



Ecclesiology: The Study of the Church

Lesson 25: The Word of God in the Church

INTRODUCTION

1. What makes a Christian worship service different from other kinds of public gatherings, such as a political rally, a rock concert, or sporting event? _____

Whatever a church's weekly gatherings may or may not have in common with these other public gatherings, one of the things that should set them apart the most is the pervasive presence of the Word of God.

As we saw in the previous study, pastors should preach expositionally because the whole Bible is profitable for Christians and because God's Word is powerful to accomplish His purposes. Building on this theme, in Section I we are going to consider how God's Word should fill every aspect of the church's weekly gatherings. In Section II we will consider how all Christians are called to minister the Word to each other. This sends us a bit downstream from preaching, but we're still considering the power of God's Word and its role in the life of the church.

MAIN IDEA

Not only should the church's weekly gatherings should be filled with God's Word, but the New Testament calls all Christians to speak the Word to each other in order to help each other grow to maturity in Christ.

I. God's Word in the Worship Service

In Colossians 3, Paul sets out some of the corporate dimensions of how we are to live in light of the gospel.

Colossians 3:12–17

1. Who is Paul addressing in these verses? _____

2. What does it mean for the Word of Christ to dwell in the church richly (v. 16)? _____

3. What does the language of “dwelling richly” teach us about the Word of Christ itself? _____

4. By means of what specific activities does Paul instruct the Colossians to let the Word of Christ dwell in them richly? _____

5. What’s the most obvious context in which Paul’s instructions in verse 16 should be carried out? Explain.

6. What are different ways that Christians teach and admonish one another in their corporate gatherings, as described in this passage and the rest of the New Testament? _____

The following is a good summary of the New Testament’s teaching about what activities church gatherings should include. The church should:

- Read the Bible (1 Tim. 4:13)
- Preach the Bible (2 Tim. 4:2)
- Pray the Bible (1 Tim. 2:8)
- Sing the Bible (Col. 3:16)
- Support the Bible through offerings. (2 Cor. 11:9; Phil. 1:3–5; 4:15–19; cf. 1 Tim. 5:17–18)
- “See” the Bible, in the “visible words” of baptism and the Lord’s Supper (Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 11:17–34)

7. Prayer is one way that Christians not only lift up their hearts to God but also instruct each other. With that in mind, how can those who lead the church in praying ensure that the Word of Christ is building up the church through their prayers? _____

8. How is it that the Word of Christ can dwell in us richly through singing “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs”? What does this require of the songs that we sing? _____

9. By what criteria would the apostle Paul evaluate the music he encountered in church? How does this differ from how we often evaluate music in church? _____

10. Based on Paul’s teaching in verse 16, what are the purposes for which Christians should gather? What should we aim to do when we come together as a church? _____

II. The Ministry of the Word

The New Testament calls all Christians to speak the Word to each other in order to help each other grow to maturity in Christ.

Acts 18:24–28

1. What did Priscilla and Aquila do for Apollos? _____

2. Were Priscilla and Aquila pastors or other specially appointed church leaders? _____

2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14–15

3. In view of these two passages, who do you think taught Timothy the Scriptures in his childhood? _____

4. Based on the passages we have just examined in Acts and 2 Timothy, who was teaching the Word in the early church? _____

Colossians 3:16

5. According to Paul, who in the church is supposed to teach and admonish others? (Hint: In the original Greek, the “you” in verse 16 is plural.) _____

In Ephesians 4, Paul explains that pastors are to equip the saints for the work of ministry so that the whole church would be built up to maturity in Christ and would not be blown and tossed by every wind of doctrine:

Ephesians 4:15–16

6. According to verses 15–16, by what means does the body of Christ grow to maturity? _____

7. How many of the body’s members contribute to its growth by speaking the truth in love? _____

All Christians are to speak the truth in love to one another to help the whole body grow to maturity in Christ. We are to speak the truth in love so that we are no longer tossed to and fro by every wave of doctrine.

What does this mean in practical terms? It means that all Christians, not just pastors and other recognized teachers, should teach other believers the Word of God and help them apply it to their lives. This may take place in one-on-one or small-group settings rather than in public ministry such as preaching or Sunday-school teaching. But the diversity of settings only contributes to the richness of the church’s overall ministry of the Word.

8. How will a lack of vibrant expositional preaching from the pulpit hinder one-on-one ministry of the Word in the lives of members? How will a rich diet of expositional preaching enable and inform one-on-one ministry of the Word?¹ _____

¹ Adapted from Bobby Jamieson, *Hearing God’s Word: Expositional Preaching*, ed. Mark Dever, 9Marks Healthy Church Study Guides (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 35–42.