*

Bad attitudes of the heart hinder His work.

D. Not recognizing the importance of a clean vessel will also hinder His work. So the local church was admonished by Paul's letter to the Corinthians that the body is the Spirit's temple.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 6:18-19: read

^{NAU} *1 Corinthians 6:19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?*

²⁰ *For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.*

These are some of the ways that the local church can protect the integrity of the church as a work of the Spirit.

The last thing we'll have time for.

3. Jew and Gentile Are United. The local church is responsible for maintaining the special unity that exists because the wall of separation has been torn down-- not just between God and man, but between Jew and gentile.

How this plays out practically (by extension) is that Jesus is no respecter of persons in terms of age, nationality, gender, socio-economic class, and the NT addresses this head on.

Unity is to be a central tenant and is to be fought for.

This unity is to exist even within the various classes of people such as:

Rich and poor:

^{NAU} James 2:1 My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.

Fighting for the unity.

^{NAU} 1 Corinthians 1:10 Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.

Please turn to:

^{NAU} Philippians 2:1 Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion,

² make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.

³ Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;

⁴ do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

⁵ Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,

⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,

⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.

⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Here's what matters, says Paul:

NET Gal 6:14-15 ¹⁴ *But may I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*

¹⁵ *For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that matters is a new creation!*