

Advancing the Church

A short class on the importance of the church, its
doctrines and its make-up

Lake Community Bible Church

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Session 1- How should I think about the church, and my place in it?

Opening thoughts

What I intend to do and not :-)

The primacy of The church drives me.

The Church's cancellation in the minds of men

WHAT GUIDES MY THINKING ABOUT THE CHURCH— Talking points

1. How God is viewed: A shift in how we view God from, who He is, to what He is doing. We must recover an understanding of Who He is as we think about what he requires of us.
2. The Priority for thinking about the church
 - The Church possesses the Gospel, the Good News, and the world, which is lost and separated from Christ, can only be “saved” or reunited with him by hearing the gospel, and responding to it (Not accepting it). This amounts to believing it, being justified, and regenerated.
 - Our mission is Gospel first, “mission second”. We are not merely building a community of “nice people” but a called assembly of redeemed people. Put another way— who we are is more important than what we do. Peter calls us a peculiar people...
3. The church as an assembly
 1. (OT: Duet 9:10; 10:4; 23:1-3); An *assembly* and a *gathered congregation* (OT: Ex.12:3)
 2. The church (NT) (Ekklesia) A called out body..... Used by Paul to primarily designate a group of believers in a certain place. (I Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:2)
 3. **A definition:** The church as the whole body of those who through Christ’s death have been savingly reconciled to God and have received new life. It includes all such persons, whether in heaven or on earth. While it is universal in nature, it finds expression in local groupings of believers which display the same qualities as does the body of Christ as a whole.
— Millard Erickson, Christian Theology
4. The Church as an image of the Apostle Paul’s conception
 - The people of God: Created as a people for Himself: Called out. (2 Cor. 6:16). It’s His initiative. (2 Thess.2:13-14)— Requiring a particular quality of holiness: (Eph. 5:25b-27)
 - The Body of Christ: The Church is the locus of Christ’s activity now: Used of an universal nature (Eph. 1:22-23), and of local congregations (I Cor. 12:27). There is present here— a connection with Christ, an interconnection between all who make up the church, Fellowship, unity, the universal nature of the entity (Col. 3:11), and an extension of Christ and his ministry. (Col. 1:27) and more.
 - The Church as the Temple of the Holy Spirit: The church now indwelt by the Holy Spirit collectively and individually. (I Cor. 12:13), (I Cor. 3:16-17). (Believers as a spiritual house. (I Peter 2:5)
 - The Spirit imparts life (Gal. 5:22-23), conveys power (Acts 1:8), provides for unity, creates a sensitivity to the Lord’s leading, provides the Lord’s guidance (Romans 8:9-10), and serves as a sovereign of the church (I Cor. 12:11), and makes the church pure (I Cor. 6: 19-20)

Making a case for church membership

Considerations

1. There is no 11th commandment for membership, but there are indications that provide the basis for building an argument— similar to my position on Trinity... No direct statement, we build an argument.
2. Historical precedents:
 - A. OT: God numbers his people for a specific purpose: Numbers 1:1-3; setting the stage for a distinction of those with God and those without.
 - B. NT: As imitators of God (Eph. 5:1), we function in an environment of distinctiveness, those within the family of God and those without.
 - C. (Acts 2); added to the church— I think that means something more than added to the universal church. Many letters directed to specific “churches”
3. Represents meaningful commitment: (Num.1: 1-3): Those who could be counted on— Live out life in a community of committed believers who are bound together by common belief system and desire for church life, done, “decently and in order.” Such was the process involved in the implementation of directions from Acts 15.
4. The biblical metaphors for church life: The flock in I Peter 5:3; and “family” of I Tim.3:15; There is responsibility here; and Ephesians 4:25, where the members are part of a larger body.
5. It’s connection for discipline: Mt. 18:17 (Tell it to the church); I Cor. 5:12; 2 Cor. 2:5-6; Hard to “put someone out” who is not presently “in”. If you can apparently be removed from “it”, you must have been part of “it”
6. Accountability: (Heb.13:7) Who is the flock that I am responsible for? All of Baldwin, GR, etc? (I Peter 5:2) Who am I responsible to shepherd? Everyone?
7. Additional references: In Acts 6, when leadership are chosen, who are they leading?
 - (I Tim. 5:3-16) What about the widow’s list? It seems like it was part of an organized church system working out a plan for the care of those within.
 - What did it mean for the 1st century believer to acknowledge “Christos” as Lord? I would suggest it was a far more compulsory commitment than anything asked of modern day parishioner. It often cost them their lives.
8. An argument from silence: To say that the Bible does not require local church membership is an argument from silence. It appears to me that they did but even if not, we have added organizational structure to the church throughout history; the presence of Sunday School, specific order of service, and ministries to the youth, as well as a number of different leadership options (pastors, assistants) meant to improve ministry and widen the church’s reach; as well as create an environment where family can be lived out. **Imagine a marriage sustained only by “common law.”**

The Value of a Church Covenant

As a tool for putting the relationship with a church in perspective

Summary

The Church, its priorities and its practices are very important to me and therefore I believe it valuable and necessary for members and non members alike to understand the church, and its necessary place in a culture that has lost its way. Our church seeks to be Gospel centered, Spirit led, and living out the truth of God's word as followers of Jesus. Many of our positions in regard to doctrine are built from the texts of Scripture we have, and by comparing Scripture with Scripture, we are led to a logical or reasonable decision for the doctrines we believe. We have therefore concluded as a leadership that membership in a local church is consistent with the greater teaching of the Scripture. That said, I certainly recognize not all will agree; I for one, seek not be be heavy handed or unruly in our handling of God's people, but purposeful in pursuing the goal of membership as one of it core values. MJC

Notes and thinking for later...