

Sunday, November 6, 2022 | Upon This Rock

Week 5 | Ephesians 4:1-16 | "Church Organization"

Upon This Rock is a study designed to help the believer answer one question: "what is the church." How a person answers that question will significantly impact their life. And we began to answer that questions by looking at the church's origins in Matthew 16. **There we learned that Peter, like all true believers, is the substance of the church. The church is not a building but a people who confess that Jesus Christ is the Messiah.** But we also discovered that even though when we are at our best, we can be the foundation of the church, we become a stumbling block when we're at our worst. This is precisely what happened to Peter. He misunderstood Jesus' mission and tried to stand in the Messiah's way. Therefore, to avoid making the same mistakes that Peter made, we must understand that to follow Jesus—i.e., to be the church—we must deny what we want and devote ourselves to Jesus' suffering.

In the second week, we unpacked the church's objective from Mathew 28. **Often called "the great commission," our prerogative is to be disciples making disciples of all nations.** Our mission in life is global, not just local. And that purpose not only stands on the principle that Jesus has all authority; it also has a few methods which assist us in our endeavors. And those methods are baptizing in the name (singular) of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and teaching new disciples to obey all the commands of Jesus. And while all who profess the name of Jesus can rest assured that the Lord, at that moment of salvation, takes up residence in their heart, the great commission, nevertheless, ends with a promise that those who obey and make disciples will have the presence of Jesus all the days of their life. Only the believer actively trying to make disciples will genuinely understand what Jesus' never-ending presence actually means.

In the third week, we started unpacking the church's ordinances. And the first of the two ordinances we discussed was communion, also referred to as the Lord's Supper and the Eucharist. And communion is a beautiful way that we, as believers, remember what Jesus did for us on Calvary. While not the literal representation of Jesus' body, the bread is a symbolic object that recalls how Jesus was broken for us. Likewise, while not the literal representation of Jesus' blood, the wine is still symbolic of how Jesus' life force was poured out for us. Furthermore, communion is not only designed to help us recall some past event, but it is also a way that we anticipate the Lord's return, where he'll gather all believers from every age to attend a feast where there'll be no chair left empty. However, it is essential that when we take communion, it is not some simple ritualistic exercise that has no real-world impact; far from it.

The Lord's Supper helps us remember Jesus, for sure, but it ought to remind us to serve one another as well.

Last week, we studied the other ordinance of the church, baptism. To review, baptism has no salvific properties. Only a belief in Jesus can save. However, while it may not redeem a person, baptism still helps the believer in several ways. First, it demonstrates to others what has already transpired inside the heart. This is why only a believer must get baptized. Otherwise, the symbolism of the actions loses all meaning. Secondly, it is the first step in obedience for a new believer, as Jesus himself insisted that a disciple must be baptized. Thirdly, baptism helps the believer internalize Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. It is a vivid illustration that reminds us that we are no longer enslaved to sin, that we are free to serve God, and that, one day, we'll be resurrected and given a new body just like Christ. And lastly, baptism enrolls the fledgling disciple in the local church. In this way, baptism is like the door which leads a believer into close fellowship with other believers. Simply put, baptism is the conclusion of the old life and the commencement of the new life.

Today, we'll be seeing how the church is organized. Often referred to in theological circles as "church polity," this study may initially seem boring. However, for those with a mind to learn, significant and encouraging implications are at the heart of this topic. As church members, we need to know who (exactly) is in charge and who does what in the church. Not only will this help protect you from unhealthy, unbiblical, and dysfunctional "churches," but it will also reveal what sort of gifting you have as a believer and what kind of function you should serve in the church body. Everyone has a place in the community of faith. But if you don't know how the church fits together, how will you know where you fit in?

READ: Ephesians 4:1-16 (ESV)

¹ I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷ But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." ⁹ (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth?

¹⁰ He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Now, there are many ways you can explain the organization of the church. But since different words are used to refer to the same office throughout the Scriptures, I've categorized those terms according to their purpose for simplicity's sake. Thus, characterized according to their function, there are four offices in the church:

i. **The Function of Commanding**

READ: Ephesians 4:4-6 (ESV)

⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

When asked, "Who is in charge of the church?" The only appropriate answer to that question is Jesus Christ. But, as we know, Jesus doesn't exactly show up, in bodily form, on Sunday morning, does he? Thus, we also need to ask ourselves, "in charge of what?"¹ And we'll address that second question in a moment. However, we mustn't breeze past that initial question; for why it may have a simple answer, it is nevertheless crucial to our understanding of the church's organizational system. Jesus, and one else, is in charge of the church. Paul highlights this principle twice in our present passage. First, in verses 4 and 5 and then again, in verse 15: "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ...."

¹ Emadi, Sam, *Who's in Charge of the Church?*, Church Questions, (Wheaton, IL; Crossway, 2022), p. 16.

As we've already seen in our series, Christ, alone, instituted the church; he, alone, has set its objective; and he, alone, has laid down its ordinances. The church does what it does (*Or, I should say, it ought to do what it does?*) because it obeys its leader's directives. Later in the book of Ephesians, Paul, in trying to explain how a husband ought to love his wife, says that Christ is husband to the church (cf. Eph. 5:22-33). The church does not have multiple husbands. The church is not a polygamist. She has one husband, and his name is Jesus Christ.

When we understand this principle, it keeps us from falling into several harmful assumptions. For instance, it keeps a pastor (such as myself) from thinking that the church is his; that, however well-intentioned he may be, he does not say, "This is my church." Those are the words of a cult leader, not a pastor. Tangentially, this is why I insisted that my name not be included on the church sign. If I were to see my name plastered on the front of our building every day as I pulled into work, I'd begin to think that I am the sole owner of this church rather than a mere servant among many.

Likewise, when we understand that Jesus alone is the head of the church, that principle keeps members from becoming controlling, dominating, and possessive of the church. A church member does not own the church; they are a part of it. When we give of our time, resources, and talents, we ought to do so willingly and freely without thought of return (cf. Lu. 6:35). We are not in some quid pro quo type of community where we're allowed to be demanding and domineering. At the heart of the church, the community of faith beats to the drum of self-service, not self-centeredness. The church is not a country club where members are owed certain benefits. The church is a family united under one roof. And while, yes, there are certain expectations (What family doesn't have expectations?), the ruling principle is love, not license (cf. 1 Cor. 13). Paul urged the church in Ephesus ["to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."](#)

Now, to help us "walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which [we] have been called," Jesus gave the church various gifts to certain people, with each person serving a specific function. Some gifts, people, and functions have changed throughout the church age, and some have remained consistent. And while we could spend weeks diving into a detailed study about each gift, person, and function, for today's message, we'll divide these offices according to their function. And broadly speaking, the various offices in the N.T. fall into four camps: commanding, equipping, serving, and ministering. Admittedly, there is quite a bit of overlap, so these headings are not exclusive. However, these headings will help us discuss varied roles within the church body.

ii. The Function of Equipping

READ: Ephesians 4:7,11-12 (ESV)

⁷ But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift....¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry...

Past offices: Apostles

Present offices: Pastor (cf. 1 Pet. 5:1-4; Heb. 13:17; 1 Tim. 4:13-16). This is both a teaching and authoritative role and one reserved for men (cf. 1 Tim. 2:12). The Greek term from which we get "pastor" is **ποιμήν** (poimén), and it is translated as "pastor" only one time in the N.T. (cf. Eph. 4:11). Most of the time, *poimén* is translated as "shepherd" (cf. Mat. 9:36; 25:32; Mar. 6:34; Lu. 2:15). But even this term is not the standard one that is used when referring to the head of a local church. Usually, the Greek word used is either **πρεσβύτερος** (*presbýteros*, "elder") or **ἐπίσκοπος** (*epískopos*, "overseer" or "bishop"). Isn't it interesting that nowhere do we find the term **ἀρχιερεύς** (*archiereús*, "priest") used to refer to a pastor? Christians need no earthly priest when Jesus Christ is their high priest (cf. Heb. 4:14).

So, what do I mean when I say that the pastor's charge is a "teaching and authoritative" role?

READ: 1 Timothy 4:12-16 (ESV)

¹² Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. ¹³ Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. ¹⁴ Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. ¹⁵ Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. ¹⁶ Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

The charge of a pastor is to be an example. This means he applies himself in a way his fellow Christians should (want to?) follow. As the pastor follows the example of Christ, the local church ought to follow the example of the pastor. And he accomplishes this task through devotion to the Scriptures via public readings, exhortations, and teachings. And his is a role that will grow as he grows. No pastor is perfectly formed when they take up the mantle. Just like the Christian life, the pastor will grow and mature. And should he "keep a close watch on [himself]" and not give up, he will save himself and his hearers from the wickedness and destruction of this world.

iii. The Function of Serving

READ: 1 Timothy 3:8-10 (ESV)

⁸ Deacons [Διακόνους, Diákonous] likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. ⁹ They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.

Today, we refer to this office as “deacon.” And we get this term from the Greek word **διάκονος** (*diákonos*), which is better translated as “servant.” So, when we talk about deacons, we’re really just talking about those who serve a specific function in the church (cf. Ac. 6:1-7). Interestingly, when used in a church context, this term refers not only to males (cf. 1 Tim. 3:8-10) but to females (cf. 1 Tim. 3:11; Rom. 16:1-2).² Thus, the term “deaconess” is as valid as “deacon.”

READ: Romans 16:1-2 (ESV)

¹ I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant [διάκονον, *diákonon*] of the church at Cenchreae, ² that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.

According to church history and tradition, the church in Rome would not have received the book of Romans if not for Phoebe hand delivering it to them.³ And while it is hard at this point to verify such things beyond all reasonable doubt, if true, this means that the most significant explanation of Christian theology was entrusted to a deaconess of the church in Cenchreae (*Sin-Kree-ay*), a seaport town in Corinth. Moreover, there seems to be broad agreement in early church history that “deaconess” was a recognized office.⁴ Phoebe was a recognized servant who utilized her resources to further the Gospel. To be clear, even though she was a deaconess, she was not a pastor and did not appear to have served in any teaching role. Instead, she was an honored courier to whom the church is greatly indebted; if not for her, the

² Schreiner, “Thomas, Does the Bible Support Female Deacons? Yes.” *The Gospel Coalition*, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/bible-support-female-deacons-yes/>, [accessed, November 4, 2022].

³ Schreiner, Thomas R., *Romans*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Second Edition, (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Academic, 2018), p. 759.

⁴ Bray, Gerald, *Romans*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament, Volume 6, (Downers Grove, IL; InterVarsity Press, 2005), p. 355-356, Origen (2nd century), Chrysostom (4th century), Pelagius (5th century), and Theodoret of Cyrus (5th century), all agree that Phoebe was more than just a “servant;” she was a “deaconess” of the church in Cenchreae.

church in Rome wouldn't have gotten such a formative document, nor would we have it in our hands today.

iv. The Function of Ministering

READ: Ephesians 4:11-12 (ESV)

¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ

I know that in today's vernacular, when we talk about "ministers," we usually refer to someone in church work—i.e., pastor, music leader, Sunday school teacher, etc. But, in actuality, the term "ministers" refers to every Christian. This means that the vast majority of the church will be ministers; they--i.e., you and me--are supposed to be doing the actual work of the ministry. We are the workforce of the church. We are the ones who actually get the job done!

So, what's the takeaway?

Proper organization of the church organizes believers into their proper place so that the church is functioning properly.

READ: Ephesians 4:13-16 (ESV)

¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

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Proper organization of the church organizes believers into their proper place so that the church is functioning properly.

God has instituted the various office of the church so that the body of Christ is unified and mature. When this goal is achieved, the church will not be like children, susceptible to every

kind of teaching, but will be adults fully cognizant of the schemes which could lead them astray. Doing so allows the believer to become (to grow into) the person Christ wants them to be. They will be "joined and held together" by others who, like the joints in a skeleton, secure them to the church body. And all is "working properly," the entire church community grows and even builds itself up into love.

Video Description

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Pastor's manuscript can be found here: