

The Blueprint What We Believe and Why The Church

Introduction: Long ago, in a perfect garden, a man and a woman, the first man and woman, sided with the rationality of a serpent to eat the forbidden fruit that would unleash knowledge that they were led to believe would add wisdom and depth to their lives. Tragically, however, the knowledge it unleashed was an eternal existence that mankind has been condemned to live in ever since. Eating that fruit was blatant rebellion against the authority of God because He had made it unmistakably clear that they were free to eat any fruit in the Garden except that fruit. God even told them what would happen if they disobeyed Him:

16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." (Genesis 2:16-17)

The death that occurred that dark and terrible day was a death Adam and Eve created for themselves and all of mankind. When they bit into that fruit, their hearts didn't stop beating, but, worse, their soul did. The soul of Adam and Eve gained an experience, but to their surprise, it wasn't glorious at all. Instead, it was dark, heavy, and lonely. They felt ashamed of who they were and covered themselves with clothes made of fig leaves. They even found themselves afraid to face God. Instead of running to greet Him as they heard Him walking through the Garden, they ran and hid. The separation of sin had already taken hold, but the dreadful reality of its consequences had only just begun.

As we have spoken about frequently in this series, God then condemned mankind to the reality that man's sin created for himself. Mankind was cast out of the Garden built by God to experience perfect fellowship with Him and each other. Mankind even lost the ability to be in fellowship with himself, something that would bear the terrible fruit of physical death and the complete separation of body from soul.

But in the tsunami of the judgment Adam brought on himself and all who came after him, there was a promise of hope. God said to Satan, the one who had appeared to Adam and Eve as a serpent, the one who would now influence all of the creation,

15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." (Genesis 3:15, NIV)

It was a prophecy of a Savior who would crush the head of the one mankind had surrendered his allegiance to and, in so doing, break the curse that separated man from God, himself, and one another! Later in Genesis, we learn something else about this Savior that was to come,

3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Genesis 12:3)

In speaking to Abraham, God promised to form a great nation out of his descendants, a nation that would produce one who would not only be a blessing to the physical descendants of Abraham but also to every ethnic group on the planet. There would be a true uniting of the people who, because of their sinful nature, could never experience the unity of being a true family. The reality of sin that separated man from God also separated man from one another, so much so that there is no peace on earth. There is no peace between men because there is no peace within man!

As the centuries passed, God continued to reveal more and more about His plan concerning the one who would come from Abraham and bless all the people groups of the earth, the one who would redeem man from the curse mankind had brought on himself. For instance, Isaiah, in speaking of the one God promised, wrote,

14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14)

Of this child, Isaiah also said,

6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

But to the shock of Isaiah's readers, as they continued reading, they would find out how this Promised One would bring about peace. He wrote,

5 But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5)

God then used other prophets to point to this New Covenant of peace that would be justly established through the death, burial, and resurrection of the Promised One, The One who would atone for our sin and redeem us from its curse. For instance, Jeremiah declared,

31 "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. 33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the

**LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."
(Jeremiah 31:33-34)**

Similarly, God proclaimed this through the prophet Ezekiel,

19 And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, 20 that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. (Ezekiel 11:19-20)

However, in the following centuries, the promised New Covenant grew increasingly distant to those who had received its declaration. The understanding of its purpose moved from the peace it would bring between God and His people, the peace it would bring between His people, and the peace it would bring within each of His people, to being totally misunderstood as a promise of God to free the Jews from the rule of the Romans. But nonetheless, after hundreds of years of silence from God, this happened,

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" 29 But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. 30 And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." 34 And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" 35 And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy--the Son of God. (Luke 1:26-35)

To the one who would be her husband, God said,

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. 20 But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:18-21)

The domino had been flipped, unleashing an unstoppable God-ordained plan to rescue people from every tribe and tongue on the earth from the curse that separated them from God, one another, and themselves. God was going to create a family for Himself, a family

that would live in fellowship with Him and one another forever. This family would know nothing but the peace of an eternal existence removed from the curse of sin that leaves humanity incapable of peace.

As one promised domino hit another, a day came when Jesus said something to one of His disciples in front of all the other disciples that likely left them all scratching their heads,

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" 14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:13-18)

What in the world did that mean? It clearly didn't mean Peter would become the supreme leader of Christ's church because neither Peter nor anybody else other than Christ Himself will ever have that singular authoritative role. Therefore, the claim of the Roman Catholic Church that the Pope has somehow inherited a seat of authority from Peter is a totally false claim right from the very start. It requires a significant twisting and contortion of not only the Scripture but also of history itself. It is clear that no such seat of authority ever existed in the early church; thus, it's impossible that Peter ever sat on it!

So what did happen? How did Christ use Peter in the creation of His Church? Well, after Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, Christ's followers did what He told them to do. They gathered, prayed, and waited for the power that was going to come. As we read last week, before Jesus ascended into heaven, he said some very straightforward things to them. In the Book of Acts, we read,

4 And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." ... 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:4-8)

So they waited. As they did, they selected Mathias to replace Judas as one of the twelve Apostles charged with officially and authoritatively testifying to Christ's resurrection and teachings. Then, they continued to wait.

The twelve disciples, as well as the other disciples of Christ who had remained in Jerusalem after His death and resurrection, gathered every day to fellowship with one another, pray, and wait for what Jesus said would be the obvious sign to start the work He had commissioned them to do—making disciples of every ethnic group on the planet. Fifty days after the day after Passover, when the first fruits of the harvest were offered to God, a

celebration took place to end the harvest season. It was called the Feast of Pentecost, and it was the day the Church of Jesus Christ was born into this world! The Book of Acts states,

1 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. **2** And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. **3** And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. **4** And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. **5** Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. **6** And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. **7** And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? **8** And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? **9** Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, **10** Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, **11** both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians--we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." **12** And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" **13** But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine." **14** But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. **15** For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. **16** But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: **17** "'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; **18** even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. **19** And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; **20** the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. **21** And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'" **22** "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know--**23** this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. **24** God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. **25** For David says concerning him, "'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; **26** therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. **27** For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. **28** You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'" **29** "Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. **30** Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, **31** he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. **32** This Jesus God raised up, and of that we

all are witnesses. 33 Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. 34 For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, "'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, 35 until I make your enemies your footstool.' 36 Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." 37 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" 38 And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." 40 And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." 41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:1-41)

God had just used Peter to start His Church! Peter, just as he had done that day in Caesarea, just as Christ prophesied He would do again in a much more significant way, proclaimed the very Truth that is the Rock that Christ builds His Church on—The Gospel! Peter isn't the Rock, but rather the Gospel Peter proclaimed that day, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that is, the Good News of who Jesus is, what He has done, is doing, and will do to rescue His people from the curse of sin and bring them the peace of perfect fellowship with God, themselves and one another is that Rock!

When he was done presenting that Rock of Truth, three thousand people were baptized to testify to the world that they had surrendered their lives to Jesus Christ! But this experience wasn't a one-and-done thing for them to return to wherever they lived and do life as they always had done! Instead, they had literally just been saved from the curse of sin that left them separated from God, themselves, and one another, to now be sons and daughters of God—a family! This family, which Jesus said would consist of people from every tribe and tongue, had literally just started that way in Jerusalem. Jews and proselytes from all over the world, who spoke all kinds of different languages, would gather in Jerusalem for Pentecost! Many of them had likely been there since arriving for the Passover, and now 3,000 of them had just repented and believed in the Jesus who had been crucified the day before the Passover and rose from the grave the day after—on the third day.

What they had in common was now SO much bigger than what had originally brought them to Jerusalem. They had been there worshipping God for freeing their ancestors from slavery in Egypt and establishing them as a nation, but now they were there praising God for freeing them from slavery to sin and forming them into a people who had something much more important in common with one another; something, more correctly someone, who unified them as a people with a far greater bond and commonality than a Covenant made with Moses at Mount Siani. They were now filled with the Holy Spirit of God! Nobody else on the planet had what and Who they had! Nobody else on the planet had been freed from the curse of separation from God and regenerated to be adopted as God's fully favored sons

and daughters! They were now a very different family, not bound together by genetics and religious tradition but by Christ's blood and the Holy Spirit! Later, Peter described this new family this way,

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10)

So, what did this new family do next? After that kind of start, what do you do on the second day of your existence? Well, the Bible says,

42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

In other words, they were doing exactly what Jesus commanded them to do in Mathew 28 ... well, sort of. They were undoubtedly making disciples with a massive effort to lead more and more people to become disciples of Christ and join the family, but as you continue to read the book of Acts, that effort stayed in Jerusalem even though Jesus had made it clear His church, the family He died to create, was intended to spread all over the world by making disciples of every ethnic group on the planet!

Meanwhile, despite the euphoria that initially existed on the day of Pentecost, the religious leaders who had despised and hated Jesus so profoundly that they arranged for His death were still very much in charge of Jerusalem—they hadn't gone anywhere! So, to no surprise, these leaders began to organize a serious response to squash the church's growth in Jerusalem. A man named Saul rose up as one of the key leaders of their effort, and he even helped organize the killing of one of the faithful servants and proclaimers of the Gospel of Jesus. His name was Stephen, and at his death, the believers in Jerusalem came to the full realization that their identity as followers of Christ threatened everything the Jewish leaders were about, so much so that the Jewish leaders were going to try and kill them to protect it!

As such, many of them returned to the cities and towns from which they had originated, but they carried with them this Gospel message they had learned about in Jerusalem. They took with them this newfound identity as adopted children of God who had been freed from the curse of sin and were awaiting His return to establish a new heaven and earth for them to dwell in perfect unity with God and one another as His people forever.

Interestingly, the man named Saul, whom the Jewish leaders commissioned to lead the effort to destroy the movement of the gospel of Jesus Christ, eventually met the risen Savior and repented and believed in Him. This religious zealot and hitman became a new creation in Christ and, as such, carried with him a new name and mission. Instead of going out to find Jews, who were proclaiming the gospel to other Jews, this man, Saul, became Paul and spent the rest of his life bringing the gospel not only to Jews in synagogues around the world but, more noticeably, to non-Jews.

Paul traveled all over the Roman empire, spreading the good news of Jesus Christ and thus creating a local gathering of this new and exclusive family in every city and town he entered. Just as Jesus promised, the proclamation of His Gospel would do; it led people from every ethnic group to repent and believe in Him. Whether they were Jewish or not, the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ created a people who now had a common identity that was more significant than their forefathers because now they shared an identity as sons and daughters of The Creator of the universe! Bigger than any ethnic tradition or religious ceremony that brought people together, they now came together as those who had been rescued from the slave master of sin, adopted as fully favored sons and daughters of God, and filled with the Holy Spirit of God so that they could live in fellowship with Him, one another and themselves for the rest of eternity! They now had citizenship bigger than their Roman citizenship or any other earthly citizenship they carried; they were now citizens of the Kingdom of God and not just any ordinary citizens, but they were the fully favored sons and daughters of the King of the Kingdom—Yahweh!

This is the CHURCH! The CHURCH is the family of God who have been rescued from the curse of sin that left them separated forever, that left them slaves to sin and Satan with no inheritance but an eternity without God and His love. The Church is the people Christ is returning for at His second coming. The Church is the people whose glory is bigger than any achievement possible by man, no matter how powerful that man may be. The achievement that brings us glory is the accomplishment of the Godman Jesus Christ, who conquered death and rescued us from its curse! Throughout history, men have constantly conquered other men, but no man has conquered death, much less rescued anyone from it! However, Christ has forever rescued all in Him from the terrible curse that started in the garden. Jesus has crushed the head of Satan and freed all who are in Him from sin and Satan's power and, one day, even from sin and Satan's influence.

So, as depraved and divided the history of the church has been, it is nonetheless still the people who belong to God. As flawed as we are, we are a family that is immeasurably unlike any family in the world because we, who are from every background possible, have been brought together by The One who is not of this world—the person of Jesus Christ! If you have repented and believed in Jesus, you will never be alone, not only in the fact that Christ will never leave you but also in that you are one with all who are in Christ! The Bible says,

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)

So, in all the things flawed human beings have done to weaken the testimony of this family in a lost and depraved world, the fact remains that we who are in Christ are still the family of God. As any loving father does, no matter what, He is still proud of His family, and He is coming back to finish what He started for His family!! As the Bible says,

6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:6)

Therefore, as important as the Church is, let me conclude this message by quickly summarizing what I believe the Bible teaches about the Church and what it means for us to exist together as His family as we wait for His return.

Proposition: The following are four very clear and obvious teachings in the Bible about the family of God—The Church!

The first clear and obvious teaching in the Bible about the Church you need to know is that,

- (1) The Head of the Church is Christ alone, and all who have been born again and adopted into the household of God through Christ's death and resurrection are equally a part of it.**
 - A. 2 To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: (1 Corinthians 1:2)**
 - B. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. 21 And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 22 he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, 23 if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister. (Colossians 1:18-23)**

The second clear and obvious teaching in the Bible about the Church you need to know is that,

- (2) The Church practically exists as local autonomous gatherings shepherded by local pastors (also identified in the Bible as elders, overseers, and bishops) charged with equipping it to function as Christ's family. They do this by ensuring all in the church rightly understand, uncompromisingly cling to, and**

faithfully carry out Christ's teachings, commandments, and mission as definitively and authoritatively declared by the Apostles and exclusively revealed in the 66 books of the Old and New Testament.

- A. As I previously stated, nowhere in the Bible is a person charged with being the head of the church other than the person of Jesus Christ! As such, every church in the New Testament functioned autonomously from the others while being united under the singular authority of Christ. The Apostles' authority was to authoritatively declare what was true and not true about the Gospel. Their definitive and authoritative declaration of what Jesus taught was given to us in the form of the New Testament, and it definitively and authoritatively explains the meaning and fulfillment of all that was taught and prophesied in the Old Testament. Therefore, all 66 Books of the Bible serve as the definitive authority on who God is, who we are, and how we are to live as His people. It's why Paul wrote,
- B. **19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. (Ephesians 2:19-20)**
- C. In speaking of the apostles and prophets as the foundation, the Apostle Paul was linking together the teachings of the Old Testament about Christ and the New Covenant that Christ would make with His blood to be that which the Apostles authoritatively proclaimed to be the Gospel. Therefore, all 66 books of the Bible stand as the definitive and authoritative Word of God over the Church. The Gospel preached by the Apostles was so definitive that the Bible states,
- D. **3 If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, 4 he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, 5 and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. (1 Timothy 6:3-5)**
- E. Therefore, it's to no surprise then, in speaking to the Elders charged with overseeing and leading the followers of Christ in the city of Ephesus, Paul commanded them to,
- F. **28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. 29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three**

years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears. 32 And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. (Acts 20:28-32)

- G. It was the Word of God as spoken by the Old Testament Prophets as well as preached by the Apostles and written in what we now call the New Testament that the elders of local churches were to be under and used by them to govern, teach, mature, and lead God's people to be under the Lordship of Christ. The Bible says,
- H. **16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work. (1 Timothy 3:16-17)**
- I. **12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)**
- J. Peter gave the leaders of local churches insight on how to do their job. He wrote,
- K. **1 So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: 2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (1 Peter 5:1-4)**
- L. However, in doing their job, the Elders of a local church are not the only ones called to do stuff in the church! This leads us to,

The third clear and obvious teaching in the Bible about the Church you need to know is that,

(3) All in a local church are to labor together as one body where each person uses their unique gifts in harmony with everyone else's to ensure everyone is physically and emotionally cared for, maturing in their faith, producing the fruit of the Spirit, making disciples of the lost in their community, and participating in the effort to extend the Gospel to every nation on the earth.

- A. **4 For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. (Romans 12:4-5)**

- B. 4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. (1 Corinthians 12:4-7)**
- C. 11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Ephesians 4:11-16)**
- D. I read this next verse to you earlier but for a different purpose. Previously, I read it for you to see how unique the church is, but now I want you to notice the unique purpose we have as God's unique people,**
- E. 9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9)**
- F. Jesus said it this way,**
- G. 14 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16)**
- H. The point is that everyone in the family has a role in helping others mature in the faith and navigate life's adversities and trials. We should also invite those who are not followers of Jesus to repent, believe in Him, and join the family!**
- I. However, for pastors to effectively equip their local church to follow Jesus and labor together in His work, the people in that local church must also be committed to some things!**

This leads to the fourth clear and obvious teaching in the Bible about the Church you need to know,

- (4) Christians are not to forsake the routine gathering of their local church to be strengthened and encouraged by the preaching and singing of God's Word and the Gospel it's about. They are all to be committed to nurturing genuine relationships with others in their local church that inspire each other in faith and life through intentional, practical efforts such as gathering together in each other's homes for table fellowship, discussing the Gospel and its application to themselves with each other, and praying together.
- A. 42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:42)
 - B. 4 For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. 9 Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. 10 Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. 11 Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. (Romans 12:4-13)
 - C. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 5:18-21)
 - D. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:23-25)

So, with that, the challenge shouldn't be surprising!

Challenge: How are you treating your eternal family, that is, how well are you building relationships with others in your local church to help each other live life, grow in Christ, and engage those far from God with the Gospel of Jesus Christ to know and follow Him?

Too many Christians act like those entitled family members who constantly demand love from the family but never seem to actually do for others what they continually demand from others.

Too many Christians act like those family members who, with gratitude, show up every now and then to family functions but are never willing to truly be a part of anybody's life in the family, much less be a part of the effort of the family!

So, what kind of family member are you? An entitled brat who demands love, a distant relative who pops in here and there but has no intention of being a part of the family, or one who understands just how incredible it is to be in the family of God and thus prioritizes life in the family and the mission of the family with their time, talent and treasure. What does your calendar, the use of your skills and abilities, and your bank accounts say about your involvement with the family you've been made to be a part of through the precious blood of Christ?