

Love the Church

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Jesus on the subject of the Church.

Matthew 16 – The Universal Church

Matthew 16:13-19

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. 19 And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

The church of Jesus Christ consists of those people living and dead who have been “called out” from the world (I Pet. 2:9-10), who have separated themselves unto God and have gathered together unto the Lord Jesus Christ for worship and fellowship.

Matthew 18 – The Local Church (Visible Church)

Matthew 18:15-20

“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ 17 And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. 18 Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

Out of 114 references, about 95 refer to the local church. This aspect of the church is called ***the visible church or the local church***.

It involves a specific group of people in given localities which are marked out by confession of faith, discipline of life, obedience in baptism, gathered to the person of Jesus Christ, having gifted ministries and keeping the memorial of the Lord. They are always spoken of as complete units within themselves, which may voluntarily cooperate and fellowship with other local churches.

Introduction – The Church is under fire in the world today by many people who were actually raised in the Church.

The argument is that the established church has let them down in some way. They profess a love for Jesus but they just have had enough with church.

And so they do not go to church unless a church in the area is doing something that warrants their presence (i.e. a concert, an Easter egg hunt, a drama or a movie, etc.).

More and more people who profess themselves as “Christian” do not have a local body of believers with whom they identify. Instead they get together in coffee shops, on their back patio or at the golf course in authentic community with a few fellow believers. They consider themselves as part of the universal, mystical or invisible church. They consider themselves a part of the greater Kingdom of God.

Some people in this category speak of the local church with a certain amount of venom. Sometimes a good portion of their fellowship is around what they don't like about the church. Evidently, misery loves company or, perhaps, to some degree it is a way to justify their own existence.

Why have people come to such a place of disdain for the church?

In some cases the church has let them down. That is to say that the local church with which they are familiar has been a poor reflection of what Christ referenced when He said, “Upon this Rock I will build My Church” (Mt. 16:18).

In the church that they grew up in it was a lot of show but no “go”. In many cases what they experienced could actually be more descriptive of the established religion of Jesus' day that was characterized by the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus called them hypocrites or actors because of some of their traits (See Matthew 23):

- They were more concerned with their traditions than they were with human needs.
- They were more concerned about the letter of the law than the spirit of the law (Mt. 23:4). Heavy on the law, but weak on grace.
- They loved titles, chief seats, position and things that elevated them above the rank and file (Mt. 23:8-10).
- They were more interested in the recognition and praise of men than of God (Mt. 23:5-7).
- They were great at teaching the Law of Moses but poor examples of how to live it. In other words, they talked the talk but didn't walk the walk (Mt. 23:1-3).
- They were more concerned about money and external things than ministry to the poor (Mt. 23:14).
- They were more interested in being served than serving others (Mt. 23:11-12).
- They were more interested in external appearances than inward realities (Mt. 23:25-28).

If there is anything that today's generation despises, it is hypocrisy.

Here are some of the more common charges leveled against the established church.

1. I don't see any difference between the people in church and the people at work.

The church is full of hypocrites. People are looking for authentic community not plastic platitudes.

2. I hear nothing but judgment and condemnation when I am at church.

Presented lovingly, judgment is part of helping people see their need for Jesus. The problem is that they too often hear it presented unlovingly to control or manipulate with guilt.

3. I have been in church for six months and no one has connected with me.

I was sick and no one visited me. People may come in with some desire to be anonymous, but most do not come with a hope of being ignored. When *nobody* talks to them, they see little reason to keep coming.

4. I see no relevance in most of what happens in church including the preaching.

Most of the stuff I hear or things that are done are not easily applied to me and my situation. I get more help from the DIY Channel.

5. I have been hurt or wounded by pastors and church leaders.

Many people have unresolved offenses and feel that leaders are unapproachable and do not care. Or they may feel that they were used or abused.

6. I can get the best preaching and Christian entertainment in the world off of my computer without any hassle.

Modern technology has made it possible to do this any time you want. And I can do it without putting on "church" clothes. And of course, if you don't like what you are hearing, you can just change the channel.

7. I am tired of all of the church drama.

Some of the most ridiculous interpersonal fights I've ever seen have been among believers. They seem to care more about their building, their parking lot, their stain glass and their choir than they do about real ministry to real people.

8. I don't feel like anyone needs me.

There seems to be an elite team of people that do everything. They go along without me before and they will get along without me if I leave. There is no place for me at the table. I would love to be involved but no one has asked me all they seem to be concerned about is my attendance and my money at least those seem to be the only things that are counted.

This is the way many people feel, but before we give up on the local church, I would like to share with you fifteen reasons why I love the local church.

I love the local church because....

1. Because it is God's instrument in the earth to extend His kingdom and purpose.
2. Because the keys of the kingdom have been given to the church.
3. Because God's power backs up the actions of the church.
4. Because it is a place where God promises to dwell in a manifested way.
5. Because God Himself is building it and He allows me to be a builder together with Him.
6. Because Jesus promises to love and nurture the church (Eph. 5:29).
7. Because I find expression and ultimate ministry fulfillment when I am connected to the church—the Body of Christ.
8. Because the local church is a place where I can be perfected by my connection to others (Eph. 4:16).
9. Because the local church is a caring community where I can care and be cared for as we bear one another's burdens.
10. Because the local church forces me out of my comfort zone and forces me to:
 - Deal with offenses
 - Embrace different people/cultures
 - Cross generational lines
 - Be accountable to others
 - Hear what I need to hear not just what I want to hear
11. Because it allows me to fulfill mission and purpose that I cannot do on my own. It is a Commission.
12. Because the church like no other organization has the power to enrich communities by its presence (Feeding Hungry, hospitals, schools, charities of all kinds spawned by the church).
13. Because being part of a local church gets more critical as we near the end times (Heb. 10:24-25).
14. Because God has guaranteed victory to the church in the last days (the gates of hell).
15. Because Jesus loves it---it is His Bride (love me, love my wife).

Conclusion

Rather than giving up on the church, realize that the church is made up of imperfect people on the road to redemption. Determine to set your heart on the local church and help make it be the best expression of Christ that it can be. Be a part of the solution.

I can safely say today that Jesus has not written off the church and His prophecy will yet come to pass, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it."

A Biblical (A2) Vision

A biblical (A2) vision includes becoming a local church that is modeled after the Early Church described the Book of Acts especially Acts chapter 2.

The qualities of such a church include the following:

1. A Pure Church

We desire to build a local church that holds personal character over ability, holiness over charisma and spiritual strength over natural strength (Lev. 19:1-2; I Pet. 2:9).

2. A Servant Church

We desire to build a local church that fully embraces the teaching of Jesus requiring all of His followers, especially leaders, to posture themselves as servants and to lay their lives down for others so that the people of God can become successful in reaching their God-ordained destiny (Mt. 10:44-45; Mark 9:35).

3. A Word-Based Church

We desire to build a local church that accurately interprets the word of God, preaches and teaches the word of God without compromise and seeks at all times to align itself with the pattern of living reflected in the word of God (I Th. 1:8; II Tim. 3:16-17).

4. An Evangelistic Church

We desire to build a local church that takes the commission of Christ seriously in preaching the gospel and reaching out to those who have not entered into the Kingdom of God through the new birth experience (Mt. 28:18-20).

5. An Authentic Community Church

We desire to build a local church that is composed of people who have entered into a place of authentic community, deep fellowship and caring relationships that translates into a caring and compassionate body of believers (Acts 2:44-47).

6. A Family Church

We desire to build a local church that recognizes and celebrates the sanctity of marriage, the value and importance of children and the indispensable contribution that the natural family has to the fulfillment of God's purpose in the church and in society.

7. A Multi-Ethnic Church

We desire to build a local church that has no "walls" separating people culturally, racially, economically, educationally or generationally believing that our expression of the Body of

Christ on earth should reflect God's heart for every nation, kindred, tribe and tongue (Rev. 5:9; 14:6).

8. A Worshipping Church

We desire to build a local church that understands its priestly ministry to God in offering to Him the spiritual sacrifices of praise and worship according to the biblical prescription for worship reflected in Psalms (John 4:23-24; Heb. 13:15).

9. A Praying Church

We desire to build a local church that demonstrates its utter dependence on God, its passion to hear His voice and its recognition that God is the head of the local church by emphasizing an individual and corporate life that is saturated by prayer (Mt. 21:13; Acts 2:42).

10. A Prophetic Church

We desire to build a church that operates in the gifts of the Spirit as described in the New Testament with a strong desire to see prophetic ministry bringing edification, exhortation and comfort to the people of God (Acts 2:17-18; I Cor. 14:1).

11. A Team Ministry Church

We desire to build be a local church that practices team leadership ministry as reflected in the Godhead, the natural family and the local church consisting of a plurality of elders with a chief elder or senior pastor (Eph. 4:11; Acts 14:23; Heb. 13:17).

12. A Generous Church

We desire to build a local church that has the generous spirit of Jesus who said that "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:25) and "Freely you have received, freely give" (Mt. 10:8; Pro. 11:25; Acts 20:35).

13. A Church of Excellence

We desire to build a local church that reflects God's nature to the world which includes the qualities of industry, efficiency, goodness and excellence in every area of expression taking our responsibility seriously to be the leaders and shapers of society (Ps. 16:3; Is. 12:5).

14. A Church of Financial Integrity

We desire to build a local church that is a wise and faithful steward over all of the resource provided from the Lord knowing that we will one day give an account of our stewardship to the Head of the Church—Jesus Christ (I Th. 2:5).

15. A Powerful Church

We desire to build a local church that is truly baptized with the Holy Spirit and power, that walks in the power of the Kingdom of God and that experiences the miraculous display of God's awesome ability in our midst (Mark 16:15-18; Acts 4:32-33).

16. A Global Church

We desire to build a local church that is not only concerned about reaching its city with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but is also interested in reaching the nation, the continent and the world (Acts 1:8).