

*We the Church – Ecclesiology
Partnership and Community (Small Groups)*

Good morning and welcome again to CHC. We are so happy you are here. Are you guys happy today? Who is still doing great on the new year's goals?

Who has already slipped a little? No judgement here.

If this is one of your first times, we are incredibly thankful you decided to come. Your presence matters.

Last week we celebrated our 3-year anniversary, and we kicked off a new sermon series called, **We the Church**.

I was able to share the vision God has given us for the future. Let me encourage you to go back and listen if you didn't catch it.

We laid out phase 1 of what we are calling the hope project. I want you to jump in and get involved in this. We are asking you to pray and turn in your pledge cards before Feb. 1.

As we continue in this series, we are going to look at some foundational principles and questions as it pertains to church.

What is the church? Is it a building? Is it a collection of like-minded people? A combination of both?

There is a theological term that we are digging into today is....

Ecclesiology = the study of the church.

Ecclesiology comes from the Greek word **ἐκκλησία (ecclesia)** - a **gathering or a calling out to a meeting**.

Let's start at the beginning...1. **What is the church?**

The church is the body of Christ, of which He is the head.

Ephesians 1.22-23 | **And he subjected everything under his feet and appointed him as head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.**

This is important...The body of Christ is made up of all believers in Jesus Christ from the day of Pentecost (found in Acts 2) until Christ's return.

The church is not a building or a denomination. According to the Bible, the church is the body of Christ—all those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation.

The church is people under the authority of King Jesus.

Biblically, the church is regarded in two ways, as the universal church or as the local church.

The universal church consists of everyone, everywhere, who has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 12.13 | For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

This verse says that anyone who believes is part of the body of Christ and has received the Spirit of Christ as evidence. All those who have received salvation through faith in Jesus Christ comprise the universal church.

The local church is seen in **Galatians 1.1-2 | Paul, an apostle—not from men or by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead—² and all the brothers who are with me: To the churches of Galatia.**

Here we see that in the province of Galatia there were many churches—they had a localized ministry and were scattered throughout the province. They were local churches.

So, if it's a Baptist church, a Lutheran church, a Presbyterian church, etc., is not *the* church, as in the universal church; rather, it is a *local* church, a local body of believers.

2. Why is the local church important?

When we consider the biblical teaching on the church, we realize the church is vitally important for growing in Christ. Like a branch that grows because of its connection to the tree, we thrive when we stay connected to the church.

God has ordained the church, a fellowship of the flawed, to carry out his purpose and will in the world. There is much the Bible teaches us about the church...let me give you some.

- A. We have Jesus' declaration in **Matthew 16.18 | I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.**

The church is something that Jesus is all about. He is the builder. If He is all about it, we should be all about it. The power of hell is no match whatsoever for Jesus and his church.

- B. Jesus gave the church its mandate and purpose for existence when he gave the disciples the Great Commission in **Matthew 28.19-20** | ¹⁹ **Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,** ²⁰ **teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”**

God wants the church to be a family, a body. He wants believers...those who are His disciples, to be disciple makers.

Hard Truth: To have people come in a room with no intention of ever being a disciple maker, makes no sense.

To have people who call themselves Christians that just want to sit in a service and not really be a part of the body, the family, that doesn't make sense.

Churches all over the world have this problem...To appease the casual Christians so they don't get mad and leave we lower the standard and say its ok...and pretty soon we have this thing that is no longer a light to the world. It's just a social gathering with bad singers.

- C. The third thing we learn from Jesus concerning the church comes from his high-priestly prayer in John 17. At the end of the prayer, Jesus expresses to the Father, **John 17.26** | ²⁶ **I made your name known to them and will continue to make it known, so that the love you have loved me with may be in them and I may be in them.”**

The NT frequently refers to the church as Christ's body. We are literally the presence of Christ on earth. As a Christian, when you show up, you are bringing the presence of Christ with you. And the church's mission is exactly the same as Christ's mission: to proclaim God's name.

In other words,...once I experience Jesus' love, its my job to invite others to experience Jesus' love! (Sound familiar?)

The last one we'll look at today...

- D. The local church is where believers can fully apply the “body” principles of 1 Corinthians 12—encouraging, teaching, and building one another up in the knowledge and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That is impossible apart from the local church.

So....Let's talk about City Hope here for a second. Two things we want to challenge you on today as it pertains to church.

1. Partnership

Here at CHC we want what Jesus wants. We do not just want to gather a crowd.

We want this for your life. We want this for your student's life. We want this for your kid's life. We believe, God wants this for your life too.

We want you to truly experience a life totally surrendered to Jesus.

“You cannot live a victorious Christian life with joy, peace, and hope filling up your soul, without faithfulness in the church.” – Billy Graham

Today isn't just about information and knowledge. The church isn't just about getting a bunch of Bible in your head and telling everyone how smart you are and never doing anything with it.

This is why we want you to partner with us. This is what you may call church membership, but we feel it's so much more than that.

You can be a member at a gym or a golf course – walk in and some gym machine is broken, what are you going to do? Call someone else to come fix it. Why? You don't own it or you're not a partner in it. (picking up shoes or trash in some else's yard)

Here at City Hope we don't have members, we have partners. We want you to partner with us because it infers commitment.

Your level of love goes up when you take ownership.

Our process for you to become a partner starts with attending Step 1 of The Loop. (Starting today and for the next 2 Sundays we are going to be hosting Step 1. All 3 weeks remaining in January during the 2nd service)

I believe once you take that step, your love for this local church will really deepen. I believe anytime we are obedient to Gods Word our lives see change.

What you are committing to when you become a partner at City Hope....striving to live a Biblical life.

The second thing we want to challenge you with today...

2. Community

If we are going to truly be the body of Christ, we cannot isolate ourselves. We cannot allow our schedule to isolate us. We must make community and fellowship and intentional part of our growth.

We believe life change happens in the context of relationships. **Small Groups have one simple purpose: to bring people together.** God created us to live in community with others, and it is only then that we can experience the full life He intends for us.

Small Groups provide three things:

1. A place to connect with others.

“Yes, whatever a person is like, I try to find common ground with him, so he will let me tell him about Christ and let Christ save him.” | 1 CORINTHIANS 9.22 TLB

We were not made to do life alone. God created us for community, and Small Groups provide a place for you to connect with others, share life, and grow in faith together.

2. A place to protect each other.

“We know what real love is because Jesus gave up His life for us. So, we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters.” | 1 JOHN 3.16 NLT

When we do life together, our problems become smaller as God uses others to bring support and encouragement to our lives. Small Groups become a place where others don't just know your name but care about what is happening in your life and want to support you in your spiritual journey.

3. A place to grow together.

“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” | PROVERBS 27.17

We believe every person is created with God-given potential to make a difference in the world. Small Groups are a place you can grow with others to become more like Jesus and reach the potential God has put inside you.

Conclusion: The response to today's message is pretty straightforward.

Take a look at your life as it pertains to Gods Word on the Church and see if it matches up.

Maybe you've been here for a while and Gods calling you to make it official. Become a partner. Get in a small group.