

ECCLESIOLOGY

The Nature and Purpose of the Church

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The Nature and Purpose of the Church

There is a great need today to understand the essential nature of the church from what the Scripture teaches and not from the role some claim it ought to have in society. Thus we must begin with the word of God in order to get a sense of the kind of entity the church is, and what kind of tasks it ought to be engaged in.

The Classical Greek term; “Ekklesia” is used predominantly throughout the New Testament, (approximately 114 times) to refer to the church. The term most often refers to an “assembly” regularly convened. **(Acts 2:47) (Ephesians 3:10 & 21)**

In the Septuagint (the Greek OT) the term; “Ekklesia” is often used of Israel’s gatherings for religious purposes. **(Deuteronomy 9:10) (2 Chronicles 20:5) (Joel 2:16)**

The term “Ekklesia” in the N.T. can refer to the “church of God” meeting in:

A Home. **(Romans 16:5)**

A particular City. **(1 Corinthians 1:2) (1 Thessalonians 1:1)**

A Region. **(Acts 9:31) (1 Corinthians 16:19)**

When the term is fully understood, we realize that the church is a universal body composed of all true believers in Christ, united in Him by the Spirit. Thus, though there are many local “churches,” there is really only one true church! **(Ephesians 4:4) (Hebrews 12:23)**

This leads naturally to the idea that the church is both visible and invisible. It is invisible in that God knows who is truly a Christian and who is not. It is visible in that there are local expressions of it to which Christians commit themselves. **(2 Timothy 2:19-21)**

Furthermore, it is not necessary to belong to a local church to be a Christian, though, of course, one will want to out of obedience to Christ. And, just because a person goes to church, does not mean they are in fact part of the spiritual body of Christ. **(Hebrews 10:23-25) (John 3:1-6) (1 Corinthians 12:13)**

Metaphorical Expressions in Reference to the Church

The N.T. writers refer to the church using several rich metaphors:

1. The Body of Christ! **(1 Corinthians 12:12-27) (Ephesians 1:22-23)**
2. God’s Family or the Family of God! **(2 Corinthians 6:18)**
3. The Vine and its Branches! **(John 15:1-11)**
4. The Pillar and Ground of the Truth! **(1 Timothy 3:15)**
5. A Building or Living Temple! **(1 Corinthians 3:9 & 16) (Ephesians 2:20-21)**
6. A Holy Nation, a Royal Priesthood! **(1 Peter 2:9)**
7. Salt and Light! **(Matthew 5:13-15) (Acts 13:47) (Colossians 4:5-6)**

The Church and Israel

There are many covenant-amillennial theologians who argue that the church has replaced national Israel in God's plan of blessing and has herself inherited the promises to Israel, thus becoming the new Israel.

They state that the Davidic covenant is now being fulfilled in the church and will be ultimately fulfilled in the eternal state, and that there is, therefore, no future for national Israel and no special future for ethnic Jews either.

On the other hand, there are many Dispensational-premillennial theologians who argue that the church and Israel are distinct and mutually exclusive. *(Note: We are in this Camp)* They claim that the Davidic covenant is not now being fulfilled in the church (since it was made with national Israel), but that it, along with all the other promises God made to Israel, will be fulfilled in the millennium. In this system the two entities of Israel and the church must be kept separate, one fulfilling God's earthly promises and the other His heavenly promises. **(Romans Ch. 11)**

Purpose & Service of the Church

1. The purpose of the church is to carry on the work of Christ in proclaiming the gospel and being a light to the world!

(Matthew 28:18-20) (Acts 1:8) (2 Corinthians 5:17-21) (Acts 13:47)

2. The church is to be a place of Worship, Praise and Prayer.

(1 Timothy 2:1-3) (Philippians 3:3) (Revelation 4:10) (Luke 19:46)

3. The church is to equip the believers in the faith and for ministry.

(Ephesians 4:11-16) (2 Timothy 3:16-4:2)

The Government of the Church

Throughout the history of the church there have been several different, yet basic forms of church government. These include: (1) **Episcopalian** (2) **Presbyterian** (3) **Congregational** (4) **Elder Rule** — (Of which Calvary Chapels Adhere)

In the **Episcopalian** form of church government the archbishop (and there are several) has authority over the bishop who in turn presides over a diocese, i.e., several churches, which are cared for by the rector or vicar. The archbishop, bishop, and rectors are all ordained priests within the Episcopal system of church government. This form of government can be seen in the Methodist, Anglican, and in its most hierarchical form (i.e., many levels of bishops), Catholic church.

In the **Presbyterian** form of church government the local church elects certain elders to the “session,” who become members of a higher governing body called the “presbytery”. Some of the members of the presbytery are chosen by the presbytery to form a synod. There is yet a higher governing body in the Presbyterian Church, referred to as the General Assembly which itself is composed of lay and clergy representatives from the presbyteries. The General Assembly may be responsible for churches in a region or country.

In the **Congregational** form of church government, both the autonomy of the local church and the rights of its members are stressed. The conviction in this system is that there is no evidence in the NT that churches were controlled by other individuals or other churches. In fact, Paul told Titus to establish leaders in the churches from among the people. (Titus 1:5) There is no mention that these leaders were responsible to outsiders for their budget or day-to-day, practical considerations.

The congregation of believers is held in high regard in this system and in this form of government a leader or leaders are chosen (voted on) by the members.

In the **Elder Rule** form of church government, the senior or head Pastor/Elder with the assistance of the other Elders oversees the Spiritual governing of the church. Elders in this form of government are not chosen by, or elect to their office by a Presbytery, or Congregational vote. They are appointed by the Elders as they are led by the Holy Spirit, and as the Eldership bears witness to God’s calling and the qualifications of ministry being evident in their lives.

The New Testament support most fully the idea of a plurality of elders overseeing the local church. **(Acts 6:1-6 & 14:23 & 20:17) (1 Timothy 4:14) (Titus 1:5) (James 5:14) (Hebrews 13:17) (1 Peter 5:1-2)**

The authority of the apostles is communicated to us via the writings they left to instruct us, but there is no need for “presbyteries” or “general assemblies” to which we are to be accountable. Indeed, it has often been these organizations which have caused local churches to go astray doctrinally. Through free and desirable associations with other Christian fellowships, churches and their leaders can maintain high levels of doctrinal and moral purity.

There are certain qualifications that must be met before a person should be considered for the role of elder. **(1 Timothy 3) (Titus 1)**

The principle roles of the elder involve leading, teaching, correcting and protecting the church of God.

Ordinances Given the Church

There are two ordinances given the church by the Lord.

I. They are Water Baptism.

2. The Lord's Supper or Communion.

In **(Matthew 28:19-20)** Jesus told his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations, Baptizing them. Baptizing new believers is an expression of their new life in Christ, the old man is dead and buried, the new man is risen. **(Romans 6:1-11)**

The most common meaning of the verb "to baptize," in the Greek New Testament, is to "immerse," "dip," or "plunge." It does not mean "to sprinkle". **(John 3:23) (Acts 8:37-38)**

This is in keeping with the idea of immersion.

Paul uses water baptism in **(Romans 6:4)** to symbolize the idea of "dying and rising" with Christ. The apparent parallel with "dying and rising" is much more easily understood if immersion is the method that Paul had in mind.

In as much as baptism is an outward sign of an inward spiritual reality, and a new union between Christ and believer, it is to be administered to believers only, not infants.

There are also some who argue that baptism is necessary for salvation and they often refer to **(Acts 2:38)** in support of their views.

I would respond to this argument by saying that the verse should be translated: "Peter said to them, 'Repent, and each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ because of (eis) the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"

Since repentance precedes baptism **(Acts 3:19 & 26:20)** and salvation is given totally by grace **(Ephesians 2:8-10)**, baptism, though joined closely in this passage with believing, must not constitute an essential aspect of a saving response to God.

In **(1 Corinthians 11:23-29)** Paul gives us instruction on "What" and "How" we are to administer the Lord's Supper.

The What: It is to be a "reminder," to us of God's Love and of the great cost He paid to redeem us. That the debt of our sin has been paid, and we are forgiven.

The How: To be taken with the most sober, and soul searching care, so as not to take it likely nor carelessly!

There are two different views on the nature of the Lord's Supper as it relates to the elements, the bread and the wine.

The Roman Catholicism view is called **transubstantiation**. Where it is claimed that the bread and the wine are mysteriously transformed into the literal body and blood of the Lord so that the Lord's body is literally present as the elements..

The Protestants view is called **consubstantiation**. This view simply teaches that the bread and the wine are only symbolic of the body and blood of Christ, why because Christ died and shed is blood for our sins “once” and for all!

(Hebrews 10:12-17) (Note: This is the view we at Calvary Chapel hold)

Gifts Given the Church

He has showered numerous gifts upon us, including the gift of salvation itself.

Furthermore, in keeping with this great salvation is the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, who bestows different spiritual gifts upon each and every member of the body of Christ.

This is the first thing to remember about the spiritual gifts: they are given by God, at His discretion and for the good of the body, and for reaching of this lost world.

May God give His church wisdom, power, and love in the development and exercise of the gifts He has given, and a passion to build up the body of Christ and to reach lost souls for Christ! **(1 Corinthians 12 -13 -14) (Ephesians 4:11-12)**

The Position Given to the Church Eternally

The Church will hold a very unique position in God’s Kingdom.

1. We are Co-heirs with Christ, so all that the Father has given His Son Jesus Christ is ours by inheritance. **(Galatians 4:6-7) (Revelation 21:7)**

2. We will Rule and Reign with Christ over all of His creation. **(2 Timothy 2:12) (Revelation 20:6)**

3. We will be seated on His Throne with Him. **(Revelation 3:21)**

4. We will be given the authority to Judge, even Angels. **(1 Corinthians 6:3)**

5. We will be given the Victors Crown. **(2 Timothy 4:8) (Revelation 4:4)**

6. We will be called the Bride of Christ. **(John 3:28-30) (Revelation 22:17)**

7. We are a Royal Priesthood a Special group of people. **(1 Peter 2:9)**