

The Church: Its Nature And Its Mission

*"Life Foundations: Christian Faith Essentials", Part 17
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THE BIG IDEA: THE CHURCH IS THE FAMILY OF ALL TRUE BELIEVERS IN CHRIST WHO ARE LOVED, ADOPTED, AND CALLED BY GOD TO IMPACT THE

"...I will build My church..." (Matthew 16:18, NIV)

I) THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH: THE ***"EVERY CHRISTIAN, EVERYWHERE"*** DIMENSION

1) A definition of the universal church:

The body of all called, true Christians **EVERYWHERE** who are part of the family of God since the **DAY OF PENETCOST** (Acts 2).

Jesus: "...I will build My church..." (Matthew 16:18, NIV)

"...Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her..." (Ephesians 5:25, NIV)

"And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church..."
(Ephesians 1:22, NIV)

"But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men and made perfect..."
(Hebrews 12:22-23, NIV)

"The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body— whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free— and we were all given the one Spirit to drink."
(1 Corinthians 12:12-13, NIV)

2) The birth of the universal church in the New Testament (on the Day of Pentecost):

a) Holy Spirit baptism is promised in the **NEAR FUTURE**.

"For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 1:5, NIV)

b) Holy Spirit baptism **TAKES PLACE**.

(see Acts 2, the Day of Pentecost)

c) Holy Spirit baptism is equated with the DAY OF PENTECOST.

"As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'" (Acts 11:15-16, NIV)

d) The Holy Spirit's baptizing work formed the BODY OF CHRIST.

"The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body— whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free— and we were all given the one Spirit to drink..." (1 Corinthians 12:12-13, NIV)

e) Since the CHURCH is the same as the body of Christ, it had to begin on Pentecost!

"And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way..." (Ephesians 1:22-23, NIV)

This also proves that the church is NOT the same as Israel. They are each distinct.

3) The four distinct eras of the universal church throughout history:

a) The Patristic church (100 - 600 AD): Rapid growth, external unity, and internal purity.

b) The middle ages (600 - 1500 AD): Little theological development, the rise of philosophy, the primacy of Rome emerges, in 607 A.D. Boniface III (Gregory) acknowledged as the first RC pope.

c) The reformation era (1500 - 1648 AD): Luther rejects infallible RC church, Calvin, Knox and others go further in rejecting RCism, Anabaptists go even further with an autonomous church and state.

d) The modern era (1648AD - Present): Started strong, 19th century enlightenment and rise of liberalism has led to many churches that devalue accurate doctrine and that operate as worldly.

4) The mystery nature of the universal church (hidden in the past but revealed now):

a) The church is the mystery of Jews and Gentiles together as ONE BODY.

"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility." (Ephesians 2:13-14, NIV)

b) The church is the mystery of Christ INDWELLING every believer.

"I have become its [the church's] servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness—the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." (Colossians 1:25-27, NIV)

c) The church is the mystery of the BRIDE OF CHRIST.

"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' This is a profound mystery — but I am talking about Christ and the church." (Ephesians 5:31-32, NIV)

d) The church is the mystery behind the RAPTURE.

(see 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

5) The foundation of the universal church:

"And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ." (Matthew 16:18-20, NIV)

a) The Roman Catholic view: PETER is the foundation of the church (hence the Pope).

b) The "Person" view: CHRIST is the foundation of the church.

c) The "profession" view: PETER'S CONFESSION is the foundation of the church.

"For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 3:11, NIV)

6) The means of entrance into the universal church: The HOLY SPIRIT.

"For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many." (1 Corinthians 12:13-14, NIV)

II) THE LOCAL CHURCH: THE "SOME CHRISTIANS, SOMEWHERE" DIMENSION

1) A definition of the local church:

The MINIATURE expression of the universal church where people meet together in a local, organized assembly to carry out the ordinances and commands of God.

2) The reality of the local church:

- a) Letters were written to local churches (The epistles):
- b) The seven letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3:
- c) The evidence all over the New Testament:

3) The purpose and program of the local church:

"Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."
(Acts 2:41-47, NIV)

- a) Evangelism (2:41):
- b) Baptism (2:41):
- c) Membership (2:41):
- d) Edification (2:42):
- e) Fellowship (2:42):
- f) Evidence of Divine power (2:43):
- g) Demonstration of love and sharing (2:44-45):
- h) Effective Christian living and evangelism (2:46-47):

4) The membership of the local church (not commanded but valuable for the church):

- a) The number of converts is known (Acts 1:15, 2:41, 4:4):
- b) Special "rolls" of widows were kept (1 Timothy 5:9, may also be for others):
- c) Election of officers for people implies "roll" keeping:
- d) Church discipline assumes a "roll" (Matthew 18, 1 Corinthians 5:1-5):
- e) The leaders responsibilities assume and/or require a "roll" (Hebrews 13:7, 17):

5) The leadership and government of the local church:

a) The leadership role of Elder: SPIRITUAL OVERSIGHT.

"The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you." (Titus 1:5, NIV)

"Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap." (1 Timothy 3:1-7, NIV)

b) The leadership role of Deacon: SERVANT LEADERSHIP.

"In those days when the numbers of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them.'" (Acts 6:1-4, NIV)

"Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well. Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus." (1 Tim. 3:8-13, NIV)

c) The leadership role of Trustee: STEWARDED OF RESOURCES. (required by law)

6) The discipline of those in the local church:

"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among the pagans: A man has his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature [flesh] may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord." (1 Corinthians 5:1-5, NIV)

"The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient...forgive and comfort him..." (2 Corinthians 2:6-7, NIV)

a) Christians who are members of the church and overtly sin must be CONFRONTED.

b) Christians who are confronted for overt sin should be given opportunity to REPENT.

c) Christians who refuse to repent of overt sin should be DIS-FELLOWSHIPED.

d) Christians who eventually repent of overt sin should be RESTORED & FORGIVEN.

7) The ordinances of the local church:

a) Believer's Baptism: By IMMERSION after CONVERSION.

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19, NIV)

b) The Lord's Supper: Communion for believers to REMEMBER Christ's sacrifice.

"For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 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.' In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself." (1 Corinthians 11:23-29, NIV)

c) What about foot washing? Not NORMATIVE for the church.

(see John 13)

III) THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH: THE "ALL CHRISTIANS ALWAYS" DIMENSION

"Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'" (Matthew 28:18-20, NIV)

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:13-16, NIV)

1) More disciples: EVANGELISM of seekers.

2) Better disciples: EDIFICATION of believers.

3) Sold out disciples: EXALTATION of God.

IV) FALLING IN LOVE WITH THE CHURCH: THE BRIDE CHRIST WILL MARRY

"Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another— and all the more as you see the Day approaching."
(Hebrews 10:25, NIV)

- 1) **ATTEND it regularly!**
- 2) **PRAY FOR it passionately!**
- 3) **SERVE IN it faithfully!**
- 4) **GIVE TO SUPPORT it generously!**
- 5) **INVITE OTHERS TO it consistently!**

***SUMMARY THOUGHT: WE SHOULD SERVE THE CHURCH THAT GOD
LOVINGLY CALLED US INTO WITH OUR BEST ENERGIES TO BE A LIGHT TO
THE WORLD!***

V) QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION IN GROUPS OR FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

- 1) What is the Universal church? Try to explain what it means in your own words. What is the only requirement necessary for entrance into the universal church?

- 2) In point 1) 2) above, we see that the church was not a part of the Old Testament because it was born on the Day of Pentecost in the New Testament. How does this prove that the church is distinct and not the same entity as the people Israel?

- 3) What are some of the ways that the local church is different from the universal church? Consider things like membership, participation, leadership, location, activity and anything else that comes to mind.

- 4) What are some things you learned about the church in this study? What will you do differently to be devoted to the local church? Find two or three ways in which you can personally apply this session to your life.