

Church Course: 1 What is THE Church? What is A Church? What is THIS Church?

Aims of the course:

- To clear away false/wrong view of the church
- To be clear on what the Bible tells us about the church and to challenge us to 're-think' our presuppositions
- To understand the church's purpose and mission in the world
- To ignite a 'red-hot' passion and love for the church
- To understand the vision, values and strategy of this 'local church'.
- To motivate us to become appropriately involved in the church's ministry and mission, using the gifts God has uniquely given to us

Number these in order of priority:

God
Marriage
Work
Family
Church
Friends
Hobbies/Leisure activities
'Me-time'

If you moved through work to another part of the country, in looking for somewhere to live number these in order of priority:

Desirable area to live in
Good school
Good church
Nearness to work
Specific requirements for a house (ie number of bedrooms, garden/no garden, busy/quiet, old/new etc)

If you moved to a new area, what are your priorities in deciding which church to attend:

Size of congregation
Denomination or lack of it
Proximity to where you live
Teaching/Preaching (including its 'theological position')
Worship style
Youth and/or children's work
Warmth of welcome
Commitment or lack of it to evangelism

Read Mark 3:31-35 + Matthew 10:35-42

What point/s do you think Jesus is making here?

Read Acts 20:28-31 + 1 Timothy 4:15-16

What do we learn here of the 'value' of the church? What is Paul's great concern for this church (Paul is writing 1 Timothy to Timothy when he is in Ephesus), what does he see as priorities for its leaders? What does the last part of 4:16 mean?

1) What is THE Church:

"Christ shed his blood not just for individuals but for a body of people, the church. The church is all of God's elect, the one, holy, universal and apostolic people of God, gathered together in a visible organization" John Frame

"According to the Bible, the church is the people of God, the assembly and body of Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit... for a fresh look at the biblical doctrine of the church, a full Trinitarian approach serves best. In the history of revelation, the Old Testament people of God become the church of the Messiah, formed as a fellowship of the Spirit." Ed Clowney

The Apostles' Creed:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
the Maker of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord:
Who was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
He descended to the dead
The third day He arose again from the dead;
He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
from there he shall come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit;
the holy catholic church;
the communion of saints;
the forgiveness of sins;
the resurrection of the body;
and the life everlasting.

The Creed is intentionally 'Trinitarian' – but does anything strike you about that?

Why is that?

Nicene Creed:

“We believe in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church”

ATTRIBUTES OF THE CHURCH

One: There is but ‘one’ Church (sometimes called the ‘Invisible’ Church). Anyone who is a Christian automatically belongs to the One true Church of Jesus Christ.

Holy: If you belong to Christ – you are ‘holy’, you have been declared ‘righteous’ and your sin has been forgiven – you have been ‘justified’ (See Romans 8:30 – you have been justified, you are being sanctified and you will be glorified)

Eg – “ To the saints in Ephesus” Eph 1:1 – All Christians are ‘saints’ – ‘holy ones’

Just as to be ‘justified’ does not mean you are perfect, so the fact that the church is ‘holy’ does not mean that it is perfect...but one day it will be!

Catholic: Simply means ‘universal’. The Church exists throughout the world and throughout history. (Sometimes called the Church ‘Militant’ and the Church ‘Triumphant’)

This understanding informs our liturgy, for example in Communion services we say:

“Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven, we proclaim your great and glorious name, for ever praising you and saying...”

It is not so much that when we meet together Jesus comes to us but rather that we come to him and join with all his people around his throne.

“But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the first born whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect” Hebrews 12:22-23

Apostolic: Formed by the ‘apostolic message – the gospel’ and under apostolic authority – namely the Scriptures

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one” John 17:20-21

These attributes describe the ‘**Invisible Church**’.

The phrase is slightly unhelpful – because The Church is not ‘invisible’ – God knows exactly who belong to it, he sees The Church and loves it dearly – but the point is – it is ‘invisible’ to us:

- We cannot see all its members now – some are living and some are with Christ, it is worldwide

- We don't know for sure who belongs to The Church because we cannot see a person's heart only hear their 'profession'

2) WHAT IS A CHURCH?

Theologians also talk about 'the Marks of the Church'

These are 'characteristics' that 'mark' out a local church as being a genuine expression of The Church.

A local church is not simply a 'part of' THE Church, as a hand is a 'part of' the body, a local church is THE Church in 'microcosm' – if it exhibits certain 'marks'.

The 39 Articles: (Church of England Basis of Faith)

"The visible church of Christ is a congregation of believers in which the pure Word of God is preached and in which the sacraments are rightly administered according to Christ's command in all those matters that are necessary for proper administration." Article 19

What is the significance of the sacraments as a 'mark of the church'? What does that imply?

"The Reformers generally acknowledged three marks: the true preaching of the Word, the right administration of the sacraments, and church discipline...a good biblical case can be made for worship, love and the Great Commission as marks of the church" John Frame

Mark Driscoll argues for 8 marks:

- Regenerated church membership
- Qualified leadership
- Preaching and worship
- Rightly administered sacraments
- Spirit unity
- Holiness
- The Great Commandment to love
- The Great Commission to evangelise and make disciples

Mark Dever argues:

- Expository preaching
- Biblical Theology
- The gospel
- A biblical understanding of conversion
- A biblical understanding of evangelism
- A biblical understanding of church membership

- Biblical church discipline
- A concern for discipleship and growth
- Biblical church leadership

Within the article 19 of the 39 articles it could be argued all the above are implied.

The local church is a gathering of those who believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, implying that **membership** is intended to be for professing believers.

The Word of God is taught – means that it is rooted in biblical authority and endeavors to shape its life, ministry and mission around biblical commands and priorities such as the call to worship and glorify God, the priority of evangelism and the call to love one another.

The right use of the sacraments includes the exercise of church discipline.

3) What is THIS Church?

We are a Church of England Church