

☞ **What is the church?**

Last week we talked about enjoying church. You should prepare in advance and expect to meet with God. You should encourage others with a smile or a kind word. And, you should practice what you learn. By doing these things, you will enjoy church more. Now today, since we're talking about church, we ought to discuss what the church really is.

From Mark Roberts, Fuller Seminary...

People get their ideas of church from their past experience of church.

These days, more and more people come to church with no religious background whatsoever. But most folks still have at least some prior history of church, even if it's limited to weddings and funerals. People tend to have diverse feelings about their past church experiences. Some come with negative memories. Others look back through the rose-tinted glasses of nostalgia.

People get their ideas of church from pop culture.

Even folks who've never stepped into a church might have seen a television show with a pastor or a church in an episode or two. Of course there are dozens of other images of the church in pop culture. These often shape their expectations.

People get their ideas of church from the news.

The media is generally not inclined to report on the good things that churches do, but church scandals tend to make headlines because they draw viewers and sell advertising.

People get their ideas of what a church should be from a projection of their personal needs and preferences.

People have a need and figure the church is the sort of place that should meet their need. Sometimes it's the need for friendship, or financial assistance, or political activism, or, well, you name it. Folks take their needs and project them onto the church.

People get their ideas of church from similar institutions.

☞ *For example, some people expect a church to be **like a concert**. When you go to a concert, you file into an auditorium. You sit in rows and watch something happening on the stage up front. If the concert is any good, you feel lots of positive emotions. At times you might even get into the act by standing, clapping, or even singing along. You leave a good concert feeling uplifted and satisfied by the performance. Church, for many people, is just like this, only better, because you don't need a ticket, and don't even have to pay anything if you don't want to.*

☞ *Others think of church **like a school** and they come for religious education.*

☞ For others, a church is **like a club**. At church, as in a club, we make friends and find a center for our socializing.

☞ Many people today see the church as **some kind of store**. Both churches and stores hope to attract interested “consumers.” If the church you attend provides what you’re wanting to consume, you continue to go there. If that church stops meeting your consumption needs, you think nothing of finding a better church, just as you might switch markets or clothing stores.

☞ It’s also common for people to see the church as something **like a hospital**. When you’re physically sick, you go to a hospital to get well. Similarly, churches promise to help you overcome your spiritual ailments.

All of these institutions – concerts, schools, clubs, stores, and hospitals – are like churches in many ways. Thinking of a church in these categories makes sense, to a point.

- A church is like a concert, but it’s better to see a worship service as a concert in which God is the audience and the worshipers are the performers.
- A church is like a school, but a church offers much more than religious and moral education. It seeks to transform people’s hearts and lives, not just to educate their minds.
- A church is like a club, but at church even non-members are welcome to participate in many aspects of “club” life. Those who think of their church like a club tend to exclude others and to think that their church exists primarily to meet their own needs.
- A church is like a store, but it ought to do far more than offer “products” for consumption. A church will thrive only if its members are committed to the church in a way far beyond consumer loyalty.
- A church is like a hospital in that it offers healing to those who are spiritually sick, just like Jesus did. But a church is not like a hospital because it seeks, not only to get “patients” well, but also to enlist them on the caring team.

People have many preconceived ideas about church. Often, people think of the church **as a building**. In fact, that’s how an online dictionary defines it: A building used for public Christian worship. Someone might say, “We go to Open Bible Church on the corner of Hancock and Linn in Boone.” So, there’s churches all over the place. Some are big, some are small. Some are wood, others are brick, etc. Some people like the old, traditional building with a steeple and a bell. Others like a more generic building. Church, as a building can be judged by “who has the building that fits my idea of church;” or, “who has the biggest building with the coolest stuff.”

☞ Others tend to think of church **as the Sunday morning meeting**. Someone might say, “We ‘have church’ at 10:00 on Sundays.” So, there’s an expectation of a certain order of events. Some expect to “have church” by singing a lot of songs. Others are expecting a lengthy sermon and prayer. Some are expecting a series of traditional rituals. Still others are looking to socialize. Church, as a meeting then, can be judged by “who does all the things I like, when I like it, and the way I like it.”

Churches often have a building and almost always have a regular meeting. But those things alone are not the church. Many preconceived ideas about the church are just plain wrong. Here at OBC we want to find out what the Bible says about church. People's opinions about the building or the order of service are just that, "opinions." We want to know what God says and then do our best to follow his guidelines.

What the Bible says:

The word "church" is used exactly **79 times in the NIV Bible**, all of which are found in the New Testament. Some of those references are descriptive while others are simply a brief mention of the word "church."

☞ The word "church" comes from the Greek word **ecclesia**. Originally, this was a generic term meaning "**a gathering of people.**" Over time it came to mean "**the called out ones.**"

--Strong's bible dictionary... a "gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place; an assembly"

☞ The Church refers to people... people who have been "**called out" of the world... called out of their homes... to a common assembly.** We are called forth to serve and to work and to grow and to reach new people! So when Jesus said "I will build my church... He was ☞ talking about **people being called forth with a purpose!**

Here are some the things the Bible (those 79 verses) says about the church...

The church belongs to God.

Jesus builds the church and it grows.

The church is strengthened by the Holy Spirit.

The church prays.

The church gathers together.

The church sends out ministers and welcomes ministers.

The church is led and directed by overseers, who "shepherd" it.

The church can meet in houses.

The church is called to be holy.

The church is supposed to judge its members.

The church is edified by spiritual gifts.

The church is a group of individuals who each have something to offer.

The church is the body of Christ and he is the head.

The church shows God's wisdom.

The church submits to Christ.

The church is loved by Christ.

The church listens to the Spirit.

The Key concepts:

If you study the Bible regarding the church you will find some core ideas about what the church is; here are two prevailing ideas brought forth in the scriptures...

☞ **The church is a group of people who belong to God.**

The church is the body of Christ and he is the head.

Really, the idea of church as a building is never used in the bible. A building is the least biblical description of the church. Church is not some inanimate object; it is a group of people. And yet, the word church refers to more than just people who agree on something.

☞ The word church is almost always used in reference to **a gathering of people**. It is not used to refer simply to people that believe. It's actually inaccurate to simply say that believers are the church. In the bible there's a clear assumption that the church is a group of people that gets together. To say, "I'm a part of a church but I don't attend" would be like if you invited me to a party at your house on Sunday evening saying, "I'm having a little *gathering* of friends on Sunday night. Can you come?" and I answered, "Sure, I'll be a part of your gathering, but I won't be able to attend." You'd be confused by my answer, because being a part of a gathering means being physically present. The church is made up of believers who gather together. Now, I understand in our current situation with a pandemic, that not everyone can physically attend our meeting, but hopefully you can join us live online to be a part of the service. And hopefully, you are staying connected with others from OBC in some fashion. Without those kinds of connections you are missing out on what it really means to be part of the church.

The Church meeting:

Now, what does the Bible say about the gathering or the meeting that the church has? Actually, the Bible gives very little detail about the specifics of the meeting. From those 79 scriptures we can see some things that are often included in the meeting...

☞ **Prayer; Singing; Spiritual gifts; Welcoming & sending ministers; Giving money; Teaching from the word**

Those sound familiar? Right, these are things we typically include in our Sunday meetings.

☞ But the Bible **never gives specific details** or an outline for how the meeting is supposed to be run – whether there's two songs or ten songs; whether there's a short sermon or long sermon; or even if there's an interactive discussion. These are all left up to individual congregations. Sometimes people say that today's church should be like the early church in the Bible. But what exactly was that like? Nobody fully knows; we only know little snippets. But, here is what we do know...

Summary:

Church is not a building; it's brothers and sisters in Christ.

Church is not a place; it's a people who get together.

Church is something you go to, but not *just* something you go to; it's something you are.

☞ Church is comprised of **Individuals** who are **Interconnected** and **Interdependent**. With so many individuals, there is a great variety. Scripture says that we are many parts, but those many parts form one body. That's how we are interconnected and unified. And all those parts must cooperate and work together in interdependence to accomplish God's purpose.

The very first time the church was mentioned in the Bible was by Jesus:

☞ **Matthew 16:18** **"I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."**

I will build. Jesus doesn't build buildings; **he builds people.**

My church. The church belongs to Christ. It's not mine; it's not yours; **we are *his* church.**

Gates of Hades... We will endure and have the ultimate **victory through Jesus.**

☞ **C** hrist-followers

Hearing the Spirit

United together

Reaching the lost

Continually growing

Honoring God

☞ ***"I am part of the Church, which is God's primary means of accomplishing His purposes on Earth."***

Let's be the church! Let's follow Christ; let's hear the Spirit; let's stay united; let's reach the lost; let's grow; and let's always honor God.

Assignment: in these unprecedented times with a pandemic affecting everything we do, we need to make extra effort to stay connected. We can't simply depend on our Sunday gatherings to interact with people. So, as you think of others of our church, **reach out**; give them a **call**; send a **text** or a card in the **mail**. That goes for those of you listening online as well. Each one of us needs to make the effort to stay connected because that is a significant part of what it means to be the church.