

BASICS • Part 8 – The Church

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Top Ten Ways To Know You're In The Wrong Church*

10. The pastor refers to God only as "Jehovah" and constantly exhorts the congregation to "witness".
9. The pastor attends monthly conferences in Las Vegas and Rio de Janeiro.
8. Instead of a cross on the front of the pulpit, it's a gold dollar sign.
7. The Women's *Quartet* is married to the pastor.
6. John 3:16 on the wall in the Fellowship Hall has been replaced with the slogan, "Big Brother Is Watching You!"
5. The Pastor preaches a knock out sermon on ancient heresies and the elders want to make them part of the doctrinal statement.
4. On Monday nights the pastor is known as "The Undertaker." (find a WWF fan and they'll explain it to you)
3. The Pastoral Search Committee announces that they discovered a problem with their *one good* candidate - *she's divorced!*
2. The media refers to the church facilities as a "compound".
1. The New Members kit includes a Bible, church statement of faith, and an UZI.

B. *The Church – What Is It?*

1. People have many ideas about what the church is.
2. Most of those ideas are drawn from childhood experiences of going to church now and again.
 - a. what they tend to remember is sitting in a hard pew,
 - b. listening to some boring old guy drone on for what seemed like forever
3. Others, who never went to church when they were younger, glean their ideas of what church is from the movies and TV shows like *Seventh Heaven*, or the obligatory Roman Catholic church in a horror film.
4. What we're concerned with today is understanding what God means by The Church.
 - a. what does He see?
 - b. what does God intend the Church to be and to do?
6. The Bible has a lot to say about the Church, but the best place to begin is with 1 Peter 2 . . .

II. WHAT THE CHURCH IS • 1 PETER 2:4-5, 9-11A

A. *Visible & Invisible*

1. Peter wrote this letter, not to any one person or church, as so many of the Apostle Paul's letters were
2. This was a general letter, meant to be sent out and distributed in the 5 provinces of the Roman empire the Church had spread to
3. As the leader of the Apostles, Peter sent this letter out as a way to *unite* them

- all under the same set of truths
4. And here in chapter 2, he tells them how God sees them . . .
 - 4 **Coming to Him [Jesus] as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God *and* precious,**
 - 5 **you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.**
 5. Peter then quotes from the prophet Isaiah and Psalm 118 which both speak of the Messiah as the *cornerstone* of the work of God
 6. Of course, it was natural for Peter to think of the Church as a *building*; the very first time Jesus had spoken of the *Church*, He had referred to it in this way . . . [Matt. 16:18]

I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

7. Peter understood that because of the resurrection, Jesus is the *living* cornerstone of the church.
8. And each time a person is saved, they are quarried out of the pit of sin and cemented by grace into the Church, which he calls here a “spiritual house.”
9. Paul uses this same picture in Ephesians 2:19-22
- 19 **Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,**
- 20 **having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*,**
- 21 **in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,**
- 22 **in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.**
10. Though Peter wrote this letter to believers living throughout the Empire, he said that they *all* belonged to *one* “spiritual house.”
 - a. the first word of v. 5 – “you” is plural = “you all”
 - b. Peter sees the Church as *one*, though it was scattered across the earth
11. That’s the ***first thing*** we need to realize about the Church: There is a *unity* of God’s people that transcends all local and individual groups and congregations.
12. When we talk about the “church,” we need to be careful to distinguish between the *real Church*, which is *invisible* and *universal* and the *visible church*, which is seen in local congregations and denominations
 - a. the two are *related*, but they are not the same
 - b. what *God* calls the Church is comprised of all men, women, and children who have been born again and who are indwelt by the Spirit of God, as we saw last week.
 - c. that Church is invisible and universal, or *catholic*
 - 1) “catholic” simply means *universal*
 - 2) don’t be confused with the term *Roman Catholic* – that’s altogether something different

- 3) in it's *proper* sense, *all true believers* in Christ are catholic, not Roman Catholic; just catholic, because they are part of the *Universal* and Invisible Church
 - 4) they may attend a Methodist church, or be part of a Presbyterian congregation, or they may even participate in an independent, non-denominational group – it doesn't matter where they *go*;
 - 5) if they're indwelt by the Spirit of God, they are a part of the *Church*.
13. ***Second*** – This Universal, Invisible Church meets in *local, visible groups* that we call local congregations or churches. [Revelation 1-3]
- a. these local groups, for purposes of identification, call themselves by different names
 - b. so we have the First Baptist Church of Oxnard, First Baptist Church of Ventura, Camarillo Christian Church, CCO, Ventura Missionary Church, First Assembly of God in Port Hueneme
 - c. over time, different *movements* have emphasized different distinctives and ways of doing the work of the Church.
 - d. these movements become *denominations* like the Presbyterians, the Lutherans, the Baptists, and the Methodists.
 - e. some churches form with a mind to stay *independent* from current denominations
 - f. while some people are disturbed by all the groups that are out there, seeing them as a sign of *disunity*, personally, for the most part, I rejoice that God has provided so many different local churches.
 - 1) the reason I say that is that I know from experience that people are *different*
 - 2) we have different tastes and needs
 - 3) in His infinite wisdom and grace, God provides a rich and varied landscape of local congregations so that everyone can find a place to fit in.
 - g. now, this is not to say that every local church is something pleasing to God
 - h. and here is where we need to make an important distinction . . .
14. From God's perspective, The Church is *all true believers*, regardless of where they live or what local fellowship they attend -
15. While any specific local congregation may very well be comprised of people who are *both* saved ***AND*** those who aren't!
16. In other words, to be part of ***God's*** Church you have to be saved, but all members of a ***local*** church may not be.

B. A Spiritual House

1. Look at how Peter describes God's Church in v. 5 - we are a *spiritual house*
2. As living stones, God is cementing us to one another to construct a habitation He may dwell in
3. How important it is that we grasp this truth – the Church is the place in which God seeks to manifest Himself
4. In the OT, though the heavens themselves were not big enough to contain the glory of God, yet He chose to manifest His glory in a special way in the

- Tabernacle, and then later in the Temple in Jerusalem
5. In His mercy and grace, God made these *special places* where man could meet with Him and worship Him – where fellowship between God and man could find it's *fullest expression*
 6. Well, the Tabernacle and Temple are no more, and there's a reason for that – because of the Cross, God is not longer limited to just one geographic expression of His glory
 7. The Church has become the Temple of God – the House He indwells
 8. And it's His desire that each local congregation be an expression of His glory, His radiance and truth shining out to enlighten a dark world
 9. While it's true that the Spirit of God indwells each believer individually – there is something incredibly special when the people of God gather together in one place to unite their hearts in glorifying God
 10. When we see an actual expression of the universal, invisible Church gathering in a visible way, there is a spiritual dynamic that unites us and results in the glory of God being made manifest.
 11. I believe the very best evangelism we can do as a church is to worship and praise our God with all of our hearts when we gather here
 - a. we reach the lost best by being who and what we are
 - b. not hiding behind slick marketing programs to try and sell religion
 12. When sinners find Christians sitting at the banqueting table of God's presence, enjoying Him and being satisfied by His fullness, it makes them hungry!
 13. I received a press clipping a couple weeks ago that I found very interesting
 - a. it was about George Barna's most recent study
 - b. Barna is a pollster who has focused on church issues for years
 - c. he has been at the forefront of studying the seeker-sensitive style of church growth and has been a leading proponent of it
 - d. but recent studies have caused him to conclude that seeker services may not be the best way to reach the unchurched.
 - e. Barna has found that churches who have fared *best* at drawing newcomers have done "little, if anything, to alter the style of services they offer."
 - f. two years of research have led him to conclude: "Other things were more important to outsiders than whether or not the service has been designed to minimize traditional religious trappings and approaches - other elements make a bigger difference than the style of music, the nature of the sermon or whether or not an offering is taken."
 - g. his conclusion is that churches who center their ministry on glorifying God rather than enticing man reach more people
 14. To be the Church means to be a spiritual house in which God dwells in a special way

C. A Holy Priesthood

1. Next, in v. 5, Peter calls the church a holy priesthood –
2. This was a radical change from the OT: There Israel *had* a priesthood, but now God's people *are* a priesthood
3. When Jesus died, the veil in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom;

God was saying that the barrier between God and man has been removed and now all are welcome into His presence through the blood of Christ.

4. The duty of a priest is two-fold;
 - 1) he represents the people to God
 - 2) then represents God to the people
5. If you are a Christian, it means you are a priest!
 - a. you come before God with the needs of those around you
 - b. and then you stand before others as God's ambassador
6. And as Peter says here, your office is a *holy* one – this is a holy priesthood
7. You and I are set apart from the mundane and profane things of this world to the unique and special purposes of God
8. God has a special calling on your life!

D. V. 9-11a

1. Look at v. 9 – there we find more of what it means to be the Church . . .

9 But you are a chosen generation,

- a. Christian, God chose YOU! Let that sink in – God chose you.
- b. He chose you to be part of His people; that word “generation” means “group”
- c. in this context, we could translate it as *team*
- d. think of it this way; remember when you were a kid and your friends would decide to play a game in which you had to choose sides?
- e. well, God has composed His team – and He picked you and me and all those who comprise the Church to be on that team
- f. and guess what; we are absolutely on the winning side!

a royal priesthood,

- g. here Peter adds the title of *royalty* to the holy priesthood he mentioned in v. 5
- h. as Christians, we're not only priests, we're children of God, and because He is King, that makes us *royalty* by virtue of our relationship to Him.
- i. it's largely lost on us today, but people of the ancient world longed for a ruler who was the supreme embodiment of both religious and political power – they all longed for a priest-king
- j. maybe we *can* relate to that today – wouldn't it be incredible if the man we elected to the office of president was not only supremely skilled in making political decisions on the governing of our country, from both the domestic and economic issues to foreign affairs, but also was the most godly and spiritually mature man at the same time?
- k. that's what we have in Jesus Christ – He is a Priest-King;
- l. and as His followers, we've been ushered into His service as royal priests & priestesses

a holy nation,

- m. when you travel overseas, and as you are preparing to land in a foreign country, you have to fill out a form for customs

- n. on it there's a box stating your citizenship
- o. whenever I fill it out, I'm proud to mark down the letters - USA!
- p. but I always smile, because while it's the answer I'm supposed to write, inside I know that isn't my real citizenship
- q. I am far more a citizen of the Kingdom of God than the Republic of the United States of America
- r. friends, the Church is a holy nation
 - 1) in this nation we share the common language of love and truth
 - 2) we share a culture of grace
 - 3) and our lifestyle is determined by the Word & Spirit of God
- s. Christians who travel to other parts of the world will all tell you the same thing – no matter where you go, no matter what language barriers there are, or the color of the skin or the shape of the houses and style of the clothing, there is a spiritual bond that unites genuine believers that transcends all these things and makes us *one*

His own special people,

- t. these words convey the idea of ownership and belonging
 - u. the old King Jimmy translates this as “a *peculiar* people” but this makes it sound like to be a Christians means to be strange.
 - v. that is not what's in view here – the point is, The Church BELONGS to God!
 - 1) while it is true that God loves all people, He lavishes a special love on the Saved
 - 2) they are special to Him!
 - 3) let me use an example, imperfect as it is
 - a) this is my Palm Pilot
 - b) while I like *all* Palm Pilots, only this one belongs to me – I bought this one!
 - c) and because it's uniquely mine, I've written all my important information on it
 - d) in a way, my mind and heart are found in here
 - e) while I like *all* Palm Pilots, quite frankly, I only *care* for this one, because it belongs to me
 - f) I bought a new case for it this week because the old one wore out' this new case is cushioned and keeps it from getting damaged
 - g) I am very careful with my Palm Pilot, protective, jealous
 - h) here's some PDA for my PDA
 - w. the Church is special to God, it belongs to Him, and so He guards and cares for us in a way He doesn't, the rest of the world
2. In vs. 10 & 11 Peter says . . .
- 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.**
- 11 Beloved, I beg *you* as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,**
- a. I wish we had time this morning to talk about what it means to be the

people of God

- b. about what it means that we are *sojourners*, travelers, and people on a *pilgrimage* to heaven
- c. but I'll have to leave it to you to study these things on your own
3. We have some more ground to cover this morning – we need to take a look at the Mission of the Church . . .

III. THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH • EPHESIANS 4:11-16

A. *The Mission*

1. It's in Ephesians 4 that we find the Mission of the Church
2. When I use the word, "mission" most people probably think of World Missions & evangelism
3. They think of *missionaries* !
4. They think of Matthew 28:19 as being the mission of the Church

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.

5. But that's not the *mission* of the church- that's the Church's *commission*
6. "Going" is just the first step of the real mission of the Church, which is found in Ephesians 4

11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,

7. Why? To what end? What's the focus of the ministry of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers? We find out in v. 12 . . .

12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

8. Who here is saved? Who is in full-time ministry?
9. Tell me – who does the work of ministry in the church?
 - a. everyone!
 - b. let's face it; most people think that it's the job of the paid staff to do the work of the church – after all, that's why we pay them!
 - c. but that's not what we find here
 - d. the job of the pastor is to equip the people so *they* can do the work of the ministry
 - e. the minister is not the guy behind the pulpit – the ministers are all the people in the chairs
 - f. the pastor's job is to edify, to build people up so they have the proper tools to minister effectively
10. And as everyone works together, we labor in the same direction, which is found in v. 13

13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

11. There you have it! It is so critical that we understand this – the Mission of the Church *is to become like Christ!*

12. Our goal is to be *spiritually mature*, finally measuring up to the image of Christ
13. If you're a Christian, then understand what God is doing in your life is conforming you to the image of Jesus Christ - **Rom. 8:29**

Whom God foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

14. *Everything* that happens in our lives, both big and small, has this end in sight, whether we are conscious of it or not.
15. God is working every moment of our lives both in our sight and behind the scenes in ways we will never know, to make us more like Jesus
16. The Church is a spiritual factory where dead, wretched sinners go in one end and living, glorified saints come out the other
117. What we need to see is that *each and every member* of the Body of Christ plays a *vital role* in the Church – look at v. 14 . . .
- 14 **that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,**
- 15 **but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—**
- 16 **from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.**
18. Paul uses his favorite analogy of the Church being a *living body*
 - a. the only way a body is healthy is when every part is pulling it's weight and doing it's share
 - b. when that's the case, all the parts benefit from what each part does
 - c. the result, health – strength!
 - d. but when certain parts of the body don't do their job or shut down, we call that disease
19. The Mission of the Church is to Grow and become more and more like Christ.
 - a. that's the mission of the *Whole Church* -
 - b. the mission of *individual believers*
 - c. and it's the mission of *local congregations*
20. Paul says here that that mission is lived out in the context of spiritual *unity* and mutual care for one another.
 - a. look at v. 13 again . . .

till we all come to the unity of the faith

- b. look at v. 16 . . .
- 16 **from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.**
 - c. now look at how Paul begins this chapter, vs. 1-3
- 1 **I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called,**

- 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love,
- 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
21. Paul drives the point home about unity because he well understood how critical spiritual unity is in the Church
22. Listen to Jesus pray in John 17 . . .
- 20 “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word;
- 21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.
- 22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one:
- 23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.
- a. look at how Jesus links the success of evangelism to the spiritual unity of His people
 - b. He asked His Father to make the oneness of His followers to be like the unity He shared with the Father
23. In John 13:35, by what means did Jesus say the world would know we were His people? By our love for one another!

B. Unity

1. Jump back to Ephesians 4:3
endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
2. That word “endeavor” means to exert concerted effort toward something
 - a. it’s an intense and urgent word
 - b. it pictures an emergency, something that demands immediate attention so that we drop other things to do this one thing
3. There are two main ways we can keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace
 - a. first, we need to take serious thought to doing what Paul says in vs. 11-16
 - 1) we need to be actively serving one another
 - 2) we need to be discovering, cultivating, and using our spiritual gifts
 - 3) the best place to do that is in a smaller and more intimate setting
 - 4) home groups provide the perfect context for this
 - 5) in fact, meeting here on Sundays and Wednesdays and then in homes & small groups throughout the rest of the week is a close parallel to what we find the early church doing in Acts 2 [42-47]
 - a) they met in the Temple to listen to the Apostles teaching,
 - b) then they met from house to house to break bread, and minister to one another
 - c) in the same way, we meet here as the larger fellowship for corporate worship and to listen to the Word of God

- d) then we meet in the home to share our lives and take care of each others needs
- 6) if you are not part of a home group – and we have several now – then make it a priority to plug in to one
- b. second, each of us needs to be on guard to protect our spiritual unity from the attempt of the enemy to break it
 - 1) satan hates it when the people of God are united because it spells His defeat
 - 2) remember, Jesus said that He would build His church, and the gates of hell would not be able to stand against it
 - 3) when Christians are in genuine spiritual unity, the fortifications of hell come tumbling down
 - 4) so the devil works overtime to divide Christians from one another
 - 5) the problem is, all too often, Christian are his unwitting accomplices
 - 6) instead of being on guard and defending unity, they take little things and turn them into big things.
 - 7) instead of being gracious and forgiving minor offences, they harbor them and nurture their hurt and turn them from molehills into mountains they are willing to die on.

IV. CONCLUSION

A. *Make It Right*

1. This morning, if there's someone in this fellowship with whom you find yourself at odds – you need to get that settled now, today, before you leave.
2. In a couple minutes as we end, if you realize the need to be reconciled to someone
3. Take the time to either sit where you are or come up to the front here, and just you and the Lord, ask Him to forgive *you* for harboring disunity in your heart toward your brother or sister.
4. Then, find that person, and make amends – make that relationship right because it is nothing less than God's will that you do so.
5. If someone comes to you today attempting to make that relationship right, then you are duty bound as a believer to listen and work for genuine unity in the Spirit with that person
6. Think what God can do with a local congregation that is in unity – where outsiders look at us as we love and serve each other!