



The Church

Small Group Work Sheet
October 31, 2010

Part 1 - Ice Breaker (This is just for fun)

- Before this sermon, how would you have defined “the church?”
- What are the dangers of not having a clear definition of the church? Provide examples.

Part 2 - Review the sermon

- To make sure you understand the terminology, define the difference between the following:
 - Universal vs Local Church
 - Invisible vs. Visible Church
 - Gathered vs. Scattered Church

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 sacraments 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.

- Why is it important to insure a church has regenerated membership? What has modern day (and ancient history) taught us about the dangers of unregenerated membership and leadership in a church?
- What role has spirit-anointed preaching played in your life? Why is preaching a crucial part of the church?
- We currently celebrate communion once a month. Do you think we should celebrate it more frequently? What would you think if we had communion every week, after the sermon, and invited people forward to be prayed for by the elders? Discuss it as a group and have the group leader email the groups thoughts to Pastor Kurt (ktruck@me.com)
- Do you think church discipline is important? How do you think it should be exercised (Matthew 18:15-20)? Do you think the church leadership calling the police and forcibly

exiting a divisive individual from church who refuses to respect their authority is going too far? Why or why not?

- What is wrong with the “me” church of our consumer culture? Is this something you have found yourself slipping into and do you need to repent of it?
- What are the danger and benefits of the postmodern “virtual” church? Faith EFC is currently discussing ways to better utilize technology for ministry. What thoughts can you give us? Email Pastor Kurt at (ktruck@me.com).
- What are the dangers of the postmodern “anti-authority” church that wants to boil church down to “community and a conversation?” When your children go to college and are exposed to this, what will you say?

Part 3 - Digg deeper ...*get the rest of the story.*

What is Jesus’ relationship to the church?

I don’t want you to think Jesus went back to heaven and abandoned the church. Last week we studied the Holy Spirit and learned that through the Holy Spirit, Jesus didn’t leave us alone in this world. Jesus also didn’t leave the church alone.

Christ is the head of the church.

Four times in Ephesians it says Jesus is the head of the church. He is supreme. He is preeminent. The church is always, totally, completely, thoroughly about Jesus. He is the one who purchased us with his blood to redeem us from eternal, conscious punishment. When you look at the church organizational chart on the wall outside of the library, who is the boss of the applesauce on the chart? Jesus!

Jesus is the apostle who plants a church.

Hebrews 3:1 says Jesus is an apostle. Apostles are people who plant churches. There is no faithful Christian church that comes into existence unless Jesus plants it. People are working with Jesus but Jesus is the one who plants the church. This church was planted October 1949. Pastor Norm pastored from the beginning, then Pastor Chris carried the baton, but it was Jesus who planted the church, not the people or the pastors, they just worked with Jesus.

Jesus is the leader who grows a church

In Matthew 16:18 Jesus said, “I will build my church.” Every church that grows, builds, multiplies and reaches the community with the gospel is being built by none other than Jesus. Men and women work with Jesus, but he is behind and leading everything.

Jesus is the senior pastor of the church.

1 Peter 5:3 calls Jesus the chief shepherd. While my title (Pastor Kurt writing here) is senior pastor, I don’t begin messages by saying I am your *senior* pastor because technically, Jesus is the *senior* pastor of the church. I am just *one of* the pastors. I love what I do but I work *for* Jesus and I work *with* the church. So if I get run over by a truck and my guts are splattered on the highway like road kill, the church will be OK. I will go to heaven and tell Jesus that everyone at Faith EFC says “Hello.”

Don't worry about the church, Jesus, the senior pastor, is still on the job. He will take care of *His* church.

Jesus is the one who shuts down a church.

In Revelation 2, Jesus warns the church of Ephesus to get their act together or he would come and shut the lights off. 80% of the churches in America are plateaued or declining. 3,500 churches die each year. Why is that? Jesus shuts them down. He says, "You are doing more harm than good, I'm shutting the lights off."

Jesus is the vine of the church.

The best lesson on how Jesus relates to the church comes from Jesus himself. Jesus says, "I am the vine, you are the branches." Presbyterians are a branch, Methodists are a branch, Lutherans are a branch, Evangelical Free is a branch. The key for any church is to be a branch connected to Jesus. Unless churches are connected to Christ, there is no life and while there may be a lot of noise, there will be no fruit. This is why it irritates me so deeply when churches devalue the Scriptures and turn Jesus into nothing more than a good example. Break a branch off of Jesus and it will die. There is no way it can live.

Some churches get really weird about this. They think *they are the vine* and everybody plugs in to them to be part of the *real* church. That is crazy. *Jesus is the vine*, to be a true church we plug into him.

Who harms a church?

There is a lot I could say about this but let me give you three quick answers.

Burned Out Church Leaders

A church can totally kill their leaders. The work of church leadership is never done. A leader is never "off" duty. The average church pastor lasts only two years. Sometimes the way churches treat their leaders is downright brutal. I can give you story after story of pastors who burned out and as they were burning out the church, the church decided to chew them up and spit them out.

I believe Satan has the sights on his gun focused on church leaders. Get the leaders to fail, get the leaders to burn out and he can take much of the church down with them. The stress of church leadership is more than most people realize. When I had my first senior pastorate, the stress of preaching every week was almost more than I could bear. On Saturday nights, I would bite off my nails and tear out my eyebrows. I didn't know why I couldn't stop that compulsive behavior. I later learned these were all signs of stress the night before I preached (Thankfully I have eyebrows and fingernails again today... feel free to check them!)

After reading ancient and modern Christian biographies and interviewing other pastors, I learned the importance of a church leader taking care of themselves physically so they are healthy enough to take care of a congregation spiritually. To keep myself healthy, I take my vitamins, get my sleep, try to enjoy my wife and children as much as I can and exercise on a daily basis. Church leaders that take care of themselves, are the church leaders that take care of their flock. One added benefit is you don't have to do their funeral when they hit age 50.

False Teachers and Wolves

False teachers are dangerous. One of the keys to recognizing a false teacher is they are single issue voters. Their main thing is not the plain thing of Scripture. They have a hobby horse they like to ride and they get worked up over it to the point of not being able to display charity toward anyone else who disagrees. Another hallmark of a false teacher is when they are reproached by church leadership they refuse to listen.

While false teachers are recognized the by the lopsidedness of what they teach, wolves are usually recognized by their character.

I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Acts 20:29–30 (ESV)

Wolves love power, they love authority, they love control. 3 John 9 talks about a wolf named Diotrophes. He was recognized as a wolf because he always had to be first. While a wolf's goal is to kill the sheep, they do their work by attacking and undermining the shepherds. When I was a young pastor, I didn't realize wolves were mixed with the sheep of the congregation. I wasn't ready for people who were trying to eat the shepherd for lunch! (Anybody want to serve some roast pastor?) The job of a shepherd is not just to feed the sheep but to identify the wolves and protect the sheep and the church from them.

Consumer Christians

These are people who attend but they are nothing more than takers. They do not give. They do not serve. They do not pray for the church or attach themselves to the body. I am not talking about new Christians who are trying to get their life together. I am talking about established adults who attend on Sunday for the "show" but keep the rest of the church at arm's length. They are takers, not givers. The consumer Christian mentality is a product of the modern era where everything is about "me" and for me. The Biblical picture is that life is not about us but life is about God and his glory. That is why we exist. We bring glory to God by our holiness and through our relationships as we use our gifts to serve others.

The consumer Christian comes to church asking, "What did this service do for me and how did it make me feel better." The biblical Christian comes to a worship service saying, "How can I grow in holiness and how can I love and serve someone in my church family today."

If Faith EFC is to be used by God to reach our region and change our world, we need to be a church filled with people on mission. Our mission is to delight in God's love for us through Christ, live in holiness and purity, and serve others as if we were serving Jesus himself.