

“The Church: Christ’s Plan for Your (eternal) Life (in Him)”

Hopewell 101 — October 1, 2017

1. Five representative uses of the word ‘church’ in Scripture
 - a. Ephesians 5:25—all for whom Christ has died; all believers in heaven and earth
 - b. 1Corinthians 12:28—the church on earth throughout history; these men were appointed not in heaven but in the church on earth
 - c. Acts 7:38—a great assembly of Christians; an assembly so large that in this case it was an entire nation of 2-6 million
 - d. Acts 11:22—the entire society of Christians in a particular area, in this case several thousand
 - e. Colossians 4:15—a local assembly, even one small enough to gather in a private home
 - f. Note: always, always a corporate body of believers with whom the Lord interacts not merely as individuals, but even more and primarily as a whole.
2. Jesus’ two uses of the word during His earthly ministry
 - a. Matthew 16:18. *I will build My church.* The only earthly entity that He says that He will build. He talks about the kingdom having arrived, but only of the church does He say that He is building or starting it. It is the only earthly entity to which He ever attaches the possessive pronoun, “My.” This is His chief concern on earth and the chief expression of His kingdom on earth.
 - b. Matthew 18:17. *Tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church.* Jesus is talking about a brother in sin who refuses to repent, even when confronted by multiple brethren. This implies several later developments that we see come to fruition through Christ’s later ministry by His apostles:
 - i. Membership. This is a local body that is not just spoken to, but listened to. Not just a group with one is primarily recognized as ‘brother’ so long as he is a member, but also a group from which one can be expelled so that you primarily identify him again with his ethnicity or vocation.
 - ii. Standard of belief and conduct. Doctrine that defines what is right and wrong
 - iii. Procedure for what to do about it
 - iv. Meetings (courts). Specific gatherings at which such telling and hearing can take place
 - v. Officers. Those who lead such meetings
 - vi. n.b. this is the context of the “where two or three are gathered,” and its point is that this is a covenantal gathering in which authority is employed to exercise discipline. That quote is *exactly the opposite* of the false idea that any spontaneous gathering of believers is “the church.”
3. The nature of the church as built by Christ through the apostles
 - a. A gathering without which it is impossible to follow Christ biblically. Ac 2:41-42
 - i. Body from which to receive instruction and sacrament, v41a
 - ii. Body into which to be added as a particular number, v41b
 - iii. Personally received teaching, v42a
 - iv. Personally interacted fellowship, v42b
 - v. Personally cooperative ministry, v42c
 - b. This is a perpetual pattern in the church. Eph 4:11-16
 - i. Officers, v11
 - ii. Membership, v12a
 - iii. Duties and responsibilities, v12b
 - iv. Doctrinal standards, v13a
 - v. Standards of conduct, v13b
 - vi. Identification and exclusion of heresy, v14
 - vii. Obligatory every-member ministry, v15-16
 - c. The pillar and ground of the truth. 1Timothy 3:15. Gospel basics (v16) are preserved by God through the means of church order specifics (v15)
 - d. More specifically: elder oversight and shepherding
 - i. Ac 20:17-38. God’s keeping of the church by the word of His grace (v32) is specifically through the teaching of the whole counsel of God, in public and from house-to-house, by recognized and ordained men, who oversee and shepherd, and must take heed both to themselves (plurality of elders) and to the flock.
 - ii. Ac 14:21-23. Elders in every church. Not just congregations but a Presbytery.
 - iii. 1Tim 3, Titus 1. Local leadership and ministry carried out by overseers/elders. If this is not in place, it is “lacking” (Titus 1:5).
 - e. For next week: no lone rangers; no self-excluders. 1Cor 12:12-31 (cf. 1Cor 12-14; and really all Acts, 1Cor, Eph). The “one anothers”

For further reading:

Clowney, Edmund. *The Church* (InterVarsity, 1995).

De Young, Kevin and Ted Cluck. *Why We Love the Church: In Praise of Institutions and Organized Religion* (Moody, 2009).

Johnson, Terry. “Jesus and the Church” in *Tabletalk Magazine* (July, 2014). Also available at <http://ligonier.org>

Kuiper, R.B. *The Glorious Body of Christ* (Banner of Truth, 1967).

McGraw, Ryan. *James Bannerman’s Church of Christ: Outlined and Abridged with Study Questions* (Amazon Digital, 2013).

Witherow, Thomas. *The Apostolic Church: Which Is It?* (Aitchison, 1856). Also available as a reprint from many sources, and in full online at <http://apuritansmind.com>