

The Church

Why?

Why do you go to “church?” – parents? Social interaction for yourself or your kids? Just “seems” like the right thing to do? We have a profound problem in defining the church – why it exists and why we should bother with it

I. The Problem: its fruit

A. Non-Christian society

1. Sociology – “From its inception, sociology was committed to the positivist view that religion in the modern world is merely a survival from man’s primitive past, and doomed to disappear in an era of science and general enlightenment. From the positivist standpoint religion is, basically, institutionalized ignorance and superstition” (Gerhard Lenski, “The Religious Factor” 1961)
2. Popular culture – “spirituality” vs. “religion”
 - a. Spirituality – angels, personal relationship with the Divine, individual expression vs. rules and regulations. Spirituality is real, religion is historical
 - b. Religion – structure, distant, imposed, inauthentic – that thing in which you have been raised vs. your own internal spirituality. What you have been taught vs. what you are. Fear based.

B. “Christian” society

1. non-institutionalized spiritual sources. These can be good or bad (Tabletalk devotional vs. Joel Osteen) The subtle danger is that all market-driven spiritual input gets melded into one confused Christian worldview. Marketplace fuels/is fuelled by instant gratification in books, music, etc. Faddish
2. leaving church as “true Christianity” – books, ironically, put out by Christian publishing houses – Zondervan: “Dear Church, Letters from a Disillusioned Generation” IVP: “Life After Church” Tyndale: “Pagan Christianity” (by George Barna)

II. The Problem: its source

A. Lost: The doctrine of Original Sin

1. “church is full of hypocrites...unloving...” The church’s imperfections may only be understood if we recognize that we are all sinners – *simul iustus et peccator* (Martin Luther)
2. As the doctrine of original sin has become more marginal in the pulpit message, the commitment to the church has declined

B. You ain’t the boss of me, *or*, I shall be as God: Rugged American Individualism

1. Fuelled by poor/no theological depth in preaching/teaching. If there aren’t answers to the tough questions of life –

predestination vs. free will; the Trinity; *raison d'être* – they will be sought elsewhere

2. Fuelled by our own sin – our immediate instinct to rebel against any authority whatsoever, and our unwillingness to acknowledge that God has created a Christian external, visible structure in which we are to be enfolded and disciplined, and through which we are to engage in Christian life and ministry.

III. The Answer

A. Mother Church

1. Historic position

- a. Cyprian (AD 250) – “You cannot have God for your Father unless you have the church for your mother”
- b. Augustine (AD 400) – “the church...without whom there is no forgiveness of sins”
- c. Calvin (AD 1550) – “The church is the common mother of all the godly, which bears, nourishes, and brings up children to God, kings and peasants alike; and this is done by the ministry”
- d. Westminster Confession (1646, American adoption 1789) – “the visible church...out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation”
 - **Note** – the first 3 quotes occur in the context of commentary on portions of Scripture – not simply “this is what I think”

2. Redemptive purpose (from Calvin’s Institutes)

- a. Security – “it stands by God’s election and cannot waver or fail any more than his eternal providence can”
- b. Ministry – “the saints are gathered into the society of Christ on the principle that whatever benefits God confers upon them, they should in turn share with one another”
- c. Bride – “ Yes, language in the Church has been too masculine. We have ignored the truth that the Church is the bride of Christ, and the Mother of all believers. By eliminating the Mother from the doctrine of the new birth, we have forced women to try to find some new place for feminine language. Even worse, by denying the necessity of the visible Church in the soteriology, we have ignored the Mother - and now she is dying, being excluded from our understanding as God’ tool through which souls are revived and sanctified. Yes, God alone is our Father, but it is the Church who is our Mother, by whom we are nurtured through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.” (Emidio Campi)

B. *Klesia* as well as *Ekklesia*

1. *Ekklesia* – “the called out ones”
 - a. Most commonly translated as “church” in New Testament, but also refers to clearly non, or anti-Christian assemblies (Acts 19:32,39,41)
 - b. Christ’s people are “called out” of the kingdom of darkness – the world – and, thus, are a people separated unto God
2. *Klesia* – “the called ones” – other side of the same coin
 - a. 2 Peter 1:10 – we are called into something – the eternal kingdom, which cannot be made distinct in this world from the visible kingdom – the church. 2 Peter is “part two” (2 Peter 3:1) of a letter which is focused upon the visible church (1 Peter 5)
 - b. “Inasmuch as [Christians are] called by an external *klesis* of the word, they are gathered in successive generations to constitute the external *ekklesia* on earth. In as far as they are called also by the internal *klesis* of the Spirit, they are gathered to constitute the invisible *ekklesia*, the full and complete actual of the eternal ideal” (Stuart Robinson, “The Church of God” p.41)