

Doctrine - The Church

Sign Title: The Church

October 31, 2010

Good to see you this morning! My name is Kurt and I am one of the pastors. If you are new, I would like to welcome you. This fall, we are in a series of studies called, "Doctrine - What do we believe?" The purpose of these studies is to review the basics of our faith. This week, we are talking about the church. The church is a very important, but often misunderstood entity. If I was to ask you to tell me what a good church looks like, chances are you would point me to a large group of people with a large building that calls itself a church. How do you know if they are a God honoring church or nothing more than a big crowd? Before this message, most of us could not tell the difference, but you will be able to after this morning.

For much of the history of the definition of the church was simply assumed. For example, the Nicene Creed states that *we believe in one holy catholic apostolic church* but it never says what the word *church* means. Early Christians debated and discussed many things. They debated, discussed and recognized the full humanity and deity of Christ. They debated, discussed and recognized the Trinity. One issue they never talked about was, *the church*. After Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, wrote *The Unity of the Church* in AD 251 until Wycliffe wrote *The Church* in AD 1378, there was no significant book written about the church for over a thousand years. What a church looked like and did was just assumed, it was never defined or described.

Discussion about the church finally took off in the sixteenth century when the Reformation forced Protestants and Roman Catholics alike to define the church. The Roman Catholics defined the church in relation to apostolic succession. The church was an institution you became a part of, similar to joining the Pheasants Forever hunting club. Joining the Roman Catholic church made you a card carrying member of the pedigree because you could say you could trace your lineage back to Peter. This was the same trick the Jews tried in the days of Jesus when they said, “We have Abraham as our father.” In other words, they figured they were good with God if they could trace their lineage and prove they were pure bred Jews. That didn’t work for the Jews, I don’t think it works for the Catholics tracing their pure bred lineage to Peter.

The Protestants defined the church in relationship to the Bible, Christ and something we call regeneration. They didn’t define it by an external institution but by an internal reality.

Since the reformation, discussion on what the church is and on what the church does has sat on the back burner for 400 years. It is time to think about it again. In an effort to be innovative and effective, young church leaders are trying different ways to do church. Some are even trying to do church through the internet and Facebook.

I am all about innovation and creativity but innovation and creativity within biblical bounds. What are the guardrails the Scripture gives us to define what a church looks like and what it does? We are going to look at that this morning.

Before we do that I want to give you a few theological categories so you can understand discussion about the church.

Universal vs. Local Church - The universal church is all the Christians all around the world today. A few billion people say they're Christians. They are in different countries, languages, styles and cultures. They are members of the universal church with us. Then there are local churches. That is Faith EFC, First Presbyterian, and Good News, to name a few. When we speak of the church, we are talking in both terms. When you become a Christian, you're automatically part of the universal church, and then you need to plug in and become part of a local church.

Invisible vs. Visible Church - This terminology goes all the way back to the church father Augustine. The invisible church is the church as God sees it: all the people of the past, present and future who have regenerated hearts and really do love Jesus. The visible church is the church as we see it. We see people who come together for worship. Even though we come together, that does not mean everybody here is part of the invisible church. There are some Christians and some non-Christians here this morning, only God knows the heart. Only he knows who is truly part of the invisible church.

Gathered vs. Scattered Church - Right now, we are the gathered church. When we're done, we'll scatter, but you know what? We're still a church. We still belong to one another in Christ. We are still supposed to pray for one another, love one another, serve one another and care for one another, even when we are not meeting. Think of it like a family. The family gathers at night for dinner but

then scatters during the day. When a family is scattered, that doesn't mean they cease to be a family.

With that background, let's work our way through this definition.

What does a Biblical Church Look Like?

The local church is a community of regenerated believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord. In obedience to Scripture they organize under qualified leadership, gather regularly for preaching and worship, observe the biblical ordinances of baptism and communion, are unified by the Spirit, are disciplined for holiness, and scatter to fulfill the Great Commandment and the Great Commission as missionaries to the world for God's glory and their joy.¹

Regenerated Church Membership

To be a member of Faith EFC, you need to be a Christian. In the Old Testament, the language used to describe this is "a new heart." In the New Testament, the language used to describe this is being born again or a new creation. What it means is you met Jesus and you've changed. You're not perfect, but you've changed and you want to keep changing and be more like Jesus. How many of you had the experience, where you say, "I didn't love Jesus, but now I do. I didn't care about the Bible, but now I do. I used to like to sin, but now I want to stop." That's regeneration. God's changed you from the inside out. Regenerated church membership means that to be a God pleasing church, the members need to be Christians.

This was a big issue in the reformation. At the time, the leadership in the Roman Catholic church had almost no spirituality. Priests were having crazy sex parties and bribing people, it was like watching the Jerry Springer show. Church

¹ *Doctrine*, Driscoll and Breshears

membership didn't have anything to do with regeneration before the Reformation. It was like joining a club where you didn't have a change of heart.

If you are checking out Faith EFC, I love that you are here but if you want to join the church, to vote in the church, to be teaching or leading in the church, you need to be regenerated because that is what we are about.

If you are here and you are not a Christian, we love you. I'm glad to have you. Don't feel like you have to give in the offering. You are welcome in small groups and Faith University classes. On Wednesday nights we have a great Bible study going on in the church library during Awana for those checking Christ out. If you can't afford a Bible, I will buy you one. Totally love to have you and want you here, but to be a member, you've got to be a born-again Christian.

If you are a Christian and you aren't a member, get off the stick and get connected. Seriously! Romans says the church is like a physical body and it has many members. Some of you are fingers, others eyes, others ears, others feet. Christians are specially gifted by the Holy Spirit when we are regenerated so we can connect to the body and to serve others in the local church we are a part of. So Christians unconnected to a local church body and not serving in a local church are living in sin. I know that harsh to hear, but it is true. I hate to break this to you but the Lone Ranger was not a Christian. We are created for community, not isolation. We need each other to grow and to be spiritually healthy. I cover a lot more about this in the *digging deeper* section of this weeks Small Group Work Sheet. There is some real important stuff in there I want you to read so go online and get a copy.

Qualified Leadership

I won't get into this in great detail because of time but let me summarize the offices of elders and deacons. You can read about them in 1 + 2 Timothy and Titus in your Bible. Elders are qualified, godly men. They are also called pastors. They love God. If they're married, they are really good husbands and if they have kids, they are really good fathers. They know their Bible and they care about others. They care about the spiritual health of people in the church. They focus on the spiritual health of the body. The other office is deacon. These are godly men and women who are also in ministry, who love God, love their Bible, they are gifted to help lead the church but their focus is on the practical aspects of running and administrating the church.

One common thread through all church leadership is the importance of being an example. They should be the most faithful people in the church. The most faithful in serving, the most faithful in giving and the most faithful in attending and the most faithful in caring for others.

By the way, unlike the way leadership works in the secular world, church leaders are recognized and affirmed into positions of leadership. They are not put into positions of leadership so they can begin doing something they haven't been doing all along. That is why your church leaders are to be the best examples to follow, because they are recognized into formal positions of serving because they were already doing their serving in informal ways.

Preaching and Worship

Let me warn you before I get started. I feel strongly about this and am going to get on my soap box. I have read the studies from the cultural guru's. They say we shouldn't bore people to death with preaching. Give people a lot of worship, and 20 minutes of preaching that makes them feel good, then let them go. That is how you grow the church. I respectfully disagree.

I don't think we need less preaching, I think we need more! Think about this. How was the world created? God gave a sermon. He spoke the world into existence. How did God call his people back to him in the Old Testament when they strayed? It was the preaching of the prophets. You think I do radical things to get my message across, in the Old Testament prophets preached naked to get peoples attention, they married women who were whores so they would leave their husbands to sleep with other men, all so the prophets could keep taking them back again and again to drive into people heads that no matter how much they rebelled, God still loved them. I know some of you blew a gasket a few weeks ago when we talked about the cross of Christ because it grossed you out. Just be thankful you aren't living when one of the Old Testament prophets was your preacher.

Get to the New Testament and John the Baptist comes along to prepare the hearts of the people for Christ and what does he do? Finger-painting? Weaving baskets with his toes and singing with a guitar? No! He preaches a tough message! Repent for the kingdom is at hand. What does Jesus do when he comes? Yes he heals people, yes he cares for the widows and orphans but

don't overlook the obvious, he is a preacher and thousands came to hear him. Go to the book of Acts and what happens. The Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost and Peter begins preaching and God uses the preached word to grow the church by 3,000 in one day. Follow the theme through the book of Acts and everywhere the early church goes they are preaching. The growth of the church is always described in Acts as the spread of the Word of God.

Leave the Bible and go to history. Study every revival you want and learn how they began. It wasn't through oragami clubs and knitting circles. The spirit of God anoints a man of God to preach the Word of God and revival happens. Just as God preached to bring forth creation, God anoints the preaching of His word to birth churches. Today people want to grow the church so they go to marketing gurus who tell them they need slick web sites and a marketing director. Nothing wrong with that but that isn't what grows the church. It is always the preaching of the Word of God that God uses to give birth to the church of God. You want to grow the church... PREACH!

It absolutely infuriates me when people say that preaching is passe, and it is ineffective. Preaching is always the way God does his work. This doesn't mean happy "give you a back rub" preaching. They say you don't want to talk about hell, you don't want to tell people they are sinners, you don't want to call people to repent because if you do, you will offend them. Make your choice, be offensive to them or be offensive to God, you can't have it both ways.

So that is why I preach and the pulpit is a big deal around here. Preaching is not about me or any other pastor. Preaching is God's chosen method to birth and edify his church.

Ordinances

That is communion and baptism. We do communion once a month and it is a very visible and tangible picture of the root of everything we have. Jesus Christ died in our place, for our sins and without that we have nothing. We celebrate at communion. Baptism is also a tangible visible picture of the unseen new birth that happens in our lives. We love baptizing new Christians.

Our next baptism service is on Thanksgiving and if you want to be baptized to let your church family know you have repented of your sin and are trusting in Christ for forgiveness, let us know by telling us on your registration card or talking to Pastor Greg directly. In baptism Christians go under water showing we are buried with Christ, then they come out of the water showing we are raised with Christ. I love baptism because it publicly proclaims the new life we have in Christ. If you haven't been baptized, I want to let you know there is a blessing that goes with baptism. You deny yourself of that blessing if you are an unbaptized Christian. The blessing is simply the blessing of obedience because the Bible says believe and be baptized.

Unified in Christ

This means we agree on what we will and will not fight over. The stuff we will fight over, those are the things we are talking about in this series. The sinfulness of man, the Trinity, the full humanity and divinity of Christ, heaven, hell

etc... These are things we are closed fist on. The stuff we won't fight over are things like home school vs. private school, contemporary vs. traditional vs. country western music. Does the pastor wear a choir robe or preach in a tank top and shorts (though you might throw a robe over me if I try the tank top and shorts.)

The closed issues of the faith are the clear non-negotiable issues of salvation. The rest we allow for diversity because unity around Christ is much bigger than division because of secondary issues.

Disciplined for Holiness

This means that if you are a Christian and you're living in sin, someone who loves you will come to you and say, "You know, this is not good. From what I see, you need to repent and change." And if you get hard-hearted, stiff-necked, self-righteous and proud, then a small group of people who love you will come along and tell you the sin they see in your life they are concerned about. The whole point is to get you to repent because you are killing yourself and we love you. If you keep on being defiant and rebellious and hard-hearted and you are a member, we will discipline you formally and publicly in a meeting of the church membership. Of course, we will discipline you respectfully, but that doesn't mean we won't discipline you.

Some of you aren't members but you are Christians living in sin. What will we do? Our hands are not tied. If we have talked with you personally and with a small group and you are still hard-hearted and rebellious and the elders feel you

are infecting the rest of the church with your spiritual sickness, we will ask you to leave. If you don't leave, we will call the cops and escort you off the property.

You say, "Kurt, that is terrible." No it is leadership. The nursery has a sign outside of it, "If your child has flu symptoms, please don't bring them to the nursery and get everyone else sick." If someone is sick spiritually and they are infecting the body with their spiritual rebellion, which the Bible says rates up there with the sin of divination, it is like witchcraft, I don't want you infecting everybody else. If we can keep kids out of the nursery, we can keep rebellious people out of the church. As leaders, we do not want spiritual sickness spreading through the church. That is the role of leadership in the church.

Obeying the Great Commandment to Love

One of the great evidences of Christ in the church is people loving one another. This really happens best in our small groups. These smaller groups of 8, 10 or 12 people are places where you get to know one another, care for one another, serve one another, eat together and pray for one another. This is the place you can best fulfill the one another commands of Scripture. If you are not in a small group, once you have experienced this kind of Christian love, it is hard to be without it. They are some of the most satisfying, and meaningful relationships you will experience.

Obeying the Great Commission to evangelize

Let's get to the bottom line. If you are here and you are not a Christian, I want you to be a Christian. How do you become one? Simply admit you are a sinner, trust Jesus is God who died in your place for your sin and God will give

you a new life. He will change you right now, send his Holy Spirit in your heart and you will live with him forever.

Some of you will criticize and say that this church is all about numbers and about growing bigger and that sounds so unspiritual. Well, duh! So is Wal-mart! So is Pure-Fishing! Everybody is about numbers and growing. If you aren't growing, you are dying. We want to grow for a different reason. We just want people to meet Jesus, have changed lives that are holy and not sinful and for them to go to heaven rather than hell.

Let's take a little vote, how many vote for less people in hell, raise your hand. Today everyone is turned off if you push your thing on them. What are we supposed to do, not tell people about Jesus? Any of you sell Shaklee? How do you sell it? You push your thing. Shaklee is using people to tell people. Why can't we use people to tell people about Jesus. Who gets the kickback? We don't. The bigger we get, the more headaches I have. People with changed lives get the kickback. They grow in their faith, fall in love with Christ, get their marriages straightened out, become good parents, love their kids, make God honoring choices and to go heaven to find a grain bin full of eternal rewards they laid up for eternity. We don't get the bonus, the people who come to Jesus get the bonus.

That is what a Biblical church looks like.

Where has the church gone wrong?

I want to take a few minutes to show you how the modern and now the postmodern church is drifting away from the biblical church.

The Modern “Me” Church.

The great characteristic of the modern era is its emphasis on the individual. Mark Noll, a church historian, after studying British sermons of the 1700's noted that in the early 1700's preachers talked about God's plan for the church, by the mid 1700's, with the enlightenment, the focus changed almost exclusively on the individual.

While salvation is an individual thing, every Christian is part of a larger church body and expected to participate in the life of the local church with the gifts God gives us. This is so God may be glorified and his people built up (1 Corinthians 12:1-31). It is therefore sin for someone who claims to be a Christian not to be actively loving his or her Christian brothers and sister and seeking to build up the church as faithful members.

that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. 1 John 1:3 (ESV)

John's point is that believers stay in relation with other Christians. He goes on to speak of false believers as those who ignore relationships with other Christians.

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. 1 John 2:19 (ESV)

Why is it important that believers stay together in the church? Because that is where we love other believers, the mark of the Christian according to

Jesus. I like the way John Calvin said it, “every member of the invisible church belongs to the visible church.”²

If this is true, then many people are either in sin, or worse still, wrongly believe they are saved when they are not. If they were, it would be evidenced in part by their loving their brothers and sisters, which means getting to know them to serve them and learn from them in love.

The modern church focuses its attention on the individual rather than the community and the glory of God. As a result, many churches define their purpose as a place where individual spiritual needs are met. Congregational attendees are simply consumers of the church’s goods and services. Consequentially, the modern church is known for marketing glitz and attraction, rather than love and service for one another. A growing number of Christians define church as listening to a worship CD or downloading a sermon or reading a good book. While those are good things, they are not a *complete* definition of the church. That is not all God says we need and all God intends for us to have through the church.

The Postmodern “Virtual” Church

What the church looks like in the postmodern world is still up for grabs but some trends are emerging.

Many churches are now using internet campuses. They broadcast their entire church service on the internet. People can log in and tweet or blog about the sermon. They give their offering via credit card but is this really church?

² Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1021-22.

What do you think? How do they take the ordinances? How do they participate in the one-another commands of Scripture? Is there any discipline for holiness?

How about Facebook? The internet seems like a reasonable way for people to check out a church but without the face to face interaction, home groups and relationships, you can't call the internet a full-blown church experience.

The Postmodern “Anti-Authority” Church

Emergent churches are popular among young people. They are informal communities that don't have any spiritual leadership, doctrinal convictions or Biblical preaching. What they have is lots of conversations. Who is part of the emergent church? Mostly our children. The disgruntled children of evangelicalism looking for a fresh expression of the church in our multi-culture world where tolerance is king. The scariest part of the emergent church is that regeneration is not the starting point. For these churches Jesus is nothing more than a good example of how to live a moral life.

Where is the preaching? They don't like it because it smacks of authority. Where is qualified leadership? They don't like it because it sounds authoritative. It is hard to see much of the anti-authority emergent church as a biblical version of church.

Conclusion

What concerns me is that while many churches are committed to innovation, and creativity, they are doing it at the price of being Biblically rooted

and doctrinally sound. Many churches are unwittingly morphing into something less than the biblical church was intended to be.

Every sermon has to answer two questions. What do you want people to know and what do you want people to do. I want you to know what the church is supposed to look like. I want you to know some ways the modern and postmodern church has drifted away. What do I want you to do? Repent! While most of us haven't bought into the anti-authority church, more of us are buying into the virtual church and even more of us have bought into the "me" church. All of those modern expressions of church are less than what God desired to give us to keep us spiritually healthy.

This morning, especially repent of the "me" centered church in our consumer culture. God plans are not just for you and me, but they involve us working together as a body. I love you. Let's pray. See you next week.



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