

LESSON 8: THE CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

The church. Some think of it merely as the building that you go to worship in every Sunday and Wednesday. It is a physical place. Others believe that the church is made up of all the Christians in the world. What do you believe is the Church? Who is included? Are there criteria to be involved in the church?

JESUS' DEFINITION OF THE CHURCH

Read Matthew 16:13-19

- ▶ What is the church based upon?

¹⁸ “...upon *this rock* I will build My church”

At first glance, this passage appears to say that the church is built upon the rock (Peter). But, upon closer examination of the original text, one sees that Jesus takes Peter through two different questions. First Jesus asks, “*Who do you say that I am?*” Peter responds with, “*You are the Christ the Son of the living God.*”

Peter’s answer is correct not because he as man knew the answer but because the Holy Spirit revealed the answer to him. When Jesus goes on to say “*this rock,*” He is referring to the act of Peter saying “*You are the Christ the Son of the living God.*”

Ultimately, the Church is based upon **people who believe that Jesus Christ is who He says He is. This knowledge was revealed to them through the Holy Spirit** and not any man. These two elements are critical.

There are many beliefs currently and from the past that these two elements are not needed for someone to be saved and become part of the Church. In this passage, Jesus clearly teaches...

1. Correct understanding about Christ is revealed by the conviction of the Holy Spirit.
2. The conviction of the Holy Spirit must bring about a conversion in your life leading to salvation.

These two qualities are the requirements of membership in the Church.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:13-17

- ▶ Do you have to be baptized to be part of the Church?

A current debate amongst different religions is whether or not baptism should be sprinkling or dunking in the water. The word used throughout the New Testament is *baptismo* which means 'to dip in to' and 'immerse'. Another Greek word, *rantizo* means to sprinkle and it is not found in the New Testament. Therefore, the Bible appears to indicate the plunging or dunking in water for baptism. But is this an issue of salvation or membership into the Church? (NO!)

1 Corinthians discusses the fact that Paul was sent to the church in Corinth not to "*baptize but to preach the gospel.*" A clear distinction is drawn between the Gospel and baptism. Throughout Scripture, it is clear that baptism is an act of obedience and discipleship. Baptism is not a requirement for salvation.

As a church, we do not believe that you have to be baptized in order to participate in the Lord's Supper. We do however believe that it is an important part of the discipleship process and that the Bible demands baptism. If someone understands that the Bible calls all Christians to baptism through immersion and decides that he or she simply does not want to be baptized, then that person is living in disobedience.

The purpose of baptism is not for salvation but as proof of your church membership. It is also a public display of your faith. In Biblical times, baptism was done in the public square and often times that person was cut off from the family and friends they previously knew. The Greek word for church is *ekklesia* which means 'out' and 'called'. As members of the church we are called out from the world and into Jesus Christ. Baptism is the first outward representation of this inward change.

In conclusion, the two requirements for membership in the Church are conviction by the Holy Spirit and believing that God is who He says He is. The first proof of your church membership is baptism.

WHO IS THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH

Now that we have a description of how Jesus defined the Church and who the members of the Church are, we will take a look at the makeup of the church and its function in our lives.

Read Colossians 1:16-18

- ▶ Who is the head of the Church?

First, we must decide who could be head of the church. This passage indicates that there are only two being in the universe: the Creator and what He created. "*For by Him all things were created... all things have been created through Him and for Him... He is the firstborn from the*

dead.” The firstborn from the dead is Jesus, therefore Jesus was the Creator and not part of the creation. This indicates that Jesus is God Himself.

“He is also head of the body, the church.” Jesus is the dictator of the Church. He is the head or the controlling factor. No man, not even the pastor or the deacons, control what happens in the church. Because of this, no man should ever refuse membership to the church to anyone who has met Christ’s criteria as previously discussed.

Read Proverbs 11:14, 24:6, and 11:4

- ▶ So if Christ is the head of the Church, then why do we vote on anything?

The staff often makes decisions that the answers cannot be found in Scripture (e.g. Upward sports, AWANA, youth program, buy 10 more acres...). These verses indicate that the best way to find answers is through an abundance of counselors. This means that the Church should pray about the issue and be committed to the head of the Church (Jesus Christ). When a vast majority comes back saying that they believe God is leading them in a certain way, then victory can be found through the abundance of counselors.

In the history of Central Baptist Church, most votes have been in favor of the decision of the staff. Unanimity is not required, but it must be a loud decision and not a close call for us to move forward. Therefore, voting is used as a means of hearing from the head of the Church and being safe and victorious in our actions.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

There are two purposes within the church that can be summed up as vertical and horizontal. The vertical pertains to one’s relationship with God while the horizontal aspect involves relationships with other people.

Read Zechariah 8:20-23, Matthew 18:19-20, and John 15:6-8

- ▶ What are some aspects of the vertical purpose of the Church?

- ❖ **Relationship with God: worship and prayer**
- ❖ **God reveals Himself through you to others around you**

Others should be able to see Christ in us in our everyday lives. This is achieved by a close relationship with God containing both worship of God and prayer to God. As individuals and a church, we should show God to others through our lives in a way that makes them want to be a part.

- ▶ What are some areas of our lives that we can show other Christ?

Marriages/ relationships, work, love for others in the church and our neighbors...

Read Romans 15:5-7

- ▶ What are some aspects of the horizontal purpose of the church?

The main idea is that we have to accept and welcome one another.

In John 17, Jesus prays for them to be unified. In Ephesians 3, Paul talks about the most amazing thing he saw was that the Jew and Gentile came together in worship. In the Old Testament, the Gentiles had to become Jews in order to be a part of the same life. In the New Testament, both the Jews and Gentiles give up their identities to become unified as Christians. The basis of their unity and ours as a church is the love for Christ.

- ▶ So, can Christians never disagree?

If it is concerning an issue that is a black and white statement in the Scriptures, then no we cannot disagree. There are times in the church where gray areas such as drinking or small things such as pews or chairs or the color of the carpet that Christians will disagree upon. We are all humans and have different opinions. But, if these opinions cause dissention in the church then they are wrong, because we need to be unified as the body of Christ.

Examples: homeschool vs private school vs public school. Or the use of birth control or not.

As a family you must decide what God wants for you. This includes praying for a clear direction and following the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We are now under freedom by the Holy Spirit and are no longer bound by a strict set of rules (The Law) that we must obey. It is important to remember that just because the Holy Spirit tells you this is right for your family does not mean that it is right for every family.

Unity is based on the Word of God and our relationship with Him.

WHAT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY IN THE CHURCH

Read Hebrews 10:24-25

- ▶ What are our responsibilities as Christians in the Church?
 - ❖ We can't neglect being together. We need the support of others.
 - ❖ Disciple each other, encourage and bless each other.
 - Although worship can happen anywhere even alone, encouragement and discipleship can only happen when you are part of a group of believers.

Read Romans 12:4-5

- ▶ What kind of gifts does God give to the church?

Each Christian is given a personal, spiritual gift that is to be used to enhance people within the church. Some gifts can be transferred and used outside the church such as the gift of wisdom. But in general, if you do not use your gifts in the church, then you actually damage the church.

One gift that God gives is the gift of leadership. The people with this gift have special callings to fulfill within the church. These positions are listed in Ephesians 4:11-13 and include elders, deacons, and pastors. A pastor or teacher should have the gifts of teaching and shepherding. Deacons on the other hand are seen more in service and protection of the unity of the church.

In Central Baptist, we see these positions as the paid staff. Deacons are used more as a sounding board and a body of believers that pray over decisions and give guidance.

Every Christian has personal gifts to be used in the church. Both must be used for the church to reach its fullness. As Christians, we are designed to need the guidance and fellowship of the church to be able to be our best for Christ. That is why it is important to get involved in a church where you can be disciplined and where you can also use your gifts to help others and the Church.

It is important to remain working in your area of giftedness to avoid fatigue. In general, 20 % of the people do 80% of the work in the church. If everyone did their part and used their gift, fatigue and frustration with ministry could be greatly minimized.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

- ▶ What is our responsibility to those in leadership of the church (Pastor and staff)?

First we must be thankful and respectful of those that God has chosen to place in authority over the church. This includes, if you have an issue with a staff member that you go to them in person and handle the situation directly without bad mouthing them to anyone else.

Read 1 Peter 5:1-3

- ▶ What is the responsibility of the leadership of the church to the members?

First, they have a responsibility to live life well with Christ as an example to the members. They do not have the right to lord over or dictate to the members. Leaders must also maintain the same responsibilities of the members of the church including using their gifts and living a life worthy of our respect. They need to promote unity and follow what Christ as the head of the church has called us as a church to do. We vote to help see what the Head of the Church wants us as a church to do.

Conclusion

There needs to be unity in the church based on the understanding that the church is composed only of people that have been convicted by the Holy Spirit and are surrounded by that Spirit. We believe that Christ is the Head of the Church, and even though we vote, we are voting to find what the Head of the Church says. We have a horizontal responsibility to encourage and disciple each other, but even more importantly we have a vertical responsibility to have a strong relationship with God. We need to live in such a way that we use our giftedness to impact others. Our lives should be so different that people pull us to them and ask what is it that we have.

Extra Points that Might Need to be Addressed

There are times in our lives when we need to step back from using our gifts. These times should be looked at as a leave of absence and not moving out or “retiring.” There will come a time again when you are called to use your gifts in the Church.

Examples: young mom has a family priority and is exhausted, going through a spiritual issue and need to get priorities right, going through a divorce or loss and need to put life back together. Old age or my children are no longer in the children/youth/college ministry is not an excuse to not be working in the church. There is an area for everyone and that is needed to fulfill the purpose of the church.