

The Church and Churches

Who are we? We answer this question as we view ourselves in relation to others.

The Sections on God and His Kingdom have contributed towards this question of identity. In them we saw something of God's eternal purposes, and what He is doing today towards their accomplishment. Thus, they help us align ourselves with His purposes.

Further insights into our identity can be gained by seeing ourselves within the context of the Body of Christ, The Church.

We are not concerned here with resolving the ecclesiastical issues of the day. Much confusion and controversy revolves around this subject and we cannot wait for a general agreement from which to take our cues. Nor do we need to choose a theological camp. What we do need is to satisfy ourselves that we not only know who we are among God's people, but also how He wants us to relate to the rest of the Church and to local churches.

So this Section on the Church and Churches should help answer the question of our identity. It will also give us guidance in dealing with the practical problems that arise as we win and disciple people out of the world and help them resolve their needs for a local church fellowship.

The Church and Churches

I. Introduction

- A. In the New Testament, “church” is never a building. It is always people.
- B. There are two uses in the New Testament: church and churches.

1. Church: “Body of Christ” - Matthew 16:18; cf. Ephesians 1:22,23.

One enters the Kingdom by being born again and thereby becomes a part of His body - Mark 10:24-27; John 3:3-5.

The Church's mission is to glorify God by continuing what Jesus began in the world - Ephesians 3:10. In this sense, the Church is the earthly expression of the Kingdom of God.

2. Churches: “Congregations” or “assemblies” -Matthew 18:15-17; Romans 16:4,5.

C. It is important to note the differences between the Body of Christ and local congregations.

The Body	Local Congregations
One	Many
Universal	Local
Permanent	Transitory
True Believers	Mixed

II. The Body of Christ - *Matthew 16:18*.

A. Is being built by Christ - Matthew 16:18.

B. Is built upon the foundation stones of the person of Jesus Christ and the Scriptures - Ephesians 2:19,20; cf. Mark 8:38 and Psalm 119:63. (The Scriptures are the legacy of the apostles and prophets).

C. Is made up of many members. As stated in Romans 12:4-6 and illustrated by I Corinthians 12, they are:

1. A Unity - “In Christ we who are many form one body,” -Romans 12:5a.

Illustration: I Corinthians 12:20, “many parts ...one body.”

2. Interrelated - “Each member belongs to all the others,” -Rom. 12:5b.

Illustration: 1 Corinthians 12:21-26, the parts suffer and rejoice together.

3. Diverse - “We have different gifts,” - Rom. 12:6a.

Illustration: I Corinthians 12:7-11; cf. 1 Peter 4:10.

- a. Each has a gift - vs. 7.
- b. To be used for the common good - vs. 7.
- c. They are different - verses. 12,13.
- d. They are sovereignty bestowed by the Holy Spirit - vs. 11.

D. Observations:

1. No member can do everything. There must be specialization.
2. There are different gifts because there are different jobs to do.
3. Each member is important because each has a service to perform.
4. We need to welcome diversity in the Body as it is very important.

III. Local Congregations - Matthew 18:15-20.

A. Local congregations were born out of need. Christians need to relate in such a way that they can enable one another to live the Christian life. This mutual enabling is an essential purpose of the local congregation.

In order to fulfill this purpose, it is necessary to exercise certain functions: some together, others individually.

- Performing a function requires activity.
- Activities, when repeated, become forms.
- So, where there is a local congregation, there will be form.

B. Functions of local congregations.

1. Gathering - they “meet together.” Illustrated by Acts 2: 42-47, for worship, teaching of the Word, prayer, sacraments, fellowship.

2. Scattering - they go into neighborhoods, shops, schools, homes. Illustrated by Acts 8:4; Colossians 4:5,6.

Gifts and callings are exercised as the Church is scattered as well as when it is gathered.

C. Forms of local congregations.

1. Intended to be made up of believers - Acts 2:44-47.

2. Local - Acts 16:4,5.

3. Congregates - Acts 20:7.

4. Has identifiable leadership - Titus 1:5.

Specialized Functions

In this Section, we will examine the ways in which God equips the Church to accomplish His purposes. He not only gives gifts to every believer -with the intent that all thereby participate in the ministry - but He also sets apart certain persons to serve in specialized capacities.

“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...” - Ephesians 4:11,12.

These persons are gifts to the Body for its edification. Sometimes these specialists work individually, sometimes they work in teams. For some, the scope of their ministry is a local congregation, while for others their work is mobile by nature.

This Section constitutes another step towards answering the question of our identity. At this point our purpose is simply to establish the validity of a group like The Navigators. We are not yet ready to discuss what it is we are called to do.

Specialized Functions

I. Ephesians 4:1-16 refers to the Body of Christ, not the local church; cf. Romans 12:5,6.

In the body, there is:

- A. Unity - Ephesians 4:1-6. "One body, one Spirit... one hope..."
- B. Diversity - Ephesians 4:7-12a. "To each ...grace has been given."
- C. Interrelation - Ephesians 4:12b-16. "That the body... may be built up."

II. Gifts are given to individuals - Romans 12:4-6; 1 Corinthians 12:7-11.

III. In the body, some persons are gifted to serve in Specialized Functions

1 Corinthians 12:27-30

Ephesians 4:11,12

- A. Persons: Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, Teachers.
- B. Specialty: ultimately, whatever the specialty, the purpose is the same.
 - 1. Their job - "to prepare God's people for works of service." -Ephesians 4:12.

"To prepare" - the process of fully equipping one for service. "Works of service" - in the church and in the community.
 - 2. The purpose - "so that the Body of Christ may be built up." -Ephesians 4:12.

Acts 16:5 - "So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers."
 - 3. The ultimate aim is unity and maturity.
 - a. "Until all reach UNITY in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God." - Ephesians 4:13.

Note: The focus of our unity is the Son of God -1 Corinthians 12:3; cf. Ephesians 1:9,10.
 - b. "Until we all ...become MATURE, attaining the full measure of perfection found in Christ." - Ephesians 4:13.

Note: The measure of our maturity is Christ.

4. The means is “speaking the truth in love” - Ephesians 4:15.

Note: There must be truth spoken and love demonstrated if we are to “grow up”

Summary:

In addition to giving gifts to each Christian, God gives some persons to serve in the Body in a specialized or enabling capacity. These latter persons are to equip the saints in such a way that the Body of Christ increases qualitatively and quantitatively - Acts 16:5.

IV. The Sphere of Service of those in Specialized Functions.

A. *Old Testament:* The priest and the prophet were used by God as complementary influences. The Old Testament priesthood was a hierarchical structure. The priests assisted the people in their service to God. But God regularly introduced prophets; usually from outside the structure. Their ministries were directed at specific needs or purposes.

Sometimes, as the priest led the people into disobedience, God would send a prophet to bring them back. Sometimes it worked the other way. If the prophet strayed, God would raise up a faithful priest. Example - Ezra.

B. *New Testament:* some of the specialized functions exercised in the New Testament church were of a local nature, others were mobile.

1. Some primarily “local”: Local congregations were led by men who usually emerged from their own ranks. Those functioning on the local level were foundational to the congregation.

2. Some primarily “mobile”: Mobile men had two basic tasks. They established the Gospel in new areas and they amended what was lacking in existing congregations - Titus 1:5. The primary range of concern and involvement of the mobile person extended beyond the perimeters of a local congregation - Romans 15:19-23.

a. The mobile specialists in the New Testament...

- Moved about as individual missionaries. Mobile men from 14 congregations can be identified in the New Testament - Philippians 2:25; 2 Timothy 4:9-12.

- Moved about as missionary teams - Acts 20:4. Eleven identifiable teams in Acts (Note 2). These were a distinct manifestation of the Body, separate from the local.

b. The local congregations were encouraged to welcome legitimate mobile people, while being alert to false prophets - 3 John 5-10; 2 Corinthians 11:4.

c. They themselves were identified with local congregations and, in some cases, set apart by them - Acts 13:1-3; 2 Corinthians 8:23.

V. Structured Specialized Groups and Local Congregations

A. The existence of persons with specialized functions has led to forming specialized groups, fellowships, societies and organizations.

Although the material we have used from the New Testament in the previous section is historical in nature and not commanded, a similar pattern of specialized groups has been in evidence ever since. Their primary contributions have been:

- The preservation and dissemination of the Bible
- Evangelism and missions
- Producing leaders

B. A dynamic relationship between the two structures, the specialized groups and the local congregations, is necessary to the equilibrium and effectiveness of each. Where this is achieved, Christianity enjoys its greatest expansion. (Note 3)

C. The ministry of those in specialized groups is, by nature, limited but essential.

1. Limited: 2 Corinthians 10:13; 1 Corinthians 3:5-15.

2. Essential: Both local and mobile functions are necessary and must be working in tandem if there is to be an aggressive expansion of Christianity with an accompanying mechanism to conserve it. One is incomplete without the other. Interdependence is mandatory for the effectiveness of the parts.

Illustrations: Acts 6:7; Acts 12:24,25; Acts 16:5. Philippians 1:14.

3. They exist to serve - 2 Corinthians 4:5; 1 Corinthians 3:21-23.

D. In the New Testament; the two structures - the specialized groups and the local congregations - maintained a voluntary accountability to one another.

1. Paul and Barnabas were doubly sent. They were appointed by the Holy Spirit and they were set apart by the local congregation - Acts 13:1-3. When

conflict arose, they settled it in Jerusalem (Acts 15:6) and reported the results first to Antioch - Acts 15:30-35.

2. Some mobile men were described as “representatives of the churches” - 2 Corinthians 8:23.

3. Epaphroditus - Philippians 2:25 - “... your messenger, whom you sent ...”

4. Paul sought the counsel of men in local leadership - Galatians 2:1,2.

VI. The Navigators differ from Local Churches in Intent, Function & Form.

A. As to Intent:

- The ministry of the local church is intended to be pastoral and permanent.
- The ministry of The Navigators is intended to be missionary and transitional.

B. As to Function:

- The local church has a broad spectrum of ministry, and consequently a broad range of functions.
- The Navigators have a narrow spectrum of ministry -exercising the functions that fall within the sphere of their specialized calling.

C. As to Form:

- The local church is in the form of a broad, structured fellowship - Acts 2:44-46.
- The Navigators take the form of a specialized society -2 Timothy 4:9-12. (Note 4)

VII. Assumptions for The Navigators.

A. There is biblical precedent for gifted and called specialists to serve in mobile, as well as in local, capacities.

B. Such specialists are essential but must operate within limits.

C. There is precedent (though not a command) for such specialists to form themselves into groups to help extend the Kingdom and build up the Body.

D. They must maintain a proper, balanced relationship to local congregations (see Relating).

E. They must take care not to abandon their specialized calling.

F. Their leaders should be gifted and called.

G. Therefore, The Navigators are not a gap organization functioning until the gap is closed. Nor are we “para-Church”, i.e., alongside the Body of Christ. We are para-local-church with a biblically legitimate precedent. We are a part of the Church, God's redemptive structure, just as local congregations are.