

Growing in the Body of Christ—His Church

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Central Truth:

Growing as a follower of Christ is not an isolated venture. We are called to be intricately connected to the Body of Christ—His Church.

INTRODUCTION:

How many times have you heard the phrase, “I don’t need to go to church; I can worship God just as well at home or on the lake or on the golf course?” Sadly, many Christians carry this outlook on the church. But, the church is so much more than just a place to worship—it is a living organism made up of followers of Jesus Christ from all over the world from all of eternity. Changing the way you view the church has enormous implications as you continue to grow as a follower of Christ. Why? Because growing as a follower of Christ is not an isolated venture. We are called to be intricately connected to the Body of Christ—His Church.

1 GOD’S UNIVERSAL CHURCH

When you hear the word ‘church’, what comes to mind?

The word ‘church’ may have different meanings to different people based on past or current experiences—whether positive or negative. Therefore, it is important to gain a biblically focused view of the church. Why? Because cultural perceptions are often times different from Biblical teachings.

The Bible speaks of ‘church’ in two different ways. The way most people think of church is the local church on the street corner (or little “c” church). This will be discussed in more detail in a moment. But, the Bible also speaks of God’s universal Church (or Big “C” Church)—comprised of all followers of Jesus Christ of all time worldwide.

God’s universal Church (or Big “C” Church)

Read Colossians 1:18.

What metaphor does the Apostle Paul use to describe the church?

In this metaphor of the church, what role does Christ have in the church?

Read Ephesians 5:25-27.

According to this passage, what did Jesus do for the church?

For what purposes did He do this?

What does this suggest about who is a part of God’s universal Church?

Throughout the New Testament, God's church is called the Body of Christ. Followers of Christ from all across the globe make up God's universal church. Christ Jesus died for the Church and gave Himself up for her in order to make members of His Church (those who have professed Him as Lord) pure and holy.

Differing names for members of God's Church

The most common title for members of God's Church is "Christians". The Scriptures give several differing titles for those who have put their trust in Jesus Christ. Read the following Scriptures and identify the given name of Christ's followers...

*Romans 1:7

*Acts 2:44

*Acts 11:26

*Acts 14:21

As a member of the Body of Christ, you are a part of a global community of believers. Within Scripture, members of this community are referred to by various titles: saints, believers, Christians, and disciples among others. Knowing these differing names helps you see the continuity of Scripture and the way God sees members of His universal Church.

2 THE LOCAL CHURCH

In addition to being a member of God's universal church through salvation in Jesus Christ, followers of Christ are also instructed to be a part of a local body of believers—or little "c" church. This is what you probably think of when thinking about church. But, why should you be a part of a local church? Once again, let's turn to Scripture.

Believers are commanded to be connected to a local church.

Read Hebrews 10:25.

According to this passage, why are believers to continue meeting together?

Read Hebrews 3:13.

Linking these two passages together, why is it important for believers to continue meeting together and encouraging one another?

Believers are commanded to serve in a local church.

Read Romans 12:4-8.

Continuing to use the metaphor of a "body" in describing God's church, what is your function within it?

How does this function differ from culture's general view of the church?

Read Ephesians 4:11-14.

According to this passage, what is the purpose of serving and learning in the church?

What subtlety is given in verse 14 as the tool of maturity and service with in the church?

The church *community* is where we learn to love God and others; where we are strengthened and transformed by truth from the Word; where we're taught to pray, to worship, and to serve; where we can be most certain that we're investing our time and abilities for eternity; where we can grow in our roles as friends, sons and daughters, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers. The church is earth's single best place—God's specially *designed* place—to start over, to grow and to change for the glory of God. That's why I tell people that when they stop dating the church, they're not just adding another item to a long spiritual to-do list. Instead, they're finally getting started on experiencing *all the other blessings* that Jesus promised to His followers as the fruits of the truly abundant life.*

—Joshua Harris

The moment you believed in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you became a member of God's Church—the universal and eternal Body of Christ. Your membership in God's Church is eternally secure in the same way as your salvation. Out of obedience, though, you are instructed to be connected to a local body of believers (or a local church). It is within this local body that you serve using your gifts, draw strength and encouragement through fellow believers, and are given instruction from God's Word to propel you forward in growth and restraining you from falling into sin.

Believers are commanded to walk in unity.

Read John 17:20-23.

What is the dying prayer of Jesus Christ for His Church? (v. 21-22)

For what reason does He desire this? (v. 23)

Because you are still a sinner walking in fellowship with other sinners, there will be times of disunity and disagreement. The Bible, however, gives instructions on how to deal with friction within the Body of Christ.

Read Matthew 5:22-24.

According to Jesus, what is your responsibility to your brother if you have offended him?

Read Matthew 18:15-17; 35.

According to Jesus, what is your responsibility if your brother has offended you?

The dying prayer of Jesus was for His followers to walk in unity and love. This, He says, will show the world that believers in Jesus are a part of Him and God the Father. But, when there is disunity, there are instructions of how to deal with it—whether you are the guilty party or the innocent. Jesus basically teaches that strained relationships with others strain your relationship with Him. So, in order to be in right relationship with Him, be in right relationship with others.

3 THE GREAT COMMISSION

At the close of Jesus' time on earth, He gives a final commission to His disciples. It is His call to reciprocate His life and ministry by compelling others to follow Him and reproduce by making more disciples. This is what Christians call "The Great Commission".

Read Matthew 28:19-20.

Within this passage, there is one imperative verb and three participles describing how the action is to take place:

The Church is commanded to MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS.

Are there any exclusions to this command?

Read Revelation 5:9-10.

How is this command illustrated at the final culmination?

Jesus' command for His followers to make disciples was given only once, climactically, at the very end of His earthly ministry. Some might ask, "If it is so crucial, why did Jesus mention it only once?" The reason, no doubt, is that the motivation for reaching others for Christ is innate to the redeemed life. One might as well ask why God's command for man to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28) was given only once. In each case, reproduction in kind is natural to life. The call to make disciples is stated only once because it is natural for the new creation to be reproductive. It would beg the issue to repeat what is so basic.*

—John MacArthur

Believers are to live missional lives—GO.

Based on the definition of the use of the word ‘go’ in this passage, what does this suggest about your everyday life and making disciples?

Jesus makes it clear that we are not to hide behind the walls of a church building. He desires His followers to live lives that are missional—lives that are seeking to share Christ with others by the way they live.

Believers are to be baptized.

Read Acts 2:38.

According to this passage, when is baptism supposed to occur?

Read Matthew 3:13-17.

Following the example of Jesus, in what way should His followers be baptized?

“Go”—This word means “having gone”. It is like Jesus is saying, “As you are living your lives, make disciples.

“Baptized”—to be identified with. With whom? The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit.

“Teaching”—This word carries the connotation of a relational teaching. It is more than simply being taught from the pulpit.

It is crucial to understand that baptism has no saving power. The Bible explicitly says that salvation comes through faith alone. In the book of Acts, baptism comes after repentance. In other words, you are to be baptized (and those whom are evangelized are to be baptized) after coming to faith in Jesus Christ. This is called “Believer’s Baptism”. In following the example of Jesus, this should be done by immersion—or by being fully immersed in water. This has no purpose in salvation; it is an act of obedience telling the world you are identifying with Christ.

Believers are to teach everything Christ has commanded.

Read Luke 6:40.

What does Jesus say must take place for you to become more like Him?

Read Acts 20:27.

What does Paul give as the content that we must teach?

As you grow in your knowledge of Jesus Christ, you are to seek out the “whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). In other words, learn everything in Scripture you can possibly learn. As you learn more, pass these teachings on to those with whom you are seeking to share your life in Christ. This is to be done as you are simply living your life.

CONCLUSION: The church is so much more than a place to attend regularly or irregularly. It is a vibrant, living body of believers from all across the globe that is the personification of Jesus Christ on earth. The Body of Christ is manifested in two distinct ways: 1. God’s universal Church (Big ‘C’ Church) which is the group of believers in Jesus Christ from all across the globe from all time. 2. The local churches (little ‘c’ church) which are local congregations where believers in Jesus Christ meet together for corporate worship, Bible study, encouragement, and missions. As you grow as an obedient follower of Jesus Christ, a piece of that obedience is commitment to His Body—the Church.