

“The Biblical Necessity for the Church”

Matthew 16:13–18

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Matthew 16:13–18 says [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.*

May God bless us with the reading and preaching of His Word for His own praise.

The study I’m about to give is in preparation for the National Mission’s Conference coming up. For the last several decades or for the last possibly 150 years we have been engaging as Christians in what I will call an increasing places on the emphasis of the wrong syllable. What do I mean by that and why do I say the last 150 years? I think with the rise of some of the religious movements that came not too long after the Civil War and then to now, we have regressed in our personal overtness in our relationship with Christ and we have regressed as a Church in teaching people the Biblical necessity of the Church.

The reality in the minds of the church, in an increasingly number of people, the church has become optional. It’s not that it is optional in that it could go away or stay but it’s optional in the minds of people as to how they should relate church and in some cases how we should relate to the church. The attendance in church participation, worship time and other things has gradually gone down over the last several decades. I want to share with you in this study why I think that is. I will start by reading a quote that will open this whole thing up and it will sound a little bit negative so I know as I read it that it will be easy to pin point what is wrong but the study I will give on this passage of Scripture will tell us how to make it right. That will be our focus in this study.

Here is something we need to understand – the importance of the church in the mind of Christ. For the title of this study I wanted it to read ‘The Biblical Necessity of the C/church’ but for grammar proofing it didn’t come out that way and what I mean is to include the Church that will be arriving in heaven but this also includes the local churches in this nation. Why do we call attention to this? It is because there is a rising thought that when we are converted we become members of the invisible Church but it is really not necessary to be that enthusiastic or that involved or that faithful in local churches.

Some have said the local church is not really that important. I think it’s a minority of people who think that though but when I talk about the Church and the local church, it’s an attempt to point out that both are necessary. Otherwise, you wouldn’t find in the New Testament multiple letters written to local churches instructing them as to how to function both for spiritual health and vitality and how to function on an organizational basis with the electing of leaders, officer etc. The local church is important in the mind of Christ just as the invisible Church is important in the mind of Christ.

So where are we in this day and time? Here is where we are and the quote I want to share with you. Churches in the US are anemically weak. Why? First, there is a very limited understanding of the nature of God in the churches of today. Why is that? It is because of the second thing which is there is a very limited understanding of the Bible. There may be some exposure to the Bible and even some daily reading of the Bible but we develop without realizing we are doing it, a functional disconnect from when we read the Scripture to what we do the rest of the day. We do not develop a functional disconnect from all the other powers and forces that appeal to our attention and want us to conform to their various fields to us. Why is there limited understanding of the Bible? It is due to the third thing where there is very limited knowledge of the Bible and that's because there is very little actual, intentional study of the Bible at large in our day, so that there is very little functional importance attributed to the Bible.

I was discouraged recently to hear that a well-known "evangelical" said "I really don't understand why we have to make such a big deal out of meticulously following the Bible." A side note is the word "evangelical" has lost some of its power over the last decade in that those who are deemed evangelical, which are those who adhere to the belief of the Gospel of Christ, don't really adhere to that like they used to so the term now seems to be loosely used. So going back to what this "evangelical" said it is shocking and sorrowful to hear that but that kind of thing is on the rise in our nation today.

Very few people in comparison to the number of churches there are take the Bible with any intentional seriousness. So the outcome of this is individuals and churches are in a spirit quenching danger because they are blindingly ignorant of the importance of the Gospel and the importance of the Church and local church, in the mind of Christ.

When you come to this passage in Matthew 16 you find three very clearly orchestrated emphases. First this is where Christ identifies openly who He is and how this will be proclaimed from this point on. Secondly, He identifies what it is on which the church will be based. Up to this point there have been some mistaken ideas, nearly right ideas and some right ideas over a period of time. Some of the mistaken ones were that Peter was not the first pope and that was not intended when Jesus said 'You're Peter and upon this rock I will build My Church.' The ideas about 'Upon this rock I will build My Church' is that is referring to the content of what Peter said 'You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.' While that is true there is more to it than that. Peter was stating the reality of the necessity of Christ being the Son of God, taking our place, making forgiveness to us by His sacrifice of atoning for our sins. So what is the 'rock'? The rock is the Gospel but it is Christ. There are a number of passages in the New Testament where there is rockness associated to Him. I will read one in just a moment where He is referred to as the Cornerstone but was rejected.

The third orchestrated emphasis from the passage is on the church and we'll spend the rest of our study on this particular emphasis. Why do I keep using the word orchestrated? It is because in this passage as you study it you'll see that Jesus is developing i.e. orchestrating this conversation in order to make a declaration and have it come out the way He wants it to. Christ starts off by saying "Who do you say that I am?" and then He gets some varied responses. Then He says "But who do you say that I am?" and Peter says "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus acknowledges the rightness of that and then says that upon Himself, this Rock, "I will build My Church." That is a very strong statement of what is important to Christ among other things. Then He goes on to say that not even the gates of hell will be able to stand up against it.

About two years ago I became so impressed with this passage and this declaration of ‘I will build My Church and not even the gates of hell will stand against it’ that I finally arrived at the conclusion that from that point on and into the future where it’s my opportunity to make the decision and choice, I don’t believe I will ever again read the Great Commission passage in Matthew 28:19–20 without preceding it with Matthew 16:18. Why? It is because in Matthew 16 there is the declaration as to what Jesus planned to do once He was resurrected from the dead which was to build His Church through His Apostles, Disciples and people like you and me until He returned again. Then when it came time for Him to ascend back into heaven He said in Matthew 28:19–20, [19] *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*

Watch the tracks here. I will build My Church and not even the gates of hell will be able to prevail against it and I will get it done by making disciples wherever and everywhere in the world but you are never done in the discipling process until the loop is closed and they are in the Church. I want to look at I Peter 2:4–10 to show the emphasis of how Matthew 16:18 continues in this passage.

I Peter 2:4–5 says [4] *As you come to him (Christ), a living stone (Christ the Rock) rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, [5] you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.* Stones that are dumped in the pile out of which the building will be constructed are just individual stones until they are installed in the building that is under construction and completed. Then they don’t lose their usefulness for they have a new identity and have fulfilled identity because they are now part of something that is One, a spiritual house. This precious value (who are believers) which is taking individuals and making them part of something much bigger than they, will function of the welfare of the whole that they are being made a part of, always to the praise to the One who is doing the building, Jesus Himself and His Gospel. Then He goes into talking about the necessary oneness of those who belong to Christ.

I Peter 2:6–10 says [6] *For it stands in Scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”*

[7] *So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” [8] and “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.*

[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.*

Therefore the believer is no longer just an individual with individual appetites and pressures to pursue but we are still individuals in a great sense. We are individuals who receive a giftedness (from the Holy Spirit at the point of conversion) and this giftedness is designed for us to use for the welfare of the rest of the people in the body of Christ. Not let’s look at I Corinthians 12.

I Corinthians 12:4–12, 26–27 says [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. [8] For to one is given through the Spirit the*

*utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, [9] to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, [10] to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. [11] All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.*

*[12] For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.*

*[26] If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. [27] Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*

Christ will build His Church out of a whole bunch of different stones, individuals, but as they are converted they are to be brought into the Church that I am building. They are to be given gifts for usefulness and effectiveness. If they are out of sync with either the understanding of that or the functioning in that way there will be damage as an outcome and it could be severe or not as severe. But we are never allowed by the Lord to simply consume salvation on an individual personal basis without taking into consideration His design that we locate and function in intimacy with each other as one in the body of Christ, for each other's welfare in the Lord Jesus Himself.

As I studied this passage I began to discover that as rich as my formative years and growing up years were in my hometown where I had a steady dose of evangelism, Christian spiritual growth and development, teaching on prayer and the Word but it hurts me to say this because I have such high respect for those who led me in that time but I wasn't taught certain necessary things. Although the reason I wasn't taught these necessary things was because they were taught them either. Here are the things I wasn't taught. I was not taught the Biblical necessity of the relationship between the individual believer and Christ in His Body, the Church. I was told I needed to be a church member, a church worker but it was never defined for me what that was. In the realization of this I came up with five things that I was never taught and here they are.

One is that I was never taught that my relationship with Christ was anything other than just a personal relationship with Christ. I'm not downplaying this because no one can come to Christ for me or you so it must be personal in that sense but from that point on it branches out to being far more than just individual or just personal. It becomes intertwined with you and me and whatever the church is that we have the opportunity to approach, understand it, join it and become accountable to Christ and each other in that body along the lines of giftedness and fruitful function.

Secondly, I was never taught that my personal agenda must never be allowed to compete with the welfare of the Body which is the Church. We can have personal agendas, make plans and do all kinds of things but in making our plans it is actually true that we need to take into consideration how our personal plans will affect each other in the body of Christ. If there is going to be something in my agenda that leaves a hole or causes any kind of negativity in the church for whatever reason, then I don't have a right to pursue that agenda. I need to take you into consideration before I just pursue my personal preferences.

Thirdly, I was never taught that it was actually sinful to think that I can have a personal agenda which competes with the church and therefore actually competes with its Head, Jesus Christ. Fourthly, I was never taught that my true welfare in Christ is actually impossible apart from my fitting into His Body under His Headship on His terms. Fifthly, I was never taught that

if I do attempt to live in such an exclusive manner I actually quench the Spirit in my own life and at the same time quenching Him in the church.

All of that to say sets up the issue of the identifications of the realities that are with us and need to be changed. When I said earlier that the church is anemically weak I don't think it's hard to make the connection as to why we have a weak country spiritually, morally and ethically. If the church is not what the Lord wants it to be and declares that it would be and in many cases is, then I'm delighted to say that Briarwood stands out as a bright spot on a wide horizon. I am thankful for that but we can't just keep that to ourselves. We have to spread this situation into the lives and ministries of those who are our national partners. We have to spread the realities of the importance of the church in the mind of Christ and that it is not allowable by Him to approach the church on our own terms and establish our own agenda no matter how that might affect the church.

There are some common ideas that are fairly wide spread and have been for some time. Here is one of them. The church's job is to provide for and to promote individual spiritual welfare. Let me set this up. How do you listen to sermons? Do you listen to sermons for you and your family? That's ok but don't stop there. There is a sense in which you listen to sermons for yourself and for the welfare of your family AND for the welfare of the church. My guess is that the third one is not a common practice and that's because people like me preach sermons that are designed more for individuals and the individual families than for the church. There ought to be something in almost any and every sermon preached by pastors in pulpits in this nation that would alert leaders in the local congregations to be on the lookout for or to be aware of or to make changes in order to. So this idea that the church's job is to provide for and promote individual spiritual welfare is ok as far as it goes but it is not enough.

A number of years ago there was a leader in the church growth movement named Win Arn and he did a survey among 1000 churches. I don't know how many people were in each church but he had to have asked at least 1000 people because of the fact he asked 1000 churches. So he asked at least 1000 people this question; why does the church exist? The summarized answer was 89 percent said the church exists to take care of mine and my family's needs. That is pretty consumeristic, isn't it? So to take this a little further I want to share with you how some people view the church and think about whether this is your view or not as well.

Some people view the church in the same way we used to talk about a service station. Although in this day and age we don't have any more service stations for they are just called gas stations that are usually attached to a quick stop store that will meet most of your immediate needs. So it's viewed as a station for fuel or repair or getting incidentals you might need at the moment so you can get on your way to accomplish your agenda. In other words, a high percentage of people listen to sermons for coach-me-ups and they don't listen for life change or to be convicted or to respond to the Lord in order to say 'change me anytime You want to change me in any way You want to.' They come looking for help to get through life. There is nothing wrong with that unless that is all you do.

Here is the importance of air traffic control to a pilot. Air traffic control is responsible to help a pilot with obstacle clearance, and directional guidance through cloud, fog, darkness in order to complete a safe flight and a successful landing on a route chosen by the pilot himself when he files his flight plan. So air traffic control helps the pilot complete his flight plan. I can tell you with as much as I have travelled with the church revitalization ministry in the past eight years that this is the way the church is viewed, like air traffic control to a pilot.

The church is even seen as an intruder in some cases to family life because it is good when everything is coming from church to my encouragement to my satisfaction but if it runs cross purposes with things that I want to do then the church shouldn't tell me I can't do these things. So the church is seen as an intruder into personal and family space and participation in the functions of the church are sometimes seen as an infringement rather than functional normality as actually designed by Christ. So that "consumer Christians" evaluate the church on the basis of personal preference and sinfully shop around for personal satisfaction with either little or no regard for the individual church itself.

There is also a rising resistance to membership. The Lord expects us to enter into this relationship with Him and with His Body (Church) on a commitment basis but that has gotten in the way of a generation or several generations who have problems with the idea of commitment and don't want to be hemmed in or strapped down by commitment. So even churches are eliminating vows of membership because they feel like they won't get people in the door in order to tell them what they need to hear so the idea is to get them in the door, be soft with them for a while and then after a while you tell them the rest of the story. We don't do that at Briarwood but that is quite common in churches across this land.

What does the Bible say is the answer to this? We need to preach Jesus Christ and His Gospel with His life of perfection, His substitutionary death to atone for our sins and teach people about coming to Him to ask for forgiveness and in return give our lives to His jurisdiction. A repentant life is one where the person will say to the Lord 'I want to repent when I discover I have done something that is sinful but I want to do more than that. I want my relationship with You to be so true and committed to You that I am willing and eager for You to change me at any time in any way You want to and to any degree You want to.' That is a repentance culture and a life of commitment. This is asking the Lord to have jurisdiction in your relationship with Him.

If you say 'why should I do that?' One of the obvious reasons is that He is a lot smarter than we are. We may have appetites or plans but how many of those get in the way of our actual thoroughly true welfare. He will not give us anything that will be damaging to our true welfare therefore we need to live under His jurisdiction. That means coming into His Church on His terms, functioning with discovery of the giftedness that He has given to us and not treating the church as optional, meaning that you go only when you need it.

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and a people for God's own possession. Once you were not a people but now you are the people of God and not just individuals. You had not received mercy but now if you have trusted Jesus to be your Savior then you have received the ultimate grace and mercy. He has a plan for you to use that in His Body (Church) on His terms under His Headship. Will you do that? Are you doing that? Are there gaps that need to be addressed? Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, we ask You to grant to us such surrender to You and eagerness for Your gracious merciful will to be exercised in our life that we will stop making plans for ourselves that in any way run in cross purposes for the welfare of our local churches and our own relationship with You. May we wait on You and trust and surrender to Your loving gracious perfect jurisdiction as well as forgiveness that we obviously want and we ask all of this in the Name of Christ and pray that these things will become even more clear to us as we look to You to amplify these things in our own lives, in Jesus' Name, Amen.