

## THE ORGANIC CHURCH #3: What is the Church?

### INTRODUCTION

In this series called the “Organic Church”, so far, we’ve focused on the first word, “Organic,” meaning living; from living material. The church is a living organism with all that implies. Today, we focus on the second word, “church.”

### WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

On one of my final papers for ordination, I had to write a paper explaining the **concept of the church**. When I got the paper back, it had a note on it that said something like, “Good paper. You are beginning to develop a concept of the church.” BEGINNING! And that comment was on the mark. It is a surprisingly hard task to define “church.” But the thing is; it has such huge ramifications.

**What is church? A building?** In a certain context, yes. **People?** -To a point. But it much more than that. Let’s go back to the beginning, **what did the first church call itself?**

#### 1. THE CHURCH IS “EKKLESIA”

In the beginning, **there wasn’t a word for the concept of church**. The Jews centered on the temple and the nation, they didn’t have a word. The burden fell to the Greek language, and a word was borrowed; **ekklesia**. It meant; *a calling out of people to an assembly*. It could be for anything, but the primary context was a political or religious gathering.

That’s our first clue: The church is an assembly of people, but it **is people called out**. “Ekklesia” was to every citizen of the community. Everyone is called; so we can say the assembly is those who **heed the call**. The church is those who **hear God calling and answer**.

There’s an important implication here. In the Greek communities, **town criers would go out and announce the meeting**, that’s how people heard the call. God uses the same method.

#### **Romans 10**

**13.** Anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

**14.** But how shall they ask him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them?

God stirs people’s hearts, but each of us needs **practical guidance** on how to respond. God uses people to call out people. The church then, is first and foremost, a **spiritual opportunity**. It is an opportunity to learn how to respond.

That completely **turns the western view of the church on its ear**. *...Is the primary purpose of the church to give its members a little boost each week?* No, it is to forge them into God’s purpose, which is first and foremost, to call OUT. Don’t get me wrong; God will bless you; but He blesses you for the purpose of blessing others. **God provides you as His opportunity**.

**The church is a human bridge between God and humanity**. It is not a social club. The church can never withdraw from the world, because that is why it is here. It is a defining factor of its existence. The church is not only people called out; it is people calling out.

## THE ORGANIC CHURCH #3: What is the Church?

### WHAT DO YOU THINK?

HOW IS THE WORD “CHURCH” DIFFERENT FROM OTHER TERMS SUCH AS TEMPLE, MOSQUE OR SYNAGOGUE?

#### 2. THE CHURCH IS COLLECTIVE SALVATION

In evangelical Christianity, we have emphasized the *personal relationship* to the point that we’ve all but forgotten; the *collective relationship* with God. ***There is a collective side to the salvation process.*** The New Testament is peppered with verses like this:

##### 1 Thess 4

17. Then ***we*** who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with ***them*** in the clouds to ***meet the Lord*** in the air. And thus ***we*** shall always be with the Lord.

Isn’t it interesting, ***it doesn’t say “you” it says “we.”*** The final and ultimate connection with Christ isn’t a private event; it is a *collective one*.

##### Eph 5

25. Husbands, love your wives, just as ***Christ also loved the church*** and gave Himself for it,

26. that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

27. that He might ***present it to Himself a glorious church***, not having spot or wrinkle...

***The church, collectively, is what Christ is coming to meet.*** The church is His loved one. And the imagery gets even more direct:

##### Eph 1

22. And He put all things under His feet, and gave ***Him to be head*** over all things to ***the church***,

23. which is ***His body***, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

You or I alone; are not the ***fullness of Christ, it is the church.*** And the church is all God’s family. The church is the love story of God. It is His *design*. It is His *body*. It is His *fullness*.

There is absolutely ***no other concept or name given*** to our connection with God in the New Testament. Everyone who comes to spiritual life becomes a member of this living body called “the church.” When Christ returns for His *loved one*, it isn’t simply you; it is ***the church.***

### WHAT DO YOU THINK?

WHAT CHRISTIAN PROMISES ARE INDIVIDUAL AND WHICH ONES ARE COLLECTIVE?

#### 3. THE CHURCH IS SAINTS

When the Apostle Paul sends a letter to the church in Corinth, this is how he describes it:

##### 1 Corinthians 1

2. To the church of God which is at Corinth, to ***those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints***, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours...

## THE ORGANIC CHURCH #3: What is the Church?

**Those people called out are “sanctified”;** **what does that mean?** -To sanctify means to make holy, to purify, and above all; to be set aside, particularly, for a holy purpose.

There’s something to think about: If you are responding to God’s call, you can count on this: **God is setting you aside for a holy purpose.** If you are in here, God wants to set you aside for a holy purpose. **Are you ready for that?**

If you are responding to the call, you don’t have to guess what you are called to; **you are called to be a saint.** A favorite expression when we mess up is, “Well, I’m not a saint.” Guess what; if you’re responding to God’s calling out, that’s exactly what you are!

**So, what’s a “saint” anyway?** The original Greek was “**hagios.**” It means “*holy ones.*” It is the person who is *set aside for a holy purpose, purified, or morally blameless.*

You might think, “*That’s not me!*” But what we need to remember is **holiness is a process.** You are called aside right now, that has happened. And if you accept that call, you are in the process. Jesus is in the process of infusing you with His nature. **Are you ready to give yourself over to that level of change?** ...Well, that’s what the “called out” do!

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

IN YOURS OWN WORDS, WHAT IS A SAINT?

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BECOME A SAINT?

### 4. THE CHURCH IS ACTIVE AND EQUAL

The Apostle Paul was trying to explain God’s design of the church to folks who just weren’t getting it? *How do we know they weren’t getting it?* -Because there were divisions in the local church. There were little private cliques. There were people thinking some were more important than others. There were some who felt they didn’t need to be part of the team at all. So Paul resorts to this physical imagery:

#### **1 Cor 12**

**13.** For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

**14.** For in fact the body is not one member but many.

**15.** If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?

**16.** And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?

**17.** If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling?

**18.** But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.

**19.** And if they were all one member, where would the body be?

**20.** But now indeed there are many members, yet one body.

There are all kinds of implications in this imagery.

### THE ORGANIC CHURCH #3: What is the Church?

- First, **being “set aside” doesn’t mean sitting on a shelf.**

There are two ways we use the phrase “set aside.” Some people collect ornaments or figurines. You get something you like and you say, “*This is one is special, I’m going to set it aside on this shelf.*”

***It doesn’t have to do anything***; just sit somewhere **safe** and let people look at it. A lot of people in God’s church seem to be special figurines. Judging by their activity in His church, they must think God just wants to look at them for an hour or so on Sunday. Then it’s back up on the shelf.

But we also use the phrase in another way. You might have a special piece of yard equipment and you say, “*I’m going to set this aside to handle a certain job.*”

You are not setting it aside to do nothing. **You have dedicated it to some hard service.** You are using it, not in the safe places, but perhaps, the risky places. And not because you hate it, but because you love it; you are counting on it.

**God loves you. But that is no guarantee to a safe life, only to an eternal one.** To one, that when all is said and done, you will have accomplished eternal things. And it will have touched other people.

- **You are a hand or an eye.**

Now, I could take off my shoe and show you my foot. But, I’m sure we’d all rather I didn’t do that. And I don’t have to, because I doubt I have to convince you that my **foot doesn’t look anything like my eye**. God designed my foot for a particular task. It is an amazing thing. It can take over a ton of stress. It can walk thousands of steps every day. It is the foundation of my body. But you know what; **I can’t see a thing with it!**

**My eye doesn’t look anything like my foot.** And I can’t walk a single step on it. But it has this optical capacity. I am aware of where I’ve been and where I’m going by this amazing little organ. It has a million moving parts. It sees over sixteen thousand shades of color. It adapts to near dark or bright light. It is designed to see. **It has a purpose** and if it doesn’t perform its purpose, my **whole body suffers**.

Some of you in here have suffered with a **foot problem** and you know. If the foot cannot perform its purpose, the whole body suffers.

Here’s the two-fold concept: **The body is only as healthy as its unhealthiest part.** –And- **God has called each of us to a purpose.** So, **He equips us for our purpose.**

**But if you don’t engage**; I’m here to tell you, it’s **not just about you.** Its not just your business, **the whole body suffers.**

So here’s a question for you: The church body is Christ’s loved one. In fact it is His “body” on earth. If you cause it to suffer, by wrong activity or no activity; do **you think God might just hold you accountable?**

- **The parts are equal.**

People highlight there eyes but cover their feet. It’s not because their feet are of any less value. It’s just a case of discretion. They value their feet as much as their eyes. **In the**

### THE ORGANIC CHURCH #3: What is the Church?

**church body, everyone is needed.** The person in mercy ministry is as important as the pastor. The administrator is as important as the elder. Each needs the other. **The whole body is crippled** if any is missing. Each adds to the body. Each helps the overall purpose. And each is accountable; not for everything, but for their purpose.

- **The church is baptized into one body.**

There are **two types of baptism**; there is baptism by water and baptism by the Holy Spirit. There is baptism of the individual, but did you know there is also our baptism of the group?

The original Greek word is rather interesting. It is “baptizo.” Many people understand the primary meaning, it means to submerge. But there is another definition, “to make overwhelmed.” **What does it mean for God to take us as a group, and overwhelm us with His Holy Spirit?** -In two words; connection and coordination; or in a single word; unified.

**If anything**; person, attitude, action, plans, teaching, intentions no matter how good; if anything causes **division it is the worst kind of toxin for the church**. It threatens its existence. On the other hand, if **anything unifies and builds up**, it IS church. It is something to remember before we speak or act.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

WHAT ARE SOME IMPLICATIONS OF THE FACT THAT EACH CHURCH MEMBER IS EQUAL?

### CONCLUSION

SO, WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

- It is people; **people who respond to the calling out**. *Are you ready to respond?*
- It is people who are **set aside to call out to others**. *Are you ready to start calling?*
- It is people who are **designed into their purpose and engage**. *Are you ready to transform and move?*
- It is people who are **living for the sake of other people**. *Are you ready to live?*
- It is people, **collectively baptized into one body**; connected and coordinated. *Are you ready for life larger than yourself?*
- It is people **alive in the body of Christ**. *Are you ready to be the bridge of opportunity between Christ and your world?*

That is the church. Nothing else is the church. So... *Are you ready to be the church?*

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

IN YOUR OWN WORDS, WHAT IS THE CHURCH?