

The Church

Module 2.7

“...Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.”

Ephesians 5:23

Across every continent, there exists a dynamic and living organism, comprised of an unknown number of persons. This being is most succinctly known as the Church. While local expressions of this worldwide body are seen in and throughout individual communities, the Church is not just those who gather in one specific location; rather the Church is comprised of all true disciples of Jesus Christ.

As will be outlined later, in Module 3.6, the Charis Fellowship believes that the Church began on the particular day of Pentecost. While there is a continuum of understanding regarding the relationship between Israel and the Church, it is with graciousness we seek to uphold our theological convictions and distinctions. This belief distinguishes us theologically from those who believe that the church has now replaced Israel. What is found in this section of the CCCI is what we believe to be a core evangelical conviction regarding the Church.

As the mystery of the Church is revealed to the “holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (Eph. 3:5), and subsequently through them to us through the written Word of God, there are many different metaphors used to describe the church. In the book of Ephesians alone, we read that the church is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:23), the household of God (Eph. 2:19), a holy temple (Eph. 2:21), and the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:25), and while these metaphors do not tell us everything there is to know about the Church, they do reveal to us very significant truths.

As the *body of Christ*, we are all led by the head Jesus Christ, and are bound to one another as members of the same body. To be sure, there are distinctions within the body; different functions occur within the body, and different gifts are given to the body. Nevertheless, we have been composed according to the sovereign design and arrangement of God (1 Cor. 12:14-26). When one member suffers, whether locally or globally, all suffer because all true disciples of Jesus Christ are members of the body of Christ.

As the *household of God, or God’s Building*, (1 Cor. 3:9) we are being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus being the cornerstone (Eph. 2:20, 1 Cor. 3:10-15). This metaphor helps us understand an important part of our role and responsibility to one another. We are to use the gifts that God has given us to build up those who comprise the household, or building of God. Not only that, but we are to make sure that how we build, and what we use to build, will last when “each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it” (1 Cor. 3:12).

As the *temple of the Spirit of Jesus*, we are His dwelling place; both individually and corporately. This is a staggering statement for Gentiles to understand and absolutely unthinkable

for Israelites. For the Jew, the temple was where the center of worship resided for it is where God resided. Furthermore, it is where the presence of God dwelled and where He would allow access to Himself once a year, and only by blood sacrifice. However, because of our great high priest, Jesus Christ, a once-and-for-all sacrifice has been made, the veil has been torn, and access to God has now been obtained for those who trust in Jesus by faith (Rom. 5:1-2).

As this worldwide, corporate body, we are God's temple because God's Spirit dwells in us (1 Cor. 3:16), and as such there are certain ethical obligations that we have to one another. As Paul continues in 1 Corinthians 3:17, "if anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple." Consequently, how we love and speak about the household of God matters. We may not live in close proximity to Believers in different countries, but we are all collectively the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Paul tells us in 1 & 2 Corinthians that each one of us individually is also the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. In doing so, Paul grounds certain moral and ethical obligations in this profound theological truth and exhorts Believers to be abundantly careful with what we unite ourselves, for in doing so we are uniting Christ as well.

In 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, Paul explains that Believers are to flee sexual immorality because our bodies are members of Christ and therefore are now temples of the Holy Spirit. Because of our union with Christ, and the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ we are no longer our own for we have been bought with a price. Therefore, how we use our bodies, and with whom we use our bodies, must be for the glory of God.

Furthermore, in 2 Corinthians Paul writes about not being unequally yoked in relationships with unbelievers. Though 2 Corinthians 6:14—7:1 has long been a passage taught to high school students and those on the cusp of dating, its application is not only for marriage relationships. Rather, this passage gives specific guidance and instructions to those considering entering into any significant relationship with an unbeliever, married or otherwise. The principle of 2 Corinthians 6 is that because we are the temple of the Holy Spirit, we must be cautious with every partnership we may have, not just marriage.

For example, consider the tug and pull that business partners would invariably experience if one was a Believer and one was a non-believer. Given Paul's command in this passage, a Believer should not enter into such a partnership because of that very tension. The differences in priorities, worldview, ethics, etc. are such that Believers should not be unequally tied together with those who do not know and love Christ.

Balanced against this command, however, is the equally imperative mission Believers have as ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor. 5:20). Thus, while we should not put ourselves in unequally yoked partnerships, we must also not run away from those who desperately need to know Christ and His great love for them. As a result, this is just one of many areas where those who love and

follow Jesus experience tension regarding how exactly to faithfully live out the commands given to us in Scripture.

Thankfully, Jesus promised that a Helper would be sent, His Spirit, to help us know and understand all that Jesus desires for us (John 16:13-15). Furthermore, the Holy Spirit not only works through the written Word of God but also the Body of Christ as we benefit from the wisdom of other godly Believers.

As the Bride of Christ, we are instructed and encouraged by the depth of love, care, and protection that Jesus has for the Church (Eph. 3:14-19). Not only do we follow Him as the Head of the Body, build one another up with Christ as our Cornerstone, and receive His Spirit to dwell in us, we are also relationally united with Christ as His Bride.

In Ephesians 5, Paul not only writes about these profound truths, he also indicates what the purpose of Christ is in all of this. Three different times in verses 26-27 Paul gives us the purpose behind Christ's sacrifice for the Church. He has done so 1) that He might sanctify her [the Bride], 2) so that He might present the church [the Bride] to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, 3) that she [the Bride] might be holy and without blemish.

The predestined plans of the Father to choose "us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him" (Eph. 1:4) are accomplished by the Son, who purchased us and works out the Father's plan in us (Eph. 5:26-27). What is more, The Father guarantees His work of salvation will be fully and finally completed through the sealing of His Spirit who indwells each Believer (Eph. 1:13-14). Halleluiaah, what a Savior!

The last aspect about the Church that we will consider in this module is that Believers only become part of the Church by the action and baptism of the Holy Spirit upon their new birth, or regeneration (1 Cor. 12:13). While this is not the only action of the Holy Spirit upon salvation, nor the only aspect to the fulfillment of Jesus' promise that Believers would be "baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5, 11:16), it is an important action of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, *church membership* is first and foremost a work of the Holy Spirit whereby He baptizes the regenerated into the universal body of Christ instantaneously upon salvation. Local church membership is then only a physical symbol of what is already spiritually true. Consequently, churches do not determine via their membership rolls who is saved, nor are people saved by becoming members of a local church. Rather, membership rolls should only be composed of those Believers who are able to express and proclaim their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

While each local church works to flesh out the unique vision God has given their local body, the universal church remains fastened, till the Lord returns, to the mission He has given His Body. This mission is to make disciple-makers; to baptize the born again in the name of our Triune

God, and to teach those who have trusted in Jesus for salvation everything He has commanded us.

While not an easy mission, it is one that Jesus Himself has promised will be accomplished. For He will build His Church, and nothing in all of creation will be able to stop the One to whom all authority on heaven and earth has been given (Matt. 16:17-20).