

Ecclesiology
The Study of the Church

A. The Nature of the Church

1. Definition of and usage of “church” in the New Testament:
 - a. Definition:
 - 1) Comes from the Greek work ekklesi’ā which refers to a gathering or assembly of people
 - 2) It’s not unique to Christianity and was used in classical Greek the same way
 - 3) However, in the New Testament, it’s used almost universally to refer to Christians
 - b. Usage: The word “church” is used in three different ways in the NT
 - 1) UNIVERSAL Church (READ Matthew 16:18)—sometimes this is called the INVISIBLE church because it doesn’t involve a physical location, have a name like Renew Bible Church, etc.:
 - a) Refers to the entirety of Jesus’ Church and is made up of all born-again believers past, present and future; in other words, those who have professed genuine faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins and the gift of eternal life
 - b) READ ALL: Ephesians 1:22-23; 3:10, 21; 5:23-32
 - 2) LOCAL Church—sometimes this is called the VISIBLE church because it refers a specific group of professing Christians who meet together on a regular basis:
 - a) They often meet at the same place, and in modern times even give themselves a name like Renew Bible Church
 - b) Unlike the universal church, however, the local church can include those who are unsaved and not a part of the body of Christ
 - c) In NT times, they were generally quite small and met in homes (READ ALL: 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Romans 16:3-5)
 - 3) REGIONAL Church (my term):
 - a) Refers to all believers in a certain region or city (a subset of the universal church)
 - b) Acts 9:31: **“So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.”**
 - c) Many of Paul’s references churches in specific cities are believed to be references to all the believers in that region or city, not just a single local church (READ ALL: 1 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:1)
2. Descriptions of the Church:
 - a. People of God:
 - 1) In Romans 9:24-26 Paul says that we were called, **“not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles. 25 As He says also in Hosea, 'I WILL CALL THOSE WHO WERE NOT MY PEOPLE, 'MY PEOPLE,' AND HER WHO WAS NOT BELOVED, 'BELOVED.'" 26 "AND IT SHALL BE THAT IN THE PLACE WHERE IT WAS SAID TO THEM, 'YOU ARE NOT MY PEOPLE,' THERE THEY SHALL BE CALLED SONS OF THE LIVING GOD.”**
 - 2) Peter also references Hosea saying, **“But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His**

marvelous light; 10 for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.” (1 Peter 2:9-10)

- 3) Titus 2:14 says that Jesus Christ **“gave Himself up to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession.”**

 - b. Household of God:
 - 1) Ephesians 2:19: **“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household,”**
 - 2) 1 Timothy 3:14-15: **“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.”**
 - 3) 1 Peter 4:17: **“For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?”**

 - c. Temple of God/Temple of the Holy Spirit: this is true in both an individual sense and a corporate sense:
 - 1) Individual:
 - a) 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?”**
 - b) READ Romans 8:9-11
 - 2) Corporate:
 - a) 1 Corinthians 3:16-17: **“Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.”** (NOTE: the context—Paul and others building God’s church—suggests this is corporate not individual)
 - b) Ephesians 2:21-22 says that we are **“growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you are also being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.”**

 - d. Body of Christ
 - 1) 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.”**
 - 2) Colossians 1:24: **“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church...”**
 - 3) 1 Corinthians 12:27: **“Now you are Christ’s body, and individually members of it.”**
3. NOTE: the Church didn’t replace Israel (that’s called replacement theology); the Lord still has a plan for Israel and He will fulfill all He promised to them; the Church is grafted into Israel and we will ultimately exist as one people of God in eternity
 4. Why is the nature of the church important to us?
 - a. It reminds us that in the big picture, the Church isn’t a building; believers are the Church whether we’re talking about the universal Church or the local church

- b. God doesn't dwell in a building; We are His spiritual house and He dwells in us through the Holy Spirit

B. The Role of the Church

1. When Jesus said in Matthew 16:18 that He would build His Church **“and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it”**, it implied that the Church has a role or mission to fulfill
2. We find that mission in Matthew 28:19-20 and Acts 1:8:
 - a. Matthew 28:19-20 (READ)—the main command in this verse is to make disciples
 - b. Acts 1:8 (READ)—the Church is the means through which this command is accomplish; we are Jesus' witnesses and the ones called to preach the Gospel to the world
3. There are at least five functions in which we engage as members of not only the Universal Church but a local church:
 - a. The first is EVANGELISM:
 - 1) The first step in making disciples is evangelism which is the proclamation and preaching of the Gospel; this is what leads people into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ
 - 2) Preaching the Gospel was the hallmark of Jesus' ministry (Matthew 4:23): **“Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom...”**
 - 3) In fact, He said that this world would not come to an end until the Gospel is preached to the whole world (Matthew 24:14): **“This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.”**
 - 4) This last verse is where we come in; we are the ones who preach the Gospel from His ascension to His return, and it's something the Apostles and 1st century believers took seriously:
 - a) We saw this throughout our recent study of the book of Acts as Peter, Stephen, Barnabas, and Paul gave up everything to preach the Gospel from city to city and region to region; they ultimately and literally gave up their lives for it
 - b) In Romans 1:1 Paul wrote that he was, **“a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.”**
 - c) A few verses later (15-16) he wrote, **“So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”**
 - d) And, lest we believe that evangelism is only for some believers or for those with the gift of evangelism, every member of the body of Christ is expected to be a witness of the Gospel (1 Peter 3:15): **“but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you...”**
 - b. The second function of the Church is EDIFICATION:
 - 1) Edification refers to the building up of believers individually and the body of Christ corporately
 - 2) Jesus' goal for His Church is maturity and He has equipped it to accomplish this:
 - a) One way is through revelation and the preaching and teaching of God's Word (READ Ephesians 4:11-13)
 - b) Another way is through the gifts of the Spirit (READ 1 Corinthians 12:4-7)

- c) Yet another way is through fellowship and encouragement:
- This is one reason Hebrews 10:24-25 says, **“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; 24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”**
 - We just finished studying the Book of Acts and we saw the importance of fellowship on multiple occasions (READ Acts 2:46-47)
- 3) God never intended for believers to exist on a spiritual island all by themselves; He made us part of a body so that we can edify one another, fostering growth and maturity in the Body of Christ
- c. Another core function of the Church is WORSHIP:
- 1) As the body of Christ, we are called to worship God:
- a) READ John 4:23: **“But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.”**
- b) Hebrews 12:28: **“So since we are receiving an unshakable kingdom, let us give thanks, and through this let us offer worship pleasing to God in devotion and awe.”**
- 2) Worship comes in two forms—individual and corporate—and they often overlap:
- a) Acts of worship:
- Rejoicing, giving thanks, and praying are the obvious examples of worship (READ 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)
 - Singing is as well, and it’s even something Jesus did with the disciples; and Paul and Silas worshipped God by singing while in prison (READ Matthew 26:30; READ Acts 16:25)
 - Giving financially is a form of worship (READ Philippians 4:18-19)
 - Even what we do with our physical bodies is supposed to be an act of worship (READ Romans 12:1)
 - In fact, everything we do is supposed to be an act of worship (Colossians 3:17): **“Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”**
- b) Corporate worship in the NT:
- We don’t have a lot of information on how the 1st century church worshipped corporately, but we know that they did
 - We know that they came together to pray because after the angel rescued Peter from prison he went to Mary’s house where they had gathered to pray (Acts 12:12)
 - We also know that they gathered together to share meals and praise God, initially on a daily basis but then later on the first day of the week (Acts 2:47; Acts 20:7)
 - According to 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, they celebrated the Lord’s Supper together

- Based on 1 Corinthians 14:26-33 we know they gathered together and engaged in singing, teaching, and even manifestations of the gifts of the spirit like tongues and prophecy
 - Corporate worship also seems to be the context of Colossians 3:15 (READ): **“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”**
- d. A fourth function of the Church is CARE for fellow believers:
- 1) James 1:27: **“Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”**
 - 2) James 2:15-16: **“If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?”**
 - 3) 1 John 3:17: **“But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?”**
 - 4) This is something the 1st century Church took to heart (READ ALL Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-35; 11:28-30)
 - 5) Paul even commanded that the churches take up a collection for the persecuted saints in Jerusalem (READ 1 Corinthians 16:1-3)
- e. The final function of the Church is the CELEBRATION OF ORDINANCES:
- 1) The Bible clearly identifies two special practices that the church is to engage in; we call them ordinances
 - 2) The first ordinance is baptism which Jesus commanded as part of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19): **“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit...”**
 - 3) The second ordinance is the Lord’s Supper which Jesus commanded the night before His death; Paul repeats this in 1 Corinthians 11:23:26 (READ)
 - 4) These things are unique to believers and we celebrate them together as a church
4. So why is the role of the Church, and its related functions, important to us?
- a. While the nature of the Church defines who we are, the role of the Church defines what we do
 - b. At its foundation, the Church is to make disciples through evangelism, edification, worship, care for one another, and celebration of the ordinances
 - c. If we are not doing these things, then we are not accomplishing the mission to which Jesus called us
 - d. This makes us no different than any other secular social club or organization

f. The Governance of the Church

1. When we speak of the governance of the Church, we are speaking primarily of the leadership or authority structure of the local church

2. However, before talking about the local church we need to establish the fact that Jesus is the head of the Universal Church, which ultimately makes Him the head of the local church as well: READ Ephesians 1:22; 5:23 & Colossians 1:18
3. While every member of the body of Christ has been given gifts for the purpose of serving the church, there are three distinct leadership or authority roles described in the New Testament:
 - a. The first is APOSTLES and these men oversaw the initial founding of the Church in the 1st century:
 - 1) Who were the apostles?
 - a) Most often in the book of Acts and the epistles, this term refers to Peter, James, John and the other 8 men who made up Jesus' inner circle, plus a man named Matthias who replaced Judas in Acts 1:26
 - b) It was also a less formal term given to other leaders in the 1st century church, including Paul and Barnabas, Epaphroditus, James (the Lord's brother), Silas, Timothy, Titus and a few others (Acts 14:14; 1 Corinthians 4:6-13; Galatians 1:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2:6; 2 Corinthians 8:23)
 - 2) It's clear in the NT that the Apostles were regarded as the highest earthly authority figures and caretakers of Church as a whole:
 - a) Acts 1:1 says that Jesus "**had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen**" and it was to them directly that He gave the responsibility of building His Church
 - b) The Apostles understood their leadership role, so much so that they believed they needed to replace Judas after his betrayal with another man named Matthias (Acts 1:26)
 - c) We see a number of instances where they exercised leadership within the Church:
 - When the Hellenistic Jews felt their widows were being overlooked in the distribution of food, they appealed to the Apostles who ultimately appointed seven men to address the issue (Acts 6:1-6)
 - When the Apostles heard that the Gospel was being accepted by Samaritans, they immediately sent Peter and John to Samaria (Acts 8:14)
 - When Paul was saved, Barnabas brought him to the Apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 9:27)
 - When a dispute arose about whether or not Gentile believers should be expected to live by the Law, Barnabas and Paul brought the concerns to the Apostles who looked into the matter and issued a judgment (Acts 15)
 - 3) The formal role of apostle is one we do not see today, at least in the technical sense of the 12; these men were directly and specifically chosen by Jesus Christ and there is no indication that Jesus intended that there be any formal succession (e.g. the Roman Catholic Pope as a succession of Peter)
 - 4) The closest thing we have to the less formal role of apostle, that of simply one who is sent out, would be missionaries or church planters
 - b. The second role identified in the NT is that of ELDERS:
 - 1) Elders are the primary authority figures and caretakers within the local church and there are three different terms used:
 - a) Elder: presbu'teros (READ Acts 14:23; 15:2-6)
 - b) Overseer: episkope' (READ Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1; Titus 3:2)

- c) Shepherd: (verb; READ John 21:16, Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2)
- 2) Examples:
 - a) There were elders that served alongside the Apostles in Jerusalem (as noted above in Acts 14 and 15)
 - b) Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in the churches they planted (READ Acts 14:23)
 - c) Paul even provided Timothy and Titus with a list of qualifications for choosing elders and specifically instructed Titus to appoint elders in all the churches on Crete (READ Titus 1:5); it's implied that Timothy was to do the same in Ephesus
 - 3) Qualifications for Elders:
 - a) READ 1 Timothy 3:1-7
 - b) Titus 1:6-9 (reference only)
 - c) In both of these passages, only male pronouns are used which indicates that the role of elder is reserved for men
 - d) The Greek word presbutēros also implies older men within the local church
 - 4) What should we expect of elders?
 - a) The word shepherd describes the role of elders perfectly; both Peter and Paul used it when exhorting elders with their responsibilities
 - b) READ 1 Peter 5:14
 - c) READ Acts 20:28-35
 - 5) What should church elders expect of the church?
 - a) We are to think fondly of them (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.”**
 - b) We are to obey and subject ourselves to them (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.”**
 - c) We are to appreciate them (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13)
 - d) We are to honor them, some even with even with monetary gifts (READ 1 Timothy 5:17-18)
 - e) We are to hold them accountable (READ 1 Timothy 5:19-20)
- c. The third role is that of DEACONS:
- 1) The Greek word for deacons is diakone'ō and it refers to someone who renders help or assistance:
 - a) Jesus used it to describe waiting on tables (Luke 12:37), as did the Apostles when selecting the seven men to oversee the feeding of the widows (Acts 6:2)
 - b) In a general sense it's used to describe ministering to one another in a variety of ways (1 Peter 4:10): **“As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God”**
 - c) Paul used it of himself in regard to delivering the financial offering to the saints in Jerusalem (Romans 15:25): **“But now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints”**
 - d) In a more formal sense, it's also used to refer to those who have been officially appointed to serve the local church in some capacity

- 2) Examples:
 - a) Philippians 1:13: **“Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons.”**
 - b) Romans 16:1: **“I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea”**
 - c) Acts 6:2-3: **“So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. 3 “Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.””**

- 3) Qualifications:
 - a) READ 1 Timothy 3:8-13
 - b) Both men and women are mentioned which indicates both can serve as deacons; some believe women here only refers to wives, as the ESV and NET render it, but that is uncertain (plus, Pheobe is referred to as a deaconess with no reference to a husband)

4. Why is the governance of the church important to us?
 - a. First, it reminds us that Jesus is the ultimate head of the church
 - b. Second, it reminds us that leaders are shepherds, who serve the members of Christ’s body— they are not bosses, dictators, or CEOs
 - c. Third it reminds us that there are qualifications and expectations of those who serve as leaders
 - d. Finally, it reminds us of how Jesus expects us to respond to those He’s entrusted to care for us