

Session Seven - Church

The Community Of Faith

Let's Talk

Complete this sentence and share with others:

I LIKE TO GO TO...

BECAUSE...

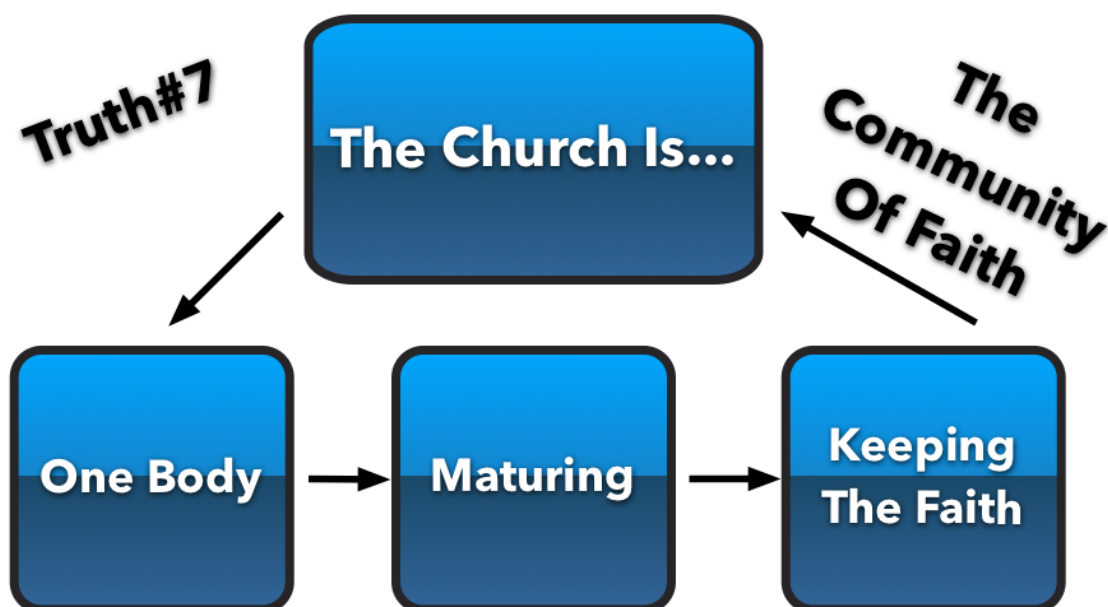
What is your experience of church?

Introduction

Read Colossians 3:12-17

Who is Paul writing to?

Overview Of This Lesson



Members Of One Body

Paul describes a group of believers as the body of Christ. Let us begin by making two observations of this.

Firstly, there is an expectation, in the NT, of community.

'Bear with each other and forgive' (verse 13). Now this doesn't assume that Christian relationships are going to be smooth sailing. Paul is well aware that people need to be ready to either bear with each other - that is to allow a reasonable level of difference, character flaws and mistakes - or to forgive one another - that is to identify wrong that has occurred and repair it. Relationships in a church are not dependent on natural friendly connections but on the common faith. This leads me to my second observation.

The second observation is that the community is always Christ's community. We are his body. We are not just a collection of like-minded people who enjoy the same activities, have the same racial backgrounds and similar outlook on politics, sport or current affairs. No, we are all sinners who have been won over by Jesus. We have all confessed that we need his help. We are more like an AA meeting than a 4X4 club. As soon as the focus of church is taken off Christ who is the head and is transferred to club meeting agendas, then we cease to be a church.

What is the point of church then? What do we do? What is church for?

The Body Must Mature

We are one body - unified by the one head, but we are made of up many parts - the church can be described as diverse and yet united.

Read Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-12

What is the message of these verses?

What goal does the church have?

Read Ephesians 4:13-16

What is the message of these verses?

apostles who saw Jesus and wrote the NT,
prophets who expounded the scriptures and taught them to the people,
evangelists who bring the word of God for the first time to people's ears,
pastors who guide the sheep of the church and teach them to discern right from wrong

But what happens to a church that is dysfunctional? What happens if each part fails to do its work? What should we expect of a church that becomes lazy?

3) Keeping The Faith

The only way to remain in the faith and to move to maturity is to keep your eyes fixed on the hope that we find in Jesus.

Read Hebrews 10:19-23

What is the message here?

Keep your eyes on the hope. We have full assurance and can come to God sure that he accepts us through Christ. And when we are sure of that hope for ourselves...keep your brother's eyes on Jesus too...

Read Hebrews 10:23-25

What is the message here?

The idea that we don't need church to be a Christian is denying the benefits that come with going to church.

Picture It!

Describe It!

Let's stop going to church

"Going" to church is it like...

Going to school

Going to hospital

Going to the beach

Going to the movies

Going to the markets

Or going to the football

No

Church is not a building

Church is not an institution

Church is not a spectator sport

Church is not a compulsory ritual

Church is not a task to be completed

Church is a gathering of people who belong to God

Let's stop going to church and start being the church¹

¹ <http://macarisms.wordpress.com/2013/09/08/lets-stop-going-to-church/>

Apply It!

Church is a funny place. It's full of quirky people and sometimes it's hard to know why we still have churches running today. But church is a gift from God. He invented it. It's not a man-made conspiracy aimed at taking money from people or forcing crowds to submit. It is formed from the lost, the broken, the lonely, the humble and the hurt people of this world who God has raised up to become his very own children. Church is full of people needing to know Christ more - whether they realise it or not. And we are all members of his body - for better or for worse.

For further thought

Read 1 Peter 4:7-11

What is your current involvement in the body of Christ?

Where are you or where would you like to be serving in church?

Listen To A Sermon

Richard Coekin speaks here on Ephesians 4:1-16 on the topic of how we grow the church. His big idea is 'unity in ministry for maturity'. Our relationships in church are the priority because it fits with the mission that God has for his world. Are we seeking to fill seats or to grow together in maturity?



Read Something Great



church is like.

Two ministers who do church a little differently to the traditional method wrote 'Total Church'. Although their approach may not get replicated too rapidly, the basis of their approach is solid enough to learn from. In this chapter, they answer, "Why Community" and this section provides a little insight into what their

For Further Reading

Dever, Mark, *Nine Marks Of A Healthy Church*, Crossway, Illinois, 2013.

Stott, John, *The Living Church: Convictions of a Lifelong Pastor*, IVP, Downers Grove, 2007.

