What We Believe

Lesson 8

The Church

*Matthew 28-18-20*

**The Church**

1. We believe that the local church, which is the body and the espoused bride of Christ, is solely made up of born-again persons. (1 Cor. 12:12-14; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 1:22-23; 5:25-27)
2. We believe that the establishment and continuance of local churches is clearly taught and defined in the New Testament Scriptures. (Acts 14:27; 20:17, 28-32; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-11)
3. We believe in the autonomy of the local church free of any external authority or control. (Acts 13:1-4; 15:19-31; 20:28; Rom. 16:1, 4; 1 Cor. 3:9, 16; 5:4-7, 13; 1 Pet. 5:1-4)
4. We recognize water baptism and the Lord's Supper as the scriptural ordinances of obedience for the church in this age. (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 2:41-42; 18:18; 1 Cor. 11:23-26)

Introduction: This doctrine will stand in contrast to the pervasive theory of the universal church. We believe that the church Jesus established was a local church and that is how churches were and are to continue and prosper; in the context of local assemblies. This lesson however will not focus on what the church is not, but on what we see that the church is. What is a New Testament Church?

I. A New Testament church is a local organized body of baptized believers assembled for the purpose of carrying out the work which Christ began.

 a. We do well to allow the New Testament itself define what a church is.

b. The church was established by Jesus in Luke 6:12-13 when the first local assembly of believers (the apostles) was called to follow Jesus.

c. The church was started by the authority of Jesus. Matthew 28:18

*And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying,* ***All power is given unto me*** *in heaven and in earth.*

  d. Was commissioned for a task. Matthew 28:19-20

*Go ye therefore, and* ***teach*** *all nations,* ***baptizing*** *them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:* ***Teaching*** *them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*

Transition: We of-course look to the Bible for purpose in our church. But we can also learn much from how the word was used in the New Testament.

II. The word for church is ecclesia.

a. The Greek word that was translated “church” in the Bible is the word ecclesia. This word is used 118 times in the New Testament and in all but three of its uses, it is translated “church”. However, there is a lot of insight to be gained concerning the meaning of this word by looking at what else it was translated into. The remaining three times the word ecclesia is used it is translated simply “assembly”. The funny thing is that the most literal translation of the word is just that, “assembly”. A more full definition would be “**a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place, an assembly**” (Blue Letter Bible Online {which is a very good free online Bible Study Tool by the way}). The word ecclesia is a compound of two Greek words, the first of which means “out”, and the second which means “called”.

b. When Jesus and the authors of the New Testament referred to a church they understood it to mean a local body of believers.

 i. I Corinthians 1:2 – *Unto the church of God* ***which is at Corinth***

 ii. Colossians 4:16 – *the church of the* ***Laodiceans***

iii. I Thessalonians1:1 – *the church of the* ***Thessalonians***

 iv. Galatians 1:2 -  *And all the brethren which are with me, unto the* ***churches*** *of* ***Galatia***

v. II Corinthians 8:1 - … *we do you to with of the grace of God bestowed on the* ***churches*** *of* ***Macedonia***

c. The New Testament use of the word church recognizes it as an assembly in a particular place.

III. The membership of a church is exclusive.

 a. The method of joining the church is found in Acts 2:41

*Then* ***they that gladly received his word*** *were* ***baptized****: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.*

 b.  They that gladly received the word were individuals who were born again.

 c. After their salvation they were added to the church.

 d. Once in the church we are members of the body, Romans 12: 4-5

 *For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:* *So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.*

IV. The church is designed to be a benefit to believers.

 a. Three goals are outlined in Ephesians 4

*And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For* ***the perfecting of the******saints****, for the* ***work of the ministry****, for the* ***edifying of the body*** *of Christ:*

b. Attending church is a means by which God wants to continue making you more like Christ.

c. The Great Commission requires laborers laboring:

 i. Opening doors

 ii. Working in the nursery

 iii. Inviting people to church through outreach efforts

 iv. Singing in the choir and playing in the orchestra

 v. In giving of tithes and offerings

 vi. Teaching classes

 vii. Preaching

 viii. Preparing and serving meals

 ix. Cleaning

d. Each of us have been given an opportunity to serve God through the local church. In this service you will find the fulfillment that only God can give.

Conclusion: So many people today despise “organized religion”. They see it as a manmade way to manipulate people to do things they don’t want to do. Or they believe that this is the way that uptight people have devised to keep people from really having fun and living life to the fullest. In reality the church was established by God. The thing that you are a part of is not what Bob Stewart or Joe Dickinson thought up one day, it’s God’s idea! When people criticize the idea of going to church remember that they are criticizing the one who started the church. I for one am very thankful for what God has done in my life through His people in the context of this local church. There is so much that we are called to accomplish, this work is greater than what the pastor, staff, and teachers can accomplish. We need every available member to seek God’s leadership for their ministry here at Hillcrest. Each member plays a vital role in the continuance and success of this local church. Seek God about how He wants you to get involved here, in service to Him.