



Mosaic Church of Central Arkansas

Passion. Prayer. Peace.

The Passions That Drive Us
Building a Holy Temple: Why the Church?

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Last week, we discussed Passion #1

1. A passion to see diverse believers walk, work and worship God together as one in and through the local church.

2. But why this passion?

This morning, Passions #2 and #3

1. A passion to see those separated from Christ come to know Him as we do.

2. A passion to see the disenfranchised reconnect to Christ and to local church fellowship.

Now, you'll recall that we talked about these passions in December, when we challenged you with a renewed commitment to evangelism and to extending the love and hope of Christ to others in this New Year. And we put together a few tools just to jumpstart the effort ...

1. Who's in your empty chair?
2. A class on *Becoming a Contagious Christian* (beginning February 3)
3. Invitation cards
4. Mosaic decals

And so this morning, having discussed Passions #2 and #3 last month, I want simply to discuss the Church, itself, to which these passions are directly tied.

Now a week or so ago, I mentioned that in these days, many evangelicals speak judgmentally about the church and the role it plays in their lives. In fact, judging by books and blogs it seems that it's become quite fashionable to do so.

Remember a movie called *Reality Bites*? Today, there seems to be an underlying attitude among some that *Church Bites*! And given some of the prevailing attitudes re. church, it's easy to see why. Take a look at the *Me Church* video ...

Tony Campolo writes ...

(http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/article_print.html?id=44495)

Young people often tell me that they are wary of the institutional church because they believe it is filled with hypocrites. Well, it is. What these people fail to understand, however, is that it is because the church is filled

with hypocrites that they'll be right at home in it. If they don't think their own lives are filled with hypocrisies, then they are blind to the truth. We in the church had no bones about it. We acknowledge our hypocrisy. We believe that everyone is a hypocrite, if by "hypocrite" we mean someone who does not live up to his or her declared ideals and does not practice what he or she preaches. Most of us in the church recognize that we fall short of our goals, but we acknowledge our shortcomings and have come together to help one another overcome our failures. As the old saying goes, "We're not what we ought to be, but then we're not what we used to be." The apostle Paul spoke for all of us in Philippians 3:13-14 when he acknowledged that he wasn't perfect but was still striving to become what God wanted him to be. I guess what I'm trying to tell you is the same thing I'd tell anyone else: if you ever find the perfect church, don't join it—because your joining will ruin it!

Well, with such things in mind,

1. Some today are attempting to redefine the church. For instance,

- a. A group of men who meet in a bar after work to talk about living deeper, more surrendered lives in which they take time to pray for their families and invite their non-believing friends to share a meal and the gospel would be church.
- b. A group of mothers invites other mothers to a park after school and builds relationships with them and their kids, hoping to share Jesus with them. They also meet to pray for each other, listen to struggles, cry together and recommit to the goal of living for Jesus and reaching every mother at that school. That is church.

Great heart and passion to be sure - models of healthy small groups, yes - but not, as we'll see in a moment, a church.

2. On the other hand, some, thankfully, are rediscovering the church

Recovery movement as good example of this; Mike Montgomery

3. And still others, like us, are seeking to reform the church

i.e., calling the church back to its NT vision and purpose

In fact, it is in the NT, that we see the intention of Christ to win the world to Himself ***through the collective effort of individuals who had come to believe in Him by faith and walk together as one, i.e., through the Church.***

1. John 17:20-23

"May they all be one so the world would know You're love and believe ..."

2. Matthew 28:19, 20

"Go into all the world and make disciples of all men ..."

3. Acts 1:4, 8

"And gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for what the Father had promised, namely the Holy Spirit ... And you (plural) will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you (plural) and you (plural) shall be my witnesses ..."

And, again, this gathering together of individual believers for the common purpose of evangelism and discipleship is specifically called in the NT, a church.

1. The word church comes from the Greek term, ***Ecclesia***, which in ancient Greece literally meant a general “gathering” of citizens or more specifically, a called-out or summoned assembly.
2. And what we find is that the NT writers commandeered this Greek word and applied it specifically to those who had been summoned by Christ to walk in faith.

Biblically speaking, then, the Church is comprised of ...

1. Men and women who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, (the saints, or, holy ones, i.e. those set apart) who together with those in every place, as I Corinthians 1:2 states, call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.
2. A specific gathering of those who have come to trust in Christ by faith for abundant and eternal life.
3. A specific gathering of those who are enrolled in heaven (Heb 12:23).

Now it is important to recognize that the Church is at once a ...

1. Universal reality (Acts 9:31)

What I typically describe as the capital “C” Church

2. A local reality (Jerusalem, Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, etc.)

Therefore, we speak of “the local church”

3. An eternal reality

All believers past, present and future one day to be revealed in heaven

- a. Indeed, the church is something to which you belong (Acts 12:1)
- b. Something you can be outside of (I Tim 3:7), and
- c. And the word church describes a distinct people group of this world; and so Paul writes in I Corinthians 10:32, “Give no offense to the Jews, Greeks or the church of God.”

And it is equally important to recognize that the church was first established, is being built by and belongs eternally to Christ.

1. “Upon this rock I will build ***My church*** ...” (Matthew 16:18)
2. In his farewell address to the Ephesian elders, Paul charges them to “shepherd the church of God since ***it was purchased by the blood of Christ*** (Acts 20:28)
3. And in other passages we learn that God gave ***Christ as a gift to the church***, and that ***Christ is its*** head and its ***Savior*** (Ephesians 1:22; 5:23; Colossians 1:18).

Now with reference to the local church, there are at least seven things that together that the saints receive or do via involvement; for instance, through the church, the saints receive ...

1. Teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, prayer and worship (Acts 2:42, 47; 11:26; 12:5)
2. Spiritual discipline and accountability (Matthew 18:17)

3. Guidance from recognized leaders (specifically elders) whose authority comes from the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:1; Acts 14:23; 15:4; Acts 20:28; I Timothy 3:5; James 5:14).

Which is why the examples above do not meet the NT definition of church.

Indeed, As Paul says to the Ephesian elders,

***“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock
of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.”***

Acts 20:28

4. Together, the church sends missionaries to the world (Acts 13:1; 15:3)
5. The church is served by others operating in their gifting – Phoebe (Romans 16:1), Paul, et al.
6. It is the pillar and support of truth (I Timothy 3:15)
7. All together then, it is the church through which the ***manifold wisdom*** of God is ***displayed*** to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places (Ephesians 3:10).
 - a. The church: Diverse people overcoming hatred inspired by Satan to love God and one another.
 - b. The church: a mystery hidden for ages but revealed to the apostles and holy prophets (Ephesians 3:1-6).

And in the NT, the Church is further described as ...

1. A **Building or Holy Temple (Ephesians 2:19-22)** **READ**

“... in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.”

2. The **Household of God** (Ephesians 2:19; I Timothy 3:15)
3. The **Body of Christ** – Colossians 1:24

And in that sense, Paul teaches that the varying gifts of its members are to be used for the edification of the church (Ephesians 4:4; Romans 12:4ff.; I Corinthians 12:7ff.; 14:11,12)

4. And finally, the church is also described at times as the **Bride of Christ** based on a simile in Ephesians where Paul equates the love of a husband for his wife with Christ’s love for the church.
 - a. i.e., “Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.” (Ephesians 5:23-32)
 - b. No one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it as Christ nourishes and cherishes the church (Ephesians 5:29) – so, in other words, Christ does not hate the church.
 - c. Also, this simile is seen in II Corinthians 11:2
 - d. Revelation 19:7-9 also may contribute to this understanding, i.e., the marriage supper of the Lamb.

For all these reasons, it is not only unbiblical, but spiritually naïve to boast a “take it or leave it” attitude toward the Church (whether universal or local), an

organization and an organism brought to life and loved by none other than our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Having said that, I do understand the breakdown of respect for institutions of family, government and church that has occurred over the past fifty years in North America. For instance, in the ...

60s – A general breakdown of respect for authority (families, government, institutions)

70s – Family (divorce rate climbs) and Government (Nixon) fails

80s – Protestant Church failures (TV evangelist scandals)

90s – Catholic failures (child abuse)

00s – All of this, then, has contributed to this “take it or leave it” attitude in our day, w/ many believers today attending church only 2x a month on the average.

So, yes, given our history, such attitudes and misgivings about the institution of the Church is today understandable. Yet, we must be clear that while the church is not perfect, it is (as Augustine one said), our mother. ***No the Church is not perfect, but it is not optional.***

Beyond this, it is critical to understand that the Church must not be informed by culture, but rather, the Church is to inform culture. And this we can do when we are of one mind concerning our commitment to the local church and our collective potential to do great and mighty things together for God.

Now, to be clear, mere church attendance on Sunday mornings does not guarantee a vibrant walk with God, but it does tend to validate it. In fact, a recent study found that the more people participate in church activities, the more likely they are to serve, evangelize and tithe, etc.

But higher levels of activity do not necessarily translate into a deeper, growing and more passionate love relationship with Christ and others. This, studies suggest, is achieved beyond the corporate gathering, first via ...

1. Small group involvement; typically
2. Leading to more faithfulness and accountability; then
3. To individuals taking personal responsibility their own faith and growth, i.e., increased practice of spiritual disciplines;
4. Whereby they soon discover their unique design and place in the Kingdom; and finally, are driven by
5. A desire to put the needs of others above your own and to serve them sacrificially in the name of Christ in or/in partnership with the people of God, the local church.

And within a local church, it's when enough of God's children arrive at this point that collective visions and dreams, inspired by faith, hope and love, can become reality.

Again, Campolo writes ...

(http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/article_print.html?id=44495)

In spite of all its flaws and shortcomings, I still believe that the church is filled, for the most part, with decent and caring people who will be there when you need them. The loving fellowship that the church often provides is exemplified in a story that a Presbyterian pastor once told me about his early days of ministry at a small country church. One day, a young woman came to the church to present her child for baptism. She had given birth to the child out of wedlock; in a small rural community, a woman who has done this can easily find herself shunned. The day of the baptism, the woman stood alone before the congregation, holding her child in her arms. The pastor hadn't recognized the awkwardness of the situation until he asked, as is customary in a baptismal service, "Who stands with this child to assure the commitments and promises herewith made will be carried out? Who will be there for this child in times of need and assure that this child is brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?" At that moment, he realized that there was no godmother or godfather on hand to answer the question. But, as though on cue, the entire congregation stood and with one voice said, "We will!"

Those who think that church people are all bad should have been around on that Sunday, when they would have had a chance to see the church at its best. They would have seen the church as a nurturing community. That kind of church is worth your time.

And that's the kind of church we want to be here at Mosaic.

Let's pray ...