

Living as a Church I
(The N/C Community)

Welcome to the first meeting of a new adult SS series entitled: "Living as a Church."

For the next 11 weeks we will explore the identity/purpose/priority/practice of the glorious institution that the Bible calls, "the Church." The assembly of God's N/C community of believers in Jesus Christ.

The goal and purpose of this study is that all of us gain a clear Biblical vision of the church as well as our shared life together as members.

**To the end that we all would become mature/Biblical churchmen and churchwomen, that the Scriptures would become more and more our only rule of faith and practice. Therein lies the foundation of a high view of the church.

{expand: matter of the Heart/Faith/Confession of things unseen and eternal rather than a mere document stating what you believe about the church}

With that goal and purpose, let's begin our study with what I am calling:

I. Foundational Texts

*Now allow me to clarify what I mean in this first major heading. Foundational texts could mean every text in the Bible that has reference to the church. Not my purpose.

I want to draw your attention to one of main texts that are designed to implant in your mind a vision of what is behind the curtain of flesh in order that you might know and understand the eternal and unseen realities that are operative in every true church of Jesus Christ.

**Dynamics that can only be grasped by faith.

(2 Cor 4:18) we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

(5:7) We walk by faith, not by sight.

**Our primary focus as we consider what the Bible teaches us about this institution for which Jesus Christ shed His blood, is not a building/a particular denomination/form of government/a certain confessional statement/a flawed people led by flawed men. No, if those things are your primary focus, you will be bitterly disappointed, which may well tempt you to step on the church hopping merry go round looking for those very things elsewhere that might better suit your taste.

But aren't those things important? Yes, a thousand times yes. Important but not the most important. All temporal. It is the unseen eternal dynamics that must have an iron grip on our minds/wills/emotions, as we work out our salvation together as the N/C community.

Turn in your Bibles please to (Ephesians 3). I want to read the section in which our key text is found {vs 1-13}.

Before we look at (vs 10) let's go back to (Chap 2) where Paul lays the groundwork for what he is saying here.

(Eph 2:11-22)

Instead of reading another long passage allow me to just sketch in what Paul is saying which forms the rich deposit of truth in (2:10).

*The book of Ephesians is all about God's redemptive purposes in forming a new people in, through and by the saving work of the LJC.

*This "new people" of God includes all the people of the world, not just Jews, but every tongue, tribe, and nation.

*God is breaking down all the racial barriers as He draws together both Jew and Gentile as one (read (14-16))

**Paul then begins to describe the church in analogous terms as the peculiar institution appointed by God/established by JC in which His new people/new humanity are to dwell together in peace flowing from the saving/reconciling cross work of Christ.

(vs. 19-22) {Read/expand}

All of the glorious spiritual reality that Paul expresses in (2:11-22) funnels down into (3:10).

Consider with me just two features of this foundational text. {What is being made known and to whom}

1. (What?) "Manifold Wisdom" of God
"is made known," revealed/expressed in the church. Referring to the "many colored" ways in which the redemption of God's new people has been brought about and is now being proclaimed in visible expression. {plug in (2:11-23) to get a better understanding}
2. (To whom) To the unseen angelic beings, who marvel at the purpose of God in redemption uniting hostile sections of mankind in one body gaining insight into the wonderful wisdom of God.

They were there when God spoke the world into being, when He hung the sun and moon and stars, when He formed man from the dust and the woman from Adam's rib. The majesty and mystery of it all must have dazzled them in wide eyed wonder. But nothing like this. The fulness of God's redemptive purpose displayed in the church!! The culmination of the prophetic distinctives of the O/C. The manger/the cross/atonement/resurrection. The saving work of the LJC drawing together this diverse group of redeemed vessels of the Holy Spirit. Wow

Brethren, this is what is going on behind the curtain when we gather as Christ's church.

***My point is this. If this Biblical reality ever gets hold of you it will transform your view of the church. It will encourage and feed your faith to see the church as the heavenly begins see it in all its wonder and beauty. It will help you get beyond the flesh. The aggravating irritations we all experience as redeemed sinners dwelling together.

Also it will help you to grasp the other distinctives that the Bible teaches us concerning the church with a proper sense of conviction as to the crucial importance of the church and your relationship to it!!

**It will give you a better understanding of what Paul means in (Eph 3:20-21) {Read}

Now with those unseen and eternal realities concerning the church (this church), as our backdrop let's consider some of the other theological distinctives concerning the church.

Our second major heading:

II. Theological Identify of the Church

Under this heading we will explore several theological terms that apply to the church that will help us to formulate a more comprehensive understanding of the Biblical/theological material.

1. The Church as the N/C Community

As you all are well aware, we live in the place of redemptive history known as the N/C.

(Lu 22:20) "this cup which is poured out for you is the N/C in my blood."

(2 Cor 3:6) "our sufficiency is from God, ⁶ who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit."

And the key text from the words of our Lord Himself:
(Matt 16:18) "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church."

Therefore from these texts (many more) we understand the church to be the N/C community. {or "The church of JC"}

Now and important distinctive of Baptist conviction has to do with the membership of the church.

Who, according to the witness of Scripture are to be considered members of this community?

(1 Cor 1:1-3) {Read}

Believers only is the clear teaching of Paul's salutation as it is with many others.

So we conclude that the N/T Scriptures teach that only those attached to Jesus Christ/in union with Him through faith are attached to His church/the N/C community.

*We have a problem, don't we?? Though the design of the church/ideal of the church is believers only you don't have to read very far to find sin manifested in the church to such a point that a member is excommunicated (1 Cor 5) (Matt. 18:17). You plug in the warning passages in (Heb ??).

How do we understand this sometimes confusing/seemingly contradictory reality?

{Explain: De Jure/De Facto, ideal/real, ??/not yet as it applies to purity of church. IS is corporate as well as individual}

**Strive for the ideal.

2. The Church as Universal/Local

As you read the N/T it will become obvious that the church is referenced to at times in universal terms.

(Matt 16:18) "I will build my church."

(Eph 5:25) "Husbands love your wives, etc."

(Eph 5:32) "This mystery is great, but I am speaking with reference to..etc."

But what is much more obvious, the church is referenced to in local terms most of the time (about 90%).

(1 Cor 1:2) “to the church of God which is at Corinth.”

(Rom 1:7) “to the beloved of God in Rome: Grace to you and peace.”

Jerusalem/Ephesus/Philipi/Thessolonica/seven churches in Asia Minor.

And we could multiply those texts.

Here is the point. This distinction that we see in the Bible teaches us that there is a unity among the plurality.

The church is one body expressed in many local assemblies.

That is one of the reasons we maintain relationships with other assemblies (pray for them/reports/preachers)

3. The Church as Visible/Invisible

{How many of you have heard this confusing terminology? Anybody want to briefly explain?}

This distinction is a theological construct rooted in the historic confessions but NOT in the Scriptures. {Our own confession refers to it carefully}

(Chap 26:1) “The universal church (with respect to the internal work of the Spirit) may be called invisible.

But is that totally accurate?

(Acts 11:23) {Barnabas sent to Antioch} “When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted ..” {saw/witnessed/observed}

(Matt 7:15f) {Warning against false prophets “wolves in sheeps clothing}

Two trees {expand}

(vs 20) “You will recognize them by their fruits.”

(Rom 1:20) “For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world.”

Hear me If you choose to refer to the innerworking of the HS in the hearts of the elect as invisible, that is fine. Many good solid systematic theologians do. {Wayne Grudem}. But you must stop short of identifying the church as being an invisible entity.

Murray, “The distinction between the church visible and the church invisible is not well grounded in Scripture, and the abuses to which the distinction has been subjected

requires correction.” (1. Church membership, 2. Mixed congregations. Don’t need to join any church, children, apostates, etc.)

4. The Unity (Oneness) of the Church as an Institution

Is there a connection between O/C Israel (O/C community) and the church (N/C community) and if so, how do we understand it? {Lesson in itself – be brief}

(Deut 9:10) {Context/Read} (10:4, 18:16) as well.

The “assembly” is the covenant people of God gathered before Him.

(Ex. 19:5-6) {Context/Read}

Now both of these events are referenced in the N/T.

(Acts 7:38) {Read}

(1 Peter 2:9-10) {Read}

**Definitely a connection. How do we understand it?

Same?? {Relate present view that church began in (Gen 12:17) or did it begin at Pentecost}

**Type/antitype. Continuity/discontinuity. Church is the fulfillment of the prophetic function of O/C community.

5. Figurative Expressions that Describe the Church

Help me with this exercise. It will give us a sense of pervasive emphasis on the church in the N/T.

- Body of Christ
- Temple of God
- Temple of HS
- New Jerusalem
- Heavenly Jerusalem
- Pillar & ground of truth
- God’s Field
- God’s Building
- God’s Household
- Bride of Christ

- Chosen Race
- Holy Nation
- Royal Priesthood
- True Circumcision

Close with exhortation. You are part of the most significant institution in the universe. According to (Eph 1:22-23), the church is at the center of the eternal rule of the risen/exalted/enthroned Christ.

“and he put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church (for the church), which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

**If you will believe that, it will transform your thinking/transform your view of the church.