

THE CHURCH AS THE COMMUNITY OF CHRIST'S FOLLOWERS

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SESSION 1 – UPON THIS ROCK: ASPECTS OF THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

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I. Introduction – The Church, and the multitude of local churches, must exhibit these qualities

II. Central Aspects of the Nature of the Church

A. Christ is the Lord the Church

Matthew 16:18 – 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.

Ephesians 1:22 – And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church

John 10:10, 15 – ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. . . . ¹⁵ even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.

2 Corinthians 11:2–3 – ² 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. ³ But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

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

1 Peter 2:4–8 – ⁴ 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, ⁵ 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. ⁶ For this is contained in Scripture: "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER stone, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." ⁷ This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, "THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER stone," ⁸ and, "A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.

B. A People Formed by the Spirit

Galatians 3:26 and 4:6 – ^{3:26} For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus . . . ^{4:6} Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

Ezekiel 36:25–27 – ²⁵ "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. ²⁶ "Moreover, I will give you a new heart

and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ “I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

Ephesians 1:13–14 – ¹³ 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, ¹⁴ 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.

2 Corinthians 3:18 – But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

Romans 8:3–4 – ³ For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

C. A People of the New Covenant

Jeremiah 31:31–34 – ³¹ “Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. ³³ “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ³⁴ “They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” (cf. Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 9:19-23; 2 Cor 3:6; Heb 8-10)

D. Church as the Mystery People

Ephesians 3:3–6 – ³ that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. ⁴ By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ 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; ⁶ 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

E. The Church as Those Testifying of and Worshipping Christ

Preaching, Ordinances, Witness, Worship — all centered on Christ

III. Conclusion – These qualities provide something of a benchmark, or set of criteria, to see how well we are doing in our local churches. May we grow to self-consciously express each of these more explicitly, more thoroughly, and more faithfully!