

**Ephesians 2:19-22(NIV)** <sup>19</sup>Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, <sup>20</sup>built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. <sup>21</sup>In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup>And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Everything God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit has ever done is for the church. Since Adam and Eve, God has saved His people from their sin through the sinless life and work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Those in the true church will be together for all eternity. "The true church is the community of believers for all time" (Wayne Grudem, Christian Beliefs, pg. 113). Paul writes, "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Eph 5:25). Paul was referring to all the people Christ died to redeem, to pay for their gift of grace through faith that saves them for all eternity. Dr Grudem writes, "He [Paul] did not just mean those who were alive after Christ had died but also those who looked to God for their salvation before Christ even came to earth" (ibid. pg. 113). All true believers, no matter where or when they lived, make up the true church.

Jesus is the builder of the church. Jesus is the foundation of the church. Jesus is the one who draws people into the church. **1 Corinthians 3:6-9(ESV)**, Paul writes, *"<sup>6</sup>I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth [increase]. <sup>7</sup>So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. <sup>9</sup>For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.* Jesus is building the church and the increase comes through supernatural means, the Father enabling people to come to Jesus as they are drawn to Jesus by the Holy Spirit. That is what I mean by supernatural means.

In high school there was a person who told me that he did not believe in Jesus Christ. I did everything I could to lead John to Christ. A group of us would gather to pray for God to save John. I spent hours with him and prayed with and for him, but John refused to bow down to

Jesus. John and I were invited to a friend's home for a birthday dinner. The hostess, a wonderful Christian mother, prepared the best meal for us. When dinner was over and before dessert, the hostess turned to John and said this, "John, you need Jesus in your life." Right then and there Mrs. Williams led John to Christ. At the dinner table! The true church grew by a population of one. It was a supernatural act of God. God gave to John the ability, the grace to believe and John became a new brother in Christ. I will never forget that night. God gave the increase and all in God's timing. The Lord had prepared the heart of John to receive Jesus and Mrs. Williams knew it, sensed it in her spirit, and acted on that inner prompting given by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said that He would build His church (Matthew 16:18) by calling people to Himself. The church began to be built long before Jesus came to earth. In the Old Testament God was constantly calling His people to Himself to be a worshipping assembly before Him (ibid pg 113). God did the same thing in the New Testament and will do so until the Day of Jesus Christ. We are the community that worships the only true God, built by Jesus, and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

There is the visible church and there is the invisible church. You and I cannot see the spiritual condition of people's hearts. We cannot tell with absolute certainty who is Christian and who is not. We are not the judge. The true church is the spiritual reality of the fellowship of all genuine believers, and it is invisible. It is the church that God sees for God knows the condition of everyone's heart. God knows the wheat from the chaff, the weeds from the true plants. We do not know what only God knows. The Bible says in 2 Timothy 2:19, "The Lord knows those who are his." The invisible church is made up of all true believers.

The visible church is the church as Christians on earth see it (ibid. pg. 113). The visible church is made up of believers "as well as others who do not truly believe or follow the claims of Jesus" (ibid. pg. 114). Please note it is not for you or me to judge who is a genuine believer and

who is not. Only God has x-ray vision into a person's soul. I know some of us will be shocked to meet certain people in heaven and some of us will be surprised at who missed out. God's judgments are perfect and that we cannot question.

The New Testament gives to us various descriptions of the church. The Bible speaks of house churches (Rom.16:5; 1 Cor 16:19), where people gathered in homes to worship God, hear the preaching of the Word, and receive the Lord's supper. There were city churches (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor.1:1; 1 Thess1:1), where each city had a gathering, an assembly of God's people meeting weekly. There were regional churches (Acts 9:31), meeting the needs of a gathering over an entire region. Finally, there was the church throughout the entire world (Eph.5:25; 1 Cor 1:28) (ibid. pg. 114). "Therefore, a community of God's people at any level is rightly called a church" (ibid. 114).

The church is described in several ways. The church is referred to as family where all believers are brothers and sisters in Christ. Christ is considered the groom and the church is the bride (Eph. 5:32; 2 Cor.11.2).

Another image of the church is that of a body (1 Cor 12), the body of believers in Jesus. All members of the church are members of one body. Each member has a special function, just like the members of one's own body. The church is referred to as a body with Christ as its head (Eph 1:22-23; 4:15-16; Col. 2:19) holding the entire body together and equipping every part for service unto God (ibid. pg. 114).

There are many other descriptions of the church such as a new temple, a field of crops, and more. What I see is this, the church is a living organism and not an organization. The church is alive in Christ and because of Christ. The church is not the steeple, it is the people of God. All of God's actions and activities are for His church, the Body of Christ.

What makes a church a church? There are two major marks of a church. The first is the correct teaching of the Word of God. The proper teaching and preaching of God's Holy Word are

primary. The proper preaching must contain salvation through Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, and is found in the Scriptures alone. Where there is false teaching, where the true Gospel is left out or denied, those are not true churches.

The second mark of a true church are the sacraments, Baptism and Holy Communion done rightly and correctly. Word and Sacrament are those two marks that separates the church from other sorts of gatherings. I am sure we all look forward for the day we can celebrate Holy Communion together in the sanctuary. God's Presence is just as powerful in the taking whether in here or out there.

It is also important for the church to be purified and united in Christ. To be purified is to hold the Word of God high and have it be our guide. To be united means we truly love one another and have the common goal of wanting the church to bring great glory to God. We are one in Christ. No one person is more important than the other. God loves us all equally. The worst sinner in this place is just as loved by God as the one with the least number of sins.

What are we to do? The church's work is to minister to God, to its members, and to the world (ibid. 116). We minister to God by worshipping God. Col 3:16 Paul tells us, "*sing psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*" Dr Grudem writes, "Worship in the church is not merely a preparation for something else; it is in itself a fulfillment of a major purpose of the church, whose members were created to live for the praise of God's glory (Eph.1:12) (ibid. pg. 117).

The church's ministry to its members is we are to build one another up in Christ so we can present everyone mature in Christ. **Ephesians 4:12-13(NLT)** <sup>12</sup>*Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.* <sup>13</sup>*This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.*

We have a ministry to the world. Jesus commands us to make disciples of all nations. We support missions worldwide and we will continue to do that. Bob Yarbrough will be here next week, whose mission trips we have supported for twenty years, and will continue to do so as well as other missionaries and short-term missions of our own. This includes helping the poor, the hungry, the down and out, the homeless and more. You will be hearing on weekends the extent to what St. Mark is taking these ministries seriously, so you know better where your offerings are headed and the good work they are doing.

*The Holy Spirit empowers us to carry out the mission Christ has given to us.* God has placed inside of you spiritual gifts so we can fulfill the calling we have in Christ. Everyone's gifts are equally important to God. The gifts are given for the common good and for the building up of the church. If everyone in this place were to put your God given gifts to use for the glory of God, we would see a huge change, not only inside these walls, but our surrounding communities and even into the world, and most of all in you.

Jesus came from heaven to the earth for the church. Jesus lived a perfect life for the church. Jesus was obedient unto death, the death on the cross for the church. Jesus was raised from the dead and overcame death for the church. Jesus ascended into heaven and is preparing a place for the church. Jesus is coming again, and he is coming for the church. The true church is where you wish to be today and for all eternity.

I close where I began. **Ephesians 2:19-22(NIV)** <sup>19</sup>*Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household,* <sup>20</sup>*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.* <sup>21</sup>*In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.* <sup>22</sup>*And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*