

LET'S GET ACQUAINTED SERIES
GOSPELGRACE101

week #2

UNDERSTANDING OUR IDENTITY

What Is the Church?

In the New Testament, the English word that describes the people of God is “church” and can be used to describe both a small local congregation and the group of believers everywhere. The Greek word for church in the New Testament is *ekklesia*, which literally means “assembly,” or “called out ones.”

God has always identified Himself with a specific group of people that He has called out to follow and identify with Him. In the Old Testament, it was the nation of Israel. Today God’s people include all those who have been born again from Pentecost to the Rapture, also called His Church (Universal). The church is organized and gathers in smaller expressions called “local churches,” which derive their function, mission, and practice from the New Testament Scripture.

Because Gospel Grace Church is part of God’s Church,

because He bought it with the blood of His Son, and because it is His plan for displaying His glory to the Universe, we desire to be directed and function according to His plan as revealed in the teaching of the Scriptures alone.

Descriptions of the Church's Nature

We are informed concerning the importance of the doctrine of the church when we look at the various descriptions or pictures of the church found in the New Testament. These descriptions are almost always in the form of analogy. If theologian Paul Minear is correct, there may be as many as 100 images or analogies. Obviously, we're not going to attempt to exhaust this resource, but there are several images that especially suggest the importance of the church.¹

THE BODY OF CHRIST

Perhaps the most popular description of the church is that of the body of Christ, of which our Lord is the Head (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12; Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:24).

With this analogy, Paul emphasizes both the unity of the body and the individuality of each particular member. That Jesus Christ is the Head of the body suggests that it is our Lord who directs and guides the body and that its unity comes from the Head of the body, Who coordinates and directs each individual part. Each member of the body functions according to the Spirit-empowered gifts God has given them.

¹ Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament*, p. 28

THE TEMPLE OF GOD

The church is referred to in Scripture as the temple of God. Each individual Christian is a stone, all of which make up God's temple, still under construction, and our Lord Jesus Christ is the Chief or Cornerstone (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:19; 1 Pet. 2:5f). The temple is the place where God dwells, so the church is the dwelling place of God. God not only dwells in each Christian individually but in all Christians corporately. As the Cornerstone, Jesus is the One who binds the walls, made up of Jews and Gentiles, in unity in Himself (Eph. 2:14f). Not only was the temple the place in which God dwelt, it was also the place of worship from which praise was to ascend to God.

THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

Another description of the church is that of the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:22f; Rev. 19:7). Here we have emphasis upon the love of Christ for His church and His full and adequate provision for His bride. In addition, we see the responsibility of the bride to keep herself pure and unspotted for her Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE FLOCK OF GOD

The church is also described as the flock of God (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2), and our Lord Jesus Christ is the Shepherd of His flock. Here we are reminded of His loving and tender care for His church in feeding, leading, and protecting it from harm. We are likewise reminded of our dependency upon Him and our helplessness apart from His care.

All of these images or analogies indicate an extremely intimate relationship between our Lord Jesus Christ and His church. Not only are we instructed by these analogies of the church's absolute need of Jesus but of His great interest and concern and care for His church as well. In short, the church is vitally important to us, because it is of vital importance to God.² These analogies indicate to us that the believer is not merely an attendee of the church, but rather every believer is an integral part of it.

Essential Elements That Define the Local Church

The Scriptures not only give us clear descriptions as to the nature of the church, they also communicate the essential elements that define the church.

A Local Church...

✪ assembles regularly to render worship to God.

*"Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. **Hebrews 10:25***

*"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." **Colossians 3:16***

✪ rightly divides the Word of God.

*"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" **Acts 2:42***

*"Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching." **1 Timothy 4:13***

² B. Deffinbaugh, "What is a New Testament Church?"

★ **practices the two ordinances – Baptism & Lord's Supper**

"And they devoted themselves...to the breaking of bread and the prayers." Acts 2:42

"For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." 1 Corinthians 11:23-25

"And Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'...So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls." Acts 2:38,41

★ **embraces leadership and service through the establishment and function of the biblical offices (Elder/Pastor and Deacon)**

1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-16

★ **practices mutual edification / fellowship between its members in an environment that is intentionally fostered**

"And they devoted themselves to...the fellowship" Acts 2:42

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." Colossians 3:16

*"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." **Hebrews 10:24-25***

*How do we seek to live out
what the New Testament instructs
the church to be?*

...BY GATHERING TOGETHER ON SUNDAY MORNINGS

This is the central gathering of Gospel Grace Church, where all of its members meet to intentionally worship God, read Scripture, submit to the preaching and teaching of God's Word, practice the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's table, and fellowship. This central gathering is absolutely essential to carrying out God's intention for how His church is to assemble, worship, learn, and grow.

...BY GATHERING TOGETHER IN COMMUNITY GROUPS

Although it is possible for the church to gather weekly at a central meeting (Sunday morning gathering) and accomplish God's design for the church, it is unlikely in our day for people to give themselves to the type of fellowship and mutual edification that is assumed as part of the life of the church. In order for Gospel Grace Church to be the healthy church the New Testament calls it to be, we believe that it is essential to provide additional times for the church to instruct each other in the Word, care for one another, proclaim the Gospel, and disciple one another to learn practical ministry skills.

How do we foster this biblical, healthy community?

Fellowship (Koinonia) is not incidental in Christianity. It is part and parcel of what it means to follow Jesus. *Koinonia* is the close association that involves mutual interests and sharing. As believers, we should find our identity not only in what Jesus has done for us but also in the relationships God is creating with other believers. Acts 2:42-47 shows a description of the early church interacting as a community of people that was growing—together.

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship [koinonia], to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ...And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” Acts 2:42,46-47

So if we as believers are called to live our lives together, what should this togetherness look like, or to put it another way, what should we be doing in community?



*We live in homes or apartments that have a number of rooms, and each room serves a different function or activity of our lives. In the same way, believers live together in community where there are different activities and types of care for each other. **We use a picture of a house to describe the way we are to live with those that are part of Gospel Grace Church.***

Dining Room – INSTRUCTING

The Dining Room picture reminds us that the word is our life and we must speak it and share it one with another. In the dining room, we have guests over and share food and conversation together. In biblical community, we share literal food together as well as the food of studying, listening to, and speaking the word to one another. Each of us prepares a part of the meal of the Word, and we share it with one another.

*“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching...” **Acts 2:42***

*But [Jesus] answered, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”
Matthew 4:4*

Living Room – CARING

In the Living Room, we remember that the gospel causes us both to care for the needs of those around us and to open up about the needs of our own lives. In our living rooms, we share our lives with others, spending time with one another, laughing at stories, working through difficulties, and rejoicing in triumphs. In biblical community, we also share our lives by practicing hospitality, listening to each other, offering words of encouragement, and even confronting sin when necessary.

*“...that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.” **1 Cor. 12:25-27***

Front Porch – INVITING

The picture of a Front Porch is our reminder that community reaches out. From our front porches, we welcome others into our home. In biblical community, we proclaim the gospel through our words and actions both to those outside community and those already inside it. We invite others to join us in community and display living, Christ-like love one for another in front of those we welcome in.

*“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” **John 13:35***

*“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” **Matthew 5:14-16***

Basement – DISCIPLING

The Basement pictures our discipleship of one another. In our basements, we learn and practice our skills. Maybe there's a workbench or a sewing room set up to enjoy a hobby or work on a broken appliance. We learn those hobbies from each other by participating together in a task. In Christian community, trained leaders welcome others into their skill. Servants are disciplined by one life touching another in mutual participation of ministry. As God-given gifts are identified, they are employed for service for the benefit and blessing of the whole Body.

*"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." **Matthew 28:19-20***

*"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" **1 Peter 4:10***

In a healthy biblical community, we are spending time together in all these rooms.³

³ Ryan McCammack, adapted from "Community Groups – House Illustration," Calvary Baptist Church, Joliet, IL.