

What Is The Church pt. 2
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What Is The Church? Pt. 2

Last week I shared some things that were on my heart with regard to the church. The Lord has been dealing with my heart concerning His church for a couple months now, and last week I tried to share some things regarding how the Christ's life defines the church.

In Ephesians 1:23, Paul says "the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all and all". That verse says a lot. It says that we are the fullness of Him because we are His body. As His body we give a greater, fuller expression of Him...even as my body gives the full expression of the life and mind of my head. But this verse also says that this is true only because Christ fills all and is in all. "We are the fullness of Him who fills all in all". Do you see what it is saying? We are not the fullness of Him because we add to Him. We are not the fullness of Him because we complete Him. We are the fullness of Him because He fills us with Himself. **And whatever is not His increase in us, is not the fullness of His body.** Whatever He is not filling with Himself is not really part of His body. Think of it this way. Is there anything on or near you that is not filled with your life that you would consider part of your body?

So, we were looking at how the church is defined by the Person. We were talking about how the church is defined and known by the parameters of Christ, and NOT known or defined by the ideas or expressions that we would add to his body. We are newly created in Christ in order to be His body. And yet that body MUST be understood, known, defined, delineated, comprehended by knowing His Life as it is revealed by the Spirit of Truth.

Think of the audacity of somebody stopping you on the street, pulling out of their pocket a plastic nose, sticking it on top of your nose, and then saying "now that is much better. That is a much more appropriate nose for your body". Nobody would ever try that. First of all, this random person's opinion is meaningless to you. And second of all, because it is ridiculous for any person to try to add their own idea to a body that is already defined and fixed and established by the life within.

But as strange as it may sound, that is often what we do with the Lord's body. We try to attach our ideas, our thoughts, onto His body and call it the church. We love things that are outside of the parameters of Christ. We love them and we want them to be a part of the body of Christ. Now notice that I didn't say that we love things that are outside the parameters of Christianity. Most of us wouldn't dare add something that we consciously considered secular or sinful to the body of Christ. But, as long as there is something that exists within the realm of Christian religion, we feel quite justified in trying to make it a relevant part of Christ's body.

In other words, we're not generally going to try to make tennis or gambling a functioning part of the body of Christ. Not many churches have a tennis home

group or a gambling committee. But there are innumerable other things that we suppose are relevant aspects of the church because, somewhere along the line, somebody attached them to Christ's body.

I really don't want to try to give a list of those things. But I remember the time when the Lord began to deal with my heart about how he was taking from me every aspect of Christianity except for Christ. I remember at the time being excited about the prospect of that...but I had NO IDEA what I was in for. I had no idea how much of what I called "the church", what I called ministry, worship, growth, preaching, purpose, prayer, fellowship...I had no idea how much had been added to Him that wasn't Him.

Now listen, all of the words that I just listed can be things that have meaning as part of His body. But what I'm trying to say is that unless He is the substance and reality and definition and source of them...THEY DO NOT have meaning. Nothing has meaning in the Lord's body unless He is the spirit and truth that defines them. All of these things are aspects of the church, but the church is defined by the PERSON. Christ's life defines EVERYTHING of Christ's body. And to whatever degree that you and I fill those words with our own meanings and assumptions and desires...and then add them to His body, to that degree we are attaching a plastic nose to a body that has already been defined by Resurrection Life.

I said this last week, and I want to say it again. You and I have no right, and no ability, to make anything a part of His Church. In truth, such an idea doesn't even make sense. Christ Himself defines the church. **I don't mean that He tells you what the church is. I mean that He IS what the church is. I mean that His actual life is the boundaries of church. And there is nothing that is not in Him and from Him that is part of the church.**

Christ defines the church. Not just in words. Christ must define the church in your soul. He must become your understanding of the church. He must become your understanding of fellowship, ministry, and worship. He must define all things of His body in HIS OWN APPEARING. And wherever we have gone out before Him, wherever our imagination and our ideas and our rituals and our religion has gone out before Him to define anything of His body....to that extent we have become a thief and a robber. We have robbed His body of its substance, and replaced it with something of ourselves. These are hard words, but you and I need to hear these things. The body of Christ is defined, delineated, understood, and known by the Person Himself. **And the church can only be founded, built, and established on the revelation of that Person. And Jesus said precisely that.** The church has its increase only when the Life of the church shines His light in your soul.

I want you to think about a familiar Scripture with me. It's a Scripture that we all have read before, but I hope you will see something new in it today. I'll read a few verses to you from Matthew 16.

*Mat 16:13 When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" 14 So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. **18***

And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

First of all, I'd like you to notice how Jesus poses His question. Rabon Byrd said something about this in Costa Rica, and it really caught my attention. Jesus says "who do MEN say that I am". He's talking about mankind, humanity. He doesn't say "who does Paco say that I am?". You see? He doesn't say, "what do the folks in Galilee say about me?" No, it's a more general question, with a particular contrast in mind. The contrast is between what "**men**" can see and understand, and what the Father will reveal. Who do MEN say that I am, vs. who has the Father revealed to you, Peter?

And He wasn't asking them because he cared what they thought. I mean he wasn't checking in on his popularity. He was asking them in order to show them a very essential contrast. Men said one thing. Men could only see one thing. Men had all sorts of ideas and imaginations about who this miracle worker was. Some said he's John the Baptist. Some say that you have to be one of the prophets raised from the dead. Men have all kinds of notions. But eye cannot see who this man is. Ear cannot hear his words. Knowing the Son of Man will never be something that "man" is able to do.

And so he turns to Peter and says "what about you, Peter". I am certain that Jesus was aware of what Peter was seeing. We know that He was because of what he goes on to say to Peter. But here's the contrast I want you to see. Peter, who do **men** say that I am? Ok...now who do YOU say that I am. And Peter answers according to truth. He speaks out from faith, out from a Spirit given view of the Son. And Jesus immediately draws his contrast. "That understanding, that reality, that view did not come out from flesh and blood. That did not come from men. That understanding and awareness was given to you, revealed to you, by My Father who is in heaven. That, Peter, is not something that men can see. That is something that is shown from heaven."

Can you see the contrast here? Two minds. Two realms. Two kinds of understanding. Men say one thing. God always says something different. Men see with their eyes, but my Father can show you a view through His eyes...and only then will you see who I am. We must always remember that it is impossible for mankind to know truth out from themselves. Truth is not something that the natural mind can stumble upon or even guess correctly. Truth is seen in a God-given revelation of a Person. And apart from that Person being revealed by the Father, man's opinions and ideas abound. "Who do men say that I am?...it doesn't really matter. But who has the Father shown me to be?" That is the only way that truth is known and established in the soul.

And here is what I am trying to get at – what does Jesus go on to say? He says "*And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.*" He says, Peter, My Father has begun to show you something that men cannot know. My Father has begun to reveal something where eye cannot see, ear cannot hear, and the mind of man cannot approach. Man cannot add to it. Man cannot comprehend it. Man cannot even see it. And this thing is called my church. The church is the body of the One that eye cannot see. The church is the temple of the One that must be revealed.

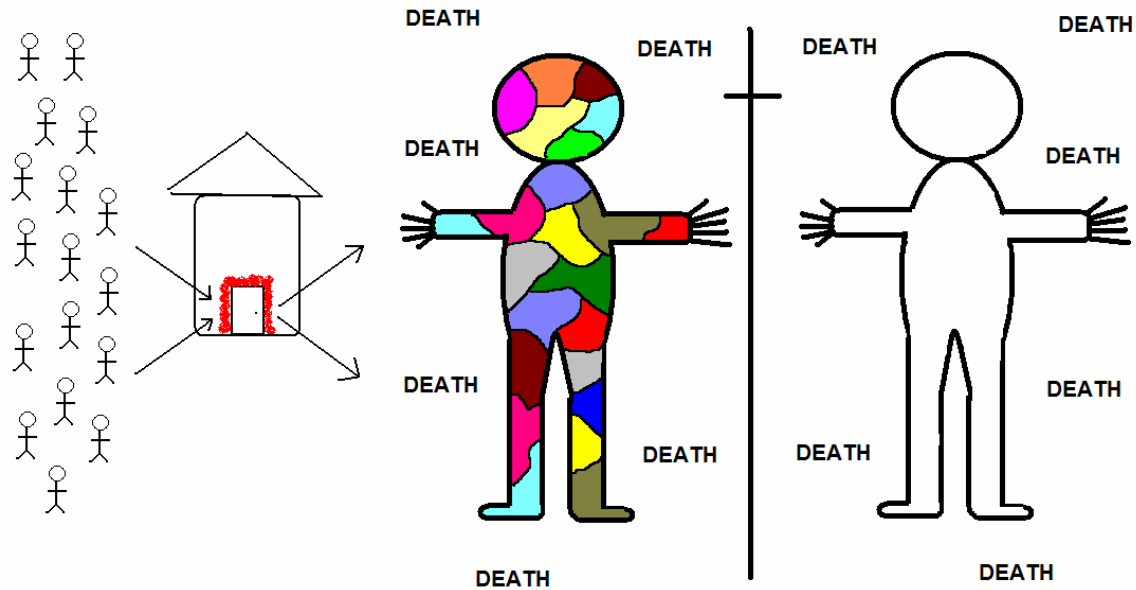
The only way for God to build His church is to reveal the one who is the Life of the church. That is so important for us to understand. **God builds his church only by expanding the parameters of Christ in our soul.** He cannot build his church by telling you what to do. Church isn't YOU doing something. God does not build his church by telling you what to believe. Church is not you believing something. God cannot build his church by you gathering more people into a building. **Church is not defined by what man brings in the body, but rather by what Christ forms of himself in the body. Church is Christ's life filling and conforming and constraining His body. And so the Father builds His house on and through the revealing of His Son**

And as we saw last week, the boundaries of the church are the boundaries of the Son. The church is not what we add to Him, but what He forms of Himself in us. And what I'm trying to convey is that we are not really experiencing church, or becoming expressive of His church, unless we are walking in the Light of Life that is God's understanding of Christ. You cannot add to Him without taking away from Him. You cannot hold on to one of your ideas without losing one of His. In order for us to know what church is, to experience church, to grow as a church, to live as the church, **we must come to see the Light, and walk in the Light, that defines the body of Christ.**

There is a single word that encapsulates all that I just said. It is the word "covenant". We must learn the covenant that we are in. And the covenant that we are in is Christ. Long ago, God spoke to the prophet Isaiah concerning Christ, saying, "I will appoint YOU as a covenant to the people". What does that mean that Christ is a covenant? What is a covenant? A covenant is the nature of a relationship. It is the condition and understanding in which two have a relationship. Christ is that condition. Christ is that understanding. Christ is the relationship that we have with the Father. Apart from Him there is no relationship with God. He is the boundaries of our relationship with God. In Him and by Him and through Him we have access to God.

Remember back in the Old Covenant...we looked at this last week. Israel had parameters to their relationship with God. They were not allowed to imagine their own ideas about worship or service or priesthood or sacrifice or relationships or anything. Everything that they were commanded to do was according to God's understanding of their relationship, not their own. And everything that they were required to be and do under the law spoke of something that was coming in Christ.

Look back at the diagram from last week



In the Old Covenant, God defined the covenant by giving them many laws that were descriptive of His Son. Make the altar this way. Have the high priest dress this way. Offer the sacrifice that way. Do not mix the seed of Israel with any other seed. Everything that God commanded by law...if you put it all together, if you added it all up, it comprised God's understanding of Christ. Yes, it was all in types and shadows. Yes it was all in natural and material demonstrations of what Christ was to be. But, in every way, in all of the details, it was a covenant, a relationship, that spoke beyond itself. It was a relationship that spoke of a new relationship. It was a letter that spoke of a Spirit. It was words that spoke of an indwelling Word.

And we left off last week talking about how outside of the boundaries of the law, outside of the boundaries of the covenant, there is nothing but death and separation from God. God made sure to demonstrate that in hugely visible ways. Outside of the boundaries of my Son there is death. **Outside the parameters of this covenant there is death. And so when people broke these laws it was punishable by death. And when people had their own ideas about the relationship it was called sin because it missed the mark. And when people stepped outside of the boundaries of this covenant it was called transgression.** Can you see all of that in the Old Covenant? The Old Covenant was the boundaries of God's relationship. And those boundaries painted a clear picture of the One who was to come.

Well, now, for us, that One has come. And many in the church today say "hooray, God has thrown away the boundaries!" "Yippee, God is done having parameters on His relationship with us. Now all I have to do is love Jesus and whatever I want to do for Him is called service. Now all I have to do is join a church and whatever I'm good at will be called ministry. Now, all I have to do is teach the New Testament and I will be preaching the gospel. All I have to do is ask God for things and I will be praying. Hooray, there are no more parameters to this relationship."

But see, that is a horrible misunderstanding. It's true that there are no parameters that are spelled out in laws. There are no more physical boundaries that exist in the

form of commands in the flesh. You don't have to keep the Sabbath, sacrifice bulls, celebrate the feasts, make offerings, and obey written commands. That is true. But can you see that the relationship still has Christ as its boundaries? Can you look at this diagram and understand that the boundaries of Christ as were seen in commands and rules and outward natural ordinances have given way to the boundaries of Christ in Spirit and truth? **The boundaries of Christ's body cannot extend beyond the revelation of His life.**

What do I mean by that? Formerly, there was physical death outside of the natural covenant that spoke of Christ. Now there is spiritual death outside of the eternal covenant that is Christ. Formerly, the boundary beyond which Israel could not go was the law. Now, the boundaries beyond which the New Israel does not exist is the Spirit. Formerly, the parameters of Christ was typified in a natural land. Now the parameters of Christ are fulfilled in a spiritual habitation. Formerly, Israel could not mix with any other seed. Now, the true seed has come, and apart from this seed there is only a dead adamic branch.

You could summarize it this way. **In the Old Covenant, Israel was not considered anything outside of God's commandments regarding the coming Christ. In the New Covenant, the church is absolutely NOTHING outside of God's revelation of the Christ who has come.**

The church has boundaries. And the boundary of the church is the boundary of Christ Himself. And when I say boundaries, I don't mean boundaries that define what you are allowed to do or not do. No, that was the Old Covenant. When I say boundaries, I mean boundaries between life and death, Christ and imaginations, Light and darkness. The church is the body of Christ, and therefore we know what church is only to the measure that we have seen Christ as the Spirit makes Him known to the soul.

You and I cannot add our so-called spiritual ideas to the body of Christ and actually think that it has relevance to God. It's like the plastic nose that I mentioned in the beginning. Our ideas about church are plastic ideas that are irrelevant to His life if they didn't come out from seeing Him who defines the church.

So how do we know if what we are doing, what we are seeing, what we have created is actually a genuine experience of church? Once again, we must bring all of the words that we have defined and offer them back to Him. We know the word "ministry". But have we seen the Person who gives that word meaning? We know the word "prayer", but have we seen Him in whose name we must pray. We know the word "purpose", but have we confronted the substance of our purpose in the Light of His appearing. All of these are Christian words that are familiar to us. But we take all meaning away from these words, and make them irrelevant to His church, when we define them by the darkness that is outside the parameters of Christ.

I'm not talking about throwing away any of these words. I'm not talking about throwing away anything except for the man who gave his own expression and his own understanding to these words. I'm simply talking about allowing Christ to define His own body. I'm asking us to approach this reality with some fear of the Lord – realizing that there is nothing that we can add to Christ and His body except what He shows us to be there. I'm suggesting that we stand with some measure of

trepidation before the one who showed in so many manifest ways that there has only ever been death and separation outside the boundaries of His view.

Christ is the life of the church. The body of Christ is the extension of that Life to the measure that His life fills all in every way. The church is growing if that Life is taking ground in our soul. The church is increasing if Christ is being formed in us. The church is thriving when the Life of the body is conforming all things to Himself.
Amen.