

Good morning to my friends and family who read the Devotionals I post on Monday and Thursday mornings. We have lived through the pandemic ... the Covid 19 struggle. The whole world has been affected, millions have lost their lives. The local churches have suffered due to attendance restrictions, and have turned to the world of electronics to share the message of Scripture with their people. I fear, however, that there may be just a few people who have grown complacent regarding the issue of actually "attending" their church for the services of worship, praise, and instruction. Please let this Devotional challenge you to remain faithful in attending your church if at all possible. God bless you.

LET'S GO TO CHURCH – I LOVE THE CHURCH!

A Devotional prepared by Dr. Robert L. Morris

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"To Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all the generations forever and ever. Amen."

Ephesians 3:21

I believe in the church! Which one, you ask? I believe in the church! That is my answer! Yes, I believe in the church, ἡ ἐκκλησία, "the called-out ones!" by whatever name or title one might give them ...

Evangelical, Methodist, Presbyterian, Missionary, Baptist, Pentecostal, and on and on and on with an unbelievable plethora of identifying names ... planted in every village, town, and hamlet, tucked in the hills and valleys, rising on the dusty plains, nestled amidst the sprawling businesses of the massive cities are those familiar structures we call "a church." Unfortunately, we live in a time when so often the organized church is looked upon with a measure of disdain. But when I speak of "the church" it is necessary to search the Word of God to find out just what is meant by that term. It is so much more than a nicely structured building where some people gather regularly for worship and other activities. What then, does the New Testament teach us regarding "the church?"

Jesus said it: οἰκοδομήσω μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν καὶ πύλαι ᾗδου οὐ κατισχύσουσιν αὐτῆς. – "I will build My church and the gates of Hades will not have power over her." (Matthew 16:18; My translation) Jesus had in mind a twin-pronged concept of both the so-called general interrelated group of people living throughout the whole world known as "the church," and also the localized group of believers organized for the purposes of:

- The display of righteousness,
- The demonstration of spiritual life,
- The distribution of help to the needy,
- The discipling of new believers,
- The dedication and support of evangelists and missionaries, and
- The dynamic of corporate worship ascribed to God.

Therefore, the historic, epistolary, and apocalyptic parts of the New Testament cover the range of geographic references to the localization of a powerfully effective and bonded group of believers known as "the church," as well as a more universally identified reference to the entire body of believers throughout the world, likewise known by this term, "the church." Yes, I believe in the church. As long as I am physically able, of a reasonably sound mind, and have a way to get there, I plan to be in attendance at my local church together with those fellow believers in Jesus as we assemble for worship and praise. Now, I want to put forth some very basic reasons why I believe in the church. It is the "preacher" in me that casts the following in what some want to call "a preaching-outline." O well ... let it be ... it is just what I am.

1. CHRIST PURCHASED THE CHURCH WITH HIS BLOOD. When the Apostle Paul was preaching in Ephesus, he made this statement: "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of God of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood." (Acts 20:28; TNIV) To that same Ephesian Church, and therefore to all of us, Paul wrote: "...Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her." (Ephesians 5:15; My translation) The precious blood of Christ was not shed to purchase "a concept" or "an idea." It was shed to purchase the eternal souls of people lost in sin, and to give them a new life here on earth, and the confidence that heaven awaits all who place their

total trust in Christ. The church, that body of “called-out believers” is not an idea or a concept. It is the collection of real, live people who live in all parts of the world, functioning in varying cultures, meeting in a vast variety of circumstances and places to worship and praise God together. Whatever they are, wherever they are, they are the church, purchased by Jesus Christ with His blood.

2. CHRIST PLANTED THE CHURCH AS A VISIBLE BODY. He said it clearly: “I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not have power over her.” (Matthew 16:18) What does that include? The following

New Testament references are to the visible, localized, organized bodies of believers as “the church.”

Acts 2:47, 11:22, and 15:22 speak of an organized body of believers in Jerusalem, to which the Lord added new believers daily as they repented of sin and placed their faith in Jesus’ atoning grace.

Acts 11:26, 13:1, and 14:27 identify a localized organized body of believers in Antioch.

Acts 18:22 notes a local church in Caesarea.

Acts 20:17 and 28 affirm the local church in Ephesus.

Galatians 1:2 and 22 form Paul’s instructions to local churches situated in the region of Galatia.

Romans 16:1, 5, contain Paul’s instruction to the house churches in Rome.

1 Corinthians 1:22 and 2 Corinthians 1:1, begin Paul’s writing to the local body of believers in Corinth.

1 Corinthians 16:19 is Paul’s reference to the church meeting in the home of Aquila and Priscilla.

1 Thessalonians 1:1 and 2 Thessalonians 1:1 form Paul’s addresses to the church in Thessalonica.

1 Peter 5:13 is a part of Peter’s message to the church in Babylon.

Philemon, verse 2 is Paul’s statement to Philemon, noting that a local church had begun in Philemon’s home.

Colossians 1:18, 24, 4:15, 16, are Paul’s words of instruction to the local church in Colossae.

Revelation 1:4 is the beginning of John’s messages, under the direction of Jesus, to the seven churches located in various places in Asia Minor, and then in 2:1, 8, 12, 18, and 3:1, 7, and 14 there is noted the identity of each of the seven churches.

Each of the missionary journeys of Paul resulted in establishing the local organization of churches.

In Acts 14:23 Paul notes that he ordained elders in each of the local churches where he ministered.

In 1 Corinthians 11:18 Paul instructs Corinthian believers, noting that such instruction was to be given when they gather together as the church.

In Hebrews 10:25, the whole body of Christ is told not to forsake gathering together as a local body of believers.

Every Pauline letter except 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus was written directly to local, organized churches, and the three mentioned here, were written to pastors assigned to serve the local churches.

In 2021 I have the privilege of attending a local church in Granger, Indiana that was planted by the Lord Jesus, working in and through some of His dear people committed to their belief in the church.

3. CHRIST PROCLAIMS HIS GOSPEL THROUGH THE CHURCH. In his letter to the Church in Ephesus, Paul wrote: “His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known

to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to His eternal purpose that He

accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Ephesians 3:10, 11; TNIV) The New Testament recognizes the

place or role of the church in the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul wrote to the Church in

Rome: “How can they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe without

hearing about Him? And how can they hear without a preacher? And how can they preach unless they are

sent? As it is written: ‘How welcome are the feet of those who announce the gospel of good things.’”

(Roman 10:14, 15; HCSB)

One of the primary functions of the organized, localized, and Spirit-energized church of Jesus Christ is the dissemination of the redeeming message of grace. The church is to organize to mobilize to evangelize.

This is not some fancy formula for avoiding the concept of the “church universal.” It is but one of the

methods Jesus used when He wanted to get His message out. In Matthew 9:36-38 we find His formula: He

saw the multitudes in their lost condition. He was moved by compassion because of the multitudes. He

did something about their lost condition. He includes His followers in that plan of action! To get the

message out takes an organized, localized, Spirit-energized plan of action. This is the plan Jesus

inaugurated ... through the Church the Gospel is to be taken to the whole world.

4. CHRIST PROTECTS THE TRUTH THROUGH THE CHURCH. In Paul's letter to Titus, a local pastor, he stated concerning the local church's pastor, leader, overseer that: "He must hold firmly the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it." (Titus 1:9; TNIV) This is the reason Paul "appointed" Titus to the local church in Crete. He stated earlier, "The reason I left you in Crete was the you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you." (Titus 1:5; TNIV)

In further instructions to Pastor Titus, Paul wrote: "You must speak what is consistent with sound teaching. ... Your message is to be sound beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be ashamed, having nothing bad to say about us." (Titus 2:1, 8; HCSB) God has spoken eternal truth. It is His Word. He has committed it to the church not only for proclamation, but likewise for its preservation. This is possible only through the faithful administration of the Holy Spirit working with and within the leadership and people of the local church as a part of the world-wide body of believers.

5. CHRIST PROVIDED ETERNALLY FOR HIS CHURCH. In his Spirit-directed instruction to the church, found in the letter to the Ephesians, and specifically in that section dealing with family relationships, Paul states clearly that "Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her, to make her holy, cleansing her in the washing of water by the word. He did this to present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and blameless." (Ephesians 5:25-27;HCSB) This "church-principle" observed in the Ephesian letter is the glorious, eternal provision Jesus Christ made for His church.

Yes, I believe in the church. Purchased by the blood of Christ. Planted by the Spirit of Christ. Proclaiming the Gospel of Christ. Protecting the truth of Christ. Provided for eternally by Christ. I believe in the church... where the Word of God is faithfully expounded, where the fellowship of God's people is enriched, where the truth is confidently and carefully examined, where the true and God-given standards of holy living are positively explained, where workers in God's kingdom are happily enlisted, where commitments to service are encouraged, and where enthusiasm in Kingdom work is energized!

So, yes, I believe in that group of followers of Jesus Christ, organized for a degree of efficiency, energized by His Spirit for obedience to Christ's call, mobilized for service and ministry, that the world might be evangelized with the message of God's redeeming grace.

And I love that great hymn of triumph, words and music produced in 1892 by Ralph E. Hudson.

A GLORIOUS CHURCH

1. Do you hear them coming, brother, thronging up the steeps of light,

Clad in glorious, shining garments, blood-washed garments pure and white?

2. Do you hear the stirring anthems, filling all the earth and sky?

'Tis a grand, victorious army. Lift its banner up on high!

3. Never fear the clouds of sorrow; never fear the storms of sin.

We shall triumph on the morrow; even now our joys begin.

4. Wave the banner; shout His praises, for our victory is nigh!

We shall join our conqu'ring Savior; we shall reign with Him on high!

Chorus (following each verse)

'Tis a glorious church without spot or wrinkle, washed in the blood of the Lamb.

'Tis a glorious church without spot or wrinkle, washed in the blood of the Lamb.