

“What is a Church?”

A church cannot be explained by merely human factors, such as a voluntary gathering of people. The Bible teaches that it is divine in origin, such as the bride of Christ, the children of God, and the temple of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, it consists of people with faults and frailties. Heresies distress her and schisms tear her apart. As Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1152) said, “A house of clay, and a royal palace!” The word “church” refers to a people and not a building. This distinction is made in Acts 14:27 when Paul sends greetings to Priscilla and Aquila and the “church that is in their house”. The people are distinguished from the building. But why is the church worth your consideration? There are four reasons.

First, the church is loved by God. The apostle Paul often calls the church the “beloved of God” (Rom. 1:7; Col. 3:12). It seems that if we love what God loves, then we will also love the church.

Second, the church is God’s plan for spiritual growth. The Lord Jesus gave to the church pastors and teachers to “build up the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-12). “Building up” is not the work of pastors and teachers alone; every member of the church is to work so that the whole church grows spiritually (Eph. 4:16). Neglecting the church neglects your spiritual life.

Third, God is present with His people when they meet. The church is a “house of God” because it is joined by faith to Christ. When we draw near to God in worship, we enter the holy places (Heb. 10:19-22). Jesus promises, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 28:20). Treasure every opportunity to gather with God’s people.

Fourth, the church stands at the center of God’s mysterious plan to display His glory in Christ. Paul writes that the church manifests the varied wisdom of God “according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph. 3:9-11).

The presence of the church opposes two errors. It opposes radical individualism because it reminds us that we need other believers. It also opposes absolute subordination to one leader. Scripture teaches that the church is Christ's body and not one person has all the gifts. The more we think about the importance of the church, the more we will learn humility, appreciation for one another, and the love of God for His people.

Judson Marvel

Pastor, Grace Presbyterian Church (PCA), Sierra Vista, AZ