

"I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it."
MATTHEW 16:18b



The Church

The Called-Out Ones of Jesus Christ

"Christ is the King of His church, and the church is the greatest queen in the world."

RICHARD SIBBES

MARVIN R. KNIGHT

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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible: 1960, 1962, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1975, 1977, 1995 by the Lockman Foundation.

The church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord;
She is His new creation
By water and the Word;
From heaven He came and sought her
To be His holy bride;
With His own blood He bought her,
And for her life He died.

SAMUEL JOHN STONE

This book is dedicated to my longtime friend, brother, and fellow elder, Julien Kinsale—a true lover of Christ and His bride.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Why Study the Church?
2. What Is the Church?, Part 1
3. What Is the Church?, Part 2
4. The Head of the Church
5. The Inception of the Church
6. God's View of the Church
7. The Purpose of the Church
8. The Government of the Church
9. The Ministries of the Church
10. The Ordinances of the Church
11. The Marks of an Effective Church
12. The Growth of the Church

Why Study the Church?



“The glory of the greatest, wealthiest, most powerful and most resplendent empire of all history was as nothing, yes less than nothing, in comparison with the glory of the church of Christ.”

R.B. KUIPER

REFLECTION and PREPARATION

- Kuiper mentions “the glory of the greatest, wealthiest empire of all history...” Think of some of great nations in history and what made them so eminent. China (*agriculture*), Egypt (*architecture*), Greece (*arts and literature*), Rome (*laws and military*), Persia (*political management*), England (*nobility and naval command*), and America (*industry, freedom, transportation, etc.*)
- WHY does Kuiper say that the church is more glorious than the greatest, wealthiest, and most powerful empire of all history?

If you are united to Christ by faith you are an *heir of salvation, heir of a kingdom, heir of God, and a co-heir with Christ* (Cf. *Rom.8:19; 1 John 3:1-3*).

LESSON AIM:

- To discover the importance of ecclesiology and the church’s role in God’s plan.

DISCUSSION: Are the following statements true or false? (circle one)

- The church has existed from eternity past. T F
- The church replaced Israel. T F
- You can study about the church in the Old Testament. T F

THE STUDY OF THE CHURCH

Why study about the church?

The church is one of the most fundamental realities of the Christian faith. The study of the doctrine of the church is called *ecclesiology*. Ecclesiology comes from the Greek words "*ecclesia*" (church/assembly) and "*ology*" (study of) and refers to the study of the church.

Is ecclesiology an important doctrine?

"If we were to engage in 'theological triage' so as to rank Christian doctrines in their order of importance, a strong case could be made for assigning the highest rankings to the doctrine of God and the doctrine of Scripture. Another categorization reckons 'the three gigantic doctrines of atonement, incarnation, and Trinity' as the most important because these and these alone are the three great mysteries at the very heart of Christianity..."¹

According to Sanders, the top tier of doctrines to study would be:

1. The Doctrine of God
2. The Doctrine of Scripture
3. The Doctrine of the Incarnation
4. The Doctrine of the Atonement
5. The Doctrine of the Trinity

Ecclesiology may not be a doctrine of *highest importance*, but it is a doctrine of *immense importance* for these four reasons:

1. **The church** is part of *the eternal purpose of God* in redeeming His fallen creatures. Read Romans 8:28-30; 1 Peter 1:17-20.
 - The church is a *distinct continuation and new phase of redemptive history* (New Covenant—*Cf. Heb.8:7-13; 1 Cor.11:25*)
2. **The church** is part of the *Father's mighty work* regarding the exaltation of His humiliated, crucified, and risen Son. Read Ephesians 1:19-23.
 - The church is a *gift to the Son for His sacrificial work* in redemption.
3. **The church** is part of the *eternal divine counsel regarding the revelation of God and His wise ways to the world and to angels*. Read Ephesians 3:3-11.
 - The church is a *means through which God is revealing Himself* to the world.
4. **The church** is assigned a *key role in the outworking of salvation*. Read Matthew 16:18; Acts 1:1-8.
 - God has ordained the church as the *instrument* by which salvation is communicated to fallen human beings. (*Cf. 2 Cor.5:18-20*)

¹ Fred Sanders, *Introduction to Christology: Chalcedonian Categories for the Gospel Narrative*, p.8

For these four reasons, and many more, the study of the doctrine of the church is significant.

Edmund P. Clowney writes,

"The Church is called *to* God, called to be His people...to a bond of life together. It ministers not only *to* God, but also *to those who make up its company*. The church is also called in the midst of the world. Its ministry is therefore threefold: it ministers to God *in worship*, to the saints *in nurture*, and to the world *in witness*."²

Think about the church's threefold witness carefully...

- To GOD *in worship*
- To the SAINTS *in nurture*
- To the WORLD *in witness*

Personally applied: Put it into your own words. What is your threefold purpose as a Christian? How can you daily fulfill God's calling for you?

DISCUSSION: Thinking our way clear

- What are the DANGERS of not understanding what the church actually is as opposed to what people often think it is?
- Why is the church important to SPIRITUAL GROWTH or DISCIPLESHIP?
- Why is the church important to GOD'S GLORY?
- What are the scriptural grounds for having an ORGANIZED church?

APPLICATION: Making it personal

D. James Kennedy wrote: "Most people think of the church as a drama, with the minister as the chief actor, God as the prompter, and the laity as the critic. What is actually the case is that the congregation is the chief actor, the minister is the prompter, and God is the critic."

What's the point? Make sure God is pleased with your *worship*, your *attitude*, and your *relationships*.

² Edmund P. Clowney, Article: *The Biblical Theology Briefings*, p.2



HART-TO-HEART

Jody Hart, Editor and Director Mountaintop Resources

When my son was in kindergarten his teacher spent the first several weeks of school going over classroom and school expectations. How do we behave at school? What happens if we misbehave? What do I do if I have a problem? How do I stand in line? What even is a line? Kindergarteners are just at the start of their education journey and need to be taught the social norms of just being a student—a functioning part of a school community. Learning these things may be just as important as learning their A-B-C's.

As believers, we have been made a part of the universal church, fleshing our Christian lives out within a local church. Yet, how many of us were taught up front what it looks like to be a functioning member? And even if we have learned these things, it is crucial for us to remember who we are, what we have been called to, and Who it is that called us. My son's teacher would go back to review these standards with her students throughout the year, which would frustrate my son because it took time away from other things. We need to be reminded as well. However, we are not to look at this reminder as time taken away from better or more important things. Yes, we need to learn our A-B-C's (the doctrines of God, The Scriptures, The Incarnation, The Trinity, etc). But, knowing who we are, what we are called to do, and Who called us, form the very basis for how we will actually function in life.

ANSWER KEY:

DISCUSSION

- **False**—The church was a part of the counsel and mind of God in eternity past (*Eph.1, 3*) but it did not exist on earth until after Pentecost. The church is not eternal, only God is eternal
- **False**—The church did not replace Israel but is a distinct continuation of God's plan in redemptive history.
- **False**—You study about the church in the New Testament.

DISCUSSION: Thinking our way clear

- The danger of misunderstanding what a Christian is
The danger of misunderstanding the church's purpose in the world
The danger of misunderstanding the means of worship and growth
- Because it is connected to what her identity and her calling/purpose is in the world.
- Because—for purposes known only to Himself—He has linked His glory to our good. (*Cf.Eph.3:1-12*)
- Ephesians 4:11-13—the Lord Jesus, in giving the Spirit, gave the church these offices and functions.
- 1 Cor.12:11; Acts 13:2; 20:28—the Holy Spirit calls, qualifies, and constitutes elders in the church.