

Ephesians 2:12-22

Basic Christian Living (The Church)

Introduction: If you are a Christian, the Scriptures teach that it is your personal, and individual responsibility to help build a healthy church. (Ephesians 4:13-16)

Jesus commands you to make disciples (Matt 28:18-20)

Jude says to build yourself up in the faith (Jude 20-21)

Peter calls you to use your gifts to serve others (1 Peter 4:10)

Paul tells you to speak the truth in love so that your Church community will become mature (Ephesians 4:13-15)

We are going to be talking about Basic Christian living because many of us don't know what are responsibility to the Faith actually is as Christians. It's amazing that we can go to church for many years, maybe even our whole life we were raised in the church, and still not know what being a Christian is all about.

What are we supposed to be doing biblically speaking? What does a Church practically look like?

Many of us probably don't realize but each of us bring a set of preconceived expectations and standards with us when we walk through the doors of a church - depending on our needs, past experiences (good or bad), what we've heard from others..etc. But have we ever asked ourselves whether these standards are right, or if they are Biblical? Also, do you hold yourself to the same standard of Christian living that you are putting on the Church..Do you greet people? Are you accepting and non-judgmental towards others? Do You serve in the different ministries at Church? Are you doing evangelism and mercy ministry? Do you give financially to the church and to those in need around you? Do you reach out to others?

What is the Church anyway?

Why does the church actually exist?

Who leads the church, who serves the church?

What are the rules of church?

Who is the Church? Who are it's members church, and who are not? Who's responsible for who and for what?

These are hugely important questions and if we don't answer them we'll probably find that we often feel very unsettled in a church, confused, or burn out quickly, we'll church hop constantly, and we'll be left feeling "unsatisfied", or "dry" in our faith. The problem might not be doctrinal for us (then again, it might be), but an issue of practice. We don't understand how it all is supposed to work. We hope to be able to answer many of these questions through this series on Basic Christian Living.

We want Refuge to be all the Church is meant to be, for the sake of Jesus and the reputation of the Gospel, but also for our own benefit and blessing. But that is going to take all of us. We want Church to be all that God intended it to be for his people and so we hope that this series will help serve that purpose. Hopefully through these teachings we can calibrate how we are doing, we can see where we need to repent, change, grow, be strengthened, and be stretched.

So what is the Church and what is the purpose or end for which it exist?

1. The Church

1. "The local church is a community of regenerated believers who confess Jesus 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." - Vintage Church
2. When a person becomes a Christian, he or she doesn't just join a local church because it's just the right thing to do. He or she joins a local church because it is the expression of what Jesus Christ has made him or her—a member of the body of Christ. You are not your'e own, you belong to Jesus. Being united to Jesus means being united to every Christian. But that universal union must be given a living, breathing existence in a local church.
3. To help us understand the nature of the Church, scripture uses a wide range of metaphors and images to describe to us what the Church is like. In the passage from Ephesians we see four different metaphors being played out: Citizens of a Kingdom, Members of

God's household, a living growing body, and a Temple for God's Spirit to indwell.

1. Kingdom Citizens - Counter cultural - Early church distinction..

1. The Church is to be a foretaste of the kingdom of God. The church is where Christ is currently reigning on earth, where his citizens live in subjection to him and harmony with one-another. The Church is not the Kingdom of God, but is pictured as an embassy of God's kingdom. It is where God's kingship and reign is realized. Where God's laws and principles are upheld and praised. It is where God's kingdom citizens receive their instruction and from where they are sent out into the world as ambassadors.
2. I love the way Eugene Peterson defines church. "Church is a core element in the strategy of the Holy Spirit for providing human witness and physical presence to the Jesus-inaugurated kingdom of God in this world. It is not that kingdom in all its complete fulness, but it is that kingdom." It is "a colony of heaven in the country of death, a strategy of the Holy Spirit for giving witness to the already-inaugurated kingdom of God." "Church" is the people who through word and deed testify to the Jesus-story and Kingdom.
3. A kingdom is full of different types of people in all different stations in life coming from various backgrounds. As Kingdom representatives God is calling each of us to uniquely express his kingdom where we are at currently. Remember that passage in 1 Corinthians when Paul says if you are married don't try to be unmarried and if you are single don't seek marriage.. **"Let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him."** (1 Corinthians 7:17) - Paul's whole point in this is that we are where we are by God's pre-ordained will. Therefore we are to be living for God now, living out his Kingdom calling in our current situations and not waiting for our situation to change before we serve God. There are people all around us - Young, old, rich, poor, single, married, divorced, remarried, empty nesters, educated, uneducated, people in every station of life

that are living without the most important message in the world - the good news of what God has done and is doing through Jesus Christ and it takes Christians from every walk of life to represent this out into the World..

4. **Sermon on the Mount** -To know what this looks like we turn to the Sermon on the Mount, or the Epistles of the NT. Consider the Sermon on the mount quickly: It's a place where men and women practice a poorness in spirit (not full of pride and self worth and self righteousness), a place where all sin is truly mourned over, not just our own sins, but the sins of others also; a place where sin in general is seen as a terrible thing that has destroyed God's creation, that has destroyed our happiness. It's a place where meekness is practiced treasured and praised. A place that is marked by a hunger and thirst for righteousness and justice rather than self seeking and the passing pleasures of sin. It's a kingdom of mercy; where mercy triumphs over judgment -because each of it's citizens have been shown great mercy so they now show great mercy to others.
5. It is marked by people who practice purity in the core of their being, without ulterior motives, there isn't room for selfish ambitions; and self seeking. They seek to praise Jesus alone. It is a society of practicing peacemaking because they are children of the God of peace and recipients of the gospel of peace. It's a place of sympathy and empathy -identifying with those who suffer because our king Jesus suffered and identified with our suffering. It's a place where the mocking and scoffing of the world hold no weight, where we esteem a reproach, because of Jesus, a great honor.
 1. It's a city of light that cannot be hidden.
 2. It is a place where the Law of God is upheld, and the praises and thanksgivings never cease for the one who completely fulfilled it.
 3. It's a place where a man is judged by the motives of the heart and not merely by the outward appearance. It is a place of comfort and rest and generosity because our heavenly Father provides for all that we need.

4. It is a kingdom of love and charity, where marriage is held in honor, men and women say what they mean and mean what they say, where we go the second mile with those who have a need.
5. It's a place where not only are friends and families are loved and welcome but those who are our enemies also.
6. It is the place where whatever is done, is done unto Christ and Christ alone, for his glory and praise.
7. This is the kingdom of God as described in the sermon on the Mount; these are to be the characteristics of it's citizens.
 1. What an amazing Mission that the Church is called to - To be God's kingdom representatives on earth. We should never get bored and complacent in our faith there is so much to do, to grow into and to explore!
 2. "The only churches that will make any impact in this generation are those that *astonish* the world with a capacity for love, sacrifice, forgiveness that obviously transcends self-interest. Then it really does look like Jesus has come to town." - Ray Ortlund Jr

2. Members of the Household of God

1. All throughout the N.T. the Church is pictured as a family:
2. God is our Father, we are his children - who have been born again to a living hope through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. we have been adopted into the family of God. We are brothers and sisters to one another. The N.T. says many times that we are to practically live and interact with one another like family. (When Scripture talks about the Church being God's family it must be understood that it means family in the best terms possible - some of you came from terrible homes and family backgrounds. That is not what the scripture is referring to..) It is the ideal family where there is loving commitment, affirmation, gentle and merciful correction and support - A family that has a deep conviction about the responsibility to love and care for one another - Where we are our brother's keeper and he is ours. Where we don't give up on one another, but we sometimes have a good fight and work it

out. We're committed to one another's good - to one another's glory (holiness) in fact!

3. We are often exhorted in the N.T. Epistles:
 1. **“To let brotherly love continue” -Hebrews 13:1**
 2. **“Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another” - Romans 12:10**
 3. **“But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another” -1 Thessalonians 4:9**
 4. Martyn Lloyd-Jones an old Welsh preacher said, “We are all equally sinners, we are all equally helpless, we have all come to one and the same Savior; we have the same salvation; we have the same Holy Spirit; We have the same Father; We even have the same trials; and finally we are all marching and going together to the same eternal home” -
The Church is a family
4. **More on the Family Metaphor**
 1. Families fight, but they are bound by their family ties. You stick together and you stick up for each other. Nobody messes with family. It's like the mafia.
 2. Families support one another, accept one another (no matter how weird you are.... You're family)
 3. Families give security - love, acceptance, rest, security, home
5. The family metaphor covers such a broad range of things, but lets talk practically - It means financially and physically we take care of one another as there is need. If we have a need - whether physical, spiritual, mental, emotional we make it known. When there is an “issue” we don't give up on one another but we continue to try to work things out... We communicate openly. We have to realize that the personal decisions we make in a family affect that family for better or for worse..if we choose to harbor un-forgiveness, jealousy, anger, a competitive or comparative spirit and much more.. this will inevitably affect our family. We must be quick to deal with these issues that might cause pain and separation in the family.

6. As a family we seek to deepen our relationships with one another by spending time together; therefore we meet together often, as often as possible. We talk about Big life issues and decisions with each other openly. We make big life decisions that our family, the scripture, and the Lord supports. We confess sin and pray for one another and hold each other accountable -so we can be healed and grow... We help one another through good times and hard times. We weep, and rejoice together. We fight sin and temptation together. We wrestle together for greater commitment to, and affections for Jesus. We don't leave the family without a BIG conversation..explaining what is going on and a chance to work things out... We respect one another's difference of opinion and practices especially in non-salvific, non-doctrinal, non essential issues.
7. We love one another through thick and thin! That is the most important thing of all - to love - to be committed to the good, the blessing, the wholeness, and full potential of God's calling and gifts that we each have. We are committed to seeing Christ magnified in each others lives!
8. Now on the flip side, it doesn't necessarily mean that we have deep connection with every single person- That's just not practically possible. But the point is that each of us are connected to others and connected as a whole. The family metaphor doesn't mean that we all click and get along like the best of friends. It doesn't mean we all agree on the same things, that we all like the same music, or art, or have the same political ideas, or same views on education or same hobbies. We are diverse just like families often are, while maintaining a single identity, and mission as Children of God

3. The Living Growing Body

1. The next metaphor we see in this passage is of a living growing body, and this is a favorite metaphor for Paul he uses it multiple times in Ephesians and Romans and of course 1 Corinthians.
 1. The idea behind this is that every member of the church is absolutely essential, (just like each body part is essential

and plays a part in a fully functioning body). No matter how small or large a congregation, smart, talented, - every one has a gift, a ministry, a part to play. John Stott in his book *The Living Church* - talks continuously of the Church as an "Every Member Ministry." Everybody cannot do everything - and if that was the case I'm sure God would not have left the ministry of the Church to sinful human beings like us. No, God has called each of us individuals to bring our unique gift, calling, personality, and perspective together, submitting to one another, working together that we might help one another grow in our identity in Christ, in human wholeness, our knowledge of God's love for us and experience his great plan to use the Church to bring people into his kingdom.

2. Listen to the words of Paul, **"When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."...he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."** -You see, you cannot be a whole mature Christian, you cannot grow up properly without being a member of a Church community.
3. This kind of thinking is so hard for us to get and to apply as Americans because we live in a culture in which the interests and desires of the individual take precedence over those of the family, group, or community.

1. “A high percentage of people want to achieve spiritual growth without losing their independence to a church or to any organized institution.... There is no way you will be able to grow spiritually apart from deep involvement in a community of other believers.” - Tim Keller
2. You can't live the Christian life without a band of Christian friends, without a family of believers in which you find your place..
3. C.S. Lewis had great insight on how we need one another. Some of you would know that C.S Lewis was part of a famous circle of friends called the Inklings, which included JRR Tolkien and Charles Williams, among others. After Charles Williams died Lewis wrote a very striking essay on Friendship in his book *The Four loves*. - He says, “In each of my friends there is something that only some other friend can fully bring out. By myself I am not large enough to call the whole man into activity; I want other lights than my own to show all his facets. Now that Charles is dead, I shall never again see (Tolkien's) reaction to a specifically Charles joke. Far from having more of Tolkien, having him to myself now that Charles is away, I have less of Tolkien... In this, Friendship exhibits a glorious “nearness by resemblance” to heaven itself where the very multitude of the blessed (which no man can number) increases the fruition which each of us has of God. For every soul, seeing him in her own way, doubtless communicates that that unique vision to all the rest. That, says an old author, is why the Seraphim in Isaiah's vision are crying “Holy, Holy, Holy” to one another. The more we share the heavenly bread between us, the more we shall have.”
4. Lewis is saying that it took a whole community to know an individual. How much more would this be true of Jesus Christ? Christians commonly say they want a relationship with Jesus, that they want to “get to know him better.” You will never be able to do that by yourself. You must be deeply involved in the Church, in Christian community, with strong relationships of love and accountability. Only if you are part

of a community of believers seeking to resemble, serve, and love Jesus will you ever get to know him and grow into his likeness.

4. A Temple for God's Holy Spirit

1. **Holiness** -The metaphor of Temple increases our awareness of God's presence in the midst of his people and our need for Holiness. To Be holy simply means to be set apart, or dedicated to a certain purpose. The Church is to be set a part for God's presence and purposes - it is not ours to direct or shape apart from the teaching of the scriptures. This also carries with it a distinction in lifestyle and choices (which we talked about under the kingdom heading). Our current culture agrees whole heartedly with the biblical concepts of love, mercy, and justice, but cringes, and protests when we talk about personal holiness, sexual purity, fidelity in Marriage, etc
 1. Holiness will mean that we take very seriously what the Bible calls right living and what the Bible calls sin, and we see that it is removed from our lives through confession and repentance. When we gather together in small or large gatherings we seek to examine our lives in light of scripture to see whether we are living in a way that is devoted to God, set a part for him, or if we are living for being influenced by something or someone else. When we find that we are not living in holiness, we repent, we turn around and correct those things by the help of God's Spirit and our community.
 2. The Church isn't just a social club, or a gathering, or a community..it is the dwelling place of the living God by the Holy Spirit. God is actually in the midst of his people when we are gathered together. This should give us a healthy fear of God's presence in our midst - a sense of awe and wonder, honor and excitement.
2. **True Worship** - Offering sacrifices which please the Lord - Faith and Repentance, Good works, Humility. Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self Control, the pursuit of the virtues of Faith Hope and Love, Ministering to serving the poor and needy. Righteousness and Justice, Peace.. these are the acts of

worship that God should find in the midst of his people - the same characteristics that he possesses. God should not just hear right words that we say or sing, but he should find right living among his people.

3. **Proclamation** - It is through the Church that God spreads his Good News to the world! That we can have a heart, change, a life change, that Kingdom of heaven is coming and will make all things new. That Jesus is victorious over the demonic realm and the spirit world, that God can remove our shame and restore honor, that We can have a right standing and right relationship with God and with humanity. It is through the Church that the glory of Christ Jesus is made known! Through telling others the great story of God's Love and Restoration - Through Lives lived to the glory of God - thoughts, words, and actions - Sharing and incarnating the message of the Gospel everywhere we go.

Conclusion: As I said last week, I hope through this series to stir up conversation, as well as examination - where are we in terms of representing well all that the church is to be?

What area of your life needs more attention? Where do you need to change? Is there someone in our family that you are harboring bitterness or un-forgiveness towards?

Maybe you aren't living your life in terms of representing the Kingdom of God - where are you struggling with this and with whom? How will you make those changes?

Maybe you need to grow in your openness to, and dependence on others? (The Family or Body metaphor) I know that can be so scary especially if you have been badly burned in the past.. I challenge you to plug into community, and accountability with renewed vigor..

Maybe you need to be more vigilant in your commitment to holiness... whatever it might be I pray that this study would bring some repentance and renewal for all of us..

"I wonder if anything is more urgent today, for the honor of Christ and for the spread of the gospel, than that the church should be, and should be seen to be, what by God's purpose and Christ's achievement it already is- a single new humanity, a model of human community, a family of reconciled

brothers and sisters who love their Father and love each other, the evident dwelling place of God by His Spirit. Only then will the world believe in Christ as peacemaker. Only then will God receive the glory due to His name. -
John Stott