

## On The Church

Dr. Stan Fleming

### Introduction

The word church:

Somebody once said, “The world at its worst needs the church at its best.”<sup>1</sup>

### I. What is the Church?

- A. If you look up the word in a dictionary it might be defined as “a building that is used for Christian religious services”. The Greek word *Kruiakon* means “the Lord’s house” and the word church is associated with that, but it is also associated with the Greek word *Ekklesia* which means “the called out ones”. In the country of Greece, *Ekklesia* meant the idea of citizens called to assemble for legislative or other community purposes.<sup>2</sup>
- B. Strong’s (1577) *ekklesia*; a *calling out*, a popular meeting, especially a religious congregation (Jewish synagogue or Christian community of members on earth or saints in heaven or both): - assembly, church.
- C. Current statistics on congregations and denominations
  - 1. 4,629,000 Christian congregations
  - 2. 44,000 denominations
- D. Mentioned in the New Testament
  - 1. Church – 80 times
  - 2. Churches – 37 times
- E. Old Testament concepts
  - 1. Old Testament concepts: assembly, congregation; though the word *synagogue* is a New Testament word, the concept of the meeting places of Jews is in the Old Testament (Psalm 74:8) and is still used by Jews to this day.

### II. The New Testament and Basic Ideas about the Church

- A. Jesus introduces and concludes the use of the word *church*:
  - 1. **Matthew 16:18** “I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”
  - 2. **Revelation 22:16** “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star.”

---

<sup>1</sup> Robert Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations, and Quotes* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 119.

<sup>2</sup> John Davis, *Davis Dictionary of the Bible – 4<sup>th</sup> Revised Edition* (Grand Rapid, MI: Baker Book House, 1977), 146.

- B. C.S. Lewis on Church endurance: “The Church will outlive the universe; in it the individual person will outlive the universe. Everything that is joined to the immortal Head will share His immortality.”<sup>3</sup>
- C. Broad usage: The word *church* is used in twenty books of the N.T., by six or seven different authors
- D. Paul uses the word *church* and / or *churches* in eleven of his thirteen epistles.
- E. The book of Matthew is the only gospel that uses the word, but it is used twice by Jesus in important and distinct applications:
  - 1. **Matthew 16:18** – the universal church
  - 2. **Mathew 18:15-20** – the local church
    - i. V. 16, 20 “two or three” (Shows the Lord’s emphasis on gathering together)
    - ii. V. 17 – “church” (a larger gathering than two or three but not the universal church).

### III. Examples of How the Term is Used

- A. Examples of the term *church* in a universal sense:
  - 1. **Ephesians 3:10** “the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in heavenly places.”
  - 2. **Colossians 1:8** “He is the head of the body, the church”
- B. Examples of the term used as a specific community
  - 1. **Acts 11:22** “the church which was in Jerusalem”
  - 2. **1 Thessalonians 1** “the church of the Thessalonians”
- C. Example of it being used in the term of a people group
  - 1. **Romans 16:4** “All the churches of the Gentiles”
- D. Examples of the term being used in a local sense
  - 1. **1 Corinthians 16:19** “The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.”
  - 2. **Colossians 4:15** “Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that is in his house.” (NU (Alexandrian or Egyptian text) text reads Nympha ... her house)
  - 3. **Philemon 2** “to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house.”

---

<sup>3</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Quotable Lewis* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House, 1990), 108, quoting from *The Weight of Glory*, “Membership” (1945) paragraph 16, page 116.

4. **1 Corinthians 11:18** “When you come together in the church”

**IV. The Head of the Church**

- A. **Ephesians 1:22-23** Jesus Christ is the head.
- B. **Ephesians 5:23** “*Christ is the head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.*”
- C. **Colossians 1:18** “*He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn of the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.*”

**V. The New Testament Church Gatherings.**

- A. **Acts 2:38-47**: The original church – (V. 38) preaching, repentance, salvation, baptism, gift of the Holy Spirit; (V. 42) teaching of doctrine, fellowship, communion, prayers; (V. 45) giving, stewardship; (V. 47) praising God.
- B. **Acts / Epistles**: Give understanding of church government: Plurality of eldership; deacons; and leadership by apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, and evangelists.
- C. **Specific Leadership models**:
  - 1. **Acts 14:23** “So when they had appointed elders in every church”
  - 2. **Acts 20:28** “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”
  - 3. **Philippians 1:1** “To all of the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.”
- D. **Ephesians 5:19 / Colossians 3:16** exhort Christians to incorporate in their gatherings “*psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*” [Old Testament Praise and Worship]
- E. **1 Corinthians 12** – Gives the spiritual gifts available to believers
- F. **1 Corinthians 14** – Gives us ideas for a typical worship service.
- G. **Matthew 18:15-17**: Jesus gives a model for local church discipline.
- H. **Hebrews 10:24-25** Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves.
  - 1. Billy Graham said: “Churchgoers are like coals in a fire. When they cling together, they keep the flame aglow; when they separate, they die out.”<sup>4</sup>
- I. **House churches**: The early New Testament believers had to meet in houses because it was against the law to be a Christian. Strong persecution by Jews, Romans, and Greeks caused the Christians to be cautious and secretive. When Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity in the early fourth century, people began constructing larger buildings (churches) in which to hold their services.

**VI. Why the Church? – God’s Idea and Plan!**

- 1. Salvation
- 2. Fellowship
- 3. Community
- 4. Preaching
- 5. Worship
- 6. Mission

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

7. Protection
8. Leadership
9. Direction
10. Purpose

## VII. Concept of the Hub

- A. Imagine that the local church is like the hub (center) of a bicycle wheel. It has spokes that stick out of it that attach to the tire. But the church is the center. It is what is the most important.
- B. Example: Youth and children classes, mission programs, small groups, women's groups, men's group are important but they are not the hub.

## VIII. Biblical Examples of Special Ministries (Spokes on the Hub).

- A. Missions: **Acts 13:1-4**
- B. Mercy Giving: **1 Corinthians 16:1-4** (collection for Jerusalem)
- C. Outreach: **Luke 10:1** (Jesus sending them out in two's)
- D. Reconciliation **Galatians 6:1-2**
  1. D.L. Moody said: "Church attendance is as vital to a disciple as a transfusion of rich, healthy blood to a sick man."<sup>5</sup>
  2. C. S. Lewis on Church Unity: "The time is always ripe for re-union. Divisions between Christians are a sin and a scandal, and Christians ought at all times to be making contributions toward re-union, if it is only by their prayers."<sup>6</sup>

## IX. God's Purpose of using the Church to make known the Manifold Wisdom of God to Principalities and Powers.

- A. **Ephesians 3: 8-12.** - The Church is to make known God's wisdom to the world.
- B. Principalities and Powers:
  1. These want to keep men in darkness and disobedience away from Jesus and the cross. (Ephesians 2:1-3)
  2. They promote lust of the flesh, lust of eyes, and pride of life. (1 John 2:16)
  3. A strong form of dualism and Gnosticism reigned in world religions at that time (Zoroastrianism, Greek religion, and the Jews picked it up in their exile). It promoted *all spirit* as good and *all bodily actions* as evil. The fruit of the belief was a works for salvation system.
  4. Today, world religions and systems still try to work their way to perfection, salvation, etc.

<sup>5</sup> Josh Wiley, "21 Great Quotes About Church" <http://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/21-great-quotes-about-church/>, (accessed 7/5/16).

<sup>6</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Quotable Lewis* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House, 1990), 110, quoting from *God in the Dock*, "Answers to Questions on Christianity" (1944), ans. 14, p. 60.

C. The Bible tells us some things about the limit of the principalities:

1. They will not keep us from the love of God. (Rom. 8:28)
2. Because they are subject to Christ's authority. (Col. 1:16)
3. And, the cross of Christ disarmed them. (Col. 2:15)
4. Christians wrestle against these rather than flesh and blood. (Eph. 6:12)
5. And, the Church is to make know God's wisdom to them. (Eph. 3:10)

D. God's ultimate position for the Church

1. **Ephesians 5:27** That He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be hold and without blemish.

## X. Key Elements That Strengthen the Local Church.

A. Preaching and teaching of the Word of God:

1. **Hebrews 4:12** *"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of the soul and spirit, and joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."*
2. The *Rhema* word that speaks to individual situations, builds up our faith, and keeps us progressing in God's path for our lives.

B. Edifying Worship:

C. Fellowship:

1. Spending time together, getting to know each other, and communing around God's awesomeness. (Not just meetings regarding activities or "spoke" ministry plans, etc.)
2. **1 John 1:7** *"If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."*
3. Fellowship also implies a strong, healthy relationship between individuals and ministries within the church.

D. Vision: (Difference between vision for hub and spoke (church and individual ministries).

1. Church Hub vision goes on and on but individual ministries may end.

E. Commitment:

1. To one another.
2. To the local church.
3. To the Lord, who is the head of the church!