

RCF

Covenant Classes

Session 2

The Church

I. Introduction

- A. The primary instrument for the Kingdom of God to invade the earth is the church. The church is a multiplicity of military outposts that are forcefully taking the Kingdom to all the earth (Matt. 11:12; 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-20).
- B. It is important for believers to have a clear understanding of purpose and pattern of the church based upon New Testament guidelines. The church should not embrace traditional religious expressions that do not reflect the Lord's commands and mandates for the church. Instead the church must embrace God's ways and build according to His principles. This is not an easy task in light of the fact that the people with which the church is to be built are sinful, self-centered and hard to get along with, but they are redeemed.
- C. The church must build based upon **relationship** and **purpose**. A church that is focused only on relationship will become a "bless me club" that offers little expression of the Kingdom outward and little health of believers inward. A church that focuses only on the purpose will lose the heart of the Lord that we are to love one another and be known by that love. Both relationship and purpose must be examined in understanding and building the church properly.

I. The Church: Universal and Local

D. The universal church (Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 10:17, 32; Eph. 1:22-23; Heb. 12:23).

- 1. The church universal includes all believers in every nation and generation. It is not limited by time or geographical location.
- 2. Believers today are members of the same church as Peter and Paul. It includes all the saints from every generation. The church universal includes every believer on earth and in heaven.
- 3. The church universal is vast in its scope and is difficult to grasp in its multi-functioning entirety except from a spiritual and eternal point of view.
- 4. The church universal is always referred to in the singular "**The**" church of God. In this sense, there is only one church and it

must never be viewed in the plural. There is no such thing as the universal churches of God.

5. There is not one denomination or structure that can claim to be the church universal. Such a position would be a supreme act of arrogance toward the church and the Lord.

E. The local church (1 Cor. 10:32; 12:23; Eph. 1:22; Eph. 3:10; 3:21; 5:23-32; Col. 1:18, 24).

1. The local church refers to true, regenerate believers that are joined together in a specific congregation or community of believers with the characteristics of a biblical local church. Any specific local church includes all true believers that have joined together under one purpose and leadership.
2. The local church is the practical arm of the Kingdom meant to implement the principles and purpose of the Kingdom to a certain gathering of believers.
3. By necessity the local church is confined to a specific area but may have governmental ties in a much larger area.
4. The New Testament pattern is that all believers in a city or region would be under one eldership. In today's factious church, there are usually many expressions of the local church in one area with different elderships for each of these local expressions. This tends toward viewing other local churches as competition rather than fellow laborers for a common purpose.
5. It is the desire of Richland Center Fellowship to see the various expressions of the believing local church work together toward a greater common purpose. We will work with other local churches in this area or other areas to advance the Kingdom (Rom. 15:5-7; Eph. 2:15, 21; Phil. 1:27; Tit. 1:5).

A. The head of the church

6. Jesus is the head of the church universal and the church local. It is important to remember that all true believers are to be serving Jesus as the head (Eph. 1:22; 5:23-25).
7. The universal church is singular, invisible and without limitation of time and location. Jesus began the church universal when he commissioned the apostles to go into all the world (Matt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15-20).
8. The local churches are plural and tangible and limited by time and location. Jesus commissions each local church with a specific purpose and identity and calls believers to join that local church so it can become an effective outpost to further the Kingdom on earth.
9. The majority of references to the church in the New Testament are in the context of the local church and its functioning.

II. The Anti-Organized Church Movement

- F. In many places, a movement has arisen against “organized religion” or “organized churches.” The people in this movement often speak of being “spiritual” but not “religious.” This seems to mean that they have rejected the concept of the local church as an organized entity with a common purpose and a specific leadership. This movement tends toward the “social gospel” of compassion ministry but has little effectiveness in carrying out purposeful acts that require resources beyond a few people or families.
- G. The “no organized religion” movement easily embraces the universal church because there is little required of them. They reject the local church because it requires their personal participation and submission. This allows these believers to remain in a rebellious condition without being challenged.
- H. The “no organized religion” movement is a reflection of a social trend that tends toward independence and isolation. As this independent trend has flooded over into the faith realm, people tend to want to embrace Jesus but reject His command to be involved in the local church. This is a similar condition to when the Israelites of the Old Testament had no king or judge so “each man did what was right in his own eyes.”
- I. While this movement may seem personally fulfilling, it is part of a rebellion against the Lord and it expresses no concern for the part that we have in functioning together in the body of Christ. The focus of this movement is self-comfort, not Kingdom building.
- J. A Barna survey released April 18, 2006, reveals some attitudes that have infiltrated the believing sector of America:
 - 1. Only 17% of believers think that being part of a local church is critical to their spiritual growth.
 - 2. Forty-five percent of Americans attend church during a typical weekend but only 18% believe that spiritual maturity requires being involved in a community of faith.
 - 3. Only one-third of all evangelicals believe that a person’s faith is meant to be developed mainly by involvement in a local church.
 - 4. Only twenty-five percent of adults who have a biblical worldview believe that the church is central in a person’s spiritual growth.
 - 5. Thirty percent of people under 40, 50% of baby boomers, and 60% of people over 60 feel they have a duty to personally make the world and other people’s lives better.
 - 6. When it comes to being committed to deepening their ties with God; 80% of blacks, 58% of Hispanics, 50% of whites, and 20% of Asians have this commitment.
 - 7. Barna states “most Christians in the U.S. do not see much value in communal faith experiences.”

- K. The anti-organized religion movement is unbiblical and is undermining the effectiveness of the church. There are many believers who now believe they do not need to be a part of a local church; therefore, the church is robbed of its effectiveness (1 Cor. 12:12-26; Heb. 10:25).

III. The Nature of the Local Church

- A. While anyone who has been regenerated by the Holy Spirit is a member of the universal church, most local churches have some membership requirements. Some churches require a specific statement of faith to which the new member must subscribe.
- L. Even those who are involved in a local church may become rebellious without much consequence. Believers can travel from one church to another without being held accountable for their rebellious ways.
- M. It is a biblical mandate to embrace people that want to become part of a local church and agree to the essential doctrines of the faith. Romans 14 demands a liberal attitude toward God's people in regard to the nonessential doctrines of Scripture. We must accept those whom Jesus accepts (Rom. 12:4-5; 15:7). However, the church is not to embrace the rebellious believer that rejects authority.
- N. Every person wanting to join a local church is to have three characteristics in that joining relationship.
 1. **Commitment** of our lives and resources to God, His people, the local church and the local church's purpose. This commitment is revealed in a deep level of heart joining, not just a relationship of convenience. We must be committed to each other in love and service if there is to be any meaningful building together in the body of Christ. Shallow commitments will produce an attitude of quitting when we don't like something or we get angry or offended. We must get beyond this to deeper levels of commitment if we are going to be usable vessels in the Kingdom. This commitment includes our time, our affections, our resources, our money and our lives (John 13:34; Acts 4:32; Romans 12:5; Gal. 3:28).
 2. **Accountability** to one another in our local fellowship must take place if we are going to grow deeper in God (Eph. 5:21). We must open up our lives and allow people to see how we live and what we believe. We must allow people to bring righteous correction into our lives and hold us up to the standards of the Lord. This requires each believer to be humble, open and correctable and it will allow others to speak truth, love and correction to us so we will continue to grow in the Lord and our relationship in the local church (Prov. 27:6).
 3. **Submission to authority** is one of the most difficult factors in becoming fully involved in the local church. In our day of

independence and disdain for authority, it is difficult to rightly relate to authority in the church. Delegated authority in the church is the authority of Jesus, even though the leaders are weak and imperfect. For any believer to be part of the church, he must be submitted to the delegated authority that Jesus has set in place. There can be no compromise on this issue even when authority is imperfect. One of the most harmful errors for any believer is to remove himself from authority without just cause. He immediately becomes a target of Satan and can easily fall into deception with no corrective measure available to guide him back to right relationship with the Lord and His body, the church. Those who reject authority are considered blots and blemishes on the Body of Christ that Jesus will remove. The bottom line is really if we can trust God to lead and correct those in authority (Heb. 13:7, 17; 1 Cor. 16:15-18; 1 Pet. 2:13; 2 Pet. 2:10, 13; Jude 1:2, 4, 8).

V. The Seven Facets of the Church

A. The church is a family. Eph. 3:14-15, Gal. 6:10.

1. God is a Father with a spiritual family. The love of a committed family will greatly impact the unbelievers around us. Such family love and unity are the Biblical norms for evangelism. John 13:35, 17:21
 - a. It is God's will that each believer is established together with other believers in deep and genuine love as a caring family with one heart and mind. Act 2:44-47, 4:32-35.
 - b. This involves an emphasis on friendship, fellowship and serving one another. Committed relationships with mutual transparency are one of the foundational building blocks of the church. One of the first steps to initiating relationships is the availability to serve the members of the body. Serving provides one of the most natural ways to develop new relationships. Prov. 3:3-4.

2. The impact of belonging to the family.
 - a. The loneliness and despair in the world today is a direct result of having no roots or no sense of true identity with other people.
 - b. Part of our identity is found in being practically joined to and functioning in His body.

- c. The joy and identity that comes with “belonging” is a universal need for all mankind. This belonging is not based on achieving but rather on receiving the free love of God.
 - d. The New Testament knows nothing of isolated and independent believers. Rather, all are commanded to assemble regularly with the local fellowship because we are all called by God to belong to the people of God in our area. Heb. 10:25.
 - e. We are commanded to create a setting in which all of God’s people can be delivered from isolation. Our committed involvement in a local body is a necessary factor in providing a structure to minister to the other members of our family needing relationship and support. Galatians 5:2, Luke 10:27-30, Romans 12:10,15.
 - f. God graciously commands the stronger and more prominent members of the body to join their lives and resources together to provide the setting in which the weaker members can experience a caring community. Together we create the structure and atmosphere to effectively serve and meet each other’s needs. Heb. 12:12-13.
 - g. It is not God’s will for His people to bear their burdens in loneliness and isolation. Jesus so loves His people that we take time and energy to show support, care and loyalty to the other members of the body in the context of long-term covenant relationships.
3. A definition of New Testament Christianity is coming under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and being joined to a family of “imperfect” people who are in the process of living a new life together by a new power under a new government. The Christian life was never intended to be lived alone but it is the call of God to a shared lifestyle.

B. The Church is a Holy Nation. I Pet. 2:9, Ex. 19:6.

- 1. One of the original purposes for God calling Israel to be a holy nation of priests was so that they might proclaim His ways to all the other nations. Deut. 4:5-8. The other nations were to hear God’s wisdom and then to see it modeled as Israel applied it to themselves.
 - a. Israel was to be an expression of God’s ways. In this way, they were to be a light for other nations. Isaiah 51:4.
 - b. The church has a similar mandate to see believers from all races and classes function together in a way that expresses God’s righteousness, justice and mercy – we do this by the power of His

grace.

c. As the church offers a model of God's ways in its corporate life, it then has the responsibility to proclaim these ways to the nations.

We must function in part as a holy nation before we can proclaim it to the secular nations.

d. This godly nation will practice righteousness, justice and mercy in all their affairs and in all their relationships in the home, work place, church, and society. Jer. 22:3, 15, 16, Ezk. 16:49, Amos 5:24.

1). This godly society settles its disputes by God's Word and under godly leadership in the church. I Cor. 6:1-15.

2). This godly society supports its members economically and in other areas.

2. The church is called a holy nation. We are to be a godly nation within the context of the ungodly nations of the earth. This holy nation by definition is composed of a social structure that includes government and discipline which is necessary for God's people. In other words, God's church is to function as a society of committed believers voluntarily living under the discipline of God's word and living in cooperation with His delegated authority called church eldership.
3. Jesus came to build His church which functions ideally as a new society that is not of this world with its values and motivations. This new society will begin to satisfy the longing of those who grieve over the deceit and injustices of our present social structure. This new society is the remedy for many of the social evils present today. This new society is **not** meant to replace the larger social structure but rather to function as a source of influence and change. This holy nation highlights the ability to walk unified under authority and discipline. It also emphasizes our call to proclaim righteousness and justice.
4. In many ways, we are to function as a society of believers within the context of the larger society around us. This society of believers becomes the guardian and administrator of God's ways of economics,

justice and truth for His creation as revealed in His Holy Word
Ephesians 3:10.

C. The Church is the Temple of God Eph. 2:20-22; II Cor. 6:16

1. The purpose of this aspect of the church is to reveal to us God's desire to dwell in manifested glory with His people. In the Old Testament, God always had His people build Him physical tents, tabernacles and temples for the purpose of dwelling in their midst. Ex. 25:8, I Chron. 17:5, I Kings 8:18, 13.
 - a. The church is the people in which God manifests Himself supernaturally.
 - b. We are to be a supernaturally empowered people that the world looks to for God's power.
2. Jesus came to build the church as a temple made of unified human beings (living stones) instead of one made of rock and wood. This corporate living temple is God's dwelling place for eternity. God dwells in and manifests Himself in power in the midst of unified believers who submit one to another. Eph. 5:18-21.
3. God refers to this temple as His house and building. I Tim. 3:15, I Cor. 3:9, Heb. 3:1-6, 9, Ps. 127:1-2.
4. The corporate church is God's habitation or dwelling place in this age. Eph. 2:22. The power and authority of the Holy Spirit are foundational to the church as the place where God dwells. He promises to destroy anyone who destroys the church through slander, gossip, false teaching, etc. because His temple is holy. I Cor. 3:17; 11:29-32.

D. The Church is the Army of God Eph. 6:12-18.

1. The church is to be an offensive, aggressive, unified army that assaults and invades the kingdom of darkness. II Tim. 2:3-4, Eph. 6:12-18, II Corinthians 10:3-5.
2. The church is called to walk in the anointing and power of the resurrection of Jesus in order to openly destroy and plunder the kingdom of Satan. We are to be a dedicated, disciplined army of militant saints who will gladly sacrifice our own desires to bring this message of the Lordship of Jesus to all the nations of the earth. It is in this setting that we become joyfully acquainted with the fellowship of His sufferings. Phil. 3:10, Col. 1:24.
3. The armor of God described in Eph. 6:10-18 is primarily given in context

to a corporate people.

a. The reason many saints are overpowered by Satan is related to their independence from the body. Satan knows the spiritual reality of warfare and the protection given by cooperating with the body and its spiritual authority. II Cor. 6:14-18, Rom. 8:17.

b. Spiritual warfare belongs to the corporate church and the individuals that are rightly related to it. To reject His people is to reject Him and thus, His protection. Mt. 10:40.

4. We can only be fully equipped corporately as the many individual members operate in their spiritual callings in warfare. Each member has only a part of the total equipment. I Cor. 12:7-9, 29-30.

Spiritual armor is distributed in part to the various members of the body. No one individual possesses all the gifts and callings of God to oppose all of Satan's tactics. Spiritual warfare involves a joint battle. Don't try to fight alone with your limited measure of grace and gifts. Prov. 18:1.

5. The multi-gifted body serves as a protection and covering for its members. A good brother who seeks to wage warfare alone creates his own snare through his independence and pride. Proverbs 18:1. Even Moses needed help in warfare. Ex. 17:12. Paul needed favor that only the carnal Corinthians could provide for him in prayer. II Cor. 1:11.

6. Matt. 16:18 says that the powers of hell will not prevail against the (corporate) church. Therefore, it is essential that the church move as a unified, corporate body. Spiritual warfare is most effective as a corporate issue. Eccl. 4:9-12.

a. Healing, fruitfulness, and blessing are given as corporate promises for corporate obedience. Ex. 15:25, 23:20-27, Deut. 28:1-14.

b. Sickness, weakness, injury and premature death are, often times, the result of not properly relating to the corporate body. I Cor. 11:29-31.

E. The Church is the Bride of Christ Eph. 5:22-23; Rev. 21:9

1. God the Father has been working through the church to provide a worthy bride for His faithful Son, Jesus.

- a. This bride will live forever as the eternal companion of the Son. This bride will be equally yoked to Jesus and will be a joint heir of all His riches and authority. II Cor. 6:14-18; Romans 8:17.
 - b. This function of the church reveals the intimate union and affection that Jesus shares with His perfected bride. There exists a deeply affectionate relationship between Jesus and His many-membered bride. Ezk.16, Hosea 2:14-20.
- 2. The Holy Spirit desires to impart to us the same quality of love for Jesus and His faithful worshippers. There will not be any independent saints in eternity. John 17:22.

F. The Church is a Royal Priesthood I Peter 2:5,9.

- 1. This reveals our responsibility to be worshippers. Jn. 4:24; Hebrews 13:15.
- 2. This also reveals our responsibility to be intercessors for the world and especially for the release of salvation of our future brothers and sisters. Jesus lives forever to make intercession. It is important for us to be interceding priests before God for the unredeemed. Heb. 7:25, Ezk. 22:30.

G. The Church is the Body of Christ I Cor. 12:12-27.

1. The Human Body

- a. The metaphor of the human body expresses our subordinate relationship to Jesus as the Head and our relationship of mutual interdependence with the other believers.
- b. Scripture uses the human body as an example of how diversity and unity operates in the body of Christ. For the body is one, yet it has many members. I Cor. 12:12, 27.
- c. Only as we corporately relate together in deep commitment are we complete in Christ. Scripture says that, "You (plural) are complete in Christ." Col. 2:10. We must not pride ourselves in being independent of His local body. We are as incomplete if we are independent of the local

body of believers as our hand would be if it were cut off (independent) from the rest of our physical body.

2. Jesus and His Body I Cor. 12:27.

a. One of the mysteries of God is the fact that the believers on earth are literally one with the risen Jesus who sits at God's right hand in heaven. To love and accept His people is to express love to Him. Mt 10:4; Hebrews 6:10. To feed His people is to feed Him. Mt. 25:34-46.

b. This spiritual unity is the great reality of being a member of His body. We are His hands, feet, and mouth on earth. When He speaks from heaven, He chooses to do it through one of His servants. The church is the visible expression on earth of the invisible Christ in heaven. When Paul persecuted the church, he literally persecuted Jesus. Act. 9:1-6.

VI. Summary

- A. The church is pictured in seven different ways to reveal its seven different functions.
- B. The church is revealed as a:
 - 1. **Family** that ensures identity, security, love and support for all its members.
 - 2. **Body** that functions with great diversity and unity to build itself up in love.
 - 3. **Nation** that provides a social structure, government, and discipline to ensure continual blessing for God's covenant people.
 - 4. **Temple** that provides an eternal dwelling place for God and His supernatural manifestations of glory and power.
 - 5. **Army** that engages in aggressive assault against Satan and provides protection for its members of the body.
 - 6. **Bride** that experiences intimate affection for Jesus.
 - 7. **Priesthood** that worships and intercedes to fulfill God's purpose.
- C. This seven faceted church of Jesus is God's special possession. Paul calls it God's inheritance in the saints. We need great revelation and spiritual insight into this reality in order to fully experience God's purpose. Eph. 1:17-18, I Pet. 2:9. When we see the church from this point of view then we will fully identify and commit our lives to it.

VII. Richland Center Fellowship

- A. RCF is one local expression of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Richland Center area. We seek to work toward greater unity in the Body of Christ in this area and the breaking down of traditional religious barriers.
- B. While we are clearly a local church expression in nature, we seek to participate fully in the work of the universal church of Jesus Christ. We also desire relational linkings with other local church expressions and national and international church structures.