

What Is the Church? Selected Text

Preached @ Harambee Church by Pastor Michael Gunn on January 11th, 2009

"How is it possible that the gospel to be credible...I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic (Interpretation) of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it."

Leslie Newbigin

"Mission Exists, because worship doesn't"

John Piper

Intro

What is the church? Seems easy enough, but all too often the church is seen as a place people go to consume its products. However, when we look at what the bible says about the church, we see that it is His body, called together as His family to be instruments of His glory. **The Church Exists to Glorify God!** While worship and mission are not mutually exclusive terms, the church exists for mission, because worship is absent in the land. Everything the church does is mission including its worship, since worship is proclaiming the Excellencies of God in Christ. We actually glorify and magnify Him when are truly satisfied in Him, so mission and worship are connected at the hip. Thus, as pastor John Piper said, the power of mission is worship. Mission is bringing others into a worship relationship (**Psalm 67:3-4; 97:1**).

From the Head...

1. *A Called Out Gathering of God's People* – We can start by using the word that is used in the NT 80 times for Church (*Ecclesia*). It literally means "gathering" and can mean a gathering of anything. It is not a word that has any special spiritual value in and of itself.

The "Church" (*Ecclesia*) can listen and speak (**Matthew 18:17; Acts 11:22**), the "Church" can feel fear (**Acts 5:11**), the "Church" can be persecuted (**Acts 8:1; 12:1**), the "Church" needs to be spiritually fed (**Acts 20:28**), the "Church" can be offended (**1 Corinthians 10:32**) and despised (**1 Corinthians 11:22**), etc. If you see the "Church" as an institution or a building, it would be strange to see that institution/building as able to speak, hear, fear, be oppressed, etc. Obviously it can't, because the "Church" (*Ecclesia/Gathering*) is not a building or institution; it's the "gathering" of God's people. You are the church!

2. *The Body of Christ.* - (**1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 4:12**). The body of Christ is a synonym for the Church or gathering of God's people. We (The Church) are members of Christ's body, meant to be knitted together to glorify Him in our body (See **1 Corinthians 6:20**).¹ The Body of Christ metaphor helps us understand our unity, our diversity, and that Christ is the Head; it specifically emphasizes our gathering is not random, but is in Christ for a unique purpose.

3. *A Dwelling Place For God* – (**Ephesians 2:16-22** cf. **Exodus 25:22; 40:34-35; 1 Kings 8:10-11**). We are created to dwell with the Lord, but sin has marred our ability to fully "Know" the Lord and this relationship is lost in the fall. But Christ came so that this relationship would be restored and established within the "people" (Plural) of God. The idea of the Holy Spirit residing in the individual believer has little theological reference, but the idea that God dwells with His people/family is a substantial truth in the story of God (**Genesis 12:1-3; John 1:12-13; Romans 12:10-16**).

4. *A Place to Mature For Ministry* – (**Ephesians 4:11-16**) Spiritual growth is never meant for individual maturity, but always with the "Work of ministry/service" in mind. All too often we fail to serve because we feel we don't "know" enough, or "that isn't my gift." Ephesians helps us see that those who may be "gifted" in certain areas are called to "equip" others so that the body will be ready and able to do the ministry, and will be united in one faith (See **v. 5**).

5. *A People For His Glory* – (**1 Peter 2:9-11**) The church is a people called out as kingdom priests, to "Proclaim the excellencies of Him!" This can only be accomplished in community. We can only "Love one another" as we make ourselves available and vulnerable with one another as we live out the gospel together before men (See **Philippians 2:15-16**).

...to the Heart

The church is God's called out people to be His witness, as we proclaim and demonstrate the power of the gospel in the body of Christ. We will never fully "Be the gospel," but by His power we can demonstrate the power of the gospel, as we live differently in the midst of an "Alien" land. Literally we are to be "In the world, but not of it." This is how the love of God is perfected (ongoing process) in His "Called Out" people; the church (*Ecclesia*).

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¹ This verse does appear to refer to an individual's body, but I think that we should meditate on its corporate implications.