

WHAT CHRISTIANS SHOULD KNOW (#WCSK), PART VIII: THE CHURCH

All Scriptures will be taken from The New American Standard Bible (NASB). Biblical references are examples and are in no way exhaustive. Also, the series What Christians Should Know is not a complete reference but is meant to provide basic beliefs, principles, and doctrines in the Christian faith. All of the lessons are best used as a general guide as you engage in your own Bible study.

“But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1).

Introduction

Here are some questions that many churchgoers do not often consider: what is the Biblical definition of the church, and what function does it serve? Why should anyone go to church, and what are you expected to do in a church? From prior lessons, it is now clear that the five core principles of Christianity do not include a “church” of any kind, so what value does the church add to the Christian’s life?

As I shall explain, the church is much more than a “building” or an “institution” that also serves as a mechanism to nurture, cultivate, and develop existing believers as well as to evangelize unbelievers. It is also a place where people can assemble in order to praise and worship God, participate in baptism and communion, and fellowship with others. The church is not responsible for salvation, does not atone for sins, and does not mediate between us and the Father—only Jesus does those things. And logically speaking, this makes perfect sense, because as we have learned, salvation is by grace alone through faith alone. The entire process is God-dependant. The church therefore has no monopoly on God, nor does it have any ultimate power over your eternal life. Certainly, going to church and being an active church member *does not* make anyone righteous; only THE LORD knows who are His,¹ and it is therefore futile for any of us to decide otherwise. Although the word “church” is used loosely in modern society, the Bible offers very specific prescriptions for what the church is and what it ought to do.

The church unifies and brings people together. As Ephesians 2:14 says, in Christ, “you who were formerly far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barriers of the dividing wall.” As we shall discuss, members of the body of Christ can be distinct, but they are not separate because all are joined together under the common banner of Jesus. Distinction *does not equal* separation.

¹ II Timothy 2:19

Finally, one thing to keep in mind when studying the nature and functions of the church is to pay very close attention to the Holy Spirit, Who plays a “leading role” in the life of the church. Jesus, Who is the head of the church,² was conceived by the Holy Spirit,³ and the Spirit anointed Jesus at His baptism.⁴ Additionally, at the start of Jesus’s public ministry, He read a scroll from Isaiah that read, “*The Spirit* of THE LORD is upon Me, because *He anointed Me* to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of THE LORD”⁵ (italics mine). Hence, a church that is Spirit-filled and Spirit-led entails being like Jesus, Who was anointed, equipped, and empowered to do His earthly ministry by the Holy Spirit. The entire point of the church, then, is to continue the ministry of Jesus as God instructed His disciples in the Great Commission: “Go therefore and makes disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit”.⁶ God sent Jesus,⁷ and now Jesus sends us.⁸

I. What is the Church?

What Christians should know is that the church is the faithful community of all those who are saved through belief in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Jesus is the head of the church.⁹

The “church” begins in Acts chapter 2 when the Holy Spirit descends from heaven on the Day of Pentecost. There, we learn that many were “together in one place” (v. 1) when the Holy Spirit filled the people, who then began speaking in foreign tongues. Subsequently, “devout men from every nation” came together (vv. 5-6) and were amazed because they heard the gospel in their own language. This unified the people for a common good under a common banner and reversed the division and separation that happened at the Tower of Babel.¹⁰ This event coincides with the Biblical narrative that when God saves people, He brings them together, and when He judges, He separates them. Next, the apostle Peter preaches a sermon and testifies to the saving power of Jesus, and the result was that “when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’ Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” (vv. 37-38). Those who received the gospel and were baptized began “continually devoting themselves the apostles’ teaching and to

² Colossians 1:18

³ Luke 1:34-35

⁴ Luke 3:21-22

⁵ Luke 4:18-19

⁶ Matthew 28:19

⁷ Luke 4:43; John 8:42

⁸ John 17:18, 20:21

⁹ Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:15-16; Colossians 2:19

¹⁰ Genesis 11

fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer ... all those who had believed were together and had all things in common ... day by day continuing with one mind ... praising God and having favor with all the people ... and THE LORD was adding to their number day by day” (vv. 42-47).

So, what is the church? The short answer is found in Acts 2—the Holy Spirit empowering people and turning people’s hearts and minds toward Jesus. This is a paradigm that transcends traditions and institutions and is a totally free and voluntary act open to any and all those who will hear and receive the good news.

The Greek word for church is *ekklesia*¹¹ meaning a religious congregation or an assembly of members on earth or of saints in heaven or both. Accordingly, the church is not one physical structure fixed in time, but a timeless institution that transcends any physical location. The church is both a tangible and a figurative organization. It is for the church that Christ gave up His life: “Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.”¹² The word church did not become familiar in the Bible until the writing of the New Testament, but the Old Testament offers several examples of God calling together a faithful community of those who believed in Him. In Acts 7:38, for example, the martyr Stephen uses the word *ekklesia* to refer to the Israelites who wandered in the wilderness. In fact, the Greek translation of the New Testament (the Septuagint) uses the word *ekklesia* most frequently in order to translate the Hebrew word, *qahal*, which means “assembly” or “to gather.”^{13,14}

Christ gave Himself up for all of humanity—past, present, and future. The church is the body of Christ that is ruled by Jesus. That authority to rule was granted by God: “And He put all things in subjection under [Jesus’s] 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.”¹⁵ Jesus exclusively builds the church (He calls it “My” church),¹⁶ and in that building process, THE LORD is the one Who adds people to churches.¹⁷ The church equates to unity,¹⁸ being made anew,¹⁹ and fellowship among the members of the household of God.²⁰

The church is both visible and invisible. A very easy way to think about this is that we can only see the visible church, whereas God is able to see both. The *ekklesia* that I can see includes my local church and the people who attend it as well as all the other

¹¹ For example, as used in Acts 20:28 and I Timothy 3:15.

¹² Ephesians 5:25b

¹³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 854.

¹⁴ Examples of use of the word *qahal* include Genesis 28:3, Exodus 16:3, Numbers 10:7, Deut 4:10, and II Chronicles 1:3.

¹⁵ Ephesians 1:22-23

¹⁶ Matthew 16:18

¹⁷ Acts 2:47

¹⁸ Ephesians 2:14

¹⁹ Ephesians 2:15

²⁰ Ephesians 2:19

churches and people around the world that I can visit or see in pictures. The invisible church, however, includes all those saints in heaven who serve as a “cloud of witnesses.”²¹ As Hebrews 11:4-32 mentions specifically, many faithful believers of the past are now enrolled in heaven and worship in the “church.”²² By implication, the invisible church is in a very secure position and is immune to corruption. The visible church is actually in a very precarious situation, where many “savage wolves” prey on sheep,²³ and false prophets attempt to deceive many.²⁴

The Bible doesn’t give a number that defines how many people a church must have, nor does the Bible state where the church must operate. Romans 16:5 and I Corinthians 16:9 label a church as a gathering in someone’s house. In other places, the church refers to the assembly of an entire city,²⁵ and Acts 9:31 refers to a church throughout “all Judea and Galilee and Samaria.” The New Testament also refers to the church that exists throughout the entire world.²⁶ Hence, the church is local, regional, global, earthly, and otherworldly. A simpler way of saying this is that the church is local and universal, and the local church is an expression of the universal church.

II. The Nature of the Church

A Biblical understanding of the church’s nature will prime your mind to understand what the church is supposed to do. The apostle Paul uses many metaphors to explain the nature of the church, and a popular label is the bride of Christ. In Ephesians 5:31-32, he refers to the relationship between a husband and wife as analogous to Christ and the church: “FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.” II Corinthians 11:2 also uses similar language: “For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.” Generally speaking, Paul refers to the members of the church as members of a family and encourages believers to treat each other with the love that family members have for one another. Using this lens, everyone cares for and looks out for one another, and each exercises a selfless, sacrificial, and persistent dedication for the growth of the others. In I Timothy 5:1-2 Paul says, “Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father, to the younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, in all purity.” The head of this church family is the Father,²⁷ Who cares for and looks after His children.²⁸ As His children, we are thus all joined together in the family of God.²⁹

²¹ Hebrews 12:1

²² Hebrews 12:23

²³ Acts 20:29-30

²⁴ Matthew 7:15-16

²⁵ I Corinthians 1:2; II Corinthians 1:1; I Thessalonians 1:1

²⁶ I Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 5:25

²⁷ Matthew 6:9, Ephesians 3:14

²⁸ II Corinthians 6:18; Galatians 4:1-7

The New Testament uses many other metaphorical examples to describe the church, including an olive tree,³⁰ a harvest,³¹ branches on a vine,³² a new temple built upon the cornerstone of Christ,³³ a pillar and support of the truth,³⁴ and the body of Christ.³⁵ The generous use of Biblical metaphors points directly to the dynamic and broad range of ways to view the church and what our relationship to it ought to look like. (And the word relationship is intentional, because the church is very relational, not merely an impersonal, lifeless “institution”). For example, the church as the bride of Christ means that as members of a church, we ought to be faithful and committed and graciously submitted to the church that seeks to care for, protect, and love believers. Hence, church hopping becomes a sign of unfaithfulness to your “spouse,” and instead of demanding churches meet our requirements, we ought to ask, “How can I better serve my spouse?” The church as a pillar and support of the truth means we must diligently work to weed out non-truths and heresy. The church as the body of Christ means we ought to seek out and strive for unity with the common goal of service to Jesus. The church as a temple means it is more than a physical building, but a place to worship THE LORD and abide in His presence.

Of note, Jesus is the true vine that is the church,³⁶ He is the one Who plants churches,³⁷ grows churches,³⁸ leads churches (the “Chief Shepherd”),³⁹ is present in churches,⁴⁰ and shuts churches down.⁴¹ Paul describes Christ as being the head of the church body,⁴² and each member of the body (e.g., the ears and the eyes) serves different roles in order execute proper functioning of the unified whole. Therefore, singular people will do dissimilar things, but each function derives its value as a part of the whole. *Distinction* but not *separation*. An eye by itself without a brain to interpret the light signal simply will not work, just as in order for a head to work, you need a neck to support it. If a toe tries to be an ear or if a hand tries to be an elbow, the results will be disastrous.

A portrait of the different gifts given to different people in the body of Christ is stated in I Corinthians 12:

²⁹ Matthew 12:49-50; I John 3:14-18

³⁰ Romans 11:17-24

³¹ Matthew 13:1-30; John 4:35

³² John 15:5

³³ I Peter 2:5-6

³⁴ I Timothy 3:15

³⁵ I Corinthians 12:12-27

³⁶ John 15:1

³⁷ Hebrews 3:1-4

³⁸ Matthew 16:18

³⁹ I Peter 5:4

⁴⁰ Matthew 28:20

⁴¹ Revelation 2:1-5

⁴² Ephesians 1:22-23, 4:15-16; Colossians 2:19

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given *the word of wisdom* through the Spirit, and to another the *word of knowledge* according to the same Spirit; to another *faith* by the same Spirit, and to another *gifts of healing* by the one Spirit, and to another the *effecting of miracles*, and to another *prophecy*, and to another the *distinguishing of spirits*, to another *various kinds of tongues*, and to another the *interpretation of tongues*. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.

For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, *second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues*. All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? But earnestly desire the greater gifts.

And I show you a still more excellent way (all italics mine).

In the Scripture above, I italicized several of the specific gifts given by the Spirit as well as the different job titles that people will have in the service in the body of Christ. As the text says, everything is always done “for the common good,” which means a gift given by God is to be used *in* the church and *for* the church. It is never meant for self-gain, self-promotion, or entrepreneurial endeavors. It is always meant to help other people and direct them toward Jesus.

III. What is the Church supposed to do?

Knowing what a church is supposed to do is important, because in the 21st century, many “churches” exist that do things antithetical to what the Bible teaches. You could have a dozen nature worshippers that form a “church,” or a band of rebellious people who form a “church” based on false doctrine. So how does a Christian know what a Biblical church looks like?

One of the most succinct passages that describes what the body of Christ must do is found in Ephesians 4:1-16 (NIV). Essentially, this passage describes the unity and maturity in the body of Christ:

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all ... So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, *to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.* Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

In essence, many different people playing many different roles work to build up the body of Christ into strong, mature believers who are firm in their beliefs, resistant to false doctrine, and equipped to do good works. These relationships and dynamics are characterized by peace, unity, love, and the common focus on Jesus.

The first thing a church must do is teach sound Christian doctrine. (By implication, that doctrine should also be heard and received by others). John Calvin said that “wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ’s institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists.”⁴³ In speaking to Titus, a leader in a church, the apostle Paul says, “speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine”.⁴⁴ In the same letter, Paul writes that one of the qualifications of a church leader is one who holds “fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict”.⁴⁵ II Timothy 4:2-4 says, “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. 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, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.” II Timothy 3:16 says that, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.” I Timothy 6:3-5 says, “If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain.”

If sound doctrine is not taught and preached, essentially what you have is a “church” based upon a doctrine of human ideology or some other perversion that is not of God. Resultantly, although the label of “church” is applied, that assembly will be based on heresy and lead people astray. Paul openly criticized those churches that had major doctrinal problems, that deviated from the Word and whose moral principles were also lacking.⁴⁶ (It’s no surprise that the two went hand in hand). The church at Corinth is a perfect example. Instead of following the Word, that church basically did what “felt good” and as a result, there were numerous divisions,⁴⁷ a reliance on worldly wisdom and reason (and therefore not on the Holy Spirit),⁴⁸ carnal behaviors,⁴⁹ susceptibility to false doctrines,⁵⁰ people engaging in communion in an unworthy manner,⁵¹ drunkenness,⁵² participation in pagan rituals,⁵³ sacrificing to demons,⁵⁴ and being led astray by idols.⁵⁵

⁴³ John Calvin, *Institutes* 4.1.9

⁴⁴ Titus 2:1

⁴⁵ Titus 1:9

⁴⁶ I Corinthians 3:1-4, 4:18-21, 5:1-2, 6; 6:1-8; II Corinthians 1:23-2:11, 12:20-13:10; Galatians 1:6-9, 3:1-5

⁴⁷ I Corinthians 1:10-12

⁴⁸ I Corinthians 2:1-9

⁴⁹ I Corinthians 3:3

⁵⁰ II Corinthians 11:3-4

⁵¹ I Corinthians 11:23-33

⁵² I Corinthians 11:21

⁵³ I Corinthians 8

The book of Revelation also speaks of “synagogues of Satan.”⁵⁶ In contrast, Paul took great joy in the churches at Thessalonica and Philippi that were based upon strong doctrine and had upstanding characters.⁵⁷

The second thing a church must do is administer the sacraments of baptism and communion. Baptism and communion will each be discussed in greater detail in the second series of *What Christians Should Know*. Essentially, baptism is an outward sign of the inward change of a person’s new life with Jesus. The baptism thus is the start of a relationship between the person and God, and communion is the outward sign and a symbol of the continuance of that relationship.

The third thing a church must do is “look up” and worship God. Paul tells the church at Colossae “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”.⁵⁸ Paul also says in Ephesians 1:11-13, “Also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be *to the praise of His glory*” (italics mine). He tells those at the church in Ephesus to make “the most of your time ... be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.”⁵⁹

The fourth thing a church must do is “look in” and nurture believers. Colossians 1:28 (NIV) says, “He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, *so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ*” (italics mine). Ephesians 4:11-13 says, “So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, *to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature*, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (italics mine). Many times in the New Testament, nurturing those in the church also involves material help.⁶⁰

The fifth thing a church must do is “look out” and evangelize non-believers. In the great commission, Jesus told His disciples to “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.”⁶¹ As Wayne Grudem says, “The evangelistic

⁵⁴ I Corinthians 10:20

⁵⁵ I Corinthians 12:2

⁵⁶ Revelation 2:9, 3:9

⁵⁷ Philippians 1:3-11, 4:10-16; I Thessalonians 1:2-10, 3:6-10; II Thessalonians 1:3-4, 2:13

⁵⁸ Colossians 3:16

⁵⁹ Ephesians 5:16-19

⁶⁰ Acts 11:29; II Corinthians 8:4; I John 3:17

⁶¹ Matthew 28:19

work of declaring the gospel is the primary ministry that the church has toward the world.”⁶² This evangelism includes proclaiming the gospel, being merciful to those who would rather not hear it,⁶³ and being kind and gracious to *all* people.⁶⁴

THE LORD Jesus, the head of the church, portrays evangelism in John 4 when He engages the Samaritan woman. In fact, this is the longest recorded conversation Jesus had with anyone in the entire New Testament, and it was with a non-believer (at least initially), a woman, and a Samaritan (Jewish men and Samaritan women were like oil and water back in those days). Jesus traveled far out of His way and became wearied⁶⁵ in His quest to find this woman, and when He did find her, He defied customary social boundaries to speak frankly to a woman living in sin. Because His act defied expectations, and because He took the time to speak with a person who was deemed “unclean,” look at the extraordinary results: “So the woman left her waterpot, and went into the city and said to the men, ‘Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done; this is not the Christ, is it?’ They went out of the city, and were coming to Him ... From that city many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, ‘He told me all the things that I have done.’ So when the Samaritans came to Jesus, they were asking Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. Many more believed because of His word; and they were saying to the woman, ‘It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world’”.⁶⁶

In analyzing the call to look up, in, and out, it is important to understand that the whole interprets the part and all angles of vision have to be treated equally. For example, a church that does not look up to God can cast their eyes on an idol, therefore “nurturing” their congregants with tainted milk leading to spiritual sickness. A lack of sound doctrine will lead to superficial believers who may then evangelize but not be able to effectively minister to others whose degree of scrutiny exceeds the comprehension of the missionary. And superficial believers will be very susceptible to changing tides, wavering between opinions, and shaking like reeds in the wind. Too much emphasis on looking in without looking out will raise up strong disciples, but those disciples will never get out of the building. Subsequently, speaking metaphorically about the body of Christ, it now becomes very clear that as a unified “church,” some body parts will do much more of one thing (e.g., singers who lead worship, pastors who lead teaching, and missionaries who lead evangelism) and subsequently do very little of others because different parts have specialized functions.

The sixth thing a church must do is strive for unity and purity in the things that it does. Under the banners of “unity” and “purity,” the list of specific requirements that a church must execute is very long, but the point is that every member of a church has to be on the

⁶² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 868.

⁶³ Luke 6:35-36

⁶⁴ Luke 4:40

⁶⁵ John 4:6

⁶⁶ John 4:28-30, 39-42

same general page, and the things that they do must be effective. So, it makes no sense if ABC church looks up, in, and out very well and routinely performs baptisms and communions, but the married pastor is sleeping with the choir director and the evangelists routinely get drunk in order to “fellowship” with non-believers. So, in pursuit of unity (i.e., “one flock and one shepherd”)⁶⁷ and purity, the church also seeks to “[admonish] and [teach] everyone with all wisdom” so that believers may fully mature in Christ.⁶⁸ Furthermore, the church must not only teach sound doctrine, but must also equip its members to refute false doctrine,⁶⁹ have *qualified* leadership,⁷⁰ silence teachers of false doctrine,⁷¹ maintain the purity of the Christian faith,⁷² execute the sacraments of baptism and communion *properly*,⁷³ execute church discipline to correct those who deviate from proper conduct,^{74,75} *effectively* worship,⁷⁶ *effectively* witness,⁷⁷ properly govern the church,⁷⁸ demonstrate spiritual power in the ministries of the church,⁷⁹ promote personal holiness,⁸⁰ care for those without,⁸¹ build up the church,⁸² and of course, love Jesus.⁸³ The unity of the church is something that is very valuable, because innumerable forces are at play that seek to divide and destroy the church.⁸⁴ Jude says there are rebellious people who actually set out to split up the church: “These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit.”⁸⁵

⁶⁷ John 10:16, 17:21, 23; I Corinthians 1:2, 10, 13, 10:17, 12:12-26; Ephesians 4:3; Philippians 2:2

⁶⁸ Colossians 1:28

⁶⁹ Titus 1:9

⁷⁰ I Timothy 2 and 3

⁷¹ Titus 1:11

⁷² Jude 3

⁷³ I Corinthians 11:17-34

⁷⁴ I Corinthians 5:6-7, 12-13

⁷⁵ Church discipline is always meant to restore, reconcile, and prevent sin from spreading to others. Discipline is executed just as a loving father disciplines his son (cf. Proverbs 13:24; Hebrews 12:6; Revelation 3:19). For the prevention on the spreading of sin, see I Corinthians 5:2, 6-7; Hebrews 12:15. Matthew 18:15-17 provides the blueprint for conflict resolution, and the following verses detail examples *for what* church discipline is to be exercised: heresy (II John 10-11), blasphemy (I Timothy 1:20), divisiveness (Romans 16:17; Titus 3:10), incest (I Corinthians 5:1), laziness (II Thessalonians 3:6-10), and disobedience (II Thessalonians 3:14-15).

⁷⁶ Ephesians 5:18-20; Colossians 3:16-17

⁷⁷ Matthew 28:19-20; John 13:34-35; Acts 2:44-47; I John 4:7

⁷⁸ I Timothy 3:1-13

⁷⁹ Acts 1:8; Romans 1:16; I Corinthians 4:20; II Corinthians 10:3-4; Galatians 3:3-5; II Timothy 3:5

⁸⁰ I Thessalonians 4:3; Hebrews 12:14

⁸¹ Acts 4:32-35; Romans 15:26; Galatians 2:10

⁸² I Corinthians 14:12

⁸³ I Peter 1:8; Revelation 2:4

⁸⁴ Romans 16:17-18

⁸⁵ Jude 19

Of course, all of these activities apply to the visible church and not the invisible church. And in the quest for church purity, it becomes very clear that *everything* centers around Jesus. A church that suggests an answer to a problem that is not Jesus or when Christ is not the head of the church, then what is supposed to be a house of faith has now turned into a house of manmade ideology where prescriptions are given for behavior change, personal improvement, or outlets for socialization that do not involve THE LORD at all.

Conclusion

As I hope it is has now become clear, the Biblical formulation for “church” stands in stark contrast to what many in 21st century America have accepted as the formal definition. It goes without saying that no church will excel in all of its functions all the time, but modern churches have often confused what is distinguishing from what is central. That is, although a church may do something very well, while that is something to be noted, if that excellence happens at the expense of other functions that are central to the church, then the “church” has ceased to do what the Bible says it should. For example, if a church has a magnificent music ministry, then that is a wonderful thing. But if in its *distinction*, that church places its resources in music and worship at the expense of sound doctrine and evangelism, then the church’s *central* functions will suffer.

This also speaks directly to the modern fascination with church “marketing” that actually uses business techniques in order to “promote” the church to certain demographics and market segments by engineering programs and activities to “attract” certain cohorts. God is the only Person Who plants, builds, leads, runs, and adds members to a church. Resultantly, “planning” and “vision” become a function of what *we* can do in order to materialize a yet-to-be-determined future and recruit more “customers.” In this dynamic, the congregants are being attracted to things that are appealing *to them*, so once those big flashing lights go away, attendance plummets. The focus shifts away from learning sound doctrine, praising God, and spreading the good news to others. Instead, the focus becomes a matter of personal fulfillment.

God bless, and on to Part IX: The Christian Life & Regeneration.

Questions? Email us at dlcfchurch@gmail.com. Be sure to put WCSK (yes, all caps) in the subject line. We hope to hear from you!

Dr. C. H. E. Sadaphal