

FOUNDATION OF FAITH!
ECCLESIOLOGY
THE STUDY OF THE CHURCH
PART 2

This morning, in our Foundation of Faith series we are in part 2 of our study of the church or ecclesiology. Last time we looked at what the church is and we said that the Greek word, ekklesia means “those called out” and thus, the church are those who have been called out by God, called out of the world! It is not a building. It is not an organization. It is a living organism with the head being Christ!

This morning we are going to cover two important topics regarding the church. We are going to look at what the Universal Church or the Invisible Church is all about and we will then focus on the Visible Church and what that is all about. Again, important topics that I truly believe we need to understand because people, churches, organizations will throw these words around like they are the same and they are not as you will see this morning.

Before we get to these subjects, let me just share this with you. You think I make mistakes in our church bulletin, you have not seen anything like this! And the reason I am sharing this with you is to show you that the church, the body of believers come together to worship the Lord, to study His Word, and to enjoy fellowship together. We can laugh and we can cry and we can grow. So let me just share a few with you.

- Bertha Belch, a missionary from Africa, will be speaking tonight at Calvary Memorial Church. Come and hear Bertha Belch all the way from Africa.
- Our youth basketball team is back in action Wednesday in the recreation hall. Come and watch us kill Christ the King.

- Miss Cheryl Hanson sang “I Will Not Pass This Way Again,” giving obvious pleasure to the congregation.
- Ladies, don’t forget the rummage sale. It’s a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Don’t forget your husbands.
- The peacemaking meeting scheduled for today has been canceled due to a conflict.
- The sermon this morning is “Jesus Walks on the Water.” The sermon tonight is “Searching for Jesus.”
- Barbara remains in the hospital and needs blood donors for more transfusions. She is also having trouble sleeping and requests tapes of Pastor Joe’s sermons.
- During the absence of our pastor, we enjoyed the rare privilege of hearing a good sermon when Steve and Conrad taught from our pulpit.
- Don’t let worry kill you off. Let the Church help.
- Gil Henson and Jolene Jackson were married on October 24. So ends a friendship that began in their school days.
- At the evening service tonight, the sermon topic will be “What is Hell?” Come early and listen to our choir practice.

Now we laugh at that but folks, that truly is us, the church, the body of believers Today! God has a great sense of humor as He puts us together and then sends us out to do the work of the ministry, to bring the Gospel Message, the Good News to a lost and dying world. And as we saw last week regarding what the church is. We are:

- Believers joined to Christ’s spiritual body by the Holy Spirit.
- Individuals who have placed their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Joined together to a local body of believers who meet regularly.
- For the equipping for the work of ministry and edification.
- A place of worship and observing ordinances.

And with that said, let's move on and look at the Universal or Invisible Church and what that is all about.

1. THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH OR THE INVISIBLE CHURCH

Now what is this Universal Church or this Invisible Church all about? Very simply, the Universal Church or the Invisible Church is made up of all believers, even those in heaven. It is not a local body of believers or some denomination, but it is all believers living and dead. We will deal with the Visible Church in a few minutes, but the problem with the Visible Church is that it is made up of believers and unbelievers; there are tares among the wheat you might say.

Now you may read from many years ago about the Catholic Church and many times they are not speaking of a denomination but of the Universal Church, that is what the word "Catholic" means. Now if they spoke of the Roman Catholic Church then they would be speaking of a denomination. And this denomination believes that they are the Universal Church on this earth, but as we will see, that is not what the Scriptures teach.

Let me also say this. There are those that say that there is no such thing as the Universal Church and they put down the idea of the Invisible Church because they say that the Church is not to be invisible but it is to be seen! Many times people come to conclusions like this because they don't believe it is true and thus, they go to the extreme and say that this can't be right because Jesus says we are to be the light of the world. That is not at all what these words are speaking of. They are talking, like I have said, of the body of Christ both living and those that have gone to be with the Lord. It is invisible in that sense! I hope that clears that up.

Now in the Old Testament it was not a mystery that Gentiles would be brought into the redemptive community of God, the mystery was that God was going to bring both Jew and Gentile together into one body, the Church of Christ! Paul picks up on this in Ephesians 3:1-7 as he wrote, **“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles - if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.”**

Paul was dispensing a mystery that was revealed to him by God. Paul uses the Greek word MUSTERION (moss-tay'-ree'on) for **“mystery”** and it is different from our English word, which speaks of something that is secret, or puzzling, or dark, something that we can't know. The word that Paul uses speaks of something that has been hidden from human knowledge but now has been disclosed by the direct revelation of God and here, to Paul. That mystery is that Jews and Gentiles would be united together into one body in Christ. This is speaking of all believers and not a local church body!

And this Church, this body of believers did not begin until the day of Pentecost even though the 120 in the upper room were believers, it got its start on the day of Pentecost. We see Paul pick up on that in Acts 20:28 when he said, “**Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.**” Did you see that? It was the death and resurrection of Jesus, His shed blood that was, in a sense, the seed that started the Church and it continues on only through Him!

Of this Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871-1952) wrote, “There could be no church in the world . . . until Christ’s death; for her relation to that death is not a mere anticipation, but is based wholly on his finished work, and she must be purified by His precious blood.” Lewis Sperry Chafer, Systematic Theology, 4:45.

Let me make a few more comments about the Universal Church or the Invisible Church before we move on to the Visible Church. The Universal church, Christ’s spiritual body, is ethnically and socially neutral. It doesn’t matter what color your skin is, it doesn’t matter where you are from, it does not matter if you are rich or poor, a leader or just a common worker, it doesn’t matter what your status is in this world, because in Christ we are one and we make up the body of Christ, the Universal Church!

You see, the universal church, of which the local church should be a reflection, is composed of all who belong to Jesus Christ, for in Him all are one (Galatians 3:28). There are no racial, national, or political distinctions; Christ’s body transcends all of these as a spiritual union of all believers since Pentecost. That is the distinction, believers! You see, not only are all saved persons in the Universal Church, but only saved people are in it!

And hear me out on this, you may not agree but the Universal Church is not political because our Leader, our King is Jesus! And I can even see this played out in the Visible Church. There are some churches that if you don't agree with their political affiliation you are gone or you are so uncomfortable that you leave. I think we should vote and vote to the best of our ability, to put the best person in office. Too often we compromise what we believe so we can benefit from the person in office and that is wrong! But our mission is not political, it is evangelical, may we not forget that!

And here's the thing, some of the differences between the Universal Church or the Invisible Church and the Visible Church. The local church has both saved and unsaved in it. Wheat and tares are made up of the local church and you can read of that in Matthew 13:24-30. The local church has wolves in it and you can read of that in Acts 20:28-29. The local church has false brethren within it, and you can read of that in Galatians 2:4. The local church has unbelievers in it, and you can read of that in I Corinthians 14:23. And some of those unbelieving leaders have crept into the local church as Jude 4 tells us!

The bottom line is this. Only the Universal Church is truly catholic, which that word means. The local church is not catholic in nature only the Universal Church is as we have seen. You will never find in the Scriptures the local church spoken of as the catholic or universal church on earth. I don't care what denomination or non-denomination you are from! Not even Calvary Chapel; we are part of the local church. Only the invisible church is truly universal, it is truly catholic!

Now let's move on and look at the Visible or local Church.

2. THE VISIBLE CHURCH OR THE LOCAL CHURCH

Of the 115 New Testament references to the church or churches, nearly 100 of them refer to the Visible Church or Churches! And like the Universal Church, the Visible Church has Christ as the head; He is the One who is to lead the Church. Paul, in Ephesians 1:22-23 tells us, “**And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.**” Jesus is the head of the church and we as believers are His body. Thus, if Jesus is not in control, then we are running around with our heads cut off! Let us be guided by Him.

Look at what Christ, as the Head of His Church, the Body of Christ does in His Church.

- He holds the “messengers” in His right hand – Revelation 1:20
- He rebukes the churches for their sin – Revelation 2:9
- He commands them to repent – Revelation 2:5
- He will judge and reward them for their deeds – Revelation 2:5, 10, 26, 3:12
- He takes away their Lampstand (church) if they are not faithful – Revelation 2:5
- He searches all of their minds and hearts – Revelation 2:23
- He convicts them by His Spirit – Revelation 3:22

Just like our brains that control the function of our body, so Christ controls His Church and guides it, directs it to where He wants it to go and what He wants it to do. Frances Schaeffer writes, “These are the things that the world should see when they look upon the church – something that they cannot possibly explain away. . . . The church of the Lord Jesus Christ should be functioning moment by moment on a supernatural plane. This is the church living by faith, and not an unfaith. This is the church living practically under Christ’s leadership, rather than thinking of Christ being far off and building the invisible Church, while we build that which is at hand with our own wisdom and power.” Francis Schaeffer, *True Spirituality*, pp. 172, 174.

You look at what goes on in the church today, and like I have said before, it is like a business that has marketing schemes to help grow the church and sadly, many get involved in these things. Regarding this issue of marketing the church, T. A. McMahon, from *The Berean Call* wrote,

During the last three decades, many have experienced Christianity in church setting that major in the entertainment rather than in teaching the Scriptures and discipling those who attend. Thus, they are the products of years of church-growth marketing schemes that have attempted to fill pews with the “unchurched” and keep them coming back by using consumer-oriented tactics.

It’s a “keep the customer happy,” seeker-friendly approach that has critically diluted the biblical content as churches compete with the world in order to interest their youth. The game rooms of some mega-churches could put to shame their cities’ most popular arcades.

The marketing mentality of “do whatever it takes to attract and keep the kids coming back to the church” reflects a “bait and switch” scheme, and in most situations the “bait” (games, music that mimics the world, and entertainment) overwhelms the intended “switch” (learning the Bible). That endeavor has both trivialized and marginalized the instruction of the Word of God for those who have been subjected to that worldly approach. The outcome has resulted in a shallow Christianity for millions of young professing Christians. . . .

- T. A. McMahon, *The Berean Call*

Pastor John MacArthur, from *Grace to You*, makes these comments regarding the marketing strategies of the church. He wrote,

The leading strategists for church growth today are therefore all pollsters and public relations managers. In the words of Rick Warren, “If you want to advertise your church to the unchurched, you must learn to think and speak like they do.” [Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) 189].

An endless parade of self-styled church-growth specialists has been repeating that same mantra for several decades, and multitudes of Christians and church leaders now accept the idea uncritically.

Both their message to the world and the means by which they communicate that message have been carefully tailored by consumer relations experts to appeal to worldly minds.

Many church leaders have radically changed the way they look at the gospel. Rather than seeing it as a message from God that Christians are called to proclaim as Christ's ambassadors (without tampering with it or changing it in any way), they now treat it like a commodity to be sold at market. Rather than plainly *preaching* God's Word in a way that unleashes the power and truth of it, they try desperately to package the message to make it subtler and more appealing to the world.

The most compelling question in the minds and on the lips of many pastors today is not "What's true?" but rather "What works?"

Evangelicals these days care less about theology than they do about *methodology*. Truth has taken a backseat to more pragmatic concerns. When a person is trying hard to customize one's message to meet the "felt needs" of one's audience, earnestly contending for the faith is out of the question.

That is precisely why, for many years now, evangelical leaders have systematically embraced and fostered almost every worldly, shallow, and frivolous idea that comes into the church. A pathological devotion to superficiality has practically become the chief hallmark of the movement. Evangelicals are obsessed with pop culture, and they ape [mimic] it fanatically.

Contemporary church leaders are so busy trying to stay current with the latest fads that they rarely give much sober thought to weightier scriptural matters.

In the typical evangelical church, even Sunday services are often devoted to the trivial pursuit of worldly things. After all, churches are competing for attention in a media-driven world. So the church vainly tries to put on a bigger, flashier spectacle than the world. . . .

Evangelical churchgoers desperately want their churches to stay on the leading edge of whatever is currently in vogue in the evangelical community. It almost seems like ancient history now, but for a while, any church that wanted to be in fashion had to sponsor seminars on how to pray the prayer of Jabez. But woe to the church that was still doing Jabez when *The Purpose-Driven Life* took center stage. By then, any church that wanted to retain its standing and credibility in the evangelical movement had better be doing “Forty Days of Purpose.”

And if your church didn’t get through the “Forty Days” in time to host group studies or preach a series of sermons about *The Da Vinci Code* before the Hollywood movie version came out, then your church was considered badly out of touch with what really matters.

It is too late now if you missed any of those trends. To use the language of the movement, they are all so five minutes ago. If your church is just now experimenting with Emerging-style worship, candles, postmodern liturgy, and the like, then you are clearly way behind - that train already left the station . . . and *crashed*.

Of course, I’m not suggesting that all those trends are equally bad. Some of them are not necessarily bad at all. For example, there can be great benefit in teaching a congregation how to respond to something like *The Da Vinci Code*. But contemporary evangelicals have been conditioned to anticipate and follow *every* fad with an almost mindless herd mentality. They sometimes seem to move from fad to fad with an uninhibited and undiscerning eagerness that does leave them exposed to things that may well be spiritually lethal.

In fact, the question of whether the latest trend is dangerous or not is not a welcome question in most evangelical circles anymore. Whatever happens to be popular at the moment is what drives the whole evangelical agenda. . . .

- John MacArthur, How Did We Make Such
An Evangelical Mess? March 03, 2010

Folk's, if you have known me for any length of time you know I am not about marketing the church. And I do realize some of you may feel that we should market the church, what is wrong with those techniques? And let me say this before I answer that. We do have our name on the sign in front of the building. We do have our name and information in the Visitor's Center booklet. There is nothing wrong with that but how far do you want to take that? Do you want to draw the people in with your marketing schemes? If you do then you better be prepared to come up with new ideas to keep them in the church because they are going to get board after some time!

I like God's plan better. It takes the pressure off of me and really off of you and it rests upon the Lord. In Acts 2:42-47 we see how God grows a church and it is vastly different from any marketing scheme that is out there. We are told, "**And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.**"

Interestingly enough, verses 42 and 43 are the verses I preached on during my first Sunday Morning message here at Calvary almost 17 years ago! I felt that this was the foundation for our church, what we are to do. And it is very simple, it doesn't cost any money, you don't need marketing experts to do this.

Notice what this church was all about. They had a oneness of mind in studying the Scriptures, in fellowship with each other, in the breaking of bread which included meals and communion I believe, and in prayer. The result is the power of God working in and through these believers in such a way that within 30 years the Gospel message went throughout the whole known world! They lived what they believed and others noticed it, they saw the power of God in them! No marketing strategies. No talk on how to draw more people into the church. No talk of compromising the Gospel message because some might not like it. They feed the sheep and the goats or unbelievers who were there with them heard the truths of God found in the Word of God. Some turned to Christ and became sheep and others remained goats and nothing was going to change that, no matter what song and dance show you put on for them. That is how you do church!

And the world was fearful of what they were doing. The world was fearful because of the light of Christ that was shinning upon their sin through the church, through the people and nothing was going to stop them from shining. Oh how I pray for that to be the case in each of our lives today! Instead of us being fearful of the world, the world is fearful of the power of God at work in the life of a believer! This is how you grow a church, **“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”** Acts 2:42. But how does the church grow? **“And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”** Acts 2:47b. God will take care of His church and He will grow it as He sees fit! That is how you grow a church, you do your part and let God do His and the pressure is off and the church will grow!

I am going to split up the marks of the church or the character of the church from the mission of the church; we will cover the mission of the church in detail next time. And please keep in mind when I speak of mission I am not talking about missionary work, even though that is included in it. But the mission of the church is what we are about, what we do. But I think we need to look at this issue, the character of the church, what it looks like or should look like as people look at it, or I should say as people look at you and me!

THE MARKS/CHARACTER OF THE CHURCH

1. JOY

The first character or mark of the church is that it should be filled with joy! Now we may not think much of this today but years ago, the more solemn, the more serious, the sadder you looked the more holy you looked, or so they thought! It is like the following story. We are told,

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., was a member of the U.S. Supreme Court for 30 years. His mind, wit and work earned him the unofficial title of “the greatest justice since John Marshall.” At one point in his life, Justice Holmes explained his choice of a career by saying: “I might have entered the ministry if certain clergymen I knew had not looked and acted so much like undertakers.”

- Moody Bible Institute’s Today in the Word; June, 1988, p. 13

I wonder how many people look at us, the church, and when they see us they truly don't want what we have because there is no joy, no laughter, no rejoicing in the Lord! I know, some of you are thinking, "Hey buddy, you don't know what I am going through. You want me to be filled with joy and look at what is going on in my life! You wouldn't say things like that if you were going through what I am going through right now!"

That is true, I don't know what you are going through, the difficult time you are having but I do know this, depending on who your God is will manifest itself in your countenance! Let me show you what I mean, an example will help drive home the point!

Let me give you a little background information before I tell you what this man wrote about. The man is Paul the apostle and Paul visited Philippi on his second missionary journey. It was during this time that a woman named Lydia and her family were saved as well as the Philippian jailer and his family, besides others of course. You can read of this in Acts 16:14-34. The timeframe for this first visit was around 51 A. D.

Philippi was a Roman colony and enjoyed all the benefits. It also was an important city in eastern Macedonia (Northern Greece). The area was important for its gold mines and its soil that was very rich, it was very fertile. Philippi was also located on the main road from Rome to Asia, the Via Egnatia, which made it a strategically important city.

Paul, the author of this letter to the Philippians, wrote to them from his imprisonment in Rome, probably around 61 A. D., some 10 years or so after his first visit to Philippi and the establishment of the church there. Philippians is one of the four prison epistles that Paul wrote, along with Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon.

People today are focused; their lives are consumed with trying to be happy. They are trying to fill that void and find happiness by buying the latest gadget, the newest car, they might party hearty, look for that perfect job and still not be happy. Thus, we have books, seminars, counseling and yet, for most people they cannot attain happiness because of the situations that come their way. And in the end they come to the conclusion of Solomon, the preacher, who said, “**‘Vanity of vanities,’ says the Preacher; ‘Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.’**” Ecclesiastes 1:2.

In this little 4-chapter letter, some 104 verses, Paul uses the word “**joy**” four times, (1:4, 1:25, 2:2, 4:1). He uses the word “**rejoice**” eight times, (1:18, 2:16, 2:17, 2:18, 2:28, 3:1, 3:3, 4:4). And he uses the word “**glad**” two times, (2:17, 2:18). In fact, this letter has been called, “The Epistle of joy!”

Now some of you may be thinking, “That’s great for Paul, but he doesn’t know what I am going through now! No one knows the trouble I’m in!” Let’s turn that around for a minute, you don’t know the trouble Paul was in – he was in prison, chained to soldiers 24 hours a day, seven days a week! It was not ideal circumstances at all! Then how could Paul speak of joy, how could he rejoice in the situation and situations that he was in?

Because joy, biblical joy is not based upon outward circumstances but an inward reality that God is in control and He will use the situations in our life for His glory and our growth. Thus, divine joy is available to every believer if they would only receive it into their lives. David Hocking put it this way. He said, “There is ‘joy’ in the midst of trial when we understand God’s purposes and realize what He is accomplishing in our lives.”

Let me share these words from Paul from Philippians 1:18, where Paul said, **“What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.”** Paul, in prison for his faith, was able to rejoice in the Lord and those around him saw that joy and desired to have what he had, *JESUS!*

Someone once said that “Joy is the flag that is flown high from the heart where the King is in residence there!” I can’t agree more. If He is truly on the throne of your heart, that flag of joy should be flying high so all can see!

And if you are still struggling with this, listen to what Jesus said in John 17:13, this is the prayer of Jesus as He said, **“But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves.”** You see, God’s purpose is to multiply joy in our lives, not to subtract it. “Then why am I lacking that joy” you might be thinking. There are two reasons for this. First of all, the world, the flesh, and the devil would tell us something different, they bring us to superficial joy or happiness that does not last. The second reason is we are not abiding in Him because if you are abiding in Jesus you will be joyful. In fact, God wants this **“joy fulfilled”** in our lives! Thus, abide in Him and let that joy overflow in your life and touch the lives of others. The early church was joyful, it was a joyful assembly, that is a mark or a character of the early church and it should be the same today! It is Jesus, Others, and You – JOY!

2. HOLINESS

The second character or mark of the early church was that it was holy! It was not perfect but its passion was that of holiness, separating themselves from the world. And please understand that I am not speaking of all these rules and regulations. You know, do this and don't do that mentality. Holiness, as I have said, speaks of separation or a consecration unto the Lord! Thus, you don't have to do this or don't do that but it is a way of life for you.

Let me give you an example. I have been married for almost 33 years now and for all those years Julie has never had a rule that said, "Thou shall come home every night!" Now that may scare some of you, you may be thinking, "Did you ever not come home?" I came home every night, not because of some rules or regulations that Julie put forth, but because I love her and it is a way of life for me. I do not want to do anything that would hurt her and thus, my actions are based on love and not the Law you might say!

Again, in John chapter 17 listen to what Jesus was praying for in John 17:14-16, **"I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world."**

Here is a problem for many in the church today. They want to be a part of this world and hold onto their Christianity and it does not work! We don't embrace the things of this world; the world is not to have a hold on us. And thus, as the light of God shines upon their darkness, the world reacts by hating us, persecuting us because we are not like them, we don't endorse their sin! The thing we need to remember, the thing that Jesus warns us about, is they hated Him for standing up for the truth and as His servant, they will also hate us!

We are not to compromise our relationship with God to make the world like us more; they are not going to like us, that is just the way it is. And here is the reality of being in this world. It is like a boat, it needs to be in the water to function, but when water gets in the boat it begins to sink. The same is true in our own lives as we let the world in us. We are to be in the world but not of the world! But, too often today people develop the heart of a Pharisee, looking down upon others, not wanting to touch them, and yet we have been sent into the world to present the Gospel message, to reach out to people! May we not forget that we are to be in the world, not of it!

And remember what Peter said in I Peter 2:9-12, **“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.”**

There is a battle going on and may we stand strong in the Lord, bringing glory to Him as we walk in holiness!

One more thing about this prayer of Jesus in John chapter 17 and it is this. Jesus cautions us against seeking refuge in Christian isolation; in modern day monasteries. Our goal is to be in the world, but not of it, or of the evil one; even as a ship is to be in the ocean, but not allowing the ocean to be in the ship. The early church was holy, that is a mark or a character of the early church and it should be the same today!

3. TRUTH

The third character or mark of the church is that it is truth! Think about what the world holds on to and in reality, they hold on to illusions. Do they have some truth? Sure they do but that truth is marked with all kinds of errors. What about Christians, why do we say that we have the truth? We don't say that, if we did it would be meaningless. "Joe, how can you say that?" Because it is true, it doesn't matter what I say, it matters what God's Word has to say. Jesus, in John 17:17, in His prayer to the Father prayed, **"Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth."** The Amplified Bible puts this verse like this, **"Sanctify them [purify, consecrate, separate them for Yourself, make them holy] by the Truth; Your Word is Truth."** And lastly, The New Living Translation puts it like this, **"Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth."**

You see, anyway you slice it, God's Word is truth and it will help us to live lives that are separated unto God! It will help us in our daily walk if we listen and obey His voice! And the only way you are going to be able to counter the attacks of this world, put a halt to their influence, is by the power of God's Word!

Ray Stedman puts it like this in regards to the truth. He wrote,

“The world lives by what it thinks is truth, by values and standards which are worthless, but which the world esteems highly. Jesus said, “What is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15). . . . How can we live in that kind of a world – touch it and hear it, having it pouring into our ears and exposed to our eyes day and night, and not be conformed to its image and squeezed into its mold? The answer is, we must know the truth. We must know the world and life the way God sees it, the way it really is. We must know it so clearly and strongly that even while we’re listening to these alluring lies we can brand them as lies and know that they are wrong.”

- Ray Stedman, *Secrets of the Spirit*, pp. 147-148

In other words, Christians should be realists because what we believe is based in the Word of God and as Jesus said, God’s Word is truth! It is as Paul said in II Timothy 3:16-17, **“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”** And so the church is to be filled with the truth of God that is found in the Word of God. And thus, another character or mark of the church is that it has the truth, never forget that, never lose sight of that fact!

4. MISSION

Now don't let me scare you with this one because the Emergent Church talks about missional and that is not what I am talking about. I am talking about missions and it is different. Now before I do talk about missions, let me share just a few things about this idea of missional. For example, Tim Keller, from his recent lecture "Contextual and Missional" at Urban Plant Life Conference in London, spoke regarding the nature of a missional church. Listen to what he has to say and then I will expound on it.

A missional church gears absolutely every single part of its life—its worship, community, public discourse and preaching education—for the presence of non-believers from the culture surrounding it. **A missional church's congregation** reflects the demographic make-up of the surrounding community—and therefore it gives non-Christian neighbors attractive and challenging glimpses of what they would look like as Christians. **A missional church's worship** is 'evangelistic' in the sense that it makes sense to non-believers in that culture, even while it challenges and shapes people with the gospel. **A missional church's people** are outwardly focused, so involved in the local community, and so alert for every opportunity to point people toward Christ, that evangelism happens naturally through relationships. Because of the attractiveness of its community, the contextual nature of its message, and humility of its people, a missional church will discover significant numbers of people always in the midst, 'incubating' and exploring Christianity. It must welcome them in hundreds of ways. It will do little to make them 'comfortable' but will do everything to make its gospel message understandable.

- Tim Keller, Contextual and Missional

First of all how in the world can we attract an unbeliever to the way we live out our faith if they are dead in their trespasses and sins? They have no concept of what they need and do we want to trick them into the church? No, that is not what we are about. Let's be real, the unsaved are not attracted to us they are repulsed by us. They can't stand us. They were not attracted to Jesus and His men, not in the early church and not today. The only time the unsaved, the only time the world is attracted to us is when we compromise our faith and water it down so much that it does not affect them at all!

Now in saying that let me show you what we are to be about. Jesus said in John 17:18, **“As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.”** Did you notice that Jesus prayed that the Father would send them out **“into the world”** and not to have the church draw unbelievers into the church! There is nothing wrong with that but we are not going to change the message because it might be offensive to them. The call is always to go out into the world with the Gospel Message and compel people to come into the kingdom of God!

You see, the church is not only to look inward and find that joy in the Lord. The church is not to just focus Christward for sanctification, holiness. The church is not to just focus on the Scriptures, the Word of God. The church is to go out into the world and bring the Gospel message to the lost! Listen to the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20, **“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen.”** To do that you have to go out and thus, the mark or character of the church is to be seen in missions.

5. UNITY

The fifth character or mark of the church is unity! Now again, don't freak out on me here, I am not talking about ecumenicalism! Again, listen carefully to the prayer of Jesus in John 17:20-23, **“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”**

In these verses Jesus is praying for believers, you and me and all who will come to Him and ask Him to be Lord and Savior of their lives. And it is out of this, out of all those who have come to Him that Jesus is speaking of unity! Please keep that in mind.

Now the unity Jesus is speaking of is not ecumenical, as I have said, just believe whatever you want, accepting all things. This unity is based on the truth and Jesus just got done telling us that His Word is truth. Thus, as the Scriptures teach, Jesus is the One who unites us all together into the family of God and without Him there is no unity!

Now some might not think this is important, but it is. It is amazing the church splits over issues that are not foundational but personal. And you may not agree with me, but Jesus tells us that it is this unity that will cause people to believe. It is the disunity, the fighting over silly things that causes the world to shake their heads and walk away in unbelief and how it must grieve God! Jesus said in John 13:34-35, “**A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.**” You see, our unity with believers is linked to the way the church represents Jesus to the world!

Let me show you what I mean. Maybe some of you have heard the story of the woman, a very poor woman, who visited a church that was upper class you might say, kind of the high society church.

The woman attended the church for a period of time and then she applied for church membership. Her application though, was rejected. She then sent a second one a few months later and that too was returned and she was rejected. She did this a third and a fourth time and finally she decided to go to the chairman of the membership committee and she asked him, “Why are you rejecting my application for membership to this church?”

The chairman answered the woman in a very professional manner, “You need to go home and pray about this and I think the Lord will show you why you have been rejected, what the real issue is all about?”

A few years went by and the chairman of the membership committee saw this woman working at a local hotel, scrubbing the floors and he said to her, “You haven’t made an application for membership lately. In fact, I don’t recall seeing you in church at all! Tell me, when I told you to go home and pray about this situation, did the Lord speak to you?”

Very politely the woman replied back and said, “Why yes, the Lord spoke to me and He told me not to feel bad about being rejected because He has tried to join that church for twenty years before He finally gave up!”

We laugh at that but do you see how we can allow our views, our legalistic views, our ideas to cause disunity, conflict, and ultimately division in the body of Christ? Of all the things that Jesus prayed for before He went to the cross, one of them was for unity among believers. You are not going to agree with everything I say, but we can be united together in Christ, that is a character or mark of the church, unity!

6. LOVE

The sixth and last characteristic or mark of the church is love and this is the one that ties all the others together! And yes, this was another prayer of Jesus before He went to the cross, the love of the believers. He said in John 17:26, “**And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.**” We are to have that same kind of love that the Father had for the Son! Paul, in I Corinthians 13:13 put it like this, “**And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.**” This is truly the greatest mark of the church, of believers, *LOVE!*

And let me share with you how this love is connected to the other five characteristics or marks that we have spoken of today. If you take love out of any of these you are in trouble.

Let's start out with **JOY**, the first one we looked at this morning. If you subtract love from joy you end up with hedonism, self-indulgence or an exuberance in life and its pleasures but without the sanctifying joy found in a relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The next one we looked at was **HOLINESS** and this too is important. But, if you take love from holiness you find self-righteousness, the kind of self-contentment that characterized the Pharisees of Christ's day. You begin to look down upon others because you have lifted yourself up so high. It is all about you.

What about **TRUTH**? That is the next one we looked at. How does that work if we take love from truth? If you take love from truth you have a bitter orthodoxy, the kind of teaching which is right but which does not win anybody. It is harsh, it is cold, it is unloving!

Next we looked at the **MISSION** of the church and this too applies here. You see, if you take love from mission you have imperialism, colonialism in ecclesiastical garb. It is a form of godliness but it is denying its power, the power that comes from God. You may be all dressed up but there is no place for you to go!

And then we looked at **UNITY** and this too is important. You see, if you take love from unity what ends up happening is you soon have tyranny, oppression, domination. Tyranny develops in a hierarchical church where there is no compassion for people or desire to involve them in the decision-making process.

Obviously that is not good, that is not what we are to do. Let's turn it around and see what we do have if we add *LOVE* to these marks or characters.

If you have love for God the Father you have joy in what God has done for us.

If you have love for the Lord Jesus Christ and know that one day you will see Him again, it will lead to holiness. I John 3:3.

If you have love for His Word then you will have a deepening desire to grow in Him and you will hunger and thirst to know God through His Word.

If you have a love for this world, for the people of this world it will cause us to bring the Gospel message to the lost, it is our mission!

And if you have a love for our brothers and sisters in Christ then we will find unity with each other.

That is what love will do and it is obviously important for us, the Church!

Let me close with this. Wee have seen how beautiful the marks or the character of the church should be. And again, when I speak of the church I am not speaking of some building or denomination or non-denomination, I am speaking of the people. This is the Visible Church, the hands and feet of Jesus that go out into the world and minister to others. We are the local body of believers that make up part of the Universal or Invisible Church! As Ignatius wrote, "The disciples were called Christians at Antioch, when Paul and Peter were laying the foundations of the Church." And he wrote, "The Lord Jesus Christ . . . according to His own will, has firmly established His Church upon a rock, by a spiritual building, not made with hands, against which the winds and the floods have beaten, yet have not been able to overthrow. . . . There is but . . . one Church which the holy apostles established from one end of the earth to their other by the blood of Christ, and by their own sweat and toil." That is the Universal Church or the Invisible Church and the Visible Church together!