

What is Church?

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[0 : 0 0] Now if you got a bulletin sheet today you would have got an insert and a blue insert which is giving details of This short series that we're doing on membership and we're kind of starting with a general Theme this evening of what is the church you if we're talking about being members of the church I think it's important for us to think about and realize what the church is It's a fairly general theme this evening and then next Sunday morning And he's going to look at becoming a member of the church what what it means to be a member of the church and then the evening Next Sunday what kind of churches St. Columbus and then being a member in St. Columbus the following Sunday evening so please Try and follow that series through if you don't you'll get on the website of course and Pray about it and pray both if you're not a member if you're not a Christian If you are a Christian and not a member if you are a Christian and a member then I hope there's something in it for all of us to Consider particularly as we think about the church

Now I suppose if I went around with a microphone this evening and asked People what they think the church is I would probably get as many different answers as there are people here I Was tempted to do it actually but I'm not going to tonight not tonight don't have the energy To go around you all but also if I also went around with another microphone work You'd be the same one and asked what the church is not I'm sure you would also come out with a lot of different answers of what the church is not because I think we all have quite a lot of Sometimes presuppositions about what the church is so what I want to do this evening is go back to scripture and And primarily I'm going to speak a little bit from Ephesians the chapter that was read But then I'm going to go back to another part of scripture, which I think Maybe we don't think about as much as describing the church, but it's a prayer of Jesus for all believers. It's what Jesus prays for the church in other words and I can't think of anyone better to

Describe the church than Jesus and if Jesus is praying for certain things then we can know that these things are important to him in respect to what the church is so I know there's lots of things I'll miss out There's lots of things. I'll not touch on But I just want to focus on these two things a Little bit from Ephesians here, and then we're gonna read a little bit in John So if I was asked to define what the church was Or to give a one word description of what God thinks the church is Then I would use the word that he uses and That is the word that we get ecclesiastical from our ecclesiastic ecclesia and that really means and I think we can understand this really well. It means a gathering It means a gathering Ecclesiastical literally means called out, but it called out into in general usage. It was a gathering a

People coming together. It was in the marketplace in the Greek Culture, but it's a call it's an assembly a gathering And so the church then is a gathering of people who follow Jesus if you go back to the Great Commission She had made disciples teaching them to be everything. I've commanded and I'll be with you always So the Great Commission for us is to make disciples to make walk followers of Jesus So that the gathering that there's a church is a group of people Who who follow Jesus? That's what the church is. This isn't the church The building the denomination isn't the church another denomination isn't the church The church is the gathering of God's people to worship him to follow him to serve him and This gathering has certain characteristics that I'll go through very quickly Here it's a gathering where God is at the center. Okay, that's fundamental and it's important

We'll come back to that again and again in Ephesians 1 verse 22 where we read we're told that God placed all things under the feet of Jesus that is under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church For the ecclesia, which is his body the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. It's an amazing verse It's an astonishing verse where God says that He has appointed Everything to be under Jesus Jesus is given all authority and he's given all authority for all time for the church So the church is at the very center of God's purposes if you look at Ephesians 4 15 and 16 Just a little bit of this Or particularly 15 instead speaking the truth in love he's speaking to the church in Ephesus We will in all things grow up to him who is the head that is Christ

[5 : 11] From him the whole body another word for the church Joined and held together by every supporting ligament grows and builds itself in love as each part does its work So the the church has been God Christ's authority is over the all things and it's for the church of whom he is the head That Christ is the head of the church and if you flip back quickly to Ephesians 1 4 We're told there and 1 4 that God chose us In him in Christ before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight So you've got this amazing view of the church which says that God has placed Christ with all the authority and it's for the church and That Christ is the head of the church and indeed actually we were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world to be part of His body so there's this amazing reality of this gathering Where God is at the center is kind of a wow moment Wow That is unbelievable and I've always just thought of the church as the building

There's a human construct just a group of people that maybe have the same kind of way of thinking and God is saying notice it's It's hugely significant in that it will even outlast this present universe It will always be a Gathering a following of Jesus Christ that will come to fulfillment and fruition in Glory God is at the center and In this amazing body in this amazing assembly in this amazing gathering. We are followers We're followers of Jesus all of us in Christ The church is made of people who are followers of Jesus Following him because he's preparing a place for us And so until we get to that place that he's preparing for us We serve him and we worship him and we live by repentance and faith and trust in him and

We are his servants so we're followers of Jesus. So it's not an institution. It's not a denomination It's not a building the church is Gathering with God at the center and we are followers and crucially by way of introduction I say that we are followers. I think this is very important. We're followers together We're followers together now that will open out a little bit more Poor followers together. This is a crucial aspect Now the Bible speaks about coming to personal faith in Jesus Christ That you must stand before God and you must stand as an individual before God and you must come to a Personal faith in him. That's absolutely undoubted But beyond that We are never islands as believers. We are never saved to be islands We are never saved to be in an individual only an individual relationship with Jesus to

Hang with the rest of Christendom or the rest of the world always The Bible speaks about the church as being followers together So there's this picture of it as a body with all the supporting ligaments and all the different parts It speaks about a family. It speaks about a priesthood a holy nation It gives all these illustrations and all these pictures of what the church is and it's it's never They're never individual It's always a people together and that is therefore we are followers of Jesus together by design not by By design not by our choice in other words or not just by chance It's not like we just say oh, this is a nice church. I like being part of this church And while I keep liking being part of this church, I'll be in it It is not either because a good church or a bad church at one level It is by design that we are a people together now. I know that's that is too hard

And let me be some of you this evening was saying that's just too hard It's so hard to be part of the church so hard to be part of a body of believers. There's there's so many Clowns and the church there's so many idiots in the church. It's so difficult They let me down so much. They're so different from me Please remember that he died for them too Any thinking that we have and which we do often have which is critical and judgmental of the church Stems from a place where we are judging them because we think we're better What is grace is always a recognition that it's unbelievable that Jesus Christ saved me And He died for them also and He loves them just as he loved me now. We're bound together in church. We are followers together now that is going to be messy

[10 : 32] And we may as well get used to that and as part of the teaching of what the church is is messy It's committed. It's ugly It's beautiful is a lot of different things But we mustn't have some kind of standard that allows us to drop out of it when things don't go away Drop out of it when we're let down drop out of it when others fail Because it doesn't leave a place for our failure and it doesn't leave a place for our forgiveness and it doesn't leave a place for our being loved so We have that basic Recognition of the word which is it's a gathering and we can understand that I can a Scottish equivalent might be a Kaley a Coming together a Celebration together in many ways, but it's a gathering. It's God at the center We are followers and we're followers together Can I look specifically then for a few minutes and if you'll stay with me?

And I hope you'll be able to stay awake and that the Holy Spirit will shake you from the inside out to do that And keep me awake to is in John chapter 17. So John prays Jesus prays rather for all believers. He's prayed for his disciples who are the founders of the church Who are the teachers the original teachers in the church?

Who have good God's message and then he goes on to pray for all believers from verse 20 that section on page 1085 My prayer is not for them also that is the disciples I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message that all of them may be one Father just as you are in me and I am in you May they also be in us so that by the world so that the world may believe that you sent me I have given them the glory that you gave me that they may be one as we are one I in them and you and me May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am and to see my glory The glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world Righteous father though the world does not know you I know you and they know that you have sent me

I have made known I have made you known to them and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have For me may be in them and that I myself may be in them Okay, so I'm gonna take the definition of the church from this prayer of Jesus Which is to the father, but he's praying for all believers and that includes us all this evening as The church I can't think of a better place to go even though it's not going to be exhaustive in any way This is to all who believe he says to all who will believe in me through their message so that Embraces the New Testament church Embraces the teaching of the New Testament church that we have in the new in the Bible and it embraces all believers until Christ's return And so what I want to look at here what kind of gathering What kind of community what kind of people Jesus wants us to be if we are to understand what the church is

Well, the first thing that he speaks about and that is core to this prayer is that it's going to be a united gathering Okay, it's a united gathering of people Now I know that the church you can look at the church in many different ways you can look at it as the local church St. Columbus here tonight You can look at as the church in Scotland for example tonight Or the church throughout the world today or indeed the church from all time from when Christ first died until the return of Christ And it includes all of that because that ultimately is going to be the gathering that will be with Jesus Isn't it? It's going to be all of that, but really for all intents and purposes I'm looking at it for us for St. Columbus what it means to be the church here in a local setting for you and I are in other words So it's a united gathering

[14 : 59] He makes that very clear It's absolutely the theme of what Jesus says that all of them may be one father just as you are in me and I am in you And he goes on to say that I am them and you and me they be brought to complete unity So the world we know and so on this is the theme that he goes on and repeats it's central to him That the church is one that we are one that we are united. That's the kind of gathering that he wants now. I know there's extremes There's two extremes that we want to avoid. Okay. It's part of this We want to avoid unity at one level one right down here unity apart from the truth Okay, so there's no Truth at all. It's just unity on its own unity apart from the truth and then the other extreme is You've got truth without unity So there's true two extreme sometimes that we see in the church isn't it the church is always need be united all cost whatever It doesn't care what but there's no truth there. There's no truth to bind us together

Which is very important and at the other end there's people who say all it all it matters is the truth And we can be divided and small and tiny and getting smaller all the time because we're the only ones who've got the truth But there's no unity unity is a Cinderella Doctrine to them and we want to avoid that As the free church we've kind of to be here towards this end. Haven't we we've not got a great history. It's a kind of fractured dysfunctional history of Presbyterianism where we just split all the time and we say it's because of truth And we take that high moral ground and Maybe currently the debate that's happening and with our brothers in the Church of Scotland is at the other end where there's at least a Degree of people within the church say it doesn't matter what you believe. We just need to stay united So these are two extremes and we need to come together and recognize what the Bible teaches about unity So is unity a united gathering, but it's united as we saw earlier. It's united with God

Isn't it God is at the center of the church and he must be the center of our involvement in the church verse 21 he says that all of them may be one father just as you are in me and I'm in you and They are all to recognize that he is in them also and That's hugely Significant I in them and you in me so God is at the center of this gathering and it's a unit a unity with God in other words, it's a distinctly biblical unity Jesus says no one comes to the father God except through me So it's a unity with God our father through Jesus Christ our Redeemer and Savior So that in our church for example going to say this another night membership is based on our profession of that faith that we have faith in Jesus Christ as our

Savior so the unity of membership is based on a spiritual reality It's redemptive unity that we believe in its cross-shaped unity It's unity that's based on an understanding of a creator God who created that we fell from a relationship with them That we can't do anything about it unless Jesus redeems us and Has paid the price for us and gives us that hope and that indescribable grace That motivates us in our lives So it's a unity a gathering that's united with God and therefore We're in fellowship with God as a people So one of the most important parts of being a gathering is that we commune together we worship together we sacrament together Also, we pray surely we pray together That we talk to and that we talk of

Jesus Christ isn't that part of the unity that we have it's a hugely significant aspect of the unity that we're a spiritual society a Spiritual gathering that we talk with and talk of Jesus Christ because he is in us and we're in him and father the son is in the father So it's unity with God very important We're a spiritual organization and I will harp on about this until I fall into my grave is that we need to be a praying people and Not just in our own but together Because it's a unity we have with God and he will be our God right into eternity and it's important that we are talking together with God as a people Unity with God, but it's also a unity. We see it as it we describe the church. It's a unity through the message First 20 my prayer is not for them also the disciples I pray for those who will believe in me through their message

[20 : 15] So we have this Recognition that God is saying that the people of God the church of God is united through the message that the foundational message The New Testament disciples the apostles will give In other words, it's a unity That is communicated through the word through the truth of God's word We are a people who come under the authority of scripture and Under the authority of the message of scripture and we learn the truth together That is the gathering that we are whatever else we are whatever social interaction we share and that's hugely important whatever Love and relationship we have we're a people who are learners together We all will have help plates Hung around our spirits you'll help plates hung around our neck until and maybe even beyond glory until we get into glory But we're disciples. We're learners of Jesus through the message

So we're never free as some churches will declare their free to do and maybe we've done We're never free to abandon the clear and simple truth of God's word However, counter counter cultural that will make us We can never say well You know that used to be what the church believed that is what the Bible teaches, but we don't regard that as being In line with modern thinking we don't have that freedom. The church is not its own declaratory body The church is united through the message that Jesus has given us So as I gathering people we have his parameters round us, don't we?

His practice tells us this is what we are Fundamentally to believe and understand in our lives now, of course, we recognize there's fundamental truth in their secondary truth And there's other things aren't clear But we recognize what is significant and important And what's the most important thing is the summary of the Ten Commandments loving God as a gathering and loving one another and You I'd forget something it's always the same I write something in my notes and I say take it with you and I forgot and it'll be no good taking it next week the moment's gone If any of you've been in the house you'll have seen in the Where the computer is in the in the room that we sit in family room? There's a Frame above the computer on the wall and it's an embroidery embroidery my great lover embroidery and It has the 24 or so

Love one another's from the New Testament embroidered with the texts and I was going to take that tonight and show you visit high-tech visual for you and It was given to me by a lady in the congregation that I left in Roskeen to come down here and it's always been there and it's always important because The message of the New Testament is full of these love one another's and all the important Significance of these one another's because that's the kind of church Through the message that Jesus wants us to be a church that's accountable to one another that Shepherds one another that cares for one another looks out for one another that Treats one another with grace and love that is submissive to one another that sees God's pattern and God's model So we have unity through this message this message that teaches us how to live teaches us how to Be the church and as I'll say a little bit more in a minute. It's a

Church that is united with a message to share you know I Pray for those who believe in me through their message. It's a message We will always always have a message to share with people tomorrow Remember a couple of Wednesdays ago. I said pray for an opportunity tomorrow number of you came back saying yeah I got an opportunity yesterday tomorrow yesterday today whenever it was when I saw you Because God is faithful because we're a message to share it's nice to smile at people It's nice to be Christian But it's lovely to then follow through that smile with the truth when we get that opportunity naturally to share the gospel How will they hear unless we share that message together?

[24 : 53] So it's a gathering through the message. So we worship in spirit and in truth We seek to worship in spirit truth We seek to keep the gospel at the center of all we do that graces is the air that we breathe that the sacraments help us to Understand the gospel and we practice them a biblically That we pastorally care and disciple one another which you'll see more as we talk about membership more directly that we serve each other That we search the scriptures Because it's his message or a gathering united with his message There's another couple of things about this unity which describes this church and so unity with God It's a unity through the message, but it's a unity now this you may not have heard before It's a unity as evangelism Okay, the church just by being the church properly Just by being Christ's kind of gathering will be evangelistic

You know there are times of course when we need courses and we need events and we need go out there on the street But as we are the church just simply living his way in a united way around him with Christ's head and God in our hearts and the spirit with that unity in the message We will be evangelistic listen to what Jesus what Jesus says in his prayer in verse 20 he says I pray for them also and those who will believe that although maybe one Father just as you to me and I'm in you may they also be in us so that the world may believe That you have sent me so the world may believe so it's evangelistic If we live this way in this united way loving one another the world will see that and will believe that you have sent me And then he goes on in verse 21 to say no, so that's verse 21 verse 23 to say the same thing I name in you and me may they be brought to what complete unity

To let the world know that you sent me and loved them even as you've loved me It's not amazing that it's an evangelistic unity They were united and when we're united God's way when we're being church God's way of being church Simply living as his body simply living his way as his body as the church then That will mean that the world is amazed by that and Will understand and know God's love and will be evangelized Are you terrified of evangelism?

He terrified of sharing your faith all in your own nobody there and everyone hating you But remember this reality just as we are united and you're focused on this Unity with God through the message and the truth of God's message That has a great evangelistic effect Because we are united in living the message and living in love and The gospel will then be shared naturally Because Jesus is the head of your heart head of your life head of your community So as we have this common purpose Under Christ through grace to live in this united way Under the message and with God's strength it will speak volumes Speak volumes to this isolated broken Disestablished and dysfunctional world. That's how it should be, you know

That's part of what is to be evangelistic in the world that God's given us if we are doing church properly It will have its own effect. I'm not saying these other things aren't important But I'm saying if we are doing church God's way then the world will see and know that God loves and they will be attracted by that. It's hugely significant I think for us in this day and generation of which we live. Why are our churches empty?

[29 : 05] so often Well, maybe it's because we hate one another Maybe because we go into church and we hear a sermon we go out and we talk to anyone, but we talk about them We're disunited. There's no sense of community. There's no sense of Sacrifice and care and concern for one another. We're just individuals living our own lives just floating in our own way Gathering shells Tremendously evangelistic to be united the world can see that and what it implies though that doesn't state It's what it implies it implies somehow and this is something we're wrestling with It's something we're wrestling with our strategy day on Friday with the elders and the deacons and the women's pastel team And what we're struggling with yesterday It implies engagement with the world somehow doesn't it implies that as we're doing church We're not just doing them in these four men inside these four walls where nobody sees You know we could be as loving and as united absolutely and stay for hours and drink all the coffee and tea in China and

It have no effect because nobody sees it it implies that somehow we're taking that united Community that we are under God With his message we are taking that into the world so the world can see isn't it Somehow our Christianity needs to get out there and be the flavor the church needs to get out there not just with a message But with this unity that Jesus speaks about You see if you're uncommitted to the church God's church if you're strangers to God's grace If for your churches just this one hour experience or maybe two hour experience on a Sunday if you have the time If you come in but you really can't stand the people here If you're not accountable to the leaders of the church ordained under God as the message tells us if you're a free spirit Who just comes and goes as you please?

And you've missed the point What church is you've missed the point of what the gospel is you've missed the point of Belonging to a community that is heading towards heaven That you'll be with eternally So unity with evangelism and as I say there just as I mentioned there its unity also with a view Okay, the church has this unity with a view verse 24 is his father I want those you have given me to be with me where I am to see my glory the glory of giving me Because you love me before the creation of the world. So Christ prayer for the church is That the church would see his glory would Understand more of who Jesus is and more of the love of God Now that is a future dimension because he says I want them to be with me where I am But I think it also is a present reality because the great commission says if you know make disciples and I will be with you always

So there's this great sense in which church is Unity with God Recognising reflecting and experiencing the glory of Christ. I wonder if any of us have ever sensed that In our community of believers that can I say if you forget everything I said tonight I Hope the Spirit doesn't allow you to do that But if you do connect I would ask you to remember one thing That heaven therefore our church can I or ask you to consider this?

Definition of the church to keep in your mind one might be what I said earlier Christ died for them to but the one I really want you to take with you is It's a bit like heaven It should be a bit like heaven That's what the church should be a bit like heaven because it's knowing and experiencing and Understanding the glory of Jesus That's what it should be because we're the body of Christ and he wants us to see that glory and Share that love together. So isn't that a great perspective?

[33 : 31] Isn't it probably the last perspective you've ever thought of the church being a taste of heaven I Think for some people it's more like a taste of hell some places Some experiences so often it's a battle isn't it?

So often we've got we've got we've got self righteousness to deal with to be rooted out in our lives here and now But we have the resources of God's Holy Spirit to enable us to sense that heaven That church is a taste of heaven even Even when we're let down Even when it's rubbish that we can know forgiveness and know the glory of God and hopefully no healing Because when we're let down It can be a terrible thing and if we don't deal with it it can be a terrible thing But if we can deal with it and work through it and know forgiveness and healing and it can be a Remarkable thing also not that I'm encouraging it But I think that's what the world needs to see and I think that's what we need to try By God's grace as we understand what the church is to make it a taste a little taste of heaven Because this is reminder isn't it that it's it's gonna last a lot longer than anything else gonna last a lot longer than me or you

It's gonna last into eternity and so let's make it now What it's gonna be as much as we can by God's grace a taste of heaven so in conclusion can I just ask you the question?

What is your view of the church can I ask you to answer that in your own mind? What is your view of the church? now you may have thought I was Excessive in some of the things I've said about the church Speaking in extreme in extremists But whatever your view is of the church can I ask you biblically to lift it?

Lift it lift your view of the church so you See it as Christ sees it in this incredible prayer and see what he praises about as being significant And I do believe that there's a unique challenge for every single one of you here tonight and many more who aren't here tonight in St.

[35 : 39] Columbus I Do believe and we're talking about this on Friday and Saturday That Christ Jesus has taken you to the kingdom for such a time as this here in St. Columbus and That is what I want you to consider that your responsibility as leaders as congregation and all of our responsibilities to make this place as a taste of heaven as it can be and we all have a responsibility to do that and that will take time and I'm just asking you I'm not making any demands, but I'm asking you if there's any way you think that in your life In the culture that we live in where the employer is Lord and demands of you much more than anything else That you can be challenged to give the church of Christ the Bought blood Church of Christ more of your time more time

To be united to work at unity to work at being under God to work at the message to work at loving him and loving one another To work it then therefore the evangelism of being together as a people To make this church look more like Jesus wants it to be Will soon be gone What's the legacy we're going to live leave going to be and I'm not being Perochial I'm not asking you to do that because it's St. Columbus. It's all that matters I'm just asking you because this is our local church and I know there's wider understandings of the church But where God is place if you come to the kingdom for such a time as this year a unique a unique group of people uniquely beautiful and precious and valuable and have been brought together under God and I believe it's for a purpose and may it be that we have a high view of the church

It is scriptural and biblical and based on on on the message that he has given us about the church Let's go ahead briefly and pray Father God help us to understand a little bit more about the church. Maybe not be perochial about it Maybe not be denominational about it. Maybe not be possessive or insular about it But may we see this amazing reality of this gathering of the church?

amazing reality of this gathering of God's people that is is like a Juggernaut that is moving forward and growing all the time Until that great day when all of his people are gathered in and will join in that wedding feast of the lamb Which will be the greatest gathering of all and will be the church Triumphant Lord help us to know that that we are on that journey and help us to Remember each of us in the frustrations we sometimes feel about others that Christ has died for them to as believers And we will also seek to make church here for us a taste of heaven in the unity that we share under God and in the truth that binds us together and in the love That has redeemed us from death and from hell and from the grave So help us be pray in Jesus name. Amen