

Lesson 5: The Role of Church in Spiritual Growth

"The Church is God's creation and design; it is His method of providing spiritual nurture for the believer and a community of faith through which the gospel is proclaimed and His will advanced in every generation."

Rick Warren

Introduction

In the New Testament, the Greek word 'ecclesia' is used for 'church'. 'Ecclesia' came to denote a group of people called out and assembled for a specific purpose.

The English word "church" and its related cognate term originated from the Greek word 'Kuriakos' meaning "belonging to the Lord". 'Kuriakos' came to designate the place where the ecclesia met for worship.

So then, the church is a group of people called out of a life of sin and death into a life that belongs to the Lord, and regularly gathers with the intention of worshipping, discovering and doing the will of God, which is to influence the world for His Kingdom.

"There is nothing on earth more valuable to God than His church". Rick Warren.

IN DEPTH STUDY

I What is the Church?

a) *The church is the bride of Christ.*

b) *The church is the body of Christ.*

c) *The church is God's institution on earth.*

d) *The church is God's family.*

e) *Paul called it the 'church of the living God', and the 'pillar and ground of the truth' (1Tim 3.15)*

- The church is established by Jesus Christ.
- Jesus has a plan for his church. Jesus said: "I *WILL BUILD* my church." *WILL BUILD* is future tense. The building of the church is NOT an action which Jesus completed at some time in the past.
- The church belongs to Jesus Christ.
- Jesus will protect the church.

f) *The universal church is spiritual entity made up of all Christians, past, present and*

future.

g) *The local church is a specific local congregation of Christians who have agreed to band together to pursue the goals and responsibilities of the universal church.*

II What is the importance of the local church in our spiritual growth?

a) *A person can be saved apart from a local church, but a person CANNOT fulfill his spiritual destiny apart from a local church.*

b) *There are two metaphors for 'church':*

- A building (1Pet 2.4-5)
- A body (Rom12.4)
Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ, we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.
- A Christian is no more normal functioning alone than a brick lying apart from a building or an organ cut off from the rest of the body.

c) *"His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave him great pleasure." (Eph 1.15)*

- Because God is love, He treasures relationships.
- When we place our faith in Christ, God becomes our Father, we become his children, other believers become our brothers and sisters, and the church becomes our spiritual family. The family of God includes all believers in the past, in the present, and all who will believe in the future.

d) *Your spiritual family is even more important than your physical family because it will last forever.*

e) *While your relationship with God is personal but God never intends it to be private.*

f) *Bible says of the Church, we are:*

- Put together –(1 Cor12.12)
- Joined together (Eph 2.21,22; 3.6)
- heirs together (Eph 3.6; 4.16)
- fitted together (Col 2.19)
- held together (Eph 4.16)
- to be caught up together (1 Thess.4.17)

g) *Our purpose for life begins by loving God our heavenly Father. We continue to fulfill our purpose by letting His love for us overflow to others.*

III Why does God want us to learn to love each other?

a) It makes us more like God, because God is love.

b) He wants His children to learn to get along.

c) God wants us to love each other because it is practice for eternity.

d) 1 John 4:21

e) “I am writing you these instructions so that, [15] . . . you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church. . .” (1Tim 3:14-15, NIV)

The Church is not a place you go to; the Church is a family you belong to.

The Church is not a building; it’s a body.

The Church is not an institution; it’s not an organization; it’s not a club.

The Church is more than a service you attend for a couple hours on Sunday.

The Church is God’s family of which we can all be a part.

In God’s family, He wants us to love each other; that’s fellowship.

f) “Fellowship is loving God’s family.” In God’s family real fellowship is expressed at four levels:

1. Membership
2. Friendship
3. Partnership
4. Kinship

1. Membership

This simply means you find a church family and you choose to get connected - to be a part of a local church family.

- “...You are members of God’s very own family... and you belong in God’s household with every other Christian”. (Eph 2:19, Living Bible) God says you belong in His family.
- The Christian life is NOT just a matter of believing. It is matter of belonging - of identifying and connecting with other believers.
- Our heavenly Father not only wants us to come to Him through His Son Jesus; God wants us to choose to belong with His family, the Church. Belonging is a choice - a choice of membership

- Have you ever heard someone say, “Well, I’m a Christian, but I don’t want to belong to any church.” That just does not make sense. The church is where you live out what it means to be a Christian. That’s like saying, “I’m a football player, but I don’t want to be a part of any team.” It doesn’t work. A Christian without a church family is an orphan.
- There are two important ways we can show that we are connected to each other—that we belong together.

The *first* is through membership in a local church. Membership in the local church is like a wedding ring. The ring is only a symbol of the commitment.

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus. (Rom 15:5)

Paul’s prayer for the church in Rome, and our prayer for ICA is that God will continue to bring us together with a spirit of unity. Membership is a choice. *Will we choose to belong to each other?*

The *second* way we can show that we belong to each other is through water baptism.

This is what we proclaim in word and action when we were baptized – that each of us is now a part of His resurrection Body. (1 Cor 12:13)

Through water baptism we identify with Christ and with His body, the Church. (Rom 6:3-4)

2. Friendship

- Fellowship begins with membership as we choose to belong
- Fellowship deepens with *FRIENDSHIP*. Through friendship we grow together. Friendship is learning to share.
All the believers met together constantly and shared everything with each other. (Acts 2:44, NLT)
- Growth in the local church will happen as the members of the family choose to get together and share everything.
Share our experiences. .
Proverbs 27:17 As iron sharpens iron, a friend sharpens a friend.
1 Peter 4:9 Open our homes to each other
Galatians 6:2 Share our problems.
Romans 12:15

3. Partnership

- 58 times in the New Testament there are references where we do something with one another.
 We serve one another.
 We love one another.
 We pray with one another.
- We work together as partners who belong to God. (1 Cor 3:9)
God has made us for *MINISTRY* and for a *MISSION*. We have work to do, and God wants us to do it together.

4. Kinship

- Kinship refers to your closest relationships. Kinship involves loving believers like family.
Be devoted to each other like a loving family. (Rom 12:10)
- The word for fellowship in the Bible is the Greek word “koinonia.” Literally, this word means being as committed to each other as we are to Jesus Christ. This is the deepest level of fellowship—being as committed to each other as we are to Jesus Christ. This is more than just a family relationship—it’s an eternal relationship.
- Kinship is the loving relationship we share within God’s family.
We know what real love is because Christ gave up his life for us. And so we also ought to give up our lives for our Christian brothers and sisters. (1 John 3:16)
This describes the deepest level of fellowship; loving each other enough to sacrifice our lives for one another. Loving kinship means we have the same love for each other that Jesus has for all of us. Jesus died for us—He gave all he could give. Kinship is the willingness to do the same.
- Love God and love people - The great commandment (Matt 22.37-40)
Loving God, that’s *WORSHIP*. Loving each other, that’s *FELLOWSHIP*.
- God’s family is a laboratory for learning to love.
- We need to protect unity in fellowship.
Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." (Eph 4:3, NIV)
- Unity is the soul of fellowship. Destroy it, and you rip the heart out of Christ's Body. It is the essence, the core, of how God intends for us to experience life together in his Church.
- John 17:20-23 In his final moments before being arrested, Jesus prayed passionately for our unity. It was our unity that was uppermost in his mind during those agonizing hours. That shows how significant this subject is.
- Nothing on earth is more valuable to God than His Church. *He paid the highest price for it, and he wants it protected, especially from the devastating damage that is caused by division, conflict, and disharmony.*
- You are commissioned by Jesus Christ to do everything possible to preserve the unity, protect the fellowship, and promote harmony in your church family and among all believers.

Application

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. (Eph 4:3, NIV)

How are we to do this?

- Focus on what we have in common, not our differences.
- Be realistic in your expectations. Choose to encourage rather than criticize.
- Refuse to listen to gossip.
- Practice God's method for conflict resolution.
- And most importantly, submit to GOD and authority.

Discussion

What are you doing personally to make your church family more warm and loving? Many people in your community are looking for love and a place to belong.