



## Church (the big areas of our lives)

Taught at our Sunday evening service, 18th July 2021 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

### Introduction

Tonight, we are concluding our series titled "The big areas of our lives" looking at the topic of church. And as one final reminder, here's what we've looked at over the last 10 weeks:

- Education
- Career
- Finances
- Time
- Friendships
- Singleness & relationships
- Marriage
- Children
- Health & illness
- Death
- **Church**

Now, as has been mentioned in previous weeks, the reason we've looked at this breadth of topics is that God has given us everything we need for every area of our lives, written down in His Word - the Bible - as we read in 2 Peter chapter 1:

### **2 Peter 1:1-4**

Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Again, we have everything we need - right there in God's Word, the Bible. So why then do we need the church? What is it's purpose? Well, that's what we're going to look at this evening. And while I would love to dig really deeply into this, we don't have the time - at least, not in a single study - so what I plan to do is to take us through the who, what, where, when and why of the church.

- Who?
- What?
- Where?
- When?
- Why?

## **Who is the church?**

So who is the church?

In short, it is those who are saved. Not mere church goers, or those that affiliate themselves with a religion. Not those who go to church for the hatch, match and dispatch of Christenings, Weddings and Funerals. And it's certainly not those who select "Christian" on the national census.

But those, and only those, who have repented of their sin, have been crucified with Christ, who have put their trust in Jesus as their Saviour. And we see that it is the Lord, not man, that adds to the church - as it has been from the start. We read in Acts chapter 2:

### **Acts 2:46-47**

So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

## **What is the church?**

So if the **who** is those that are saved. Then **what** is the church?

We're going to camp out here for a little while this evening, but ultimately there are three things it boils down to. First, the word church comes from the Greek word **ekklēsia**, meaning called out. We are called out of the darkness of this world into His marvellous light. But Paul makes an important point as he opens his letter to the church in Rome:

**Romans 1:1**

Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God

That is, Paul separated **unto** Christ - the focus being what he was separated unto, not what he was separated from. Not looking back, but looking ahead. Looking to Him, to Jesus, our Saviour. And as such his whole life had changed.

Second, the church is the body of Christ - that is, we are His hands and His feet to do His will and His work. We read in Romans chapter 12:

**Romans 12:3-5**

For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

We don't have the same function, but we have the same head. That is Christ.

Now thirds, we are also the bride of Christ. The one He laid down His life for, to purchase and redeem. And in response to His love and His grace, we want to please Him, love Him, worship Him, and glorify Him. The analogy is clear; just as a much loved wife adores her husband, so we should love Jesus. But since the church is the bride of Christ, that also means you should be careful how you treat it, and how you talk of it.

So the church is called out, separated unto Christ. The body of Christ, to be His hands and His feet. And the bride of Christ, to be loved by Him, to love Him in return, and to treat well.

**There's more**

But there's more of course. And you'll hopefully recall that when we started our evening services in September 2019, that we began with a study of the foundations for the church that we find in Acts chapter 2:

**Acts 2:42**

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

These foundations stand, and are of course critical to any local church family. But that's not all scripture has to say. So while not an exhaustive list of all that a church, that the church, that our church, should be, I want to look at 8 things the Bible says we should do.

So, what things should be present in a church? We'll let's start by noting those foundations again:

## The Word

Why is the Bible so important? Well, look at what the benefit is! We read in 2 Timothy 3:16...

### **2 Timothy 3:16**

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

So if you want to be a thoroughly equipped Christian, you need the Word. As Tozer noted:

"No short cut exists for a deeper spiritual life. The man who would know God must give time to Him."

**AW Tozer**

And when it comes to our times of gathering, it is the Word that must take centre stage. Not the pastor, or the band, or the atmosphere, or anything else. Jesus is the Word, and He must be elevated to His rightful place. Charles Spurgeon warned:

Providing amusement for the people is nowhere spoken of in the Scriptures as a function of the church. The need is biblical doctrine, so understood and felt that it sets men afire.

**Charles Spurgeon**

Again, if the Bible gives us all we need, then it would be crazy to not to have that as the cornerstone of all that our church is. Indeed, Jesus is the chief cornerstone - that's what the Bible says. And the Word is to be taught. Look at how emphatic the command is that Paul writes to Timothy, a young pastor:

### **2 Timothy 4:1-2**

I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

You see, if our focus is worship, who are we worshipping? If our focus is love, we neither know why or how without the Word. If our focus is atmosphere, that will not sustain us. And if our focus is activity, it will exhaust us.

## Prayer

Now as important as breathing in, is breathing out. Likewise, the Word without prayer is a combination that should not exist - if you are spiritually alive. In fact, the first thing you find the church doing after Jesus ascended into Heaven is gathering for prayer...

### **Acts 1:12-14**

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

And we are instructed to pray throughout the Bible. Of course, few mentions are more famous than what we read in Philippians chapter 4:

### **Philippians 4:6-7**

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

And Paul himself was a great example of a man who valued prayer - we read that he prayed for the churches in Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse, Thessalonica. And that he asked for or thanked for previous prayer from the church in Corinth, Thessalonica, as well as from Timothy among others.

And just in case you're on the fence on this one, we read in 1 Thessalonians:

### **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Now prayer isn't the last resort, and as such should be a huge part of our lives. But I fear it is relegated far too often. This week I read the following comment by RA Torrey:

Unite with a church where there is a spirit of prayer, where the prayer-meetings are well kept up.  
**RA Torrey**

I found that sobering, for if that was the measure for whether someone were to join our church, would they? Our prayer meetings are not well attended.

## **Communion**

Now, communion cannot be missed by any church - and it is something we are to continually do, to remember Jesus sacrifice for us, until He returns for us. We read in 1 Corinthians:

### **1 Corinthians 11:23-26**

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

The remembrance of communion is serious, but it isn't a funeral - it is celebrating the resurrection. And we have so much to celebrate about that.

### **Fellowship**

Now the next thing that we should do, as seen in the early church, is fellowship. But what exactly is fellowship? 1 John answers that for us:

### **1 John 1:1-4**

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us— that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

That is, without God, there is no fellowship. It's just socialising. And there is nothing like true fellowship! When you are walking with the Lord, and then you meet someone else who is doing the same, it matters not that you've not met before - instantly you have everything in common that you need. You have a Saviour in common.

### **Sung-worship**

So then, with those foundations reviewed, what does every growing church need? Or in reality, what does every church need in order to grow? Well, nothing that you won't find in God's Word, so that's where we'll stay. And in Ephesians we read:

### **Ephesians 5:18-21**

And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.

Music and singing are wonderful things. I once heard it described as music takes words places where words can't go on their own. I don't want to nail that to the door entirely, but it makes the point - that singing is such an ultimate expression of who we are, and what is dear to us.

And therefore, if we are in Christ, and He is dear to us, it follows that we'll want to sing about Him, and to Him. That is what these psalms, hymns and spiritual songs are and should be.

But we need to know the Word to know what we sing. And indeed there are popular songs we don't sing in our fellowship because of the words. The words to songs do teach, and so we must be sure they are teaching the right things. We read in Colossians chapter 3:

**Colossians 3:16**

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

So praise and worship God in song with your whole heart. But don't worship worship. Our hearts are so important, and the most beautiful voice can be abhorrent to God, and the most awful voice can be beautiful to Him. What we need is to let the Word inform what we sing, and then sing it with joy!

**Serving**

I've heard it said that the motto of the Christian should be "I serve". And that's exactly the example that Jesus set for us. For all of us. Now, the ways in which we serve should differ, but not in effort. And we see this division of Spiritual labour particularly noted in Acts chapter 6, where the apostles devoted themselves to the ministry of the Word and prayer, while others who were also spiritually qualified were to serve in the practical needs of the early church.

But lest there be any confusion, I want to repeat - we are all to serve differently, but with no less effort. This is made exceptionally clear in 1 Corinthians chapter 12:

### **1 Corinthians 12:12-31**

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many.

If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be?

But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.

What is that more excellent way? Well, if you know your Bibles, which you should aim to do, you'll know that way is love.

### **Love**

When it comes to love, there is no greater thing we should do. Instructed by His Word, and following Jesus example, we are to love God, and love others. We read Jesus words in the gospel of Mark:

### **Mark 12:28-31**

Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?" Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

And Paul, notes the importance of this when writing to the church in Galatia:



### Galatians 5:13-15

For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!

And you know what, it's not just us that will notice if we do that. Look at what Jesus said in John's gospel:

### John 13:35

By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

## Witness

And the eighth and last note on **what** the church is, is that it should be a witness.

Why last? Well, consider this... what kind of witness is a church that doesn't teach the Word, doesn't pray, doesn't remember what Jesus has done through the sacrament of communion, that doesn't fellowship with one another, that doesn't want to praise and worship God in song, that doesn't serve and doesn't love?

But conversely, how can we read the Bible and not be moved to share the gospel? How can we pray, and listen to the Lord, without hearing the call to witness? How can we consider what Jesus has done for all and not want to tell others? How can we truly fellowship, with all the joy that brings, without that being evident to non-Christians? How can we serve, without thinking of all that need serving? And how loving are we if we never share the gospel?

Evangelism is not for the extroverted, it is for the converted. And we read in Mark chapter 16:

### Mark 16:15

And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

We have literally been instructed to do this by our Saviour. And if there was more motivation required, look at what Jesus said next:

### Mark 16:16

He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.

Our love should be evident in our witnessing, and witnessing should be evident in our church. It is the great commission of every church, not the the great omission. Not to merely make converts, but disciples. And to you won't make disciples without the Word, without prayer, without communion, or without fellowship, praise, serving, loving, or in turn, witnessing.

## Where

So having considered the what, where is the church? Specifically tonight, I want to consider **where** should we meet.

Initially we saw the church meet in homes:

- Where is the church
  - Started in upper rooms and homes (maybe will end there)
  - Outgrew those, and for practical reasons met in larger buildings
  - The acceptance of Christianity - Constantine - the compromise of Christianity
  - The consumerism of the church - it's somewhere we go, somewhere we get. No. You are the church. "Why isn't the church doing this?..."
  - Should we meet in person, or online? Some debate on this over the last year... you meet how you can. Is in person better? Yes. Do we use the communication open to us remotely? Yes. Look at how much Paul wrote to churches. Convinced he would have been using email, zoom, Teams whatever - the message was more important than the method it was sent by. Yet meeting in person is special. When you receive an email or text, the devil helps you interpret it. Meeting in person is really good.

We don't meet because we have a church building. Nor would having no building prevent us from meeting. But it is highly useful for the work of ministry - unless you have a secret house (and bank account) in the Cayman Islands, I'm not aware of any of us having a home that we could all fit in. And imagine what a loss that would be.

## WHERE gathered

Started in upper rooms and homes (maybe will end there) - Pentecost occurred in a house...

### Acts 2:1-2

When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.

And the early the church started meeting in houses

### Acts 2:46-47

So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

And of course throughout the epistles we see churches mentioned in houses in 1 Corinthians and Romans (Aquila and Priscilla), Colossians (Nymphas), Philemon (Archippus). But I'm going to go out on a limb here and note that those are the exceptions mentioned, as in when Paul writes to the various churches in the NT, he doesn't start by saying greetings to so-and-so and the church in your house, but asks at the end of his letters for his greetings to be passed on to these house churches too. And indeed, we don't see the preaching or teaching of God's Word limited to houses. We read in Acts 19:

### **Acts 19:8-10**

And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

Ultimately, buildings serve a helpful purpose - and we are incredibly blessed to have a building we can call our own, and use for the Lord's purposes without distraction. But neither meeting in a building or a home are wrong. It would only be wrong not to meet - and that includes the much discussed subject of meeting online. It's not best, but it's certainly better than nothing, there may well come a day, where persecution leaves that as our only option.

- Started in upper rooms and homes (maybe will end there)
- Outgrew those, and for practical reasons met in larger buildings
- The acceptance of Christianity - Constantine - the compromise of Christianity
- The consumerism of the church - it's somewhere we go, somewhere we get. But that's not Biblical. You are the church. And so when you ask "Why isn't the church doing this?..." the answer might be because you are the church and you're not doing it.

## **When**

So we've looked at the who, what and where of the church. So what about the when? Historically the church met on the first day of the week, as we see in Acts 20:

### **Acts 20:7**

Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.

And it continues to be important today to put a day aside for the Lord each week - and if your shift pattern doesn't allow that to be every Sunday, still put time aside for Him, for He put his life aside for you.

But our meeting together cannot only be Sunday's - we are to desire more, as the Bible instructs. We read these verses in Hebrews chapter 10:

### **Hebrews 10:23-25**

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

To be necessarily absent is one thing, but to be needlessly absent is to deprive oneself of being helped and helping others.

**Alistair Begg**

Simply put, the church needs to meet together. Paul expected Christians to be meeting together in local churches - which is why he wrote to them. Jesus wrote to specific churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. And so anyone who suggests you can do 'church' on your own is suggesting something contrary to scripture.

Use it - not as a consumer, but to grow in your walk with the Lord.

Church is a bit like being a member of a gym. Some people like the idea of going but don't. Others go, but aren't really training for anything. And some actually use it to help them with the race they're running.

**Milton Jones**

## Why

By now, it should be obvious that we can't do these things in isolation. To love and to serve others does require others.

And so vast is this topic, that many good books have been written on it. But there have also been many bad books along the lines of "how to build a mega church", "how to increase numbers by stopping sermons", or "how your church can grow by adding a McDonalds". I am being facetious, but sadly that's not too far from some of the suggestions around.

But unsurprisingly, the why is found in scripture, and that's what Thomas read earlier in our service - but let us read from Ephesians chapter 4 again:

### **Ephesians 4:11-16**

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

The why of the church, is that we all do the what (and we do it now), so that we are pleasing to Him both now, and at His appearing. There should be growth. And we must not be fixed on number, though we should desire to see others saved.

The real problems in churches are to do with a lack of life and fruitfulness, not the fact it is a little flock

**John Benton**

## Summary

Of course, mention the Word church, and people will immediately think of different things. For us, I hope we are excited by it. However, for others, they may think of stale, stagnant buildings. They may think of institutions - the separation of church and state and such. Or they may think of the horrors of some news stories and scandals. Or perhaps they may think of Christmas carols. Or the Vicar of Dibley. Most won't think of church the way we do. With some bad examples around, and for our own good, it's really important to make sure we're doing it right. But that's not doing it right in man's eyes, but in God's eyes. And that includes the possibility, the likelihood, even the guarantee that people will not like us for it. We may even be persecuted. But that mustn't sway us from being who we should be as Christians, and who collectively we should be as the church.

I would like to conclude with something RA Torrey said:

The church is made up of men and women, imperfect men and women, and consequently it is an imperfect institution, but none the less it is of divine origin and God loves it, and every believer should realise that he belongs to it and should openly take his place in it.

**RA Torrey**

## Application questions

- Are you separated unto Jesus? (*ekklēsia*, called out ones, separated unto)
- Are you taking your place in the body? Are you being Jesus' hands and feet?
- Are you a beautiful bride? Are you pleasing to Him?

## Series conclusion

We have covered a lot of ground in these 11 weeks, but there's still so much more we all have to learn. But as we wrap up this series, I want to read a tribute to the Bible, written by Finnis Dake, who spent over 40'000 hours writing his commentary on the Bible:

The Bible is not an amulet, a charm, a fetish, or a book that will work wonders by its very presence.

It is a book that will work wonders in every life, here and hereafter, if acted upon and obeyed in faith and sincerity. It is God's inspired revelation of the origin and destiny of all things, written in the most simple human language possible so that the most unlearned can understand and obey its teaching. It is self-interpreting and covers every subject of human knowledge and need now and forever.

As a literary composition, the Bible is the most remarkable book ever made. It is a divine library of 66 books, some of considerable size, and others no larger than a tract. These books include various forms of literature - history, biography, poetry, proverbial sayings, hymns, letters, directions for elaborate ritualistic worship, laws, parables, riddles, allegories, prophecy, drama, and others. They embrace all manner of literary styles in human expression.

It is the book that reveals the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts binding, its histories true, and its decisions immutable.

Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, and practice it to be holy. The Bible contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, and the Christian's charter. Here heaven is opened, and the gates of hell disclosed. Christ is its grand subject, our good is its design, and the glory of God its end.

It should fill your memory, rule your heart, and guide your feet in righteousness and true holiness. Read it slowly, frequently, prayerfully, meditatively, searchingly, devotionally, and study it constantly, perseveringly, and industriously. Read it through and through until it becomes part of your being and generates faith that will move mountains.

The Bible is a mine of wealth, the source of health, and a world of pleasure. It is given to you in this life, will be opened at the judgment, and will stand forever. It involves the highest responsibility, will reward the least to the greatest of labor, and will condemn all who trifle with its sacred contents.

**Finnis Dake**

It is the Bible, and nothing else, that is the manifesto of the church. So don't let anything else be what guides you to one, or in one.

**Let's pray.**