

INTRODUCTION

I have been meditating this week on Psalm 127:1.

And out of that meditation God has reaffirmed in my heart His work among us.

Psalm 127:1 says, “Unless the Lord builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the Lord guards the city, The watchman keeps awake in vain.”

Two times the psalmist says, “Unless the Lord.”

That sounds a lot like Matthew 16:18 where Jesus says, “I will build my church.”

Part of my thoughts on this passage have also reflected on how the Lord builds.

Verse 2 says, “It is vain for you to rise up early, To retire late, To eat the bread of painful labors; For He gives to His beloved even in his sleep.”

While God is sovereign in His building, He also chooses to

work through human agents.

Verses 1 and 2 makes this point clearly.

Verse 1 says, “Unless the Lord builds...They labor in vain who build it.

Who is “they?” The human builders.

I thought it said the Lord builds the house?

It does, but it also says “they labor...who build it.”

Verse 2 also says, “It is vain for you to rise up early, To retire late, To eat the bread of painful labors; For He gives to His beloved even in his sleep.”

Divine sovereignty never excuses human responsibility.

That is true with Christ’s church.

He said He would build it but He builds through human agents.

Ephesians 2:19-22 says, “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.”

As I have been thinking through this, I have been thinking about our church.

We have experienced, what I believe, to be our greatest struggle.

We have literally been wrestling, as Ephesians 6:12 says, “against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.”

And in that wrestling some have abandoned the war in the process.

Some have even given up completely.

In order for the Lord to build His church, we must labor together with Him.

1 Corinthians 15:58 says, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.”

Hebrews 6:10 says, “For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.”

The ministry of the church does not belong only to a select few but to all of His children.

It belongs to its pastors.

1 Timothy 5:17 says, “The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.”

It also belongs to all believers.

Ephesians 4:11-12 says, “And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.”

As we think through this together this morning, let’s go back to the beginning.

Let’s look at the basics.

What I mean by the basics is church membership.

Let’s ask, “Why church?”

I. Why Church?

The New Testament repeatedly emphasizes the importance of local assemblies.

In fact, it was the pattern of Paul's ministry to establish local congregations in the cities where he preached the gospel.

Hebrews 10:24-25 commands every believer to be a part of such a local body and reveals why this is necessary.

And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near (Hebrews 10:24-25).

It is only in the local body to which one is committed that there can be the level of intimacy that is required for carefully stimulating fellow-believers "to love and good deeds."

And it is only in this setting that we can encourage one another.

The New Testament also teaches that every believer is to be under the protection and nurture of the leadership of the local church.

These godly men can shepherd the believer by encouraging, admonishing, and teaching.

Hebrews 13:7 and 17 help us to understand that God has graciously granted accountability to us through godly leadership.

Furthermore, when Paul gave Timothy special instructions about the public meetings, he said, "Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching" (1 Timothy 4:13).

Part of the emphasis in public worship includes these three things: hearing the Word, being called to obedience and action through exhortation, and teaching.

It is only in the context of the local assembly that these things can most effectively take place.

Acts 2:42 shows us what the early church did when they met together: "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

Christians came together:

- A. To learn God's Word and the implications of it in their lives

- B. To join to carry out acts of love and service to one another
- C. To commemorate the Lord's death and resurrection through the breaking of bread
- D. To Pray

Of course, we can do these things individually, but God has called us into His body, the church, which is the local representation of that worldwide body.

We should gladly minister and be ministered to among God's people.

Active local church membership is imperative to living a life without compromise.

It is only through the ministry of the local church that a believer can receive the kind of teaching, accountability, and encouragement that is necessary for him to stand firm in his convictions.

God has ordained that the church provide the kind of environment where an uncompromising life can thrive.

II. What is the Church?

- A. It is the Only Institution Christ Promised to Build and

to Bless

Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, “I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.”

Notice how Jesus says this is His church “emphasizing that He alone is its Architect, Builder, Owner, and Lord” (John MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible: Mt 16:18).

“We are not to worry about building the church; Christ said He would take care of that (Matt. 16:18).

All we are supposed to do is be obedient to God, and He will take care of everything else” (John MacArthur, The Master's Plan for the Church. 48).

B. It is the Gathering Place of True Worshipers

Philippians 3:3 says, “For we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.”

The word that Paul uses for "worship" is *latreuo* (pres.act.part.) which refers to "spiritual service" (Rom.12:1). The word could be translated "to render respectful spiritual service" (MacArthur).

C. It is the Most precious assembly on earth because

Christ purchased it with His own blood

1. Acts 20:28 says, “ "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”
2. 1 Cor.6:19-20 says, “ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”
3. Eph.5:25 says, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.”
4. Col.1:19-20 says, “For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, 20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.”
5. 1 Pet.1:18-19 says, “Knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, 19 but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of

Christ.”

6. Rev.1:5 says, “and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins *by His blood.*”

D. It is the Earthly Expression of the Heavenly Reality

Matthew 6:10 says, “Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.”

E. It is the Realm of spiritual fellowship

1 John 1:3, 6-7

F. It is the Proclaimer and Protector of Divine Truth

1. 1 Timothy 3:14-15 says, “I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; 15 but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.”

2. Titus 2:1, 15

G. It is the Chief place for spiritual edification and growth

1. Acts 20:32 says, “And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”
2. Ephesians 4:11-16
3. 2 Timothy 3:16-17
4. 1 Peter 2:1-2
5. 2 Peter 3:18

H. It is the Launch pad for world evangelization

1. Mk.16:15 says, “And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.’”
2. Tit.2:11 says, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men.”

I. It is the Environment where strong spiritual leadership develops and matures

2 Tim.2:2 says, “The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

There’s no biblical defense for not belonging to a local congregation of believers.

III. Who is Changed By Grace?

A. Our Name

Changed By Grace Community Church which was taken from our radio ministry *Changed By Grace* which began before the starting of the church.

B. Our Purpose

Changed By Grace Community Church exists for the purpose of glorifying God, maturing the believer, and leading everyone to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

C. Our Vision

The vision of Changed By Grace Community Church is to *make disciples of all the nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have command you* (Mat.28:19-20).

D. Our Values

Acts 2:42 says, *And they continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.* Changed By Grace Community Church desires to do church as God design it. Our

emphasis, in connection with our purpose, will focus on evangelism (Mat.28:19-20), equipping (Eph.4:11-12), edification (1 Cor.14:26), and the exaltation of God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph.3:20). In order to build these values, we will teach the Word of God in an expositional, verse-by-verse fashion to help God's people apply what they understand (Jas.1:22).

E. Evangelism Plan

Because we believe every believer is to be involved in the process of *making disciples of all nations* (Mat.28:19), we will seek to be obedient to God's Word in teaching what every believer's responsibility is in evangelizing the lost. We will teach from the pulpit, in Sunday School, through radio and Internet.

F. Our Government (Elders)

1. There were elders in the early churches (Acts 11:30; 14:21-23; 15:2; 20:17-18; Tit.1:5; Phil.1:1)
2. Elders were pastors in the church (Acts 20:28; Eph.4:11; 1 Pet.5)
3. Elders ruled in the church (1 Tim.5:17; Heb.13:7, 17)
4. There were a plurality of elders in the church

(Acts 20:17; Tit.1:5; Phil.1:1)

5. Elders taught and exemplified the Word of God
(Acts 6; 1 Tim.3)

IV. What Do We Teach?

- A. We Teach that the Bible is the Word of God (2 Tim.3:16), supernaturally inspired (2 Pet.1:21), without error in the original manuscripts and preserved by God in its verbal, plenary inspiration (Ps.119:60; John 17:17), and it is a divinely authoritative standard for every age and every life (2 Tim.3:16-17).
- B. We Teach that the Godhead exists eternally in three persons - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - and that these three are one God (1 John 5:7; John 10:30).
- C. We Teach that God is absolute and sole creator of the universe, and that creation was by His command, not through an evolutionary process (Gen.1:1; Ps.19:1). Since God is the creator, He created man in His image (Gen.1:26). Man, having sinned (Gen.3), led the entire human race into sin (Rom.5:19) therefore bringing death, spiritual and physical, upon all the human race (Rom.5:12).
- D. We Teach that God, by His sovereign choice and out of love for man, sent Christ into the world to save

sinners (John 3:16; Rom.5:8; Eph.1:4).

- E. We Teach that sinners who die having rejected Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior will be eternally punished in hell (Rev.20:11-15; 21:8).
- F. We Teach that Jesus Christ in the flesh was both God and man (John 1:1,14); that He was born of a virgin (Mat.1:23) and that He lived a sinless life (2 Cor.5:21; Heb.4:14), in which He taught and wrought mighty works and wonders and signs exactly as revealed in the four gospels (Mat.4:23; John 20:30); that He was crucified (John 19:16-18), died as a penalty for our sins (Gal.1:4), and was raised from the dead bodily on the third day (Mat.28:1-7). Later He ascended to the Father's right hand (Acts 1:9) where He is head of the church (Col.1:18) and intercedes for believers (Heb.7:25), and from whence He is coming again personally, bodily, and visibly to this earth to set up His millennial kingdom (John 14:1-3; Rev.1:7; 20:4). We further teach that since His death, by His shed blood, the Lord Jesus Christ made a perfect atonement for sin (Rom.5:9-21), redeeming us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us (Rom.8:1-4), men are saved and justified on the simple and single ground of the shed blood (1 Pet.1:18-19).
- G. We Teach that such salvation with its forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38), its impartation of a new nature (2

Cor.5:17), and its hope of eternal life (Tit.1:2), is entirely apart from good works, baptism, church membership - man's effort - and is of pure grace (Eph.2:8-9; Tit.3:5). As a part of salvation the believer is eternally secure; he cannot lose his salvation (John 10:27-29; 1 Pet.1:3-5). But sin may interrupt the joy of his fellowship with God (Ps.51:12) and bring the loving discipline of His Heavenly Father (Heb.12:5-11).

- H. We Teach that all who receive Christ become joint-heirs with Christ (Rom.8:16-17), and at death, their spirits depart to be with Christ in conscious blessedness (2 Cor.5:8) and at the rapture their bodies will be raised to the likeness of the body of His glory (1 Cor.15:51-55; 1 Jn.3:2) and dwell forever in His divine presence (1 Thess.4:13-18).
- I. We Teach that it is the goal of every Christian to grow in spiritual maturity through obedience to the Word of God and the indwelling Spirit (Eph.4:14-15, 30; 1 Jn.5:2-3).
- J. We Teach that the Holy Spirit is a person (Jn.14:16, 17, 26), is God (Acts 5:3-4), and possesses all the divine attributes. He indwells all believers (Rom.8:9), baptizes (1 Cor.12:13), gives gifts (1 Cor.12:11) and seals them at the moment of their salvation (Eph.1:13), and fills them in response to confession of sin and

yieldedness (Eph.5:18; Col.3:16).

- K. We Teach that the church is to engage itself in the teaching of the Word of God (2 Tim.4:1-2), the maturing of the believer (Eph.4:11-12; 2 Tim.3:16-17), and the evangelization of the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Mat.28:19-20).
- L. We Teach that the church is governed by a plurality of godly men called Elders (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim.5:17; Tit.1:5) who teach (Tit.1:9), shepherd (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet.5:2-3) and oversee all the affairs of the church (1 Tim.3:5). Deacons, who are men and women, serve the church and implement what the Elders teach (Acts 6; 1 Tim.3:8-12).

V. What Do We Expect from Members?

A. Faithfulness to the Local Assembly

Hebrews 10:24-25 says, “And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”

B. Use and Development of Spiritual Gifts (Rom.12:4-8)

C. Support of Elders (1 Pet.5:5; 1 Thess.5:12-13;

Heb.13:7, 17)

- D. Give Sacrificially to the Lord (2 Cor.8:1-5; 9:6-8; Lk.21:1-4; 1 Cor.16:1; Prov.11:24; Lk.6:38)
- E. Evangelize the Lost (Mk.16:15; 2 Cor.4:3)
- F. Be Involved in Sunday School for the Purpose of Discipleship and Accountability (Mat.28:19-20; Lk.6:12-13)
- G. Personal Holiness (Heb.12:14; 1 Thess.4:1-7; 1 Pet.2:1-2; 1:13-16)

VI. What Do We Offer?

- A. An Opportunity to Serve the Local Body (Rom.12)
- B. A Place to be Equipped for Service (Eph.4:11-12)

VII. How Do I Become a Member of Changed By Grace Community Church?

- A. Publicly Profess Faith in Jesus Christ And Be Baptized (Rom.10:9-10; Mat.3:1-7; Acts 2:38)

(Constitution and Bylaws) Section 1 - Active Membership: Active membership in Changed By Grace Community Church shall be open to all persons

who confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and who have been baptized.

B. Complete a New Member Application

(Constitution and Bylaws) Section 3 - Application for Membership: All requests for membership shall be made to a Pastor or a deacon. Upon making such request, the person shall be given an application for membership along with a copy of the Statement of Faith. A Pastor or Deacon shall meet with the applicant following receipt of the application. Each applicant shall subscribe to the Statement of Faith and testify publicly before the Board of Elders at a regularly held meeting for prospective members.

C. Complete the New Member's Class

D. Complete the New Member's Interview

E. Be Presented to the Church

CONCLUSION

1. If you're not a member of this church, I would like to encourage you to consider what has been presented to you this morning.

2. If you are ready to identify with the people of Changed By Grace then let's talk.
3. I will be available after the service to talk with you.
4. But before you commit to this visible body of believers, let's make sure you're part of the body of Christ.
5. Have you repented of your sin and turned to Jesus Christ who alone can save you?
6. Let's pray.