

Orientation Class # 4

The Church

The Assembly—1 Tim. 3:15

"but in case I am delayed, I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the ekklesia, from ek, out of, and klesis, a calling. It means a gathering or assembly. The church in the New Testament was a company of true household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth." The Greek word for church is believers devoted in love to Christ and to one another.

The church has been ordained by God to be the primary instrument through which His work on earth is to be accomplished. The church is variously described as a building (Eph. 2:20-22), a household (Eph. 2:19), and Christ's body (Eph. 1:22, 23). As members of His body, each individual is important (1 Cor. 12). Christ gives to each believer, by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, some gift or gifts to equip him to serve the Lord and edify other believers (1 Pet. 4:10, 11; also Rom. 12, Eph. 4).

The church is also pictured as the pillar and support of the truth. "Oftentimes a pillar was set up in a public marketplace and notices were posted on it. It was thus a proclaimer. The church is the unit on earth which God has chosen to proclaim and display His truth."
--William MacDonald

"Does the New Testament list a certain number of requisites or essentials of a local church? ... We would suggest that this is not the case... Instead of that, we believe that the New Testament approach is this. All believers are instructed that, by the grace of God, they are members of the church. Then they are exhorted to gather together in such a way as to give expression to the great truths of the church. Some assemblies of Christians give a very poor representation of the body of Christ. Other groups present a more faithful likeness. None does so perfectly. Thus,...the language of Scripture is the language of grace; namely, 'You as believers are the church; now meet in such a manner as to give an accurate expression of this fact to the world.'" --William MacDonald

Spiritual Gifts—1 Peter 4:10, 11

"As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

Christ gives to each believer, by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, some gift or gifts to equip him to serve the Lord and edify other believers. The tendency of allowing the ministry to fall into the hands of one man should be resisted; instead, the Holy Spirit should be free to use the various gifts which Christ has given to the church.

"For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness." --Rom. 12:4-8

Additional Verses

Rom 12--gifts

1 Cor. 12-14--many members, one body

Eph. 4--equipping of the saints for the work

1 Pet. 4:10, 11--each one received a gift

Heb. 2:1-4 (1 Cor. 13:8-13; 2 Cor. 12:12)--sign gifts

Leaders—Tit. 1:5-9

"For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, namely, if any man be above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict."

Leaders in the New Testament were not a separate class; instead, they were mature believers who led by teaching and example.

Leaders were warned in the Scriptures not to "lord it over" those in their care. The example of Scripture points to a plurality of leaders in the local church, not a single pastor.

In Acts 20 we see different terms used to describe the same people. The term elder describes their character--they were spiritually mature men. The term bishop or overseer describes their responsibility--to look over and guard those in their care. And the term shepherd or pastor describes their work--to feed and care for the flock.

Elders in the New Testament were assisted by deacons (deacon means servant), spiritually mature men who helped to take care of physical needs, as well as other tasks.

It is our belief that elders should be the highest authority in the local church--there shouldn't be a federation of churches, a "bishop" over a diocese, or a superintendent over an area. Instead, leadership should be in the hands of local men who are qualified according to 1 Tim. 3 and Tit. 1, not according to a prescribed sequence of preparation.

Additional Verses

1 Tim. 3:1-13, Tit. 1:5-9, Acts 6:3--qualifications
Heb. 11:7, 8, 17, 24-26, 1 Chron. 12:32, 33--qualities
Heb. 13:17--obey
1 Thess. 5:12, 13--highly regard
Eph. 4:11-13--leaders equip the saints
Acts 5:42--teaching and preaching
Acts 11:26--leaders train the saints
Acts 20:17, 28--elder, overseer (bishop), shepherd (pastor)
Phil. 1:1, Acts 15:16, Tit. 1:5--plurality
Tit. 1:5, Acts 14:21-23--leaders appointed
1 Pet. 5:1-4--elders, examples to the flock
1 Tim. 5:19, 20--accusation against elder
Lord's Supper—Acts 20:7

Breaking Bread

This is a worship time, a time to remember our Lord Jesus, His Person and His work. In 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 we read, "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which 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 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.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes."

Participation is for true believers in Himself who are not practicing moral wrongs, nor holding teachings contrary to the Scriptures. This time is open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, where believing men may take part in an orderly manner. This may include requesting a hymn, or leading in prayerful thanksgiving and praise to God. It may also include the reading of an appropriate Scripture portion, with, perhaps, a comment. In this time we seek to intelligently remember Jesus' Person and work, and in particular, His work at Calvary.

Additional Verses

Luke 22:14-20--Jesus
1 Cor. 11:23-30--instructions
1 Cor. 10:16, 17--one bread
Acts 2:42, 46, 20:7--example of once a week

Finances--Pro. 3:9, 10

"Honor the LORD from your wealth, and from the first of all your produce;
So your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine."

The church should receive its finances from those who are within. Christian giving is an act of worship. All that a Christian has belongs to God; believers are to act as stewards, using all he has to bring glory to God. Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 16:2, "Now concerning the collection for the saints....On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper...." Funds of the church should be used for widows in the assembly, for the poor saints, and for those who devote their time to the work of the Lord.

Additional Verses

Prov. 3:9, 10--honor Lord
2 Cor. 9:6-15--cheerful giver
1 Cor. 16:2--1st day of week
Gal. 6:6--one taught share
1 Tim. 5:17, 18--support leaders
1 Tim. 5:9, 10--widows
1 Jn. 3:17, 18, Acts 6:1-6--those in need
Luke 6:38, Phil. 4:19--promises
1 Tim. 6:9-11--warning
Acts 20:35--more blessed

Church Discipline

"A church's testimony is not harmed by people of all sorts attending gospel services or other meetings where the Bible is preached or taught. But as soon as people are allowed to partake of the communion and are recognized as is fellowship with the believers as fellow-Christians, it becomes the duty of the leadership of the church to discipline any who lead lives that are immoral or careless, or

any who spread false doctrine. Many churches have no discipline at all today for fear of losing members. Also a person may be under discipline in one area or group and then be accepted in another as if nothing were wrong. The whole purpose of discipline is to restore the erring ones to fellowship. Tact and grace are imperative in this, but if the church is to be holy, as God commands, warnings must be made to the unruly (1 Thessalonians 5:14). The disorderly are to be avoided (2 Thessalonians 3:11,14,15) along with those who sow discord (Romans 16:17), and heretics are to be flatly rejected (Titus 3:10). A heretic in the New Testament is one who causes division by embracing false views on important doctrinal matters. The final form of discipline is excommunication (1 Corinthians 5:11,13). This should be done gravely, and should extend to the immoral, greedy, idolatrous, railing, drunken, and extortioners. All discipline should be fair, and church matters should be kept within the confines of the congregation. If some of the totally disqualified persons now claiming fellowship in certain otherwise sound congregations were disciplined, perhaps we would see more of God's blessing in the gospel testimony."

--from *Basic Bible Doctrines* by R.E. Harlow

Additional Verses

2 Thess. 3:6-15--keep aloof

1 Cor. 5 (2 Cor. 2)--not to associate

Tit. 2:11, 12--deny ungodliness

Heb. 12:6--whom the Lord loves He disciplines

1 Jn. 5:16, 17--sin leading to death

Matt. 18:15-20--reprove in private

Gal. 6:1--restore in gentleness

2 Cor. 13:1--testimony of two or three witnesses

1 Tim. 5:19--accusation against elder

Women's Role

Scripture declares that "...there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal.3:28); women are fellow-heirs of the grace of life (1 Pet. 3:7). Although women are of equal worth and value in the sight of God as men, the Bible does portray different roles for men and women. As believers we should follow the instructions found in His Word.

"The role of women in the assembly is one of silence in the church. The New Testament exhorts the woman not to teach or rule over man in the church. But she is given the privilege of showing in symbol the church's subjection to the Lord by praying with her head covered....Her sphere of service includes homemaking, kindness and good works, private instruction--particularly to the younger women, and her personal testimony...." --Merrill Oster

Additional verses: Gal.3:28, 1 Pet. 3:7, 1 Cor. 11:2-16, 1 Cor. 14:34, 35, 1 Tim. 2:11-15, 1 Cor. 11:5-10, Tit. 2:4, 5, 1 Pet. 3:1-4

Purpose

"Paul's skill as a missionary is nowhere more marked than in his success as a church planter. As an effective evangelist hundreds came to know Christ through his preaching. He also excelled as a teacher and trainer of people. As a faithful parent trains his children so Paul brought to maturity his spiritual children. His crowning activity, however, was that he formed churches from the believers who had been evangelized and taught. The planting of churches was the third and final step in the strategy of Pauline mission (Acts 14:21-23)...Paul looked at the local church as a dynamic organism. Its life was that of Christ Himself. Its unity was maintained through His presence. Its direction and purpose were from Him. Paul expected to plant these organisms wherever he went with the gospel. He nurtured them with a view to growth both qualitatively and quantitatively. He established them so they could thrive and grow in the cultural setting of the community. He encouraged them to reproduce themselves in the surrounding communities and, by extension, in distant places. Living organisms grow and reproduce if they are healthy. Paul viewed the churches in this way....He saw the church as an organism designed by God to function in accomplishing God's purposes. That function was in general to glorify God....In glorifying God the church, as Paul saw it, was to function in three directions. The first function was in relation to God, upward. The churches were gatherings of believers for worship....The second great function of the church as Paul viewed it was inward, toward its own members. They were to be built up in the faith, brought to maturity. They were to grow up. The risen Lord gave spiritual gifts such as teaching to people in the church to provide for its growth (Eph. 4:8-13)...Within this inward function there was room for admonition and discipline....Another side of the inner functioning of the church is that of fellowship or 'koinonia.' The local church functions so that its members share a common life. This is true in the spiritual life as well as in the social life. It even includes financial sharing. Fellowship is that which binds the Christians together.

"The third great functioning of the church was outward toward the unbelieving world around them. Christ is building His church (Matt. 16:18). At the heart of what God is doing in this age is the fact that _He is taking out from among the Gentiles a people for His name' (Acts 15:14). Paul taught that evangelism must be central in the function of the church. The church was not only the goal of evangelistic activity, it was the base for evangelism in the New Testament. To the Thessalonian church Paul said, _For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place' (1 Thess. 1:8)...God designed it so that believers would be saved, then taught to grow to maturity, and finally gathered into a local church. From the strength of the local church fellowship they were to reach out, to evangelize, teach, and plant other local churches which would then repeat the process....When healthy churches function in this way, the result is the most efficient and satisfactory means of world evangelism. It is the key to world evangelism." --from "Paul the Church Planter" by Kenneth Fleming