

WHO OR WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

An excerpt paraphrased from a sermon preached by Dr Bruce Woolard
St Davids – Sunday 05/09/2021

Bible readings are taken from the NIV Bible.

Bible Reading : **Galatians 6:9-10** *“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”*

The church is a community of believers who love the Lord and care for one another. The local church is like a hospital treating the sickness of the human soul. The Bible uses diverse metaphors to describe the church. The church is like a physical body made up of many living cells to function as an organism and not merely an organisation. The church is also, like an army of enlisted soldiers fighting the forces of evil. The church is like a building consisting of different building blocks.

WHO IS THE CHURCH?

The church is not a building of brick and mortar. The building is where the church meets. You and I, as believers, we are the church. We meet in Sunday worship, but from Monday to Saturday the church operates and functions outside of the four walls of the building.

HOW DO WE BECOME PART OF THE CHURCH?

Becoming a member of the universal body of believers is the result of a positive confession of faith in Christ - **Romans 10:9** *“If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”*

Furthermore, as the church we are taught that when Christ died we died. When He was buried, we were buried. When He rose again, we rose again, in other words the church is fully identified with Christ – See **Romans 6:1-3** *“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?”*

WHAT DOES THE WORD “CHURCH” MEAN?

The translation in English Bibles uses the word “church” which is often be misunderstood. To mean a denomination the Greek word for the New Testament church is “Ekklesia”. The word simply means “those who have been called out” or “the called out ones”. Eve was a “called out one” a church if you please. She was taken out of the side of man and made a wo-man. Maybe that is the reason why we refer to the church using a feminine gender “she” or “her” and also the church is considered to be the Bride of Christ. Abram was “called out” of the pagan heathen land of the Chaldeans and as such he was a church. Israel was also considered to be a church, the church in the Wilderness that was “called out” of Egypt. The disciples were also God’s Ekklesia – they were “called out” of Israel to represent the Messianic mission, today we as Christian of God’s Ekklesia, “called out” of the world as a unique entity as the people of God. That is the precise meaning of the term “church”, “called out ones.” We are in the world but we are not of the world.

HOW DOES THE CHURCH WORK?

There are various levels or offices within the church as indicated in God’s word. We have elders, deacons, stewards and members. In some churches the Elder is called the Priest. A Priest is someone who represents the people before God. Now that Christ Jesus has become our High Priest who represents us as the mediator we no longer need a pries as an intermediary:

Hebrews 4:14 *“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.”*

1 Timothy 2:5 *“For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus.”*

The Elders or Ministers in the church are called Pastors. The term is “pastoral” and therefore relates to the minister as a shepherd of God’s flock. Some Elders are, Pastor Teachers, who are specially gifted in terms of instruction and teaching. The congregation mandates its minister to lead in a pastoral capacity. Each believer is an ambassador primarily for Christ and secondary for the local church that he or she belongs to.

The New Testament encourages the church to take care of the community, especially widows and orphans. The church is like a light house, helping those who have been shipwrecked on the coastline of life to find refuge and safety.

THE PASTOR LIKE A CONDUCTOR

An orchestra has a conductor to produce a melody and combines the functional role of each instrument. Every member has a talent and gift and if they work together they produce a harmony and melody that inspires others. Every member is like a cricket team. In a cricket team you have batters and bowlers. Not all batsmen open the innings. Not all bowlers have the same talents, some are fast, medium paced bowlers, others are swing bowlers, others are seam bowlers, you also have leg spin bowlers, off-spin and even wrist spin bowlers. Some fielders field in the slips, others on the boundary and others in the gully, etc. But we are also as a church a spiritual family. We need interaction with one another in order to grow and develop as God's family. We need fellowship because it motivates and stimulates us and gives to us a sense of belonging. With COVID 19 this fellowship factor has been absent. People miss the fellowship that God has ordained we should be engaged in. It is with hope and prayer that we look forward to a post-COVID era when we again celebrate together as God's family.

THE CALL OF GOD

Isaiah 6:8 *"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"*

We are reminded that the messenger needs to be sent for how can people hear the Word of God if there is no-one who is going to declare it.

Romans 10:14-15 *"How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"*

LET US BE THE CHURCH

Today I appeal to you to join me in being the "church". There is someone in need. You and I have the answer. I want you to pause and think about someone today who needs to hear the Word of God. Having identified this needy person

whisper a prayer for them and then ensure that you hand them a Christian tract or booklet that will explain how they can find their way back to God. We have such booklets available free of charge, so let's do something about being the witness that God has called us to be.

GOD NEVER GIVES UP

Several years ago I visited a man in the Provincial Hospital. He had undergone surgery. I left my call card with him and it had the following caption "God never gives us, why should you." Three months later the same man had received news of a diagnosis that was terminal. In a state of depression, he thought he would go to his cupboard where the safe was containing a revolver. As he placed the key in the slot and removed the revolver he noticed the card that I had given to him lying in the cupboard shelf. Very timely he read the message "God never gives up, why should you". This desperate man placed the loaded revolver back in the safe and he called me. When I visited him he was now ready to receive Christ as his Saviour. This dear gentleman was on the brink of taking his own life but it was the message on the card that jolted him back to reality and by God's Holy Spirit he was ready to surrender all to our Saviour. The Word of God never returns to the Lord void.

AESOP – LEGENDARY STORY

In one of the Aesop fables there is a man who is troubled because his seven sons were constantly fighting. It hurt him so much, eventually he called his sons together and he took seven sticks and bound them together and asked each boy to try to break the seven bound sticks. None of them were able to do so. He then took one stick out and gave it to his eldest son, "Now," said he, "try to break the stick." The son easily snapped the stick, then said the father "My sons, if you all stand together no-one will break you, but on your own you can be easily broken," and so it is with Christian church fellowship. On our own we are more vulnerable, together we are stronger.

I trust that we will be the church bringing hope and understanding to all, and with God's help may we fulfil the commandment to love one another, for it is through love that we conquer distrust, suspicion and prejudices. Let's be the church. The church triumphant.



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