



What comes to mind when you hear the word “church”? A building with a steeple and a cross? A denomination with ecclesiastical hierarchy? There was a time when I was boy that I would have told you that the first thing I thought of when I heard the word "church" was boring!

What is this thing called the church?

Whatever the church is we know that it is something very important to God!

- He loved the church
- He died for the church
- He rose again for the church
- He lives for the church
- He is the Head of the church
- He is coming back for the church

So whatever this thing is... it must be very important. If the church is so important that God would send His Son to suffer and die for it, then there is no way we can "play church." While playing with one another I have heard my kids say, "let's do pretend church." While it may be cute for kids to "pretend church" it is sad when adults do the same!

Before we answer the question, "What is the church?" we must answer another question:

What is a Christian?

A Christian is someone who “has been reconciled to God in Christ.” (What is a Healthy Church, Dever. p.23)

A Christian is someone who by virtue of his reconciliation with God, has been reconciled to God’s people. (ibid. p.24)

This is where the Great Commandment comes in:

You shall love the Lord with all... and your neighbor as yourself. Upon this hangs all the law and the prophets. (Mt. 22:34-40)

The church is a people, not a place!

The word church (47) is “*Ecclesia*” meaning “a called out assembly.” These are people rich and poor, black and white and every shade in between who were estranged from God and one another, but who now share something profound in common: The Lord Jesus Christ.

A church is a gathering of Christians for the purpose of displaying God’s glory by becoming increasingly like Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 3:8-12 To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; 10 to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, 11 according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.

A church is...

"A group of pardoned rebels whom God wants to use to display his glory before all the heavenly host because they tell the truth about him and look increasingly just like him - holy, loving, united." (ibid. p.48)

There is much imagery in Scripture to help us understand what the church is: The church is a family, it functions body, it is a field that bears fruit, and it is a temple where Christ dwells. And we will be looking at each one of these in the weeks ahead.

"A healthy church is a congregation that increasingly reflects God’s character as his character has been revealed in his Word." (ibid. p.40)

CHARACTERISTIC #1: The people who make up the church are saved through faith in Jesus Christ (36-41)

They had responded in saving faith to the gospel message that Peter preached concerning Jesus Christ.

Follow of the narrative in Acts chapter 2:

- God got their attention at Pentecost with the speaking in tongues. (5-13)
- An explanation was given to the phenomenon (14-21)
- Jesus was preached - the gospel (22-35)
- The problem was identified - wicked people (hands) (23)
- Spirit convicted the hearts of men (37)
- Called to repentance and obedience (38)
- Promise that this was available to “as many as the Lord our God will call.” (39). IS GOD CALLING YOU TODAY?
- They repented of their sin and believed in Jesus. (41)
- They publicly identified themselves as followers of Jesus Christ through biblical baptism. (41)

Baptism is a symbol that publicly identifies us as belonging to God, it does not save us. I wear a wedding band on the third finger of my left hand. If you are meeting me for the first time in a public place and see that ring on my finger you naturally assume that I am married. The ring does not make me married, but it does identify me as a married man. So it is with baptism.

Unbelievers are encouraged to attend church services. They watch us worship, they witness the demonstration of our love and unity. This should make them uncomfortable with their own spiritual condition and long to have what we have.

Membership in a local church is restricted to believers. Disunity and arguments are the result when those who serve Christ seek to work in harmony with those who serve Satan.

2 Corinthians 6:14-16 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? 15 And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an

unbeliever? 16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God.

CHARACTERISTIC #2: The people who make up the church are committed to Scripture (42b)

The Apostles doctrine are the Apostles teachings and they were committed to them.

What you believe matters!

The issue is not that you are a “person of faith” but that you are a person of faith in what is true. You may have heard the popular idea that it doesn’t matter what you believe just as long as you believe something. That sounds sophisticated and tolerant, but its absolutely absurd! Try that approach in any other field: Mining, mechanics, engineering, travel. Imagine someone saying, "It really doesn't matter what I believe about engineering so long as I believe. Or it doesn't matter what side of the road I drive on as long as I am sincere."

Implication #1: Continuing in the Scripture is a mark of genuine salvation (Mt. 13.3-9)

I Joh 2.19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

Implication #2: The church should be a place where the Word of God is proclaimed and explained.

II Ti. 2.2 And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

Implication #3: Commitment to the Apostles doctrine is foundational to the growth and spiritual health of every church. We are united around truth!

I Peter 2.2 as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby,

Romans 12.2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Implication #4: The Apostles Doctrine has been recorded in the NT – this should be taught by all pastors. (Acts 17.11, 2 Ti. 4.2)

Hos 4.6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge...

CHARACTERISTIC #3: The people who make up a church are committed to fellowship (42c)

It is the duty of every Christian to stimulate each other to holiness and faithfulness.

There will be no excuse for believers who do not participate in the fellowship of the local church. The core of our fellowship is not primarily our cultural background, or our love of sports, or our employment... the core of fellowship is that we love the same Lord and want to serve Him faithfully.

Hebrews 10:24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

CHARACTERISTIC #4: The people who make up a church are committed to being Christ-centered (42d)

The breaking of bread speaks of the Lord's Supper (Communion). The bread symbolizes and reminds us of Christ's body that was broken for us. The cup reminds us of His blood that was shed for us. In the "breaking of bread" all believers meet on common ground at the foot of the cross. (Eph. 2.16, Col. 1.20)

Symbolizes unity as we all symbolically partake of the same Lord (Eph. 4.15)

CHARACTERISTIC #5: The people who make up a church are committed to prayer (42e)

They recognize that everything they are and everything that they have comes as a gift from God. They recognize that being in control is an illusion. In prayer we humble ourselves and admit that we don't have wisdom so we come to the One who knows everything and seek His help. In prayer we humble ourselves and admit that we are weak so we come to the One who is all-powerful and seek His help.

“Prayer is the slender nerve that moves the muscle of omnipotence.”
(Jn. 14.13-14)

The Biblical mandate is to pray at all times. We are to pray for ourselves, pray for others, pray for friends to come and believe in Jesus, pray for God’s purposes to be fulfilled on earth as they are in heaven. (Lk. 18.1, Eph. 6.11, Ro. 12.12, Col. 4.2)

At Kitwe Church we are committed to Scripture, to fellowship, to Christ and to prayer!

Let me conclude by asking you one more question:

Are you part of the church?

I could ask the same question this way, Does Christ live in you?

If you have repented of your sins and received Jesus Christ by faith then Christ is producing His character within you. If you are not part of Christ's church, please receive Jesus right now!