

3:15

GOSPEL-CENTERED APOLOGETICS

FAITH

Apologetic Life Group Curriculum

The Church

Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, ... Lutheran??? All these are Christian, right? In the Christian Faith there are over 40K denominations! Are they all the same? What's the difference?.

Scripture Passage:

“In spite of these objection, Jesus stated, “I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.”

-Matthew 16:18

written by: Richard Brown

produced by: Eric Webster



Key Truth

“The Church is the body of Christ composed of baptized followers of Jesus Christ committed to obeying His commands.”

Topic Background

Today we're going to look at Church. We are at church right now, but what is church? What makes up a church? Why do we attend services? We are going to look at God's design for the church and our place in it.

“In spite of these objection, Jesus stated, “I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.”

-Matthew 16:18

- What does this verse mean to you?
- What do you think of when you hear, “church”?

Matthew 16:18; Matthew 28: 18-20, Acts 2:42-47

Key Passages

Apologetic Purpose:

We are going to be looking at the “Church”. This includes not only your local church, but also the “Church”, the entire body of Christ followers. Many skeptics and nonbelievers see no purpose of the “church”. Many believers will attest that church is “ok”, but not mandatory. We will look at the purpose the gathering of believers serves and how God benefits believers through His church. We will see what the Bible says. Knowing this gives the believer reasons for their belief and their actions.

(Question): How many times was Paul Shipwrecked?

(Answer): 3 (maybe 4 Times!) Paul Speaks of 3 Times in Corinthians and then a fourth time is described in Acts chapter 27.

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2 Corinthians 11:25 (NLV) {This book was written in 80-90 AD}

“Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea.”

Acts 27:41 (NIV) {This book was written in 50's AD}

41 But the ship struck a sandbar and ran aground. The bow stuck fast and would not move, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf.

It is very possible that the account mentioned in Acts is included in Paul's listing of hardships in 2nd Corinthians. If so...then the answer is 3. If not...the answer is 4

DISCUSSION

• **What are some reasons that people frequently give for not going to church? Some answers may include:**



- Christians are judgmental and negative
- Church is boring
- I don't like organized religion
- The church just wants your money
- I don't have time
- Too many hypocrites

Lesson Plan

In our lesson for today, we are going to answer some practical questions about the church. We will look at five main points.

- #1: What does the Bible say about church?
- #2: What is the mission of the church?
- #3: What is expected of me by the church?
- #4: We are to support the testimony of the church.
- #5: Why should I join the church?

Teacher's Note:

There is a lot of information here. Far more than can be taught in one LifeGroup gathering. A suggestion would be to present the 5 main points. Each main point may only get a few minutes each. Then, informed by reading all the sections and using the provided supporting points, make your way to the questions.

Main Point #1

What Does the Bible Say About the Church?

The New Testament has much to say about the church making it difficult to cover in just a single lesson. However, Paul writes in Ephesians 1: 22-23: “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.” The body of Christ is made up of all believers in Jesus Christ from the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) until Christ’s Return. The body of Christ is comprised of two aspects:

1

The universal church consists of all those who have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. “In I Cor. 12:13 Paul again writes, “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.” This verse says that anyone who believes is part of the Body of Christ and had received the Spirit of Christ as evidence. The universal church of God is all those who have received salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

2

The local church is described in Galatians 1: 1-12: “Paul, an apostle....and all the brothers with me, to the churches in Galatia.” Here we see that in the province of Galatia there were many churches---or what we call local churches. For example, here in Bartow County, there are over 41 Southern Baptist churches and many other churches of various denominations. All of them are what we call local churches.

It is important to note that the church is not a building. It is not brick and mortar. It is flesh and blood. A New Testament church is composed of redeemed people. According to the Bible, the church is the Body of Christ---all those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ (John 3:16). The local church is where the universal church puts into practice the principles of I Cor. 12: encouraging, teaching, and building one another up in the knowledge and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. The New Testament also provides several metaphors (pictures or symbols) describing the nature of the church. Some of those metaphors include: The Church as a Body (1 Cor. 12: 12-27); The Church as a Fellowship (Rom. 14:19); The Church as a Family (1 Pet. 3:8); The Church as a Flock (Matt. 25:33). Each of these metaphors describe how we are to relate to one another and function in the world.

Main Point #2

What is the Mission of the Church?

Any organization that has no sense of purpose will cease to be an organization very quickly. The Lord gave us our marching orders in Matthew 28: 19-20: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

The central theme of this well-known verse is making disciples. What exactly does that look like? In Acts 2: 42-47 we find a beautiful portrayal of the church on mission. The text reads: “So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. They were continually devoting themselves to the apostle’s teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.” Wow! What a church! In this amazing passage we find the Great Commission expressed beautifully in five specific functions:



1 **Worship.** Worship is the primary purpose of the church.

Worship is simply attributing “worth-ship” to the Lord. In our text we find that the people were in awe of the Lord. That should be our experience every time with gather together as God’s people. I fear that the missing element in most churches is the awe of God. We may be in awe of the music, the preacher, the buildings, or even the atmosphere but we lack the awe of God. Let us make sure that our hearts and minds are focused on the glory, majesty and holiness of God.

2 **Evangelism (proclamation).** Our mission is to make

Jesus known to the world. Every believer has a testimony to share. In

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our text, people were being saved through the public witness of Jesus Christ and the passionate praise of His people. We are to be verbal witnesses of Jesus. A witness is simply one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. Jesus is the Bread of Life. Your success as a witness is not determined by how many people you win to Christ, but by how many you tell about Christ. May your life be a conduit of the glory and majesty of God! Be bold in your witness!

3

Discipleship. Notice that in our text, the people were devoted to the disciples' teaching.

Doctrine matters! Like the early disciples we too must be committed to sound doctrine and the equipping of others. Our goal is not to make converts but to make disciples. A disciple is a learning follower of Jesus Christ. A disciple is a student enrolled in the school of Jesus. Every day we will find ourselves in the classroom of life. We must be teachable as the Master seeks to teach us Kingdom principles through His Word and through the circumstances of life. We are also to lead others into a deeper walk with Christ. A church develops disciples through Bible study, training opportunities, and involvement in ministry. The goal is to develop mature, doctrinally sound, vibrant Christians who are able to serve Christ through the local church.

4

Ministry. Isn't it interesting how the early church cared for one another in tangible ways?

They shared meals together with gladness! They met the physical needs of those who lacked. What a beautiful picture of the Body of Christ being the hands and feet of Jesus. The Lord said in John 13: 35: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Every church should be a caring fellowship where needs are being met in the name of Jesus. May that always be true of us!

5

Fellowship. Our text beautifully illustrates Christian fellowship. The Greek word for

fellowship is "koinonia." It pictures a fellowship of believers who are bound together by the common thread of Jesus Christ and His Precious Holy Spirit who lives in us. Christian fellowship is much more than punch and cookies after church. It involves spiritual intimacy between the people of God where burdens and joys are shared together. It is a beautiful picture of God's love and concern for His people.

All of these functions should be carried out by every local church. In fact, LifeGroups are the tool we use to carry out each of these functions. LifeGroups are the Church organized and functioning to carry out the Great Commission. This is why every church member should be actively involved in a LifeGroup and actively inviting the unchurched to participate.

Main Point #3

What is Expected of Me by My Church?

Any local church should never ask more of her members than the Bible teaches. We should expect our members to do only what the Bible teaches us to do. With that said, there are four identifiable expectations of church members found in the New Testament:

1 **We are to protect the unity of the church** (Ephesians 4: 1-3). If unity is removed from the church, you no longer have a fellowship but a battleship. It is disgraceful when God's people act childish and create friction by their own selfishness, greed and pride. Those elements have no place in the Body of Christ. Paul teaches us that we are to make a priority of protecting the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

2 **We are to share the responsibility of the church** (Matt. 28: 19-20; Luke 14:23; Rom. 15: 7; 1 Cor. 12: 12-27). God adds to the body of Christ for Kingdom reasons. He did not add you and me to the body of Christ to do nothing. We have responsibilities that we are to carry out as disciples of Jesus. Some of those include:

- Serving others
- Praying for the church and its growth
- Inviting the unchurched to come
- Sharing the gospel with the lost
- Discipling others
- Being faithful and regular in attendance

Are these regular practices in your life? If not, then there is not time like the present to get started. All of us share in these responsibilities. Don't be content to sit on the bench and watch others do what you should be doing.

3 **We are to serve in the ministry of the church** If you are a follower of Christ, then you were called to be a minister whether you are on a paid church staff or not. Sadly, we have crafted a hierarchy in church life which is really unhealthy: Clergy and laity. We think of the clergy many times as the "ministers" and rest of the congregants as "members." Many "members"

think that it is the responsibility of the “clergy” to do all the ministry. This creates a “consumer” mindset where most church members feel like they are to be served or pleased by the hired professional staff. The Lord saved all of us to serve not be served. The day you were saved, the Lord did something amazing in your life. He gave you His Holy Spirit Who now indwells you. How the Spirit chooses to reveal Himself through you is what we call “spiritual giftedness.” (Eph., 4: 11-12; I Peter 4:10). Every believer has at least one spiritual gift and probably more. Our gifts are to be used to edify the body of Christ. Your giftedness is an excellent indicator as to how the Lord desires to use you in the body of Christ. Put your giftedness to work! If you have never done so, we urge you to discover your gifts (see [tabernaclebaptist.org/next steps/ opportunities for service](http://tabernaclebaptist.org/next-steps/opportunities-for-service) for an online discovery tool). The Lord did not give you His Spirit to accomplish little things. He gave you His Spirit to accomplish God-sized things. Not only is the believer equipped with spiritual gifts, he or she is also to be trained or equipped by the Pastoral staff to do the work of ministry. Learn how to share your faith. Learn how to lead others. Learn how to pray. A person who had embraced a servant’s heart with put this training into action. Be a contributor and not a consumer!

4

We are to support the testimony of the church. Every believer is charged with the

responsibility of preserving the testimony of the church. A watching world needs to see that there is something uniquely different about God’s people. When we behave poorly, the church of the Lord Jesus receives a black-eye in the minds of unbelievers. Our attitudes and actions inside and outside the church matters! What are some things we can do to support the testimony of the church? Some things would include:

- Attending faithfully (Heb. 10:25)
- Giving (tithing) regularly (I Cor. 16:2)
- Living a godly life and staying away from questionable practices that could harm our witness or the reputation of the church. (Phil. 1:27)

Main Point #4

What is Expected of Me by My Church?

These are strange days in which we live! There are many churches that do not have an official membership in the congregation. They do not invite to people to join or unite with their particular church family. While it may simplify record keeping, it ignores the simple fact all of us are part of the body of Christ. Membership displays the beautiful truth that we are all significant to the life and health of the body.

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As mentioned earlier, many see themselves as consumer Christians. They float around from church to church with no real commitment to any of them. They simply seek what the church can do for them. Please do not ever let this be true of you. Bloom where you are planted!

The simple difference between “attenders” and “members” can be summed up in one word: Commitment. When we speak of membership, we are not speaking of joining a civic organization or club. We are speaking of making a commitment to a sacred fellowship of baptized believers who are committed to glorifying Jesus Christ and advancing His Kingdom throughout the world. The local church should recognize the need for formal membership for at least four reasons:

1 **A Biblical reason:** Christ was committed to the church. He so loved the church He gave His life for her (Eph. 4: 25). That’s commitment! As believers, we are going to love what our Master loves.

2 **A Cultural reason:** Commitment is the antidote to an apathetic culture in which we live. We live in a society where very few are committed to anything. This attitude has produced a generation of “church hoppers and shoppers.” Membership swims against the current of America’s “consumer religion.” It is an unselfish decision.

3 **A Practical reason:** Quite simply, membership defines who can be counted on. Every team must have a roster. Every school must have an enrollment. Every business has a payroll. Every army has an enlistment. Even our country takes a census and requires voter registration! Church membership identifies who is in and who is not. In other words, it identifies who is one of us. Membership identifies our family.

4 **A Personal reason:** Church membership actually fosters spiritual growth. The New Testament places a major emphasis on the need for Christians to be accountable to one another. When a person is not connected to a local church, accountability is virtually impossible.



Main Point #5

What Are the Requirements for Membership?

People frequently ask, “What is required of me to become a member of this church? This is a great question. The New Testament only has two pre-requisites for membership:

①

The New Birth (John 3:3). Jesus told Nicodemus, a noted religious leader, “You must be born again.” Being religious will not merit anyone a split moment in heaven. There must be a time when each of us recognize our lostness before a holy God and our need for His grace and forgiveness. When we turn from our sin and place our trust in the finished work of Christ (His death and resurrection), we are born again. Is this a reality in your life? If not, there is no time like the present to turn to Jesus and embrace Him as Lord and Savior. Do it today.

②

Immersion Baptism (Matthew 28:19). As Baptists, we believe that the correct mode of baptism is immersion baptism. The word “baptize” actually comes from the Greek term “baptize” which means to plunge, dip or submerge. Baptism does not wash one’s sins away. Only the blood of Jesus can do that. Baptism is a symbolic act of an inward reality. The act of being submerged under water and raised again pictures one’s being identified with Christ’s death and resurrection. As one is being raised from the water, it pictures their being brought from spiritual death to spiritual life. We were once dead in our trespasses and sin but Jesus made us alive in Him. Baptism is not required for salvation, but it is required for obedience to Christ! If you are a believer and you have never followed through with believers’ baptism, then speak with a Pastor or your LifeGroup leader about this important step in your spiritual journey.

What was most helpful to you about this lesson on the church?

Application :

Is there a particular negative attitude or errant belief about the church that you need to change?

How can you be more helpful to your local church in fulfilling her mission?

If you are not a member of any church, what is keeping you back from uniting with the Body of Christ?

The two requirements for membership include the New Birth and Immersion Baptism.

o Are these both a reality in your life?

Pray:

Guide the conversation to a place of prayer. Pray that God will shape our hearts to use “church” as a refreshing of our spirit. Pray that we will have such a heart for worship that we desire to sing praises. Pray that we will trust God enough to worship through giving. Pray that we will have clear minds and open hearts to take in the message that God gives His servants to deliver to us each week.

Notes: