

The Church

The body of Christ and its nature, marks, and mission

Christ Builds His Church

Matthew 16:18

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Ephesians 2:20-22

[20] And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; [21] In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: [22] In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

Acts 20:28

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

Jesus declared, 'I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.' The church is not a human society but a temple God is constructing by His Word and Spirit, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Himself as the chief cornerstone. He purchased the flock with His own blood, appointing undershepherds to feed and guard it until He presents it complete.

Christ builds through ordinary means: the preached Word, the sacraments, prayer, and disciplined community. The keys of the kingdom (doctrine and discipline) belong to Him and are exercised under His Lordship for the life and purity of His house.

The Body of Christ

1 Corinthians 12:12-13

[12] For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. [13] For by one Spirit are

we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

Ephesians 4:4

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;

Ephesians 4:16

From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Hebrews 12:23

To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,

By one Spirit believers are baptized into one body, whether Jew or Gentile, bond or free, and are made to drink of one Spirit. The church is universal (the assembly of the firstborn written in heaven) and visible in local congregations where that heavenly reality becomes concrete.

Union with Christ makes us members of one another; the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you. Every joint supplies what the Head appoints so that the whole body grows up into Christ.

The sacraments serve as visible Words that mark out and nourish this body, and membership binds us to mutual responsibility.

The Bride of Christ

Ephesians 5:25-27

[25] Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; [26] That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, [27] That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

Revelation 19:7-9

[7] Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. [8] And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. [9] And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.

Revelation 21:2

And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her to sanctify, cleanse, and beautify her, that He might present her to Himself glorious, without spot or wrinkle. He washes His bride with the water of the Word, sustains her through His Spirit, and vows never to forsake her.

The church answers His covenant love with bridal devotion, keeping herself from idols, persevering in holiness, and bearing witness to her Bridegroom. She awaits the marriage supper of the Lamb when the holy city, new Jerusalem, descends as a bride adorned for her husband.

Our present fidelity in worship and obedience anticipates that great consummation.

The Early Church's Devotion

Acts 2:42-47

[42] And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. [43] And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. [44] And all that believed were together, and had all things common; [45] And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. [46] And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, [47] Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

From the first day the church continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers. Their worship was Word-centered and sacramental, gathering around preaching and the Lord's Table as ordinary means of grace.

Their fellowship was tangible generosity, shared life, and daily encouragement. They lived in each other's homes, bore one another's burdens, and praised God with gladness and simplicity of heart.

This pattern of teaching, table, prayer, and mutual care remains the ordinary way Christ nourishes His people and displays His kingdom.

Unity in the Body

Ephesians 4:3-6

[3] Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. [4] There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; [5] One Lord, one faith, one baptism, [6] One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

Ephesians 2:14-16

[14] For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; [15] Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; [16] And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

John 17:21

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

We must endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace because unity is a blood-bought gift, not a human achievement. By His cross Christ made Jew and Gentile one new man, breaking down the dividing wall of hostility.

There is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all; we guard that unity by holding fast to the same gospel, catechizing

in truth, practicing patient forbearance, and refusing both sectarian pride and doctrinal compromise. True unity is rooted in truth and expressed in love.

The Church's Mission

Matthew 28:19-20

[19] Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: [20] Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

Acts 1:8

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

2 Corinthians 5:20

Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

The risen Christ sends His church to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the triune Name and teaching them to observe all He commanded. Empowered by the Spirit, the church bears witness to Christ from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth as an embassy of reconciliation, pleading with sinners, Be ye reconciled to God.

The mission is comprehensive: evangelize, catechize, plant and strengthen churches, and adorn the gospel with works of mercy. The promise of Christ's presence with His church anchors confidence that ordinary faithfulness in Word and sacrament will advance His kingdom.

Not Forsaking Assembly

Hebrews 10:24-25

[24] And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: [25] Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

Acts 2:46

And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,

1 Corinthians 11:18

For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it.

We must not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, for the gathered church is where we stir one another to love and good works and meet Christ in Word and sacrament. The early believers met daily with one accord; Paul assumed the church assembled as one to eat the Lord's Supper.

Regular Lord's Day worship is not optional but covenantal life under Christ's shepherding. In corporate worship we confess, sing, hear, eat, and are sent; neglect isolates us from oversight, weakens our hope, and withholds our gifts from the body.

Pillar and Ground of Truth

1 Timothy 3:15

But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

Jude 1:3

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

2 Timothy 1:13-14

[13] Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. [14] That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.

Matthew 5:14-16

[14] Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. [15] Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. [16] Let your light so shine

before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

As the household of the living God, the church is the pillar and buttress of the truth. She guards the good deposit, contends for the faith once delivered to the saints, and holds forth the Word of life as a city set on a hill.

The church does not invent truth; she receives, preserves, and proclaims it. Creeds and confessions summarize that stewardship, catechizing each generation.

A faithful church resists novel gospels, teaches sound doctrine publicly and from house to house, and shines with good works that adorn the message she heralds.

Marks of a True Church

Acts 2:42

And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Matthew 18:15-17

[15] Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

[16] But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. [17] And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

1 Corinthians 11:26-28

[26] For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. [27] Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. [28] But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.

Galatians 1:8

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

The church is recognized where the pure gospel is preached, the ordinances are rightly administered, and discipline is lovingly exercised. These marks guard the flock from false gospels, nourish faith through baptism and the Supper, and restore the wandering.

Faithful preaching announces Christ crucified and risen; the sacraments visibly preach the same gospel; discipline applies the Word to keep the body holy and safe. When these marks fade, a congregation drifts from Christ's design regardless of activity or size.

Shepherds and Servants

Acts 20:28

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

1 Peter 5:2-3

[2] Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; [3] Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.

1 Timothy 3:1-13

[1] This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. [2] A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; [3] Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; [4] One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; [5] (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) [6] Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. [7] Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. [8] Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; [9] Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. [10] And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. [11] Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. [12] Let the deacons be the husbands of

one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. [13] For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Titus 1:5-7

[5] For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee: [6] If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. [7] For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre;

Christ cares for His church through ordained offices. Elders (overseers, pastors) must be qualified, feed the flock with sound doctrine, guard against wolves, and lead by humble example.

Deacons serve in practical mercy so that the ministry of Word and prayer is not neglected. Leadership is plural, accountable, and patterned after the Chief Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep.

Ordination recognizes Christ's calling, and ongoing oversight protects both leaders and flock.

Ordinances as Means of Grace

Matthew 28:19

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

Romans 6:3-4

[3] Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? [4] Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

[23] For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: [24] And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken

for you: this do in remembrance of me. [25] After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. [26] For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

Baptism signifies union with Christ in His death and resurrection, marking entrance into His visible church and sealing God's promise to cleanse. The Lord's Supper proclaims His death until He comes, confirming believers in grace and communion with Him and one another.

Received by faith, these ordinances do not confer grace mechanically; Christ Himself feeds and assures through them as we receive with repentance and faith. Regular participation keeps the gospel before our eyes and ties our assurance to His finished work.

Communion of Saints

Acts 2:44-47

[44] And all that believed were together, and had all things common; [45] And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. [46] And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, [47] Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

Galatians 6:2

Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

Ephesians 4:15-16

[15] But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: [16] From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Hebrews 3:13

But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

Believers share a holy fellowship in Christ. We bear one another's burdens, exhort one another daily, speak the truth in love, and build one another up as each part does its work.

Fellowship includes hospitality, prayer, sharing resources, confessing sins, and using diverse gifts so that the body is knit together in love. A communion of saints means no one suffers or rejoices alone; life together under shepherding care forms the context where faith matures.

Discipline and Holiness

Matthew 18:15-17

[15] Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. [16] But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. [17] And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

1 Corinthians 5:6-7

[6] Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? [7] Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us:

2 Corinthians 2:6-8

[6] Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. [7] So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. [8] Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him.

A holy church must address open sin. Christ commands loving correction that may widen from private admonition to the church's judgment when needed.

A little leaven leavens the whole lump, so discipline protects purity and witness. When repentance appears, the church must forgive, comfort, and reaffirm love, seeking restoration not mere removal.

Discipline exercises the keys of the kingdom, aiming at reclaiming the sinner, deterring others, and honoring Christ's name before a watching world.

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