

Church is the textured context in which we grow up in Christ to maturity. But church is difficult. Sooner or later, though, if we are serious about growing up in Christ, we have to deal with church. I say sooner. Why? The short answer is because the Holy Spirit formed it to be a colony of heaven in a country of death. Church is the core element in the strategy of the Holy Spirit providing human witness and physical presence to the Jesus-inaugurated kingdom of God in this world. It is not that kingdom complete, but it is a witness to that kingdom.

Eugene Peterson

Title: What Is The Church?

Main Passage: Acts 2:42-47

Secondary Passages: 1 Peter 2:1-12, Ephesians 5:25-33

Passage for Memorization and Meditation:

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

Ephesians 5:25

Overview: It's easy to think of the church as a stuffy building for people who happen to follow Jesus or as a lifeless group of narrow-minded people who criticize others. While these are common perceptions of the church, they do not capture what the Bible teaches.

The word we commonly translate 'church' in the New Testament is the Greek word *ecclesia*, which simply means 'assembly' or 'gathering'. So biblically, the church is a gathering of people who know and follow Jesus.

According to Acts 2:42-47 this gathering is devoted to four things: (1) the gospel, (2) one another, (3) worship, and (4) prayer. This definition of the church helps us to see that, technically, people don't enter a church on Sundays; rather, the church enters a building as it gathers to worship Jesus. Additionally, this gathering isn't lifeless or bored; this gathering is devoted to Jesus and the advancement of his kingdom.

In the Bible, we see that the church is not only a gathering; it is also a family. This is why the very first Christians, who were not biologically related to each other, referred to one another as *brothers* and *sisters*. Paul highlights the reality that the church is a family in 1 Timothy 3:4-5: *[An elder] must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?* Paul's point is that as a home is a biological family, so a church is a spiritual family, and both must be managed well.

Three great things happen in spiritual and biological families – at least, families and churches that are at their best. First, we are loved and accepted unconditionally. Second, we are given a safe place to explore who we are and what we believe. Finally, we learn to become the person God created us to be.

In the Bible, we see that the church is also the bride of Jesus.¹ This helps us to understand that Jesus doesn't just launch the church and let it be. No. He cares for the church. He loves his church. We belong to him, and when

1 See Ephesians 5:25-33 and Revelation 21:1-2

heaven comes to earth we will not sneak in the back door; we will walk down the aisle with Jesus because we are his beautiful bride.

Finally, in the Bible we see that the church is a peculiar people.² In other words, God has set the church apart. The church is different from the world around it. God's purpose in setting the church apart is so that his grace might be made visible through the church as we proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

So the church is not a building, nor is it a hobby. The church is a blood-bought bride. It is a forever family. It is a gathering of set-apart people who know and follow Jesus. When we think about the church in this way, our involvement with the church begins to be more exciting because we realize that we are part of something significant, eternal, and irresistible. We are part of God's great strategy for pointing people to his great love.

Opening Question:

- When you hear the word 'church,' what comes to mind? Why?

Discussion Questions

- Read Acts 2:42-47. What sticks out to you from these verses?
- According to Acts 2:42-47, what was the early church devoted to?
- Why do you think the church was so compelling in Acts 2:42-47?
- Read Ephesians 5:25-33. What do these verses reveal about Jesus' love for the church?
- Read 1 Peter 2:1-12. How does Peter describe the church in these verses?
- According to what you have read, what are 7-9 marks of a healthy church?

Application Questions

- What are some things you think people find resistible about the church? Is their assessment fair?
- Practically, what does it look like to declare the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his glorious light?
- Practically, what does it look like to be devoted to the gospel, one another, worship, and prayer?
- Close this week by praying for specific ministries at Faith Church. Here are several to pray for:

Worship Ministry

Ministry Leader: Dan Pahlau

College Ministry

Ministry Leader: Preston Miller

Care Ministry

Ministry Leader: Grant Pahlau

Student Ministry

Ministry Leader: Steve Baumgaertner

Small Group Ministry

Ministry Leader: Valerie Bouchard

Children's Ministry

Ministry Leader: Sandy Simpson

Table Time With Kids

- What was the sermon from Sunday about? What questions do you have from it?
- Read Acts 2:42-47. What sticks out to you from these verses?
- What is the church? *The church is a community called by God by grace through faith in Jesus who love, learn about, witness, and worship God together.*
- Does Jesus love the church? *Yes. Jesus loves the church very much. He gave his life for the church.*
- Is the church filled with perfect people? *No. The church is filled with people who are pursuing Jesus. Because we are pursuing Jesus, we are made more and more like him.*
- Do you have a role in the church? *Yes. The church is like a body and every Christian has a role to play in that body. It is important that you are praying for the church and using the gifts that Jesus has given to you to serve the church.*