

Basic Christianity

Part 6 – The Church (Pt 2)

Life is all about perspective – it’s all about the way you look at things.

We’re continuing to talk about the church – and the way you look at the church can have a profound effect on the church itself, and on you personally.

Previously, we saw that the church is not just a building, or a religious body, or a bunch of meetings.

We saw that if our membership of the universal church has any practical meaning, it must be expressed in a commitment to the local church.

We saw that the local church is the centre of God’s plan and purpose.

And that the Bible uses different paradigms / patterns for the church which we can learn from.

God’s house – the importance of finding our place.

The Body of Christ – the importance of interdependence.

Today, we’re continuing to look at some Bible paradigms of the church.

3. The Church as God’s Army.

Phil 2:25 Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow **soldier** ...

Philemon 1:2 to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow **soldier** ...

The church is God’s army.

Jesus is our Commander-in-Chief and individually we are His soldiers.

We learn some important things from an army.

First, we learn about **unity of purpose**.

What could an army possibly achieve if it is indecisive?

God wants a united people.

Ps 133:1-3 Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! (2) ... (3) It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; for there the LORD commanded the blessing; life forevermore.

The second thing we learn from the army is **discipline**.

A soldier needs discipline to stick with it when things get tough.

2 Tim 2:3-4 You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. (4) No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.

The third thing we learn from the army is **commitment**.

One Sunday, a 2,000 member church was surprised to see two men enter, both covered from head to toe in black and carrying sub-machine guns. One man said, “Anyone willing to take a bullet for Christ stay where you are.” Immediately, the choir fled, the deacons fled, most of the congregation fled. Out of 2,000 there only around 20 left. The man who had spoken took off his hood, looked at the preacher and said, “Okay Pastor, I got rid of all the hypocrites. Now you may begin your service. Have a nice day!” And the two men turned and walked out.

No army can achieve anything worthwhile if they aren't dedicated to implementing the goal with 100% commitment.

I want to look at the various levels of commitment in church life.

5 Circles of Commitment¹ OHT

Imagine five circles represent varying levels of commitment.

The outer one is the community, next the crowd, then the congregation, after that the committed, and finally the core.

Every congregation will be impacted by these five levels of community.

1. The Community

At the outside is the Community which consists of the unbelievers in our general area – the people we want to reach for Christ.

They don't have any commitment to Christ.

2. The Crowd

The Crowd – everyone who worships here, including irregular attenders.

Jesus had experience with the Crowd.

They followed Him when convenient, if they got what they wanted.

And when it wasn't convenient, when it got tough, they just disappeared.

The Crowd sometimes turn up, sometimes they don't.

If there's a better offer, or if they don't feel like coming, they'll do something else.

3. The Congregation

The Congregation consists of those who are regular attenders.

They're not just casual attenders, they don't just believe, they feel they belong.

4. The Committed

These people are serious about their faith, serious about personal growth.

They are involved in a small group.

They can be lovingly corrected and not get upset and leave the church.

They care about this church – the people here, our goals, our growth, our success.

They are the givers – they've taken up the challenge to support their **own** church financially.

The committed want to see their church succeed in every area – including its finances.

The Committed are maturing in their faith.

5. The Core

The Core is the smallest group in most churches.

Because "it represents the deepest level of commitment. They are the dedicated minority of workers and leaders."²

They are dedicated to serving the church, ministering to the church.

These are the lay ministers.

Don't be mistaken about that term – it's not referring to preachers.

If you have an active area of service – preaching, administration, leader, musician, set-up etc – and you are accountable, you are a lay minister.

The purpose of the lay ministry is **service** – an area of service for which they are willing to take responsibility and be accountable.

That's not just someone who pitches in every so often.

These are people who are dedicated to a task – you know it's going to get done, because they'll do it.

And if something comes up and they can't do it, they organise someone else to fill in.

Without the lay ministry the entire church would come to a grinding halt.

If they don't turn up at a service, or fulfil their ministry, people notice.

Everything that happens in a church, happens because of them.

They're pressing their lives into God, instead of trying to budget God into their lives.

The only reason I can do the simplest of tasks, like picking up a pen, is that I can rely on my hand to be in the right place at the right time.

ILLUS – Jesus received varying levels of commitment from those around Him. The Jewish nation, the multitudes who followed Him, the 70 He sent out to preach and heal (Luke 10:1-17), the 12, out of the 12, the 3 – Peter, James & John, out of the 3 the disciple Jesus loved.

Where do you fit into these levels of commitment?

Community, Crowd, Congregation, Committed, Core?

Whatever level you are currently on, you need to be actively working towards being in the next level.

God's purpose is to take you from one level to the next.

This is growth.

But what needs to happen is for people to go from unbeliever to regular attender, gaining maturity, to lay ministry.

¹ This idea is adapted from Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Church* p 130

² Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Church* p 134