

A MEMBER OF WHAT?

CMBC February 7, 2016

Acts 2:37 – 47

- We are standing on Holy Ground, because this is the place that we come to meet with God.
 - Not the building.
 - It is the people that are the church, and when God's people come together, that is the setting for meeting with God, and that is Holy Ground.
- Jesus said, where 2 or 3 are gathered together in His name, He is in the midst of them.
 - His presence makes this Holy Ground.
- The song says that angels are gathered here as well.
 - We are not clear about that.
 - We do read that angels rejoice, I mean really rejoicing, when someone comes to put their trust in God.
 - They are listening in. They are rejoicing with what is happening deep in our heart. For them and for us, this is Holy Ground
- We don't often think that way when we come to church
- People say "I believe in God, but I don't need to be a part of a church."
- Here are the extremes
 - One the one hand we reject the idea that you come to salvation only through the church
 - Then the other extreme of seeing the need to connect with God, but not really needing the church
 - From seeing the church building as a Holy Place where only Holy people can come to and God is at an awesome distance
 - To seeing the church building as an auditorium to do worship songs and some teaching about God
- The Scripture that Eldon read, Romans 16 , with all of the names of the people who are being greeted, that is the church

1. A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE CHURCH

a. God's description of His Church

- i. **1 Peter 2:4, 5** You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple. [5] And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God.

1. This isn't a building made by human hands
2. This is a spiritual temple, a spiritual body,

- ii. **Ephesians 2:19 – 22** You are members of God's family. [20] Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. [21] We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. [22] Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.

- iii. Here is another picture of the church:
Revelation 19:7 [6] Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. [7] Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. [8] Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear."
- iv. **Revelation 21:21 – 1** Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. [2] I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. [3] And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. [4] He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

[9] One of the seven angels... said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." [10] And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. [11] It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

1. That is the Church.
2. That is what you are part of.
3. That is a victorious, glorious church, eternally bring glory of God.
4. That is the church you belong to
5. We really need to change our thinking about our church.

- v. Numerous times Paul referred to the church as "The Church Of God" (I Timothy 3:5)
 1. Not your church
 2. God's church – the temple where God came to dwell

b. God's plan to build the Church

- i. Here is what Jesus said about that Church
Matthew 16:15 - 18 Then (Jesus) asked them, "But who do you say I am?" [16] Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, * the Son of the living God." [17] Jesus replied, "You are blessed, Simon son of John, * because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. [18] Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'), * and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell * will not conquer it.
- ii. Jesus is building something that is about people joining in God's battle against evil here on this earth.
- iii. Listen to this description of the church.
1 Timothy 3:14 – 15 I am writing these things to you now, so that you

will know how people must conduct themselves in the household of God. This is the church of the living God, which is the **pillar and foundation of the truth.**

- iv. This description isn't what we usually have in mind when we think of the church.

2. MAN'S ATTEMPT AT UNDERSTANDING THE CHURCH

- a. An organizational view
 - i. Structure – Boards and Councils and Committees and Organizational rules. Elections, motions, debates
 - ii. Structure is necessary, but it often gives a distorted view of the church
 - iii. **ILL.** If you took two molecules of hydrogen ...
If you took two pieces of hydrogen and one piece of oxygen and put them together, you would have water. That is the structure of water. But we don't think of hydrogen and oxygen structure. We just think of water.
 - iv. Structure is necessary, but that misses the point. It misses the impact.
- b. The view by the state
 - i. We have been influenced by the state.
 - 1. They demand a governing body with constitutions, with clear guidelines for membership and voting.
 - 2. You can't give out receipts for charitable giving until you follow their strict rules of organization.
 - 3. It is running the church like a business
 - ii. Our Anabaptist forefathers fought for what they called congregational form of government.
 - 1. We think that means democracy.
 - 2. What they fought for was that a church is free from the dictates of the state and the dictates of a hierarchy of bishops and popes who make the theological and ministry decision for the church. They stood for a church where the people are part of the priesthood of God.
 - 3. Democracy is a western influence that has no Biblical basis.
 - 4. But didn't the Apostles look to the church to elect deacons? No they asked congregation for nominations and then the Apostles appointed them. That is the only record of that kind of decision process. And it was a very unique and wise process in a cross cultural issue.

3. A DIFFERENT CONCEPT OF MEMBERSHIP

- a. Blood members rather than card carrying members
 - i. The word "membership" does not mean belonging to an organization. It has the meaning of a body part. When you dismembers a body, you are cutting off the members of the body. That is the understanding of the word "member" in speaking of the church – with Jesus the Head.
 - ii. **Colossians 1:18 [18]** And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead

- iii. **1 Corinthians 12:27** [27] Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. [28] And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, ...
- b. Going all the way back to Adam as members of the Body.
 - i. The universal church
 - ii. All believers in God from Adam to this day.
- c. So what about the local church?
So what is God's view of the local church
 - i. Most of the Bible's teaching about the church is about the local church.
 - ii. Membership is taken for granted.
 - 1. **Act 2** and following we read, "The Lord added to the church."
 - 2. It would have been confusing to the people for a person to have believed but not see himself as a member of the church.
 - 3. This wasn't an optional decision, if one had chosen to believe.
 - iii. Jesus' instruction about order in the church assumes membership.
Matthew 18:17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.
 - iv. The Bible's instruction to elders, pastors to care for the people entrusted to them:
1 Peter 5:1 – 5 To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: [2] Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; [3] not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. [4] And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.
 - 1. Who are these people?
 - 2. It is assumed that these are the believers in the church, and the pastor has an accountability for them.
 - v. Here is the other side;
Hebrews 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.
 - 1. If there is no membership then to which leaders are these people accountable?
 - vi. All this has been confused today by government regulations, by the growing numbers of denominations, by the multitude of churches from which people can chose.

4. STAYING TRUE OF THE BODY OF CHRIST - while living in a secular world

- a. We come back to the teaching of the Bible
 - i. Spiritual growth
 - ii. Finding your place of using your gifts

- iii. Accountability for doctrine and lifestyle
 - iv. All are found in the local Body of Christ
 - v. With membership understood not as the world understands membership, but as a part of the Body of Christ.
- b. Denominations and multitude of church has benefits
 - i. Different emphasis
 - ii. Different insights
 - iii. Different styles of worship that fit different people
 - c. I wish we didn't feel we are competing against each other
 - d. I wish we were as critical of each other
 - e. I wish we could work more closely together for the kingdom of God
- Is membership important in the local church?
 - Everything I see in Scripture would say yes.
 - Many of us are members, but understand it from a world point of view
 - Some of us are suspicious about membership because we have a world's point of view
 - Pray about what it is that God wants for you.