

The Church ⁽⁸⁾

Since we have discussed the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives, let's look now at our ministry in the lives of others through the local church. The church is an assembling of believers who worship, instruct and encourage each other for the cause of Christ. The church is God's plan for reaching people in the 21st century for Jesus, and should be about fellowship. Fellowship happens when people of the same beliefs come together in unity, sharing what is going on in their lives, and encourage each other along the way. Fellowship is very important to God, which is why he has told us not to forsake going to church.

The Church is a group of believers, not a building or a place.

Hebrews 10:24-25

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.

- In verse 25, what are we not to forsake? _____
- In verse 24, what are we to do in church? _____

The bible tells us to encourage one another to do good deeds, but there are some destructive habits that can hinder people from unity and fellowship.

Ephesians 4:29

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

- What does “unwholesome words” mean? _____

- According to this verse, what role should gossip play in our lives? _____

Edification: The building up of one another through encouragement and instruction.

God intended for believers to build up and cheer each other on to worship Him and advance His kingdom. Church should be a place to go to get “charged up” for the week ahead.

Not only are we called to gather together to encourage each other, but we are to instruct each other in the teachings of the Lord. Men called of God and recognized by the church are commissioned to lead congregations. These are the pastors. These men are charged with teaching their congregations the truth of Scripture and are a guide to the people.

1 Timothy 5:17

The elders (pastors) who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

It is good to learn together and to be able to go to a pastor and ask questions about the bible. God has it set up so that when we do not understand what we are studying on our own, we have a place to go.

Worship is also a very important part of coming together as believers. Many times this is thought to be the music and singing part of a church service, and this is a valid point, but worship goes beyond song and into the very act of giving God all that you are. A great place to go in the bible when looking for verses on praise and worship is the book of Psalms.

Psalm 95:1

O come, let us sing for joy to the Lord, Let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation.

- This verse calls believers to, “let us _____ for joy...lets us _____ joyfully.

Read Psalm 95:2-7 and list some things that stand out to you.

Our worship and praise should be directed at Jesus, and as such should draw us together in a spirit of unity. Fighting amongst God’s people was never God’s plan. Sometimes people allow their personal agendas to get in the way of God’s design for the church, unity.

John 17:21

That they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me (Jesus) and I in You, that they may also be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent me.

- We need to be unified as believers in Jesus so that the world will believe what?
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Our unity as believers gives proof that God really can change lives. Think about it. If believers in Christ fight amongst themselves, what does this say about our God? However, if we can stand together in unity, then this is one of the differences that God makes in our lives.

Unity does not mean agreeing on every point, but that we stand united in our common purpose, moving forward together as one body.

Not only is our unity important to God, but so is our purity as believers. In the bible, the church is called "*the bride of Christ.*" This basically means that those who follow Christ will be joined together with Him forever, never being separated from His love. As the bride of Christ, God desires us to keep ourselves pure and separated from sin that so easily distracts us from Him.

Depending on what your background is, you may have some ideas about what the church is and does that are slightly different than what God has taught. Let's look at some incorrect views concerning the church.

- ***The pastor is to do everything that is necessary to run the church.***

The pastor has many responsibilities but he is not supposed to do everything. For example some churches have many people helping out with events and problems that occur. The pastor is supposed to be the leader and shepherd of the church. He is to lead people in the word of God.

There is a good illustration for what the church should be like. The pastor is the coach and the people that attend the church are the players. Kind of like a football team. The coach doesn't go out and make the plays; he advises, corrects and challenges his people to win. The players don't sit back and watch the coach play, they are the ones to work and run towards victory.

- ***I just go there to get fed.***

Some people believe that going to church is the only place to feed on the word of God, and that it is the pastor's job to feed you. Yes you do learn at church, but if you want to know more about God then you feed yourself. When babies are born we feed them, cloth them and clean up after them. However, we expect them to grow into capable, self clothing, self feeding individuals. This works the same way with people who are newly born into the family of God.

- *Going to church fulfills my “goodness quota” for the week.*

Some people look at church attendance like a spiritual time card. Some wrongfully believe that it is all they have to do to please God. Others feel that they somehow get forgiveness or grow closer to God by attending. We cannot get forgiveness by anything we do. It is through the blood of Jesus that we are forgiven and brought to God. God doesn't want your time card, He wants your heart. Church attendance is more about your relationship with God and less about your duty to attend.

Have you been guilty of thinking one of these wrong concepts of the church?

Now that we looked at some of the wrong ideas surrounding the church, let's look at some of the things the church actually does. There are certain practices that the church observes to honor Jesus. These practices are a governing principle that Jesus Himself asked that we keep. For this reason we call them **Ordinances** of the church. There are only two ordinances that are found in Scripture.

1) Baptism

Matthew 3:13

Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him.

Before Jesus began his ministry he went to John the Baptist and was baptized in the Jordan river. John was baptizing for the repentance (or turning away from) sins. Jesus didn't need to turn away from any sins, He had none. However, His baptism served to ordain the beginning of His ministry.

After Jesus' resurrection, baptism was instituted as the symbol of obedience to a life lived for Christ. Its method and meaning are closely linked, so let us look at its method first so that we better understand its meaning.

Baptism is a symbol of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.

There are many ways baptism is currently done.

- Sprinkling: This is the method by which the individual is sprinkled with water. Usually this is applied to the head.

- Pouring: In this method the individual has water poured upon their head, thus soaking them.
- Immersion: In this method the individual is fully submerged beneath water so as to completely cover the entire body.

Which way does the bible tell us to do?

In every instance in Scripture where Baptism is referred to there is an over abundance of water mentioned. Matthew 3:13 refers to Jesus being baptized in a river. This implies that He was immersed since sprinkling or pouring could have been done at a well or with anyone's canteen.

Acts 8:38

And they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him.

- Both of the men went _____ the water.
- Which method of baptizing would require both men to go down into the water? _____

In this account, Philip (a believer) led this man to faith in Jesus. The man desired to be baptized as a sign of obedience to Christ. Obviously the man would have had a water canteen with him on his long journey, but they "both went down into the water." This tells us that the man was immersed.

Later in John 3:22-23 we see Jesus baptizing next to John in a place that had "much water" there. There would be no need of much water if one was merely sprinkling or pouring. However, fully immersing people does require much water. Since this is Jesus' method of baptism it follows that we should do likewise.

What is the meaning of baptism?

There are two parts to baptism: the submersion and the rising back up. Each part is symbolic.

Colossians 2:12

Having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God

When we are submerged this symbolizes the death of Christ. We believe that Jesus died for our sins personally. True obedience to Jesus means that we too also die to our old manner of life before Jesus came into it. Thus, we (the old self) died with Christ.

Since Jesus did not stay dead for long but rose up out of the grave, we too rise up out of the water symbolizing our rebirth into a new life lived in obedience to Jesus and His word.

All this is done publicly to show everyone what we believe and that we are not ashamed of our savior. This is why baptism is not for babies. Baptism is our choice to make as believers.

Luke 9:26

For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory

- Have you been baptized by immersion since believing in Jesus?

2) The Lord's Supper (communion)

Like baptism, the Lord's supper is a memorial of what Jesus did for us. It is important to note that both ordinances are symbolic and are done in memory of Jesus' work on the cross.

Luke 22:17, 19

17 And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He said, "Take this and share it among yourselves; 19 And

when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

Communion is not a supernatural event. Nothing happens to the bread and juice inside you. It does not bring forgiveness. It is in memory of Jesus.

The Lord's supper, consists of two parts the bread and the drink. The bread symbolizes His body that was beaten and broken for us. Our sin brought condemnation on us, but Jesus took our full punishment upon Himself so that we would be spared.

The drink (usually juice) symbolizes the blood that Jesus shed on the cross to pay for our sins and bring us peace with God the Father. One of the writers of the New Testament wrote about the Lord's Supper in this way:

1 Corinthians 11:24-26

24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

Clearly the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are done to remember what the Lord has done for us. They have no supernatural abilities, nor do they earn us favor with God on any level. Jesus did that with His death, burial and resurrection.

Rule to the Lord's Supper:

1 Corinthians 11:27-28

27 Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. 28 But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

- What does verse 28 say we are to do before partaking of the Lord's Supper?

Service

Now that we have talked about what the church is let us look into what our role should be in it. God has not only called us to unity as brothers and sisters in Christ, but He has called us to serve one another.

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.

- We are to serve one another as what? _____

God has gifted us to serve in the local church. We do this first by building up others and encouraging them in their pursuit of God's word. We also serve the church by using the gifts that He has given us. We can have an incredible impact on others around us if we fill our lives with God's teachings and listen to His prompting for our lives.

God has even told us the mindset that we are to have as we serve others in His church.

Philippians 2:3

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

- How are we to regard others? _____
- Should we have this attitude with church members only? Yes ____ No ____

Our ultimate goal as the church is to reach out to people who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ as savior. This is an awesome and sometimes scary job, but this is the mission of the church. Remember, the church is God's plan for reaching people in the 21st century for Jesus. What can you do to advance this mission?

Discussion Questions

- 1. Read Ephesians 4:29. How would you rate yourself according to this verse?*
- 2. Write down in your own words what the meaning of Baptism is.*
- 3. What does it mean to eat or drink the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner?*
- 4. Read Philippians 2:3. What do you need to do to conform your life in obedience to this verse?*
- 5. Have you committed to a local church yet?*
- 6. What can you do to serve in your local church?*
- 7. Define the following terms*

Edification:

Baptism:

Communion:

Service: