

## Convictions Regarding the Church

Churches today continue to struggle and fail because they compromise on ecclesiology—the doctrines of the church. Some are ignorant of what the Bible teaches concerning the church, while others simply do not follow the biblical teachings regarding the church.

If we want to retain a healthy and vibrant church, we have to know what the Bible teaches regarding the church, and we must refuse to compromise on these issues. We must stand strongly on a correct ecclesiology, a proper understanding of the church.

We are continuing this morning with our Summer Sermon Series on biblical convictions, and today we'll be considering some important convictions we ought to have about the church. Jesus said, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The church is the center of God's program for the world today, and all Christians should have strong beliefs regarding the church.

Today we'll consider what the Bible says about the church, and then we'll consider several strong convictions we should have about the church.

Let's look first of all at some important biblical principles regarding the church.

I. The local church is a divinely-appointed body.

A. Christ is the founder and leader of the church.

*Mt 16:18 ... I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

*Acts 20:28 Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.*

*Colossians 1:18 [Jesus] is the head of the body, the church, ...*

This is not my church or your church; the church belongs to Christ, and our primary concern should be that the church operates in a way that he would approve.

B. The Holy Spirit indwells and empowers the church (Acts 11:15-17; 1 Cor 3:16, 12:13).

1. The church began when the HSp fell on those early believers in Acts 2.

2. We often affirm the fact that each individual believer is indwelt by the HSp.

3. But the Bible also teaches that the HSp indwells legitimate churches.

1 Corinthians 3:16 *Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*

Both of the words “you” in this verse are in the plural. You (plural) are the temple (singular) and the HSp dwells in you (plural). As individuals, we are the temple of God, and collectively, as a church, when it assembles, we are the temple of God. In both senses, we are indwelt by the Spirit.

**Trans:** God invented the church, Jesus died for the church, and the HSp indwells the church. The church is not like any other assembly, congregation, or organization. It is a divinely-appointed body.

## II. The local church is God’s household.

1 Timothy 3:15 ... *I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*

Ephesians 2:19 ... *you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God*

- A. Up until the formation of the church, Israel was God’s household. The tabernacle or the temple was the house of God.
- B. Israel is no longer the center of God’s program; the church is. During the church age, the church is God’s household.
- C. The people of God today are not ethnic Jews, they are believers in Christ. Ethnicity has nothing to do with the church. If you want to be part of God’s house, you have to be a part of Jesus’ church.

## III. The local church upholds and supports the truth.

1 Tim 3:15 describes the church as the “pillar and ground of the truth.”

- A. The idea of “pillar” is that of support, like a pedestal holding up something on top of it. The church upholds and supports the truth.
- B. The word “ground” means foundation on which something else rests.

Taken together, these two terms emphasize the certainty and firmness of the church in upholding the truth of God’s Word.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Frank E. Gaebelin, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary – Volume 11: Ephesians through Philemon*, (Grand

- C. As the “pillar and ground of the truth,” the local church is the basis and support for reaching the world with the truth of the Gospel. Churches uphold and support the truth by believing it, teaching it, and proclaiming it.

**Quote:** It is the solemn responsibility of every church to uphold the truth of God’s Word solidly, immovably, and unshakably. The church does not invent the truth, ... It is to support and safeguard [the truth]. ... The church has the stewardship of Scripture, the duty to guard it as the most precious possession on earth. Churches that tamper with, misrepresent, ... or abandon biblical truth destroy their only reason for existing.<sup>2</sup>

- D. Sadly, many churches are so compromised that they no longer uphold or proclaim biblical truth. Or they proclaim a mixture of truth and error; perhaps a little truth and a lot of error.

E.g., a church that displays the rainbow flag—obviously rejected the truth.

- E. Many professing Christians today seem to feel that they can get along quite well without involvement in the church. They fail to appreciate the importance of the local church for the Christian life. Since the church is God’s household, the pillar and foundation of the truth, every Christian ought to be part of it.

“He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the church for his mother.” Cyprian of Carthage (died 258)

**Trans:** The church is the pillar and ground of the truth.

#### IV. The local church does God’s work in the world.

Mt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8

- A. The church is the center of God’s program for the world. We are living in the church age. Israel was the center of God’s program until Jesus’ death and resurrection. The church began in Acts 2, and since then, God’s program for the world centers around the church.

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Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 370.

<sup>2</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *1 Timothy*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 135–136.

- B. The Great *Commission* demands that believers go into all the world, preach the Gospel, make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to obey Christ's commands.

The central command of the GC is "make disciples." That is the primary work of the church. The goal is to see people converted to Christ, baptized, and taught.

- C. The Great *Commandment* demands that believers love God and one another (John 13:34, 15:12; 1 Jn 3:23). Christians ought to be known for their love.

**Trans:** The church is responsible to preach the Gospel, make disciples, baptize them, add them to the church, and teach them Jesus' commands.

V. The local church administers the ordinances.

- A. The Bible recognizes two ordinances—baptism and the Lord's Supper. These ordinances are the domain of the local church. That is, only the local church has authority to conduct baptisms and serve the Lord's Supper. The local church is responsible for these activities.

- B. That means that other organizations should not be baptizing or serving the Lord's Supper. Individuals should not be administering the ordinances for themselves.

- C. We do not believe that the ordinances contain saving grace. We don't call them sacraments; they are not channels of saving grace or of the forgiveness of sins. We are not sacramental in our theology.

Saving grace and forgiveness comes through faith in Christ, not through religious rituals.

- D. Both of the ordinances are for believers; you have to be a Christian *before* you participate in either one. These ordinances do not make you a Christian. You participate in them because you are already a Christian.

- E. The ordinances are very important. Baptism identifies you publicly with Christ and initiates you into the church. The Lord's Supper is a regular opportunity to demonstrate our continuing commitment to the faith.

**Trans:** If you want access to the ordinances, you have to be part of a church—the church is the only organization with the authority to administer the ordinances.

VI. Local church leadership is ordained by God to oversee the ministry of the church.

A. Church leadership falls into two offices.

1. Some leaders are pastors. The Bible uses words like pastor, elder, bishop, and overseer to describe the same office.
2. Some leaders are deacons. The word “deacon” means “servant.” The deacons are the servants of the church.
3. The Bible does not allow for any other official positions in the church—no popes, cardinals, arch-bishops, presidents, or other offices. The only offices mentioned in the Bible are pastor and deacons.

B. Leaders must be qualified and maintain their qualifications (1 Tim 3; Titus 1).

1. Most of the qualifications for church leadership pertain to a person’s moral character. Church leaders must be people of high moral character.
2. Other qualifications pertain to skill in handling the word of God, teaching, preaching, and administering.
3. If a church leader becomes disqualified, the church must recognize that fact and remove the person from his position as leader.

C. Church leadership is male.

1. The NT demands that males lead the church; only males can serve as pastors. I believe that deacons ought to be males as well.
2. Women can serve in many capacities in the church, and their work is very important. Few churches could operate without the work of women. However, women cannot be pastors; they must not usurp male authority.
3. Again, we see that many churches are deeply compromised on this issue. Women serve as pastors in many churches, which is a clear violation of biblical commands.

**Trans:** We should have strong convictions about church leadership. We should not be part of a church where the leadership is compromised.

VII. We believe in congregational church government.

- A. That means that the church rules itself. It does not look outside of itself for leadership or authority. The congregation is the authority, under God, for the church.
- B. The pastor serves at the pleasure of the congregation. When a church calls a pastor, it gives that man the authority to lead the church. The church can ask the pastor to resign at any time.

VIII. Members of a church support its work.

- A. We believe in church membership. Christians who assemble ought to be members of that assembly. Attendance is good, but membership is better.
- B. Members attend regularly (Heb 10:25).
- C. They give cheerfully, generously, regularly, and sacrificially (1 Cor 16:2).
- D. They serve the congregation (Rom 12:4-8).

**Trans:** Those are some of the main principles concerning the church taught in the NT. Now let's consider some...

IX. Convictions based on these principles

- A. Christians should recognize the preeminence of the local church.
  - 1. The most important consideration in life is your own personal relationship with God. Walking with God is your highest priority.
  - 2. After that comes the family. Ordering and operating your family according to biblical principles is a very high priority.
  - 3. After that comes the local church. The church is the household of God, the pillar and ground of the truth. The church is God's household; it is God's program for today. Engagement with a local church ought to be a very high priority for us, because the local church is a high priority with God.
- B. All Christians should invest themselves the work of the local church.
  - 1. The biblical pattern repeated in the NT is that a person gets saved, baptized, and added to the church. We demonstrate our commitment to a church by joining that church and serving there.
  - 2. Failure to associate with a church is disorderly. God intends that Christians assemble regularly.

Hebrews 10:25 *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.*

It's always amazing to me that professing Christians neglect the church.

Many people today have no commitment to the one and only organization that Jesus "purchased with his own blood." They have forsaken the assembly. They can't be bothered to be associated with the household of God, the pillar and ground of the truth. Some refuse to be baptized and they very rarely take communion. I'm not sure how you call that a Christian life.

Obviously, all Christians should be affiliated with a local church. Any Christian failing to engage with a local church is living disorderly and sinfully. That ought to be a strong conviction.

3. The work of the church is done primarily by the members. We believe in member ministry; the members do the ministry. There is not a lot to do around here if you are not a member.
  4. We want to encourage those who attend here to join the church. We are glad that non-members attend, but we would like to see them join and get involved (Acts 2:41,47; 5:14; 9:31; 11:21-26).
- C. The local church ought to be the center of fellowship for the believer's life (Acts 2:43,46).
1. Jesus said that his disciples would be known for their love for one another. Church ought to be a place where disciples demonstrate their love for one another. It ought to be a community of warm affection and fellowship.
  2. The NT contains many "one another" passages. E.g., honor, accept, admonish, greet, serve, bear with, submit, comfort, edify. We fulfill these commands in the context of the local church.
- D. Members of a church should be faithful to all activities and services of their church (Acts 2:42,46; Heb 10:25, 35-39).
1. We have various programs and events here that benefit of the people who attend our church. We hope and trust that these are beneficial programs; we hope that people grow and mature through them. e.g., VBS is coming up in about a month.

2. But obviously, people have to participate in these programs to get the benefit from them.
- E. Believers should be involved in outreach/evangelism/missions through their church.
1. Be involved in local outreach (Acts 1:8; 5:42; 8:1,4; 11:19,20; 1 Thes 1:8)
  2. Be involved in global outreach (Matt 9:38; John 4:35; Acts 13:1-4; 14:26,27)
- F. Church members should pray for, encourage, and submit to those who are over them in the leadership of the church (1 Cor 1:12-13; 1 Thes 5:12-13; Heb 13:7, 17).
- Perhaps the best thing you can do for your church is to pray for its leaders.
- G. Members of a church should support their church financially (1 Cor 16:2; Gal 6:6; Heb 13:16).
1. Give generously, sacrificially, prayerfully, regularly, and proportionally to the work of the church.
  2. The preeminence of the church means that we give to support the work of your church *before* supporting other Christian agencies. The local church should be your priority.
- H. Converts should be baptized after salvation and then observe the LS regularly.
1. We should have a conviction that only the local church has the authority to administrate the ordinances.
  2. We should have a conviction that baptism and the LS are for believers. We believe in believers' baptism. We believe that you must be a baptized believer before receiving the LS.
- I. Believers should do all in their power to uphold the reputation of their church in the community (Acts 5:1-11)
1. Community members often formulate their opinions about a church based on the people who attend there.
  2. The church will have a good reputation in the community to the extent that the members are doing good.



3. A church will lose its testimony in the community when the members misbehave. It's fairly common for churches to lose their good reputation when the members or the pastor behave improperly. Some churches experience scandal when their pastors or members misbehave in various ways. When that happens, they drag the name of Christ and his church through the mud.
- J. When necessary, a church must discipline members to purge sin from the assembly (i.e., excommunication) (Mt 18:16-17; Rom 16:7).
1. One of the marks of a properly functioning church is that it enforces church discipline. Members must occasionally confront/warn/counsel one another (Rom 15:14).
  2. Again, many churches tolerate habitually sinful behavior from its members. The church never or rarely confronts members about their sins. Lack of discipline is disorderly and endangers the legitimacy of the church.

There is only one institution/organization that Jesus promised to build and bless, only one institution that Jesus shed his blood for, and that is his church. God invented it, Jesus died for it, and the HSp indwells it.

The pattern we find throughout the NT is that people get saved, get baptized, and become members of the church. The local church is God's program for the world today.

Since all of that is true, Christians should have a strong commitment to their church, and they should have strong convictions regarding the local church. We must uphold these convictions without compromise. The church is the household of God, the pillar and ground of the truth. We must strive to operate the church within the truth that God has given us.

If you are not a member here, I'd like to invite you to consider membership.