

FOUNDATION OF FAITH!
ECCLESIOLOGY
THE STUDY OF THE CHURCH
PART 1

This morning in our series Foundation of Faith we are going to look ecclesiology or we are going to embark on a study of the church. There are many ideas out there regarding what the church is and what the church is not and some of them are right and some of them are wrong. Now I am not being sarcastic here but the reality regarding the church is this. I really don't care what this denominational church or that non-denominational church has to say about what the church is or is not. And that is the problem many times for people, they will tell you, "This is what the church has said!"

What is wrong with that? It is wrong if what the church says goes against what the Scriptures have to say, what the Lord is telling us. So we will spend a few weeks looking at this subject and even deal with the government of the visible church, how is that structured, what is that about. Again, very important topics and I think they will help you to see what the church is to be about, what its function in this world truly is.

Let me share with you this story to help set the stage for what we will be talking about this morning. There was a congregation that was growing and its building was old so they decided to build a new church. Of course there was a building committee and they passed the following resolutions regarding the building of this new church. These resolutions went as follows.

- We shall build a new church.
- The new building is to be located on the site of the old one.

- The material in the old building is to be used in the new one.
- We shall continue to use the old building until the new one is completed.

Now there are many things wrong in what this committee put forth, it seems like they are just rebuilding the old building and thus, why rebuild? But the main issue is that they see the church as a building and that is a false statement. The church is not a building or even an organization; it is made up of people! In fact, the Greek word *ekklesia* means “those called out.” And yet today we hear of denominations being the one and only universal church, we see people exalt the building they worship in as the church, and that is wrong as you will see in these studies.

We will be looking at what the universal or the invisible church is all about and then what the visible church is all about. But to put it simply, the universal church or the invisible church is made up of all believers who are living and those who are in heaven, it is only believers. Now, on the other hand, the visible church is made up of believers and unbelievers, the wheat and the tares are mixed together. In every congregation there are those who are saved and those who are not saved, even here at Calvary, and that is the visible church. But just because they are a part of it does not make them saved. You are saved by your faith in Jesus and if you are just attending church, if you do not have a relationship with Him, then you are not saved. You may be a part of the visible church but not the universal church or the invisible church that is made up of believers only!

Let me share with you some points regarding what the church is and then we will look at the universal or invisible church next time and see what that is all about. I want to lay down a solid foundation regarding this issue before we get to the function of the church and church government because if we truly don't understand what the church is, then we are going to be confused on what the purpose of the church is and how it is structured.

And let me say this. I have read through many books on this subject of the church and it is interesting that many of them see the universal church as a living organism and yet when it comes to the visible church they see it as an organization. I do not agree with that. I have read their arguments on how the visible church has to have a structure to it, it has to be organized like a business, but I disagree with that kind of thinking.

And that truly is the trend in churches across America today. Church has become a business, run like a big corporation. Let me show you what I mean, what the world sees in the church today, how we function and to me this is very sad! This is a report called; *Earthly Empires How Evangelical Churches are Borrowing from the Business Playbook*. I will just read some of this report but again, listen closely and I will comment as we go through this. We are told,

. . . Pastor Joel [Osteen] is one of a new generation of evangelical entrepreneurs transforming their branch of Protestantism into one of the fastest-growing and most influential religious groups in America. Their runaway success is modeled unabashedly on business. They borrow tools ranging from niche marketing to MBA hiring to lift their share of U.S. churchgoers. Like Osteen, many evangelical pastors focus intently on a huge potential market - the millions of Americans who have drifted away from mainline Protestant denominations or simply never joined a church in the first place.

To reach these untapped masses, savvy leaders are creating Sunday Schools that look like Disney World . . . and church cafés with the appeal of Starbucks . . . Although most hold strict religious views, they scrap staid [dull] hymns in favor of multimedia worship and tailor a panoply of services to meet all kinds of consumer needs, from divorce counseling to help for parents of autistic kids. Like Osteen, many offer an upbeat message intertwined with a religious one. To make newcomers feel at home, some do away with standard religious symbolism - even basics like crosses and pews - and design churches to look more like modern entertainment halls than traditional places of worship.

So successful are some evangelicals that they're opening up branches like so many new Home Depots . . . or Subways. This year, the 16.4 million-member Southern Baptist Convention plans to "plant" 1,800 new churches using by-the-book niche-marketing tactics. "We have cowboy churches for people working on ranches, country music churches, even several motorcycle churches aimed at bikers," says Martin King, a spokesman for the Southern Baptists' North American Mission Board. . . .

[Now let me comment on this before we move on. In anything that we have read so far is there any trust in the Spirit of God to work through the people of God for the glory of God? No, we don't see the Holy Spirit empowering the church; we see the techniques of the business world guiding them! Also, notice how we are dividing up the body of Christ. You have cowboy churches, motorcycle churches instead of people from all walks of life, all different colors and races coming together as a body of believers to worship God! The enemy loves to divide and conquer! We have taken away the cross because it is offensive and we are bringing in a fairy tale atmosphere to appease the people and that is very dangerous. You say that this is Goofy; well it is Disney World isn't it! I think I can safely say you do not come to Calvary because of the fancy coffee we have, sorry Angie, it is good but it is just coffee! You may even think I am Goofy but this is not a Disney Land atmosphere here! Let me continue on with what this report had to say and I will comment again in a few minutes.]

Evangelicals' eager embrace of corporate-style growth strategies is giving them a tremendous advantage in the battle for religious market share, says Roger Finke, a Pennsylvania State University sociology professor and co-author of a new book, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*. A new Pope has given Catholicism a burst of global publicity, but its nominal membership growth in the U.S. stems largely from the influx of Mexican immigrants. Overall, the Catholic Church's long-term decline in U.S. attendance accelerated after the recent sex-abuse scandals, there's a severe priest shortage, and parish churches and schools are closing in the wake of a financial crisis.

Similarly, the so-called mainline Protestants who dominated 20th century America have become the religious equivalent of General Motors Corp. The large denominations - including the United Methodist Church and the Episcopal Church - have been shrinking for decades and have lost more than 1 million members in the past 10 years alone. Today, mainline Protestants account for just 16% of the U.S. population, says University of Akron political scientist John C. Green.

In contrast, evangelicalism's theological flexibility gives it the freedom to adapt to contemporary culture. With no overarching authority like the Vatican, leaders don't need to wrestle with a bureaucratic hierarchy that dictates acceptable behavior. "If you have a vision for ministry, you just do it, which makes it far easier to respond to market demand," says University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill sociology professor Christian Smith. . . .

Many evangelicals say they're just trying to satisfy demands not met by traditional churches. Craig Groeschel, who launched Life Church in Edmond, Okla., in 1996, started out doing market research with non-churchgoers in the area - and got an earful. "They said churches were full of hypocrites and were boring," he recalls. So he designed Life Church to counter those preconceptions, with lively, multimedia-filled services in a setting that's something between a rock concert and a coffee shop.

[Okay, let me just stop here for a minute. Where in the Bible do you find the followers of Jesus doing a market research to see what they like and dislike about church? You don't and again, that is very dangerous. Where is a church service to be like a rock concert or coffee shop in the Bible? You won't find it. Yes, there are different ways you can teach the Word of God but if you noticed, that was not even mentioned, and these churches were not places to grow in the Lord but to get your physical appetites met!

You see, you are trying to be a man pleaser instead of a God pleaser and to be a man pleaser many times means you have to compromise what God has said in His Word! I have had many people who have become mad at me and left this church because of what I have said. But if I begin to compromise for this person and what they are doing or believing, then what about the other person and that goes on and on until you have moved away from the Word of God and you are there to tickle people's ears. Even the Bible says that in the last day people will seek out those who can tickle their ears and they will find them! You see, we do have someone that will direct us, it is God and through His Word. He tells us what is right and what is wrong. He tells us how to get right when we have gone astray and He tells us how to stay right. See II Timothy 3:16-17. You don't give people what they want, you give them what they need and that is the Word of God empowered by the Spirit of God! Let me continue on with the report.]

Once established, some ambitious churches are making a big business out of spreading their expertise. Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Ill., formed a consulting arm called Willow Creek Assn. It earned \$17 million last year, partly by selling marketing and management advice to 10,500 member churches from 90 denominations.

Jim Mellado, the hard-charging Harvard MBA who runs it, last year brought an astonishing 110,000 church and lay leaders to conferences on topics such as effective leadership. “Our entrepreneurial impulse comes from the Biblical mandate to get the message out,” says Willow Creek founder Bill Hybels, who hired Stanford MBA Greg Hawkins, a former McKinsey & Co. consultant, to handle the church’s day-to-day management. Willow Creek’s methods have even been lauded in a Harvard Business School case study.

Hybel’s consumer-driven approach is evident at Willow Creek, where he shunned stained glass, Bibles, or even a cross for the 7,200-seat, \$72 million sanctuary he recently built. The reason? Market research suggested that such traditional symbols would scare away non-churchgoers. He also gives practical advice. On a recent Wednesday evening, one of his four “teaching” pastors gave a service that started with 20 minutes of music, followed by a lengthy sermon about the Christian approach to personal finances. He told the 5,000 listeners about resisting advertising aimed at getting people to buy things they don’t need and suggested they follow up at home by e-mailing questions.

Like Osteen, Hybel packages self-help programs with a positive message intended to make people feel good about themselves. “When I walk out of a service, I feel completely relieved of any stress I walked in with,” says Phil Earnest, 38, a sales manager who in 2003 switched to Willow Creek from the Methodist Church he found too stodgy.

[Sorry, I have to interject once again. What is the message that they are getting out that Harvard Business School thinks is great? It is not that God became flesh and dwelt among us to pay in full the penalty for our sins by dying on the cross of Calvary and rising the third day. The message is how to market your church, how to grow your church. And again, we don't market it, God adds to it! It is all about business and I find it interesting that they are warning their congregations about marketing schemes and then they sell their programs to churches who many times can't afford them! It is a double standard and it is not the Gospel message. Let me continue with just a few more points from this article.]

So adept at the sell are some evangelicals that it can be difficult to distinguish between their religious aims and the secular style they mimic. Last December, Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano, Tex., staged a spectacular Christmas festival, including a 500-person choir, that attracted 70,000 people even though the cheapest ticket was \$20. Throughout the year, some 16,000 people take part in its sports program, which uses eight playing fields and six gyms on its \$100 million, 140-acre campus. The teams, coached by church members, bring in converts, many of them children, says Executive Pastor Mike Buster. . . .

For all their seemingly unstoppable success, evangelicals must contend with powerful forces in U.S. society. The ranks of Americans who express no religious preference have quadrupled since 1991, to 14%, according to a recent poll. Despite the megachurch surge, overall church attendance has remained fairly flat. And if anything, popular culture has become more vulgar in recent years. Still, experts like pollster Gallup see clear signs of a rising fascination with spirituality in the U.S. The September 11 attacks are one reason. So is the aging of the culturally influential Baby Boom, since spirituality tends to increase with age, he says. If so, no one is better poised than evangelicals to capitalize on the trend.

- William C. Symonds, with Brian Grow in Atlanta and John Cady in New York, *Earthly Empires* How evangelical churches are borrowing from the business playbook, May 23, 2005

Listen to this once again, “So adept at the sell are some evangelicals that it can be difficult to distinguish between their religious aims and the secular style they mimic.”

That is a very sad statement, you can’t tell the difference in what they do and what the world does. In other words, “We don’t need God, we have techniques that work and thus, look at how we are growing!”

But let’s look at this for a minute. Now if this new marketing strategy is working, why don’t we see the Kingdom of God growing, why is it at a standstill? Because these Megachurches are growing and they are taking sheep from other churches and denominations. It is a marketing strategy and like in the business world, the bigger, the more glamorous, the more things you can offer the people, the more they will come into your church. That is the mentality, if you build it they will come and yet the Bible says that it is the Lord who builds the house and not man! Several years back we had a family leave the church because they felt that their grandkids could get more out of this larger church. The husband felt that the teaching was poor but at least the grandkids were getting something out of it! Again, how dangerous is that and if the adults are not being fed, are they also entertaining the children? Do we want our ears tickled that much?

I kind of got off on this subject because I said that the church was not an organization, it is not a business but it is a living organism. And I know that there are those who will disagree with me because they say that the church has to have structure, it has to have organization. Thus, the visible church is an organization and not a living organism like the universal church or the invisible church.

Do me a favor. Look to the person next to you, who is a living being, right? If you are not sure, check their pulse. If they don't have one, it is not going to matter, wait till church is over. Now this person next to you, this living organism, take a good look at them and see if there is organization within that living being. What do you think, organization or chaos? Now I am not talking about their clothes, that is a matter of taste, but this living being next to you is organized!

Make no mistake about it; living things have a level of complexity and organization not found in lifeless objects. Just go to its most fundamental level and you will see that a living thing is composed of one or more cells. These units, generally too small to be seen with the unaided eye, are organized into tissues. A tissue is a series of cells that accomplish a shared function. Tissues, in turn, form organs, such as the stomach and kidney. A number of organs working together compose an organ system. An organism is a complex series of various organ systems. Yes, there is organization in living things and thus, I am convinced, as I read the Scriptures that the church is not some organization that functions on the level of business techniques, but is living and the head of this organism is Jesus! He is the one who controls everything, at least He should!

Now let me show you what the church is. Don't worry, we finished the introduction!

1. THE CHURCH IS BELIEVERS JOINED TO CHRIST'S SPIRITUAL BODY BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

Paul makes this point in I Corinthians 12:12-13 as he tells us, **“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free - and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.”**

The Amplified Bible puts these verses like this, **“For just as the body is a unity and yet has many parts, and all the parts, though many, form [only] one body, so it is with Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One). For by [means of the personal agency of] one [Holy] Spirit we were all, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, baptized [and by baptism united together] into one body, and all made to drink of one [Holy] Spirit.”**

Paul starts out talking about how complex the human body is and yet it is still just one body that is made up of many different parts. It is complex and it is unified, all working together for a common goal or cause, the betterment of the entire body. And think about this, you can't divide the human body into several different bodies, that would destroy the body, it would no longer function! If some part of the body is removed, the body as a whole can function but it will function with less effectiveness than when it was with the part that was removed.

Paul then takes this illustration of the human body and applies it to the body of Christ! Yes, within the body of Christ there are many different parts, functions, but there is only one church in which Christ is the head and we as believers are all part of that! And think about this for a minute. If you were to remove Jesus from the church today what would you have? A dead organism because you can't remove the head of human body and survive just as you can't remove the head of the church, Jesus and survive!

We see this illustrated for us in Revelation 3:14-22. Listen to what Jesus tells this church and warns us, **“And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, “I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing” - and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked - I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’”**

Now there is a lot we can cover here but what I want you to see, what I want you to focus on is that these church going people were self-sufficient, they were in need of nothing, not even Jesus! How do I know that? Because Jesus is outside the church and He is knocking to get in. He is calling for anyone to open the door. How is that done? It is as simple as opening the door for Christ to come in, of repenting of your sin and asking Him to be Lord of your life or Lord of the church.

Holman Hunt painted a picture of Jesus knocking on a door, and this painting hangs in St. Paul's cathedral in London. As this painting was unveiled, a critic came up to Mr. Hunt and said, "You've made a mistake, Mr. Hunt, there's no handle on the door!" "That was intentional," replied Hunt. "The door opens only from the inside!" You see, the only one preventing you from going to heaven is **YOU!** Jesus is telling you to open the door of your heart so He may come in and be not only Savior but Lord of your life! And for the church that has cut off its head, removed Jesus, it is in trouble, there is no real life there. They may go through the motions, the activities but there is no life!

And if a person isolates themselves from a local body, they too are hurting that body because each person plays a part, has a role in the body of Christ!

Now in verse 13 of I Corinthians chapter 12 Paul tells us that the church is formed when believers are baptized by Christ with the Holy Spirit. And please keep in mind that Paul is not speaking of water baptism here but this is a work of God, of the Holy Spirit and it is speaking of our salvation. And so in regards to this first point, that believer's are joined to Christ's spiritual body by the Holy Spirit, we have see that in Christ there is a diversity of people with a variety of gifts and yet we still are one body, the body of Christ!

2. THE CHURCH IS INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE PLACED THEIR FAITH IN THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

Obviously this is important for us to understand, what does it mean to put your faith in Jesus to be saved? Let me show you what Paul had to say and then I will expound on this. Remember in Acts chapter 16, Paul and Silas were thrown into the Philippian jail for freeing a demon possessed girl and taking away the profit of her masters who made money on her fortune-telling abilities.

Before they were thrown in prison they severely beat Paul and Silas and then threw them in what we might call a maximum security prison. Not only that, but their feet were placed in stocks which Bruce comments on by saying, “These stocks had more than two holes for legs, which could thus be forced apart in such a way as to cause the utmost discomfort and cramping pain.”

So as they are in this dirty, stinking, filthy prison, Paul and Silas began praying and singing unto the Lord. As they were there was an earthquake that shook the ground and their chains fell off their feet and the prison doors were opened for all to escape, not just Paul and Silas.

When the jailer, who was sleeping through the prayers and the singing unto God, was awakened by this earthquake, as the ground he stood on began to shake, he was scared. You see, as he looked he thought all the prisoners had escaped since all the doors were open and he couldn't see anyone, so he is ready to kill himself. Why? Because if you let a prisoner escape you would have to carry out their sentence, and this jailer thinks all his prisoners were gone, thus, he is going to end his life, thinking this is a better way to go. He has no hope, at least in anything that he could do regarding this situation.

And the amazing thing to me is that none of the prisoners left, they did not escape. Then where were they? I think they were around Paul and Silas seeking this Jesus that they were praying to and singing to! Thus, this jailer looks in and he sees all this, and he too wants to know what he needs to do to be saved.

And that truly is the \$100,000 question “**Sirs, what must I do to be saved?**” and that is going to be answered by Paul! Listen to what Paul tells this man in Acts 16:31, “**. . . ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.’**” Notice that Paul did not say to be saved you have to, “Climb the highest mountain” or “Crawl on your knees to some shrine” or “Light some candles before some statute” or even “You need to keep the Law.” No, Paul did not say any of those things, but what he did say to this man and his family was this, “**. . . ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.’**” And the Greek word for “**believe**” is PISTIS which speaks of trusting, relying upon and clinging to Jesus!

To believe in the Lord Jesus is not a work, it is faith. And that means you have to believe He is the one that He claimed to be, God Almighty! Jesus said in John 8:24, “**Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am [He], you will die in your sins.**” In other words, if you do not believe that Jesus is the *Great I AM*, Almighty God you will die in your sins!

Not only that but John tells us in John 20:31, “**but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.**” To believe means that you must believe that Jesus is who He claimed to be!

Secondly, you must believe what He came to do, to set man free from His sins, to pay that penalty in full. Paul put it like this in I Corinthians 15:3-4, **“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”** That is the Gospel message and thus, if you reject that Jesus is God, if you reject that He has come to set us free from our sins by paying the penalty for our sins, then you don’t really believe and you are not saved! And so the Church is made up of individuals who have placed their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, they believe that He is Almighty God who died for their sins!

3. THE CHURCH ON THE EARTH IS JOINED TO A LOCAL BODY OF BELIEVERS WHO MEET REGULARLY

Now this is one that, I’ll be honest, drives me nuts. There are people who don’t feel they need to go to church, they will listen on television or on the radio and I guess they feel that they are fulfilling some kind of commitment. Like it or not, that is not biblical! Paul, in Hebrews 10:24-25 wrote, **“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”**

The Amplified Bible puts this verse like this, **“And let us consider and give attentive, continuous care to watching over one another, studying how we may stir up (stimulate and incite) to love and helpful deeds and noble activities, Not forsaking or neglecting to assemble together [as believers], as is the habit of some people, but admonishing (warning, urging, and encouraging) one another, and all the more faithfully as you see the day approaching.”**

Now before I say anything else, let me make this perfectly clear. I am not saying you have to go to church; you can do what you want. But you do get to go to church and in doing so you are part of the local body of believers and you are able to use the gifts that God has given to you to minister to those in the local body. Believe me, God does not need you, but you do need Him and He will use you if you let Him. Paul is clearly admonishing us not to forsake the gathering together of believers!

Regarding these verses here in Hebrews chapter 10 John MacArthur wrote,

Some years ago, a young man sat next to me on a plane and we struck up a conversation. When he discovered I was a minister, he said, “I used to belong to a church, but it seems to me that a person’s relationship to Christ ought to be personal, not institutional. What do you think?” After thanking the Lord silently for providing such an open opportunity for witness, I said, “I certainly agree with you.” He then asked if I knew how he could have a personal relationship with Christ - to which I also answered in the affirmative. I thought to myself, “He certainly seems to feel his need for Christ,” and so I asked if he had studied the truth of the gospel and the evidence for Christ’s claims. He replied, “Yes, but I just don't know how to get to Him.”

“Are you ready to commit yourself to Him?” I asked. He said that he was, and as we prayed together he made the commitment. The next Sunday he was in our morning worship service, and afterward asked me if our church had anything going on during the week that he could become involved in. This young man gave every evidence of being a true believer. He felt his need, he studied the evidence, he made a commitment to Jesus Christ, and was showing every desire to hold fast to Christ and to have fellowship with His people.

The writer is saying very simply, “The door is open, the way is made available to enter into God’s presence. Come in and stay and fellowship with His people, and enjoy God’s company forever.”

- John MacArthur, Hebrews 10:24-25

Why is this really so important? First of all we are part of the body of Christ and we are to stir each other up in the work of God, encourage them to take those steps of faith. I first got started in a ministry that I was in charge of by the encouragement of a brother in the Lord, and I thank God he stirred my heart!

May we have that kind of heart that stirs people up for service, for walking in holiness! Also, being a loner sets you up for the enemy to get at. But, as we gather together we are strong in the Lord. I don’t know if you have had anyone say something like this to you, but I have on several occasions. “I don’t need to go to church, we have church in our house, or on the golf course, or in the woods, or whatever!” The problem with that kind of thinking is it is wrong. Paul is admonishing us to gather together as a local body of believers to worship God, to stir each other up for good works and-so-on.

So if you are not doing that, then you are negating what the Scriptures are saying here! That is why it is so important, not that you have to go to church, but you get to go to church and use the gifts that God has given to you!

Let me show you how this works outside of the church but it should be happening in the church itself. We are told,

One of the most touching moments in the Sydney Olympics was when Eric “The Swimmer” Moussambani of Equatorial Guinea swam in the 100-meter free style qualifying heat. The 22-year-old African had only learned to swim last January, had only practiced in a 20-meter pool without lane markers, and had never raced more than 50 meters. By special invitation of the International Olympic Committee, under a special program that permits poorer countries to participate even though their athletes don’t meet customary standards, he had been entered in the 100-meter men’s freestyle.

When the other two swimmers in his heat were disqualified because of false starts, Moussambani was forced to swim alone. Eric Moussambani was, to use the words of an Associated Press story about his race, “charmingly inept.” He never put his head under the water’s surface and flailed wildly to stay afloat. With ten meters left to the wall, he virtually came to a stop. Some spectators thought he might drown! Even though his time was over a minute slower than what qualified for the next level of competition, the capacity crowd at the Olympic Aquatic Center stood to their feet and cheered the swimmer on. After what seemed like an eternity, the African reached the wall and hung on for dear life. When he had caught his breath and regained his composure, the French-speaking Moussambani said through an interpreter, “I want to send hugs and kisses to the crowd. It was their cheering that kept me going.”

As Christians, we have a cheering section encouraging us on when we are tired and calling out to us to do better when we are feeling at our best. The author of Hebrews says, “We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses.” What in the world does he mean - great cloud of witnesses? The author of Hebrews is telling us that we are a part of something much richer and deeper than we know. As children of God and as brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, we are a part of a family.

- Dr. Bruce Emmert

As part of the body of Christ we are to be a part of a local church. We are not to negate our time together or make excuses why we can't make it. If you really want to do something you will do it no matter what! And thus, if you really want to come to church you will. You will not have to be forced to come and as you come and worship the Lord the Lord will not only minister to you, many times through other people and of course through the teaching of His Word, but you will be able to minister to other people and we are to continue gathering together until the Lord comes back or we go to be with Him! We are not only to be joined to a local church but we are to meet regularly with them and use those gifts that God has given to you!

4. THE CHURCH IS FOR EQUIPPING FOR THE WORK OF MINISTRY AND EDIFICATION

Paul, in Ephesians 4:12 told us that the pastor/teachers, teachers, evangelists are given as gifts to the church by Jesus “**for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.**”

As you read through these offices in the church did you see what they are supposed to accomplish? They are to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. It is not the pastor that does the work of the ministry but the saints that are being taught by those that are in these offices. It doesn't mean the pastor doesn't do these things, but that is not his primary purpose.

The Greek word that Paul uses for "**equipping**" is KATARISMOS, (kat-ar-tis-mos). It is a word that is often used as a medical term for the setting of a bone. It also illustrates to us the idea of putting something back to its original condition, that it is made complete, perfect. These offices are there to help return men and women back to God and to make them complete in their walk. Today, tragically it is not about building people up in the faith but to grow a church in numbers and so the church in America may be 3,000 miles wide but only an inch deep! And we therefore have Christians who are unstable in their walk because they don't know what to believe; they are not built up in the faith!

Do you see how important these gifts are to the church? As you equip the saints for the work of the ministry, as they go out and do the work of the ministry what happens to them? They are built up in the faith, they are encouraged, they are edified in the work that they are doing! But it is all based in the teachings of God that they go out and that work, as they minister to others builds them up in the faith and it builds up the body of Christ!

Make no mistake about it, the church is to build people up in the faith, but most of that edifying in the body of Christ is when the people take what they have learned and live what they say they believe! And as I said with our last section, if you are not going to church, then you are missing out on this! So the church is to equip saints to go out and do the work of the ministry and to build up, edify the body of believers and that is done from within the church and also as the people use their gifts in the church and they also go out into the world and use the gifts that God has given to them out there!

5. THE CHURCH IS A PLACE OF WORSHIP AND OBSERVING ORDINANCES

The last one we are going to look at this morning is found in John 4:24 where Jesus said, **“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”** We see here that we are not only to worship God but as we do we must do so in spirit, we must be saved, and in truth, we must adhere to the Words of God, the ordinances of God I believe can be included in them and we will expound on this in future studies. But the ones I am speaking of here are communion and baptism. They are not a requirement for salvation, Jesus is, but Jesus also said that we should observe them!

Let’s focus here on the worship of God. In England during the time of William Shakespeare and before, you would not use the word “worship.” Instead you would use the word “worth-ship” and the idea here is that we are assigning to God his true worth, He alone is worthy to be praised, He alone is worthy to be worshiped! It speaks of bowing before the King, kissing His hand, acknowledging that He alone is God!

William Barclay wrote, “The true, the genuine worship is when man, through his spirit, attains to friendship and intimacy with God. True and genuine worship is not to come to a certain place; it is not to go through a certain ritual or liturgy; it is not even to bring certain gifts. True worship is when the spirit, the immortal and invisible part of man, speaks to and meets with God, who is immortal and invisible.” And I would like to add to that this point. Our relationship with God is also manifested in our lives, in what we do and what we say. How we live can bring glory to God, it is a form of worship! Sin separated us from God, broke that fellowship with God and Jesus came to restore that relationship and tragically, many don’t worship the Lord, they don’t spend time with Him!

Remember what Paul said in Romans 12:1, **“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”** The Amplified Bible puts this verse like this, **“I APPEAL to you therefore, brethren, and beg of you in view of [all] the mercies of God, to make a decisive dedication of your bodies [presenting all your members and faculties] as a living sacrifice, holy (devoted, consecrated) and well pleasing to God, which is your reasonable (rational, intelligent) service and spiritual worship.”**

Now in saying that, please understand that the church, the worship of the church consists of individual and corporate worship of the Lord! Our worship of God must be upward, He must be the focus and not any man or created thing. Our worship of God must be based in the Word of God, it can be seen in our prayers to God as prayer is just speaking with God, letting Him know what is upon our heart and giving Him the glory and honor that is due His Name! Singing is another form of worship although for many, they think that is all it consists of and others negate worship at all. That is sad to me because in heaven, we will worship the Lord and you will like it then! Even our giving is a form of worship unto the Lord for what the Lord has given to us we give back to Him. And, believe it or not, our fellowship with each other is a form of worship of God as the way we treat each other can bring glory to God or it can dishonor Him. (Acts 2:42).

Now we will also deal more with this issue of worship as we move on in these studies but I want you to see some of the things the church is because there are a lot of things that the church is involved in that it should not be involved in.

And so, is the church an organization or an organism? It is a living organism and not a dead organization. Paul wrote, “**And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.**” Colossians 1:18. Jesus is the head of the church and we make up the rest of the body of Christ, each fulfilling the role that God has given to us in the local body and in the universal body!

Next time we will continue looking at the subject of the church and specifically what the universal church is all about, this invisible church. But before I close the study this morning, remember that the church, those who have been called out from this world to Jesus have been joined to Christ's spiritual body by the Holy Spirit. We have been placed into the body of Christ by our faith in Jesus. We have been given a local body of believers in which we can encourage and build up with the gifts that God has given to us and we should be meeting regularly. We have been given gifted men to equip us for the work of the ministry and for the edifying of the body of Christ. We are to worship the Lord and share in communion and baptism. That is what the church is about and we will deal more regarding the church over the next few weeks.

As I close let me share with you this true story by Lloyd Cory. It goes like this,

The ministry of the church is a ministry of people. When a church lives, it lives because the people within are vital and active. When a church dies, it withers and dies not because the brick and mortar and carpet and pews get old and begin to crack and rip and crumble. A church withers and dies because the people wither and die.

I think a vivid illustration of this comes from a true story of a young minister in Oklahoma who went to this little, though longstanding, church in hopes of really reviving the ministry of it. He had stars in his eyes and great hopes for the future. He thought he could turn it around. And he gave it his best effort and his best shot week after week, to no avail.

Finally, he had one last idea, and it seemed to work. He announced in the local newspaper on Saturday that the church had died, and on Sunday afternoon there would be a funeral service at the church itself, and all who wished could attend. For the first time in his years there the place was packed. In fact, people were standing outside on tiptoes looking through the window to see this most unusual funeral service for a church.

To their shock, because most of them got there twenty or thirty minutes early to get a seat, there was a casket down front. And it was smothered with flowers. He told the people as soon as the eulogy was finished they could pass by and view the remains of the dearly beloved that they were putting to rest that day. They could hardly wait until he finished the eulogy. He slowly opened the casket, pushed the flowers aside, and people walked by, filed by, one by one, to look in and leave sheepishly, feeling guilty as they walked out the door, because inside the casket he had placed a large mirror. As they walked by, they saw the church had died.

- Lloyd Cory, Quote Unquote

May we as individuals and part of the body of Christ stay attached to the true vine, Jesus Christ who will give us all we need to live out our faith and to keep us spiritually healthy and strong. This church here at Calvary is alive not because we are plugged into some program, but we are attached to Jesus! Never forget that because once we do, you will hear the funeral bells begin to ring, the church has died!