

What is the Church?
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Foothills Christian Church
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I want to start off today by asking a question, why are you here today? Why did you come to church this morning? I don't know if it occurred to you, it might have this morning. You don't have to be here. You could have stayed in bed longer. You could be doing something else. There are a lot of other options than coming to church here on Sunday morning. So, why did you do it? I will let you know a little secret. We don't take attendance here. We are not going to call the truancy officer or know if you came, necessarily, if you didn't come, if we don't see you. But to come here, you had to wake up, you had to get dressed, if you have kids you had to get them dressed (that's a good reason not to come), you had to drive down here. First service is not so bad, you had to find parking (probably not a great parking spot), you had to come in here and now we are going to hang out in here for 1 hour and 15 minutes or 1 hour and half, so why did you do it? Well, as you look across this room you will see hundreds and hundreds of people around here and every single person has a different story about how you came to sit here this morning. You have a different experience in life on maybe what your motivation is for being here. I grew up in a church, I wasn't a Christian but we went to church my entire life. If you asked me anytime growing up why you go to church, I probably would have said, "I don't know." I might have thought because I am a good person and good people go to church. That's what you are supposed to do. Maybe you are here this morning because you are like me and that is just your habit or you feel pressure from your family to be here. Or because you like it and you feel good when you are here. Or you feel guilty when you are not here. Or because you are looking for a boyfriend or a girlfriend and you know church is a good place to meet people. It is not a bad reason. I know lots of friends who don't care about Jesus at all who say I want to come check out your church. They are looking for a good woman. That's a real thing. Maybe you like the music. There are lots of reasons to come to church. As you look out at the landscape, Foothills is not the only church. There is a lot of different churches in the area, in San Diego, in this nation, in this world. There is all different kinds of styles and attitudes and different kinds of things about church so the question comes, what church do you want to go to? What do you like about church? A lot of us want to go to a church that maybe has good music, short preaching, or we want to go to a church that has people like us, people we could network with, or that kind of thing. Church on the inside, just so you know, have picked up on this. So, there are a lot of churches trying to make a place that you want to come to. A place that is really comfortable, that has nice seats, that is designed for people totally unscary and they paint their buildings in colors that are the least possible scariness (I don't know what that is) but there are actual books, systems, and attitudes out there all trying to make church a comfortable, happy place for you to come to. I saw a church recently that has a tagline and it was the name of the church "helping you to win." "This is what our church is about: Helping you win." I thought, that's great, I want to win. I want to go to that church. There are all kinds of things like that that churches have to try to get you to come. So, this morning I want to really look at 'why church' and even more specifically 'what is church?'

Right away as we want to step out and answer that question, we run into a problem which is the word church itself. The way we use the word church is problematic. We have several different definitions of what we mean. In fact, the very first definition in the dictionary is a building. Churches are known for that. If you go to Europe or somewhere, you are going to look at churches that were incredibly ornate or built in such a way and have stain glass and all this beautifully painted and design and church architectural history. So, maybe when you think of church you think of a building. We also use the word church to talk about an appointed meeting time. You know this morning when you came that we were going to start at 9:00 and we will be done right about 10:15. So, that's church. And you think, "I am going to church this morning" and at 9:00 you arrive at church and at 10:15 you leave and you are going to think, "I am now leaving. I am done with church. Church is over." So, I want to look this morning at what the Bible teaches about church. We are really going to understand: what does the Bible teach? I want to look at the very

first use of church, it is in the New Testament. The word church doesn't appear in the Old Testament, it is in the New Testament and I want to look at Matthew 16:18. The very first time church is used in the Bible. (this is Jesus talking).

Matt 16:18

I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

This is an incredible verse, there are a lot of things in here. I just want to point out something super-duper simple that we find out that is very, very important about the church. It's His church. Look, it says right there, "Upon this rock I will build My church." So, it is really important that we understand that the church belongs to Jesus. We shouldn't be that concerned about ourselves or what we want church to be. We should be concerned about what does He want church to be? How do we make this a place that He wants it to be? It belongs to Him. Like I said before, it's not a small point. You have churches all over the place that are trying to make themselves what you want them to be. People that are looking for a church is what they want it to be. But, Jesus says, "The church belongs to Me and it should be what I want it to be." If we get this wrong we get it really messed up. It is something like, if you came over to my house and you started rearranging the furniture and taking down pictures of my family and putting up pictures of your family. You go into my fridge and you make a sandwich and started messing with my thermostat and getting the nice temperature that you want it to be, you and I would have a problem. It's not your house! It's my house! I have it set up the way I like it to be. Right? And that's what we do with church all the time. We go into Jesus' house and we start to make it the way we like it or the way we want it, but it's not, it's not supposed to be that way.

So, the word 'church' in the Bible is a Greek word and interesting word, it is the word *ekklésia*. It is a combination of two Greek words which means the first word *ek* meaning 'out of' and *klesia* meaning 'a calling'. The word was originally used to talk about the calling of the army. They would call the army to arms, they were going to go into battle, that would be the *ekklésia*. And it kind of morphed over time to be the coming together of the leaders of a city to adjudicate and make laws. So, when Jesus was looking around at the words He wanted to use, He chose the word *ekklésia* to be what He was going to call His church. It means the calling out or the assembly of God's called-out people. So, nowhere in the Bible is the word *ekklésia* to describe a building. It's also never used to describe a specific meeting time. It is always used to describe people and its God's people. It's used in two possible ways. It's either used as the church universal which is all Christians everywhere or it is used to describe an individual expression of that in a certain city. The church in San Diego or the church in El Cajon or the church that meets at Mike's house. That is the only two ways that the Bible uses the word church. So, the picture that the Bible has in mind using 'church' is much bigger than what we are just doing here this morning. What we are doing here this morning is right and it's good; in fact, God commands us to do it. He says, "Don't forsake the gathering together of the saints." That we should come together and we should honor the Sabbath together. It is good for us to come as God's people and worship Him. But the Bible means much more than that when it talks about the church. So, what I want to do this morning is give a definition of the church and it is a definition that I made up and I am going to let you decide if it is a good definition or not. I am going to throw out my definition and then we are going to unpack it and work are way through it and then we will be done, okay? So, here is my definition:

The church is the people of God united in Christ for the purposes of God.

Three assertions in there: People of God, United in Christ, and the Purposes of God. I want to work our way through that and then we will get you out of here.

The people of God. This concept is given in 1 Peter 2:9-10.

1 Peter 2:9-10

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰ for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

This is what much of us mean if you have been in church for a long time. What most of us mean when we think about the church is God's people, we mean Christians. The entrance to the church, its listed right here, its salvation. It's when God has pulled you out of the darkness and has brought you into the light. That is the doorway; that is the entrance; that is the membership criteria into the church is that you be born again. That you put your faith in Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins and you confess Him as Lord, and you follow Him with your life. That means that there are Christians all over the place from every tribe, nation, and tongue, every people group, every standings. You look around this room right here and you are going to see people, like I said there is a 1,000 different paths that have led you here this morning but if you are born again, the way you got into the church is not from some secret handshake, it's not that you went to some special class, it's that you put your trust in Jesus Christ. Here at Foothills, we don't have a formal membership to our church. There are a lot of churches that do and that can be good but the reason we don't is because we don't see that in the Bible. You don't see that first you have to take this confirmation class or first you need to do this thing. If you trust and put your faith in Jesus Christ, you are a Christian, you are in. It doesn't matter what your background is. It doesn't matter where you are coming from. In fact, I called Neil this week and I asked, "How long has your family been Christians on your dad's side?... Because Mark, David, and John are pastors and their dad was a pastor but where does it go beyond that?" He said, "Well, I have always called myself a 3rd generation Christian. So, I think it goes back to my grandpa." So, I called Dave and I said, "Dave, how far does it go back?" He said, "Oh, like 400 years." So, Neil, learn your church history. But Dave's family's spiritual lineage goes back basically to the reformation in Germany. For generations and generations and generations they have been Christians and here they are, Neil... a 3rd generation... like a 30th generation Christian being a pastor in this church. There are other people in here this morning that your family, you are the only Christian in your family. You are a 1st generation Christian. The Bible teaches that you and Neil Hoffman are the exact same membership, that you have the exact same belonging to the family of God. It doesn't matter where you are coming from but where you are. If you are born again, you are part of the people of God. Okay, that is just really straight forward, I think most of us have kind of gotten there already. Being a part of the people of God means you are born again. That is how you get into God's family. The second part of that is really related to it and it is built out of there which is...

United in Christ. So, the people of God united in Christ. Unity is a word that is sort of a buzz word in our culture. We use it to talk about politics. It is one of those words we use that we are going to unite around this cause, unite around that social justice issue. It is used a lot in our culture. Unity. But if you look out at our culture, you don't see a lot of it going on. What happens now is we use that word all the time and we kind of just get a dumb down meaning and we think that unity or unified just sort of means some sort of quasi relationship with each other. Yet, when the Bible talks about unity that's not what it has in view at all. The dictionary defines unity as oneness. This is actually a very powerful, deep, profound concept. So, what I want you to do right now is I want you to think, when you think unity I want you to be suspicious of yourself, that it actually means something much more profound and deep than you think it means. So, when I say you are unified with Jesus, it means something much deeper than most of us tend to think that it means. 1 Corinthians 12:27, the apostle Paul introduces an analogy that we are the body of Christ. The word church is used over a 100 times in the New Testament to describe God's people but the word body is used the second most, it is used 30 something times in the New Testament to describe God's people. It says in 1 Corinthians 12:27...

1 Cor 12:27

Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.

So, you are individual but you are part of something much bigger, something much grander, something much more important; specifically, the body of Christ. This is not just an analogy. It means something very profound and very deep. Okay, my physical body is me. You can't cut my arm off and say, "No big deal." That's me. That's a very important part of me. All the parts of my body are really important. I identify with all of it. The good, the bad, the ugly. In some supernatural sense, we are Christ's body. I want to unpack a little bit of what this means, it is incredibly profound. Jesus said, "You are not your own. You were purchased at a cost." You belong to Him. The apostle Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I that lives but it is Christ that lives in me." Look what it says in Matthew 25:40. Jesus teaches us about the great white throne judgment. He is separating the sheep and the goats. The sheep on His right hand and the goats on His left. With the sheep on His right, He's saying, "*When I was hungry you gave me something to eat, when I was thirsty you gave me something to drink, when I was naked you clothed me, when I was in prison you visited me, when I was sick you came to me.*" They are going to say to Him, "Lord, you have been in Heaven, when have we ever seen you in this position?" *And He said, "Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me."* Jesus can be hungry. Jesus can be thirsty. And He doesn't say, "When you did it for poor people, you were doing it in My name, that was a good thing, thank you for doing that." He said, "When you did it for them, you did it for Me. I was hungry you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink." The way that Jesus identifies with His people is so profound. Look what it says in 1 Corinthians 6:15. It says it in a different way.

1 Cor 6:15

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? (Your physical bodies are members of Christ.) **Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be!**

What is it saying? A member of the body of Christ go and sleep with a prostitute and fornicate? Commit adultery? May it never be! You are defying the body of Christ when you do that. On the road to Damascus, the apostle Paul, when he was Saul he would have been persecuting the Christians and he had just overseen the murdering of Stephen, and now he is going to Damascus to put Christians in prison. The Lord Jesus appears to him in a great light. Look what it says in Acts 9:4-5.

Acts 9:4-5

And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (Why are you persecuting My body, why are you hurting Me?) ⁵ **And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.**

Jesus so identified with His people, His sons and daughters, the body of Christ. He said when you hurt them you are hurting me. The problem that He had with Saul was not that he was hurting friends of His. The problem that He had with Saul is that Saul was persecuting Him. This is what it means to become born again. To become a member of Jesus Christ himself. You become a member of His body. Part of Him whom He identifies with. But, it is not just a member with Him. You are united to Christ but you are also united through Christ to each other, to other believers. God has taken us from lots of various places and He has put us in His family not according to our likes and dislikes. Not according to our social economic standing. Not according to any other category but according to the way that seems fit to Him. The people that are His. It says in 1 Corinthians 12:12-13...

1 Cor 12:12-13

For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. ¹³ For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

The word 'one' occurs there a lot. It means that God has taken you from all these other places, all these other experiences and He put you together in His body. Together with His people. That is not how we normally think of church. We normally think of church as, "I am coming to church as an autonomous, independent being. I am going to go on Sunday morning and I am going to sit as dudes do at the theater. I am going to make sure there is plenty of space next to me. When it is over I might wave to a few people. I am going to get in my car and go home. I just churched." That is not the view that God has of the church at all and a lot of you guys have been doing that for a long time. I told you I grew up going to church. It was not a big deal. My friend Monica who I worked for invited me to this church. I came to this church when it was over in the other building and I sat there, and for about 1 year I came to church every week by myself and I didn't know anybody. At the end of service I would be very quick to get up and leave and act like I had somewhere to go because I didn't want to be the guy hanging out who clearly had no friends. Didn't belong and didn't know anybody. Didn't know what I was doing. I was afraid somebody would come up and say, "Tell me what you think about this verse" and I, "I don't know anything. I am sorry for coming, I shouldn't be here. I am leaving." So, I would just get up and I would walk to my car and I would be gone. That was a time in my life where God was doing a lot of things to me and getting a hold of me, but I am so glad that time is over because I wasn't really a part of the body of Christ. I was just showing up and attending. There are a lot of people here, that is what you are doing. You have been doing that for a long time. You have been coming, showing up, but you aren't really connected to the body of Christ. Look what he says as he expounds on it 1 Corinthians 12.

1 Cor 12:14-18

For the body is not one member, but many. ¹⁵ If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.

So it goes on to say something else. Every person in here, you have a gift, a purpose that God has put into your life. A function that God wants to use you for the body. It says, every part, every function is necessary and important. That is a problem because of a lot of you don't know what you are supposed to do. It is clear what Mike's part is. At least this morning, right? My part is to preach and to teach. So, you guys are all watching me do my part of the body. I will give you a hint, your job is not to sit there and judge me, okay? "This guy is not that good." It doesn't matter what part of the body you are, your part is to do something, to function in some way. It happens a lot more than just happening on Sunday morning. God has a function for you, a part for you to do. Now here's a problem. We are part of a big church. So you came here today and you were going to try to, my function is, I don't know, encouraging or preaching, or whatever your part is and you came up here and said, "Mike, we are going to co-teach this morning." I would say, "I am sorry, I worked very hard on this and I didn't include a partner." So, this doesn't function super well for us all to do our part, what we are supposed to do in the body of Christ. Being a part of a big church is a problem. Because it would be very easy, it is very easy for a lot of people to come on Sunday mornings. But what if you don't come? I don't actually know unless I see you. You might have gone to a different service. You might have sat on the other side of the sanctuary. It makes it easy in a big church to kind of sit back and hang out but not really enter into the body of Christ. What you are missing is that it is God's gift to you. One of the things that I realized right away when I

became a Christian is that I can't do this by myself. You know the way that it changed for me? I came here 9 months to a year just sitting by myself every Sunday... is that somebody invited me to a home group. It is actually the home group that I have been leading now for almost 20 years. Our church isn't a church with home groups, our church is a church of home groups. So listen, the way for you to be involved in the body life, to get pulled in at this church is for you to get involved in a home group, or a small group, or a ministry and get connected to other believers. It is so essential, it is God's gift to you to be operating with each other, to be strengthened by each other, to be functioning in the body of Christ, encouraging, playing your part. You know what that means? It means that it just isn't about you. A thumb can't be like, "Oh, I am a thumb, I am so great here by myself." A thumb by itself, it doesn't do anything. It wiggles around. It needs the other fingers to pick stuff up and do what it is supposed to do. So, listen, if you are a thumb by yourself it is lame to be by yourself, you need the other parts. What if the thumb doesn't show up? It is like monkeys trying to dig in the dirt without posable thumbs. I need your gift. When you are not functioning in the body of Christ, you are ripping me off and you are ripping the rest of us off. We don't think like that. We think, "What am I going to get out of that? Who's preaching today? Mike? Boo. I am not going." Listen, you aren't coming to hear a dude speak. You are coming to be part of the body of Christ, to do your part, to do your function, to serve and to help out. Here is a way for you to know if you are part of the body of Christ. I am going to give you a little test.

Hebrews 13:17

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

I am going to step on some toes. I am going to talk about a word or a concept that we don't like to talk about today which is authority and submission. God has put in the church overseers and elders, deacons and pastors. It says here that they give watch over your soul. They are going to give an account to God for how they pastored you and how they shepherd you. Let me ask you a question, who are you submitted to? Who are you submitted to? Very few of you in here are submitted to me. More or very few of you are submitted to Dave Hoffman. Really. Ultimately, if I don't know you, if we aren't involved in each other's lives, you aren't submitted to me. So, who are you submitted to? The way it works at Foothills, we have Mark and Dave who are the senior pastors of this church. Mark and Dave are accountable to a Board of Directors. We have a multiplicity of authority at this church. We have checks and balances and it is a good thing. They are submitted to the Board. Under Mark and Dave we have the pastoral staff who serve as elders of this church. Under the pastors you have home group pastors, various small group leaders and ministry leaders who shepherd this church. If you aren't submitted to anybody than you are missing out on God's gift to you and how God wants to help you, lead you, and protect you. It isn't something for you to be afraid of. It is something for you to joyously say, "I want to be a part of it. I want to enter in." Far too many people in here are missing out. I want to encourage you, go get involved in a small group. We make it really easy. We have a church app. If you have it, the notes from the sermon are on there, it's great. Another part of that church app, it talks about our home groups. Where they are at, what night they meet on, how to get involved. Phone numbers. You could call them and check in with them. There is a big board out there with a bunch of guy's pictures on it. With family pictures on it. You could pick one of those and a specific group, but get involved. Be a part of the body of Christ. As it stands right now, we are weaker, we are not functioning to our full capacity because you aren't doing your part. We need you. So, the people of God were united in Christ and the final one is...

For the purpose of God. That's who the church is. We are the people of God. But, what is the church to do? What does the body do? What does your body do? Lots of stuff. It eats, it runs, it works, it picks stuff up, it does what the head tells it to. The body's job... it's not just a cute analogy to explain how we function together... the body's job is to do stuff. Look what it says in a different way in Ephesians 3:8-10

Eph 3:8-10

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,⁹ and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things;¹⁰ so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.

The Bible says that God is making His wisdom known to the world, to the spiritual forces and physical forces in this world through His administration, through the church. The President of the United States has an administration. If it was the President's job was to do all the things he wanted to do on the platform, nothing would get done. He needs people to go do that for him. So he sets the agenda and his administration goes and does the work. That is what the churches job is to do. We are to obey Jesus and do what He wants us to do. Looks what it says in Ephesians 1:20-23...

Eph 1:20-23

...which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, (That is where Jesus is, He is at the right hand of the Father)²¹ **far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.** (When Paul starts just listing stuff, you have to think, what is he trying to do here? All power, all authority, all dominion, he is saying everything. Every king, every prince, every governor, every army, every powerful force in this world, Jesus Christ is seated far above them.)²² **And He put all things in subjection under His feet** (do you know what all things means? Ya, good, all things, everything is under His feet. You have Jesus seated on the right hand of Father Almighty and all things power, dominion, everything is under His feet) **and gave Him as head over all things to the church,**²³ **which is His body** (You have the head, Christ; the body, the church; and you have all things under the lowest part of the body, the feet) **the fullness of Him who fills all in all.**

What you have is Jesus Christ. He is the owner and He is the Lord of everything. There is not one part of this world that doesn't belong to Him and everything is under His authority. As you look out at the world, does it look like everything is clearly under the rule and reign of Jesus Christ? Not to me. I go out and look at this world and say, "Dude, this is a dumpster fire. It's out of control. This is bad news." How do I reconcile that, that all things are under His authority and all things are under His control? We have to understand how the Kingdom of God works. Jesus says the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. The smallest seed that He planted but it turns into one of the greatest trees. Slowly over time, God's Kingdom and authority it taking root in this world and all things really are being brought under His authority. So as we look out, Jesus is King over everything. He has a huge empire that He is King over, but you look around and see all these little parts of His Kingdom that are in rebellion over Him. If He wanted to He could go and exercise His authority and He could crush His rebellions if He wanted to. At the end of time, make no mistake about it that is how He will finish this thing. Every part that is not willingly submitting itself will have its knee bowed and its tongue will confuse Him as Lord. That is not what Jesus is doing right now. He is sending out ambassadors and embassies to every part of this world that is in rebellion against Him. Those embassies and ambassadors are us, the people of God. We are to go out into the whole world and make disciples of nations and bring the peace, the glory of Jesus Christ to bare in all those places, to bring the message that you might be saved, and your sins can be forgiven. Turn to Him now, He is willing to make peace with you. It is not just in every part of our heart, it is in every part of our lives, in our works, it's in our families, and it's in our neighborhoods. It's in what you do for fun, it's in yourself. Jesus wants to be Lord over all those things. He wants to bring the favor and the glory of God in every part of your life. That is what He is using the church to do so that's what we are doing here this morning. We are God's people, we have assembled together. We have assembled together to worship and glorify Him together and then to strategize together, study His Word together and then we are going to go out from here and keep being the church and function together to bring about God's purposes here on this planet. We are going to encourage each other, walk with each other, help train each other. We

are going to serve each other and as we do that God is going to be made to look glorified, beautiful, and magnified here on this earth.