

## **Ecclesiology**

### **Topic 1 – Introduction to Ecclesiology and the Nature of the Church**

Randy Thompson  
Valley Bible Church  
www.valleybible.net

#### **Introduction to Theology**

Theology comes from the Greek words *theos* meaning “God,” and *logos* meaning “word”; hence, a word or discussion about God or simply the study of God. Theology can be understood to be the general study of Christian doctrine. It is the discovery, organization, and presentation of the truths about God.

In one sense, every person is a theologian since it is impossible to live life without giving some thought to God (Romans 1:18-32). Since no person can avoid theology, the issue is not whether we are going to be theologians, but whether we are going to be a good theologian or a bad theologian. To the degree that our beliefs and behavior align with God's will, as revealed in His Word, we will be good theologians. This must be the ultimate goal of the study of God.

#### **❖ Do you strive to be a good theologian?**

#### **Types of Theology**

There are four general categories of theology. Understanding these groupings will assist us in learning what people mean when speaking of theology.

1. **Biblical Theology** is the study of theology which considers the historical circumstances and development of a doctrine as God progressively revealed Himself through the ages. Biblical theology emphasizes the study of a particular era or writer. For example OT Theology, NT Theology, Pauline Theology, Petrine Theology, or Johannine Theology.
2. **Historical Theology** is the study of doctrine as it developed in stages by individuals or groups throughout church history focusing on what others throughout history have said. For example patristic theology, medieval theology, reformation theology, or modern theology.
3. **Dogmatic Theology** uses as its primary source the dogmas (creeds, statements of faith, or teachings) of particular groups. For example Calvinistic theology, Arminian theology, Catholic theology, or charismatic theology.
4. **Systematic Theology** is the study of theology by examining the totality of Scripture and presenting doctrines by coalescing the whole. It is a correlation of the total structure of biblical doctrine. This systematization of Bible doctrine is not found categorized in defined topics in the Bible but rather has developed over the years. In systematic theology all major doctrines can be grouped into approximately ten subcategories:
  - a. Bibliology – Doctrine of the Bible
  - b. Theology Proper – Doctrine of God including the Trinity and God the Father
  - c. Christology – Doctrine of Christ
  - d. Pneumatology – Doctrine of the Holy Spirit
  - e. Angelology – Doctrine of Angels, Satan, and Fallen Angels
  - f. Anthropology – Doctrine of Man
  - g. Hamartiology – Doctrine of Sin
  - h. Soteriology – Doctrine of Salvation
  - i. Ecclesiology – Doctrine of the Church**
  - j. Eschatology – Doctrine of Last Things

While not necessarily one of the main groupings of theological study, another group could be “practical” or “pastoral” theology which examines Christian practice and studies such things as love, prayer, money, marriage, parenting, etc.

### Theology matters

There is an interesting pattern in Paul’s letters. He often starts with theological concepts then connects that to practice with a “therefore” (see for example Romans 12:1 and Ephesians 4:1). There is something important about understanding doctrine that impacts our walk with Christ. In other of Paul’s epistles, we see that maturity stands in contrast to children who are “tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine” (Eph 4:13-14) and that paying attention to doctrines of demons stands in contrast to being “nourished on the words of faith and of sound doctrine” (1 Tim 4:1-6). Advocating different doctrines shows that one is conceited and understands nothing (1 Tim 6:3-4) and Paul exhorted Titus to show himself to be an example of good deeds with purity in doctrine (Titus 2:7). We see in all of this that doctrine (body of Christian teaching) is important.

#### ❖ **Do you think doctrine is important? Why or why not?**

Many Christians tend to consider the study of theology as unnecessary. Several thoughts have contributed to this prevailing view:

- One reason is that in a day when the authority of the Bible is disputed and when many have denied the infallibility of the Scripture, some feel there is little to be gained in theological examination.
- Another reason is that many Christians consider theology to be uncertain and leading only to endless opinions with no final answers. If no one can be certain, why investigate issues that will result in disagreement between Christians?
- Yet another reason is that for many people, a desire for unity has supplanted a pursuit of truth. While unity is desired, it is not achieved apart from being "made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor 1:10). While all Christians are unified in Christ positionally (John 17:21), the practical outworking of unity is only possible by careful adherence to God's Word, not by simply declaring unity in spite of competing beliefs.

In contrast to being uncertain or inconsequential, theology is absolutely critical for living the Christian life. A. W. Tozer, in his book *The Knowledge of the Holy*, confirmed this point:

"What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion, and man's spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God. Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God. For this reason the gravest question before the church is always God himself and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. ... I believe there is scarcely an error in doctrine or a failure in applying Christian ethics that cannot be traced finally to imperfect and ignoble thoughts about God."

Understanding theology not only will help us to mature as Christians, it helps us to serve others. If people are led astray by false teaching, we will be better equipped to help them. As people need to know God's Word, we will be better able to direct them toward particular passages of relevance to them. By studying theology, we are enabled to teach ourselves and others what God says, thus being a part of disciple making, "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."

#### ❖ **How are you involved in disciple making?**

Our ultimate goal as we are diligent to present ourselves approved to God handling accurately His Word (2 Tim 2:15) is that we would “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col 1:10) while guarding ourselves against arrogance (1 Cor 8:1).

❖ **Is your ultimate goal to glorify God, to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord?**

All Theology Matters

Often people divide Bible doctrine into two categories: what is essential and what is non-essential. Essential doctrine is usually understood to be matters related to the Christian’s source of authority, the nature of God (including the Trinity), the fallen state of man, the person and work of Christ (including His deity and sacrificial death and resurrection), and the nature of salvation (by grace through faith in Christ alone). Non-essential doctrine is usually understood to be matters upon which Christians can disagree (e.g. the details of creation, the details of Christ’s return, the nature of spiritual gifts, etc.).

A popular Christian apologetic organization (Christian Research Institute) advocates the maxim, "in essentials unity, in nonessentials liberty, and in all things charity." While unity, liberty, and charity are all important, the problem lies in the fact that the Bible does not describe for us which doctrines are essential and which are non-essential.

So, on what basis do we decide which truth is “essential”? It cannot be, for example, how often a doctrine is presented in the Bible. For example, the virgin birth of Christ is normally considered essential. Indeed, to deny the virgin birth of Christ is to deny the person of Christ. Yet this doctrine is only taught a couple of places in the Bible (Matt 1:23-25; Luke 1:26-38; Isa 7:14).

Wayne Grudem offers the following guideline, "A major doctrine is one that has a significant impact on our thinking about other doctrines, or that has a significant impact on how we live the Christian life. A minor doctrine is one that has very little impact on how we think about other doctrines, and very little impact on how we live the Christian life." Many might agree with this. However, this guideline forces us to conclude that some of the teachings of God have very little impact on how we live the Christian life. If a teaching is important enough for God to communicate to us, it is important enough for us to take seriously.

All doctrine is essential in that we are required to accept and respond to it completely. Some doctrines may not undermine the gospel message directly, but the gospel is only part of what we are called to guard (1 Tim 6:20; 2 Tim 1:13-14). The conclusion is then that all theology matters.

Presuppositions

There are several presuppositions that are required if we are to adequately study theology.

1. Absolute truth exists and the only source of truth concerning God is the Bible.

In other words, the Bible is the only inspired Word of God. Many people believe the Bible to *contain* the Word of God, but not *BE* the Word of God. They believe that the Bible is a human book and contains historical and scientific errors and do not believe the Bible is accurate word for word. So, does the Bible simply contain the Word of God or IS it the Word of God? The testimony of Jesus and the Scripture’s authors is that the Bible IS the Word of God.

Inspiration is the doctrine that explains the means and extent of the Bible being the Word of God. Several specific terms are used to describe what is meant by the Bible being the Word of God.

- Inspiration translates the Greek *theopneustos* which literally means “breathed out by God” or “God-Breathed”. God is the source of Scripture and as such Scripture takes on His qualities.

<sup>14</sup>You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, <sup>15</sup>and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup>**All Scripture is inspired by God** and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; <sup>17</sup>so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. 2 Tim 3:14-17

- **Superintended** describes the means by which God wrote His Word. This means that God directed (or moved), but did not dictate to, the human authors so that, using their own personalities and styles, they composed and recorded without error in the original manuscripts God’s specific revelation to mankind.

<sup>20</sup>But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one’s own interpretation, <sup>21</sup>for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but **men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God**. 2 Pet 1:20-21

- **Infallible** means completely incapable of error (i.e. true and trustworthy) (Titus 1:2) and **inerrant** means completely without error (John 17:17).

<sup>2b</sup>which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago, Titus 1:2b

<sup>17</sup>Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. John 17:17

- **Plenary** means inspired in equal parts including every word and **verbal** means extending to the very words (“all” in 2 Tim 3:16 and “no” in 2 Pet 1:21-22). This is shown by the Lord Jesus’ and Apostle Paul’s statements, usage, and arguments (Matt 5:18; 22:31-32; Gal 3:16).

<sup>18</sup>For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Matt 5:18

<sup>31</sup>But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: <sup>32</sup>“I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.” Matt 22:31-32

<sup>16</sup>Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as *referring* to many, but *rather* to one, “And to your seed,” that is, Christ. Gal 3:16

God is the source of Scripture. The Bible is the inspired (God-breathed), plenary (inspired in equal parts), verbal (extending to the very words), infallible (completely incapable of error), inerrant (completely without error) in the original manuscripts Word of God!

An appreciation of the Scriptures’ qualities is necessary to understand the need for obedience to God’s Word. It is impossible to neglect the Bible when we truly accept it as the very Word of God. It becomes our delight when we partake of it (Jer 15:16).

<sup>16</sup>Your words were found and I ate them, And **Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart**; For I have been called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts. Jer 15:16

#### ❖ **How high is your view of Scripture?**

2. The Scriptures are authoritative and fully sufficient for all matters of faith and conduct.

This presupposition flows from the first. If the Bible is God’s inspired Word, then it is fully sufficient to meet all the spiritual needs of God’s people. And, it is only Scripture that is able to fully meet these needs. The Bible is authoritative (see Matt 4:4, 7, 10) and therefore the standard for faith and practice for every believer. In addition, the Bible accomplishes its purpose (Isa 55:11; Heb 4:12) for which God sends it forth. It is powerful and therefore able to accomplish God’s desire in the lives of people.

Unlike any other writing, the words of Scripture are able to perform the work their intended result (1 Thess 2:13) because the author, the Holy Spirit, is at work in the lives of the readers.

<sup>8</sup>“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD.

<sup>9</sup>“For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts. <sup>10</sup>“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; <sup>11</sup>So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; **It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.** Isa 55:8-11

<sup>12</sup>For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Heb 4:12

<sup>13</sup>For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted *it* not *as* the word of men, but *for* what it really is, the word of God, **which also performs its work in you who believe.** 1 Thess 2:13

❖ **Do you view God’s words as powerful and authoritative?**

3. The Bible must be approached with a plane, literal, grammatical, and historical hermeneutic.

Interpretation has to do with discovering what the Scriptures say by applying hermeneutics or the art and science of Biblical interpretation. There are three general types of hermeneutical systems: allegorical, semi-allegorical/semi-literal, and literal.

Allegorical hermeneutics assigns symbolic senses to words which results in a different meaning to the text which the author never intended to convey. If the allegorical method was applied consistently, the Bible would be reduced to fiction, with the meaning of the text replaced by whatever representation the reader gives to the words.

Evangelicals who use an allegorical hermeneutical system do so usually in the area of prophecy while using the literal or normal hermeneutical system for the rest of Scripture. It may be accurately regarded as inconsistent (semi-allegorical/semi-literal).

Literal (or plain or normal) hermeneutics takes the plain literal sense while understanding the historical, immediate, and wider contexts; uses of figures of speech; and the type of literature. This is also called the plain, literal, grammatical, historical method of interpretation. Literal hermeneutics adheres to the golden rule of interpretation, "if the plain sense makes good sense, seek no other sense". We believe this is the correct method of interpretation.

Reasons why literal hermeneutics is the correct method of Bible interpretation.

1. Linguistic Reason – The purpose of language requires the literal method of interpretation. If God originated language for the purpose of communication, it follows that the normal use of language will accomplish that purpose. The Bible does not seem to demand a deeper or hidden sense of language which deviates from its normal use. To employ such a unique linguistic device for the Bible would not aid communication but only add to misunderstanding.
2. Biblical Reason – All of the over 300 OT prophecies concerning the coming of Jesus Christ were fulfilled literally in the NT. In none do we find the allegorical method of interpretation. Of the rest of the prophecies that have been fulfilled all were fulfilled literally.

3. Logical Reason – All objectivity is lost when the literal method of interpretation is not consistently applied. Literal interpreting limits the reader from making assertions without a clear support from the text itself. To deviate from the literal approach opens a Pandora's box of possible meanings of the text.

❖ **Do you strive to be diligent to handle God's Word accurately?**

4. Since the student of theology is attempting to understand what the Bible teaches, it is necessary that the student be a Spirit indwelt and led believer.

<sup>10</sup>For to us God revealed *them* through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. <sup>11</sup>For who among men knows the *thoughts* of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the *thoughts* of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. <sup>12</sup>Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, <sup>13</sup>which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*. <sup>14</sup>**But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.** <sup>15</sup>**But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one.** <sup>16</sup>For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ. 1 Cor 2:10-16

❖ **Before you come to take in God's words, do you ensure you are filled with the Spirit?**

### Ecclesiology

Ecclesiology is the category of systematic theology that deals with the church – its definition, purpose, organization including leadership, ordinances, and practices. To these general topics we will add studies on church discipline, local church membership, the distinction between the church and Israel, a survey of church history, and a survey of denominational beliefs.

As we study this topic over the next year, my hope is that we will grow in our appreciation of what amazing things God has done in our own lives and understand His purpose for the church in magnifying His own Glory and in making disciples.

### The Biblical use of "Church"

The primary word in the NT which is translated "church" is the Greek "ekklesia". It is a compound word from "out of" and "a calling", hence "a called out group". It meant a group of people "called out" from their homes and assembled. Eventually, the "calling out" aspect faded and the idea of assembly or congregation became dominant.

The word was in common usage for assembly or gathering long before the NT usage. An "ekklesia" was an assembly or a congregation of any kind (secular or religious), whether physically assembled or not. Some Bible interpreters will focus on the etymology of "ekklesia" in its usage for the church (i.e. "called out" by God). However, this nuance is not warranted from Greek usage. "Ekklesia" is found 114 in the NT.

Three times it is used of a secular or political assembly.

- In Acts 19:32, 41, it is used of the mob in Ephesus stirred up by Demetrius the silversmith.
- In Acts 19:39, it is used of a body of citizens "gathered" to discuss the affairs of State.

Two times it refers to the nation of Israel.

- In Acts 7:38, it is used by Stephen during his preaching at his stoning of the congregation of Israel in the wilderness.
- In Heb 2:12, the author refers to the assembly of Israel by quoting Psalm 2:22.

One hundred and nine times it refers to groups of Christians in two different ways. First and most frequently, the word is used in reference to a local group or groups of professing believers. This is also called the visible church because it is what other believers and the world can see. A unique aspect of the local or visible church is that it is comprised of the redeemed and unredeemed.

<sup>17</sup>If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the **church**; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Matt 18:17

<sup>28</sup>Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the **church** of God which He purchased with His own blood. Acts 20:28

<sup>2</sup>and all the brethren who are with me, To the **churches** of Galatia: Gal 1:2

See also passages like: Phil 4:15-16; Col 4:15-16; 1 Cor 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1; 1 Tim 3:5; Philemon 1-3; James 5:14; 3 John 5-6; Rev 1:11, etc.

Second, the word takes on a more technical and fuller meaning referring to the universal church. That is, the total group of believers, and only believers, during this present age. It is comprised of all individuals who place their faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. The universal church is also called the “invisible” church. The invisible church is only comprised of the redeemed and it is a group that only God can see and know the size and members.

<sup>15</sup>He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”<sup>16</sup>Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”<sup>17</sup>And Jesus said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven. <sup>18</sup>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. Matt 16:15-18

Note: Roman Catholicism claims that Matthew 16:18 shows that Peter is the rock upon which Christ will build His church. However, the Greek does not support this interpretation. “Peter” is the masculine noun “Petros” meaning a “detached boulder or stone” or a stone that might be easily thrown whereas “rock” is the feminine noun “petra” meaning mass of rock or bedrock (i.e. a sure foundation). The verse is equivalent to saying, “you are Peter, and upon this bedrock, I will build My church.” The question then is, “What is the bedrock upon which Christ is building His church?” The context in this passage is about Christ and who He is – “the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Therefore, we find that the foundation of the church is Christ not Peter.

<sup>11</sup>For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 1 Cor 3:11

<sup>19</sup>So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, <sup>20</sup>having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, Eph 2:19-20 (see also Isaiah 28:16 and 1 Peter 2:4-10)

<sup>22</sup>And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and **gave Him as head over all things to the church**, <sup>23</sup>**which is His body**, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. Eph 1:22-23

<sup>8</sup>To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup>and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; <sup>10</sup>**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*. <sup>11</sup>*This was* in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, <sup>12</sup>in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him. Eph 3:8-12

<sup>15</sup>He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup>For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. <sup>17</sup>He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup>**He is also head of the body, the church;** and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. <sup>19</sup>For it was the *Father's* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, <sup>20</sup>and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, *I say*, whether things on earth or things in heaven. Col 1:15-20

❖ **What comes to your mind when you hear the word church, group or building?**

**Members of the Church**

The universal church is a united spiritual organism consisting of all members of the body of Christ (Matt 16:18; 1 Cor 12:12-13; Col 1:18; Eph 2:11, 3:6; 3:10). It is comprised of believers and only believers. Understanding what God does at salvation is useful in understanding how a believer is placed into the church. To understand this, it can be helpful to list the salvation process in order. Some of these *both* steps occur simultaneously, but are ordered here for understanding.

1. Election – God’s unconditional choice from eternity past of individuals for salvation (Matt 22:1-14; Rom 3:10-13; 8:27-30; 9:6-24; 1 Cor 1:18-19; Eph 1:3-11; 2:8-9; 2; Acts 13:48; 1 Thess 1:4; 2 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 2:10; 1 Pet 1:1-2; 2 Pet 1:10; 2:13). God’s choice is required because all are dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1); dead people can’t choose to come alive.
2. The Gospel Call – God’s work in sovereignly bringing the gospel to the one He has chosen. All whom the Father appoints to eternal life (Acts 13:48) He will call to Himself (Rom 8:30) by sovereignly causing the gospel to be told to them (Acts 10; Rom 10:8-17).
3. Regeneration – God’s work that brings new life (2 Cor 5:17; John 3:3; Titus 3:5). God regenerates (John 1:13) instantaneously as He wills (Jam 1:18) by the Holy Spirit (John 3:5).
4. Conversion – The sinner exercises the gift of true saving faith (belief/trust, repentance, surrender, forsaking all, confessing as Lord, etc.).
  - 4a. Justification – God’s gracious work (Rom 8:33) where the believing sinner is declared righteous (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 11:18; Rom 2:4; 2 Cor 7:10; Isa 55:6-7) in His sight; our sins are placed on Jesus (Col 2:14; 1 Pet 2:24) and His righteousness is placed on us (2 Cor 5:21).
  - 4b. Sanctification – God’s one-time work where He positionally sets the believer apart from sin and eternal death for Himself (2 Thess 2:13; Heb 10:10). There is also a progressive sanctification which is God’s work where the believer cooperates in the process to more and more die to sin, and live unto righteousness (2 Cor 3:18).
  - 4c. Adoption – God’s work in making us a permanent part of His family (John 1:12; Rom 8:15; Gal 4:5; Heb 12:5-9).
  - 4d. Holy Spirit Indwelling – God the Holy Spirit’s act by which He permanently (John 14:16) takes up residence in the believer (1 Cor 6:19).
  - 4e. Holy Spirit Sealing – God the Holy Spirit’s work which guarantees that the believer belongs to God (2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13; 4:30); providing the believer with eternal-security and assurance of salvation.
  - 4f. Spiritual Baptism – God’s act where the believer is united with Christ in His death (Rom 6:3-5) and into union with other believers in the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13).**
  - 4g. Holy Spirit Bestowing Spiritual Gifts – God the Holy Spirit’s supernatural, sovereign work where He gives spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:11; Heb 2:3-4) distributing to each believer (Rom 8:9) individually just as He wills.
5. Perseverance – God’s work (with believer cooperation) that keeps Christians faithful, causing us to persevere in the faith, despite trials, tribulations, and temptations

6. Death – God’s work where the predetermined time comes for the believer to finally get to see the Lord face to face. We enter an intermediate state, where we are in the presence of the Lord, but without our glorified bodies.
7. Glorification – God’s work when we receive our new resurrected bodies.

So, upon salvation, each believer is immediately placed by the Holy Spirit into one united spiritual Body – the church.

<sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>**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. 1 Cor 12:12-13

<sup>26</sup>For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>27</sup>**For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.** <sup>28</sup>There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Gal 3:26-28

#### ❖ **What does thankfulness for your salvation motivate you to do?**

The universal church is not comprised of people who simply profess to know Jesus nor those who identify themselves with a particular Christian group nor those who may attend a local church. There are many people who identify themselves as a Christian. This does not make someone a believer.

<sup>21</sup>**“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.** <sup>22</sup>“Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ <sup>23</sup>“And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’ Matt 7:21-23 (See also the parable of the tares among the wheat in Matthew 13:24-30)

The church is the total group of individuals who place their faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. The Scriptures are clear that saving faith is faith in the Lord of all. True saving faith is not mere intellectual assent to facts concerning the gospel. True saving faith encompasses repentance (Mark 1:14-15; Acts 20:20-21; Heb 6:1), following Jesus (John 10:27-28), self-denial (Luke 9:23-26), forsaking all (Luke 14:15-33), and confessing Jesus as Lord (Luke 6:45; Rom 10:8-10). For a detailed study of true saving faith, see Topic 4 in the Biblical Solutions for Life Issues class on the VBC website.

#### ❖ **When you meet someone new (at church), what is the most important thing you need to know about them?**

#### **Uniqueness of the Church**

The church is a NT revelation of an OT mystery.

<sup>4</sup>By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, <sup>5</sup>which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; <sup>6</sup>*to be specific*, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, Eph 3:4-6

The church is what Jesus promised to build.

<sup>18</sup>“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. Matt 16:18

The head of the church is Jesus.

<sup>18</sup>**He is also head of the body, the church;** and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. Col 1:18

The church is distinct from Israel. We will only mention this here briefly, but will investigate this fully in later lessons.

<sup>32</sup>Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; 1 Cor 10:32

### **The Birth of the Church**

So, when did the church begin? We may think this is a clear question with a clear answer, but the answer is actually controversial. There are two primary views, although there are several lesser held views as well. The two primary views are:

- Covenant theologians believe that the church began in the OT (usually with Abraham or sometimes Adam) and continues throughout all time. According to this view, the universal church consists of all believers (OT and NT) of all time.
- Dispensational theologians believe the church began on the day of Pentecost and consists of all believers of the present age (the church age).

Lesser views include the church beginning with John the Baptist since he is the first baptizer and baptism is a distinguishing feature of the church. Others hold that the church did not begin until during the ministry of Paul when a gentile church was born.

Holding to a plain, literal, grammatical, historical hermeneutic leads us to the church beginning at Pentecost for the following reasons:

- The church was an OT revelatory mystery, not revealed until the NT.

<sup>24</sup>Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. <sup>25</sup>Of *this church* I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the *preaching of* the word of God, <sup>26</sup>*that is*, the mystery which has been hidden from the *past* ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, <sup>27</sup>to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Col 1:24-27

- The Lord Jesus spoke of the church as being future (“will build”). Indicating that it did not yet exist.

<sup>18</sup>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. Matt 16:18

- The means of placing individuals into union with Christ, into the church, the body of Christ, is Spirit baptism.

<sup>13</sup>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. 1 Cor 12:13

In Acts 1:5, Jesus stated that the baptism of the Spirit on His followers had not yet occurred, it was future.

<sup>5</sup>for John baptized with water, but **you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.**” Acts 1:5

The baptism of the Spirit occurred at Pentecost for the first time with the giving of the Holy Spirit and continues with each individual when they accept Christ as Lord and Savior. In Acts 11:15, Peter recounts Cornelius's conversion and the baptizing of the Spirit and likens that to what happened at the beginning of the Church.

<sup>15</sup>And as I began to speak, **the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as *He did* upon us at the beginning.** <sup>16</sup>And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' Acts 11:15-16

<sup>1</sup>When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.<sup>2</sup>And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup>And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. <sup>4</sup>And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance. Acts 2:1-4

- The church's foundation of Christ and then NT apostles and prophets had yet to be laid (in context prophets used here is NT prophets, see Eph 4:10-11).

<sup>18</sup>I also say to you that you are Peter, and **upon this rock I will build My church** (*i.e. Christ*); and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. Matt 16:18

<sup>19</sup>So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, <sup>20</sup>having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, <sup>21</sup>in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, <sup>22</sup>in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. Eph 2:19-20

- The resurrection and ascension of Jesus are necessary for Him to be the head of His body and for the provision of the Spirit and spirit-giftedness. The church's being built on the resurrection and ascension of Christ makes it distinctive to this age. In addition, the indwelling of the Spirit and Spirit-gifting are unique to this age.

<sup>37</sup>Now on the last day, the great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. <sup>38</sup>He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'" <sup>39</sup>But **this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.** John 7:39

<sup>18</sup>*I pray that* the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup>and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. *These are* in accordance with the working of the strength of His might <sup>20</sup>which He brought about in Christ, **when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,** <sup>21</sup>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. <sup>22</sup>And **He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church,** <sup>23</sup>**which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.** Eph 1:18-23

<sup>7</sup>**But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. ...**

<sup>11</sup>And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>**for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;** <sup>13</sup>until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. Eph 4:7-16

<sup>10</sup>**As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.** <sup>11</sup>Whoever speaks, *is to do so* as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves *is to do so* as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1 Pet 4:10-11

So the Biblical evidence standing alone indicates that the universal church had its beginning at Pentecost.

### **The End of the Church**

This will be touched on again in later studies, but for now we will simply state that the formation of the church, what Christ is building, will come to an end or be completed at the rapture when Christ comes for his saints (1 Cor 15:51-52; 1 Thess 4:13-18).

### **The Purpose of the Church**

The purpose of the church is the same purpose as all things: to glorify God (Eph 3:21).

<sup>13</sup>In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, <sup>14</sup>who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.* Eph 1:13-14

<sup>20</sup>Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, <sup>21</sup>**to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever.** Amen. Eph 3:20-21

#### **❖ What is your overarching purpose in life?**

### **The Mission of the Church**

The mission of the church is to make disciples (Matt 28:19-20).

<sup>19</sup>Go therefore and **make disciples of all the nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Matt 28:19-20

This “Great Commission” is our Lord’s last command to His disciples (i.e. us). The only imperative in this passage is “make disciples”. “Go”, “baptizing”, and “teaching” are participles that modify or describe the main verb of “making disciples”. These activities characterize disciple making; they are the “how” of disciple making.

“Go” is literally “having gone”. It assumes an active pursuit of the lost (Luke 19:10). To whom are we to go? “All the nations”, which includes family, neighbors, workmates, strangers, and even different countries. This going is to increasing spheres or relationships personally removed from myself (Acts 1:7-8): near, farther, even farther, and very far.

“Baptizing” has to do with identifying individuals with Jesus Christ. An act of obedience by the new disciple that shows their desire to follow Jesus with their entire life. It is an outward expression of what has happened in the inner person. It is a sign of entrance into God’s family and of pledged submission to His Lordship.

“Teaching” is not just giving knowledge, but teaching a lifestyle – “to obey all that the Lord commanded”. Those that surrender to Christ for salvation, identifying themselves with Him in baptism, must be trained to observe all that He commanded. This process continues until each believer is presented “complete in Christ” (Col 1:28). Movement towards Christ-likeness marks a believer; a professed conversion does not make a true disciple. Jesus said, “If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine...” (John 8:31).

#### **❖ How are you involved in disciple making?**

The church's disciple making activity includes building itself up in the faith through teaching, fellowship, remembering Jesus' sacrifice, and prayer (Eph 4:11-16; Acts 2:42)

<sup>11</sup>And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>**for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;** <sup>13</sup>**until we all attain to the unity of the faith,** and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. <sup>14</sup>As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; <sup>15</sup>but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, <sup>16</sup>from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. Eph 4:11-16

<sup>42</sup>They were **continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.** Acts 2:42

❖ **How might these passages impact how believers “do” church?**

### Metaphorical Descriptions of the Church

A metaphor is a figure of speech that identifies something as being the same as some unrelated thing for rhetorical effect. It is a descriptive image to aid understanding. The Scriptures provide numerous metaphors for the purpose of painting a rich picture of the church; to describe the nature of the church. Some authors list anywhere from 40 to 100 metaphors or images of the church depending on how they are identified and counted.

Some images represent the universal church, some individual believers within the church, and some can be seen as both. God has provided each of the metaphors to provide a full, rich picture of the church. For brevity, we will only look at a few divided into four categories.

“Every biblical metaphor of the church, without exception, emphasizes its unity. The church is one bride with one husband; one flock with one shepherd; one set of branches on one vine; one kingdom with one king; one family with one father; one building with one foundation; one body with one head, ... John MacArthur, *The Church: The Body of Christ*

#### 1. Family Images

a. God's Family – This metaphor describes the church as a family unit with God as the father.

<sup>19</sup>So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, **and are of God's household,** Eph 2:19

<sup>10</sup>So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those **who are of the household of the faith.** Gal 6:10

God Himself calls us His sons and daughters.

<sup>18c</sup>**And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,**” Says the Lord Almighty. 2 Cor 6:18

Jesus calls us His brothers and sisters.

<sup>49</sup>And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, “Behold My mother and My brothers! <sup>50</sup>**For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister** and mother.” Matt 12:49-50

Paul urges Timothy to interact with other believers as family members.

<sup>1</sup>Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but *rather appeal to him as a father, to the younger men as brothers, <sup>2</sup>the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters*, in all purity. 1 Tim 5:1-2

James calls believers to view each other as siblings.

<sup>14</sup>What use is it, **my brethren**, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? <sup>15</sup>If **a brother or sister** is without clothing and in need of daily food, <sup>16</sup>and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that? James 2:14-16

This image demonstrates the love and care members of the church are to have for one another. It pictures unity, a bond, and strength of relationship.

❖ **Do you view fellow believers as siblings? How might this impact your relationships?**

- b. Bride – The church is referred to as the bride of Christ. Paul draws this comparison in Ephesians when he compares the husband-wife relationship to that between Christ and the church and in 2 Corinthians when he calls the church a betrothed pure virgin.

<sup>22</sup>Wives, *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord. <sup>23</sup>For the husband is the head of the wife, **as Christ also is the head of the church**, He Himself *being* the Savior of the body. <sup>24</sup>**But as the church is subject to Christ**, so also the wives *ought to be* to their husbands in everything. <sup>25</sup>Husbands, **love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her**, <sup>26</sup>**so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word**, <sup>27</sup>**that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless**. <sup>28</sup>So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; <sup>29</sup>for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also *does* the church, <sup>30</sup>because we are members of His body. <sup>31</sup>FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. <sup>32</sup>**This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.** <sup>33</sup>Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must *see to it* that she respects her husband. Eph 5:22-33

<sup>2</sup>For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for **I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin**. 2 Cor 11:2

The stages in a Jewish wedding are instructional in understanding this picture.

- 1) The betrothal is where the father chooses and pays for the bride and the bride and groom are promised to one another.

<sup>4</sup>just as **He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world**, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. Eph 1:4

<sup>28</sup>Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd **the church of God which He purchased with His own blood**. Acts 20:28

<sup>20</sup>For **you have been bought with a price**: therefore glorify God in your body. 1 Cor 6:20

<sup>2</sup>For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for **I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin**. 2 Cor 11:2

2) The groom returns to his father's house and prepares a dwelling for his wife

<sup>2</sup>In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for **I go to prepare a place for you.** John 14:2 (see also Acts 1:11)

3) The groom fetches his bride and takes her to his father's house.

<sup>3</sup>If I go and prepare a place for you, **I will come again and receive you to Myself,** that where I am, *there* you may be also. John 14:3

<sup>16</sup>For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

<sup>17</sup>Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. 1 Thess 4:16-17

4) The marriage takes place.

<sup>7</sup>Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, **for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.**" <sup>8</sup>It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright *and* clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Rev 19:7-8

5) The marriage feast takes place. linen

<sup>9</sup>Then he said to me, "Write, '**Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.**'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God." Rev 19:9

This rich picture gives God's children images of God's sovereignty in salvation, Christ's amazing love His church, God's work and the bride's cooperation in maintaining faithfulness and purity until the Groom comes to take her away (the rapture), and the bride's expectant preparation for the Groom's imminent coming.

❖ **What are you doing to ensure faithfulness and purity until Christ comes for yourself and corporately? Are you looking forward to Christ's coming for you?**

## 2. Agricultural Images

### a. Branches abiding in the true Vine

<sup>1</sup>**I am the true vine,** and My Father is the vinedresser. <sup>2</sup>Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup>You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup>**Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.** <sup>5</sup>I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup>If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. <sup>7</sup>If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup>**My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.** <sup>9</sup>Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. <sup>10</sup>**If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love;** just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. <sup>11</sup>These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and *that* your joy may be made full. John 15:1-11

This image looks to the believer's union with Christ and the necessity of continued abiding in Christ in order to bear fruit (glorify God). The church is dependent on Christ's words.

❖ **Are you consistently abiding in Christ (walking in the Spirit)?**

b. Flock of sheep

<sup>28</sup>**Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock**, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. Acts 20:28

<sup>11</sup>“I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup>He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters *them*. <sup>13</sup>*He flees* because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep. <sup>14</sup>I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, <sup>15</sup>even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup>I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock *with* one shepherd. <sup>17</sup>For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. <sup>18</sup>No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.” John 10:11-18

<sup>24</sup>The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, “How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.” <sup>25</sup>Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me. <sup>26</sup>But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. <sup>27</sup>**My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; <sup>28</sup>and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.** <sup>29</sup>My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand. <sup>30</sup>I and the Father are one.” John 10:24-30

<sup>24</sup>and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. <sup>25</sup>For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to **the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.** 1 Pet 2:24-25

This image pictures Christ's tender care, intimacy, security, and protection. Sheep are stupid animals – dependent, vulnerable, and prone to wandering. The shepherd feeds, protects, and leads his sheep.

❖ **How might this image impact those that lead local churches? How might this image impact your dependence on the Shepherd and Guardian of your soul?**

3. Building or Temple Images

a. Building or Temple

<sup>9</sup>**For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.** <sup>10</sup>According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. <sup>11</sup>For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 1 Cor 3:9-11

<sup>4</sup>And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, <sup>5</sup>**you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house** for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 1 Pet 2:4-5

<sup>19</sup>So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, <sup>20</sup>having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, <sup>21</sup>**in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord**, <sup>22</sup>**in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.** Eph 2:19-22

<sup>16</sup>Do you not know that **you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?** 1 Cor 3:16

This image pictures the church as a place where God dwells. As a building, the church is being built with Christ as the Cornerstone and the apostles and NT prophets as the foundation (i.e. the Word is the foundation).

❖ **How might this image impact your thinking about involvement in disciple making? How might this image impact what local bodies use as foundations?**

b. Priesthood

<sup>5</sup>and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood—<sup>6</sup>and **He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father**—to Him *be* the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. Rev 1:5-6 (See also Rev 5:9-10; 20:6)

<sup>4</sup>And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, <sup>5</sup>you also, as living stones, are **being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.** ... <sup>9</sup>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; <sup>10</sup>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. 1 Pet 2:4-5, 9-10

<sup>1</sup>Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to **present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.** Rom 12:1

This image pictures the church as those who have access to God through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. It also pictures the church as ones who bring spiritual sacrifices to God.

❖ **Do you regularly avail yourself of moment-by-moment access to God? Do you live your life as you are a holy sacrifice to God?**

4. The Body of Christ – The church is expressed metaphorically as a “body” in several NT passages. This is perhaps the best know of the metaphors.

The universal church is not an organization, but an organized, living organism. The body figure illustrates the diverse-unity and interdependence that is present in the church. The body is made up of unique individuals who are united by the indwelling Holy Spirit. The many are one body in Christ, with Christ as the head, and individually members of one another.

- Christ is the head of the church

<sup>22</sup>And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and **gave Him as head over all things to the church,** <sup>23</sup>**which is His body,** the fullness of Him who fills all in all. Eph 1:22-23

<sup>18</sup>**He is also head of the body, the church;** and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. Col 1:18

- Christ is the nourisher of the church.

<sup>23</sup>For the husband is the head of the wife, as **Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.** . . . <sup>28</sup>So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; <sup>29</sup>for **no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church,** <sup>30</sup>**because we are members of His body.** Eph 5:23, 28-30

<sup>18</sup>Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on *visions* he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, <sup>19</sup>**and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.** Col 2:18-9

- The members of the body are united in Christ.

<sup>4</sup>For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, <sup>5</sup>**so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.** Rom 12:4-5

<sup>1</sup>Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, <sup>2</sup>with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, <sup>3</sup>being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup>**There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;** <sup>5</sup>**one Lord, one faith, one baptism,** <sup>6</sup>**one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.** <sup>7</sup>But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. <sup>8</sup>Therefore it says, "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, And He gave gifts to men." <sup>9</sup>(Now this *expression*, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? <sup>10</sup>He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.) <sup>11</sup>And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; <sup>13</sup>until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. <sup>14</sup>As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; <sup>15</sup>**but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,** <sup>16</sup>**from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.** Eph 4:1-16

- The members of the body are united, interdependent, diverse, and caring for and serving one another.

<sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>For the body is not one member, but many. <sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? <sup>18</sup>But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. <sup>19</sup>If they were all one member, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup>But now there are many members, but one body. <sup>21</sup>And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; or again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” <sup>22</sup>On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; <sup>23</sup>and those *members* of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, <sup>24</sup>whereas our more presentable members have no need *of it*. But God has *so* composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that *member* which lacked, <sup>25</sup>so that there may be no division in the body, but *that* the members may have the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup>And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if *one* member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. <sup>27</sup>Now you are Christ’s body, and individually members of it. 1 Cor 12:12-26

- ❖ **How might this image impact your own pride/humility, your view of other believers, and your attitude toward each member of the body?**

### Summary

The study of theology is important because thinking impacts living. The universal church is a united spiritual organism consisting of all members of the body of Christ. The formation of the church began at Pentecost and will come to an end with the Rapture. Members of the universal church are to gather together in local assemblies or bodies. The purpose of the church is to glorify God. The Mission of the church is to make disciples. The metaphors of the church provide a rich description of the unique spiritual organism that Christ is building.

### Questions to Ponder

1. Read Matt 13:24-30. How does this passage apply to the visible and invisible church?
2. What is the first thing that comes to your mind when the word “church” is mentioned? Why?
3. Why do you think many people only think of a building when the word church is mentioned? How has the Church itself contributed to this misunderstanding?
4. Do you feel a greater sense of reverence, awe, inspiration, or the presence of God in a church building than you do outside a church building? Is that right or wrong and why?
5. How might the teaching that Christ is the cornerstone and the apostles and NT prophets are the foundation of the church impact how local bodies structure their meeting and ministries?
6. If you were to ask members of various churches, “What is the purpose and mission of the church?”, what answers might you expect? Why would you get different answers from different kinds of churches?