

# How Do You View the Church?

a sermon in the series  
A Gospel-Oriented, Mission Driven, and Community-Centered Church

A sermon delivered Sunday Morning, November 9, 2014  
at Oak Grove Baptist Church, Paducah, Ky.  
by S. Michael Durham  
© 2014 Real Truth Matters

Ephesians 4:11-16

*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*

According to the title of this new series, the church is to be Gospel-oriented, missional-driven, and community-centered. It is these three aspects of church life I desire to emphasize in this series. I pray these messages become pivotal to our lives. Any self-identity you have outside of the church of Jesus Christ is making your life more difficult and leaving your life without significant purpose. I'm convinced that Paul is saying in this text, not to mention the others that could be cited, that if your self-identity—how you view yourself—has no connection with church then life is more difficult for you and you are not fulfilling the purpose for which God created you. No one has success as God calls success without a strong commitment to the body of Christ.

To the degree you build your life without connection to the church is the degree you are outside the will of God.

These are strong statements and it would be foolish of me to think they would not offend anyone. I know they do. But there is no apology for them. I'm pleading with you to quit thinking about church the way you've done all of your life. That's a big thing I'm asking, I know that, especially for those of who have grown up in church. I'm asking you to bring your life under the microscope of what the New Testament says a church is. You cannot be successful in your life unless the light of the church and its truth is shining very clearly in your life. You can't sit here today and say, "I'm saved, and Jesus and me is enough," and be biblical, because you and Jesus are not enough. That statement divorces Jesus from His people and the New Testament does not produce a Christ without a body. A headless body is of no value. Jesus so loves the church and has so identified Himself with her that He never wants to be considered apart from her, His bride.

*For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. (Ephesians 5:30-32)*

Whatever areas of your life that have no bearing on the church and the church has no bearing upon them is more than likely unscriptural.

For example, my relationship with my wife and children will have influence on the church and the church is to have influence on my relationship with my family. It is through the church I am to first learn from the Bible how I am to relate to my family and second learn by other men in the church as they model what a godly husband and father looks like. If I am not taught by the church, then that will have impact. If I don't obey what I have learned that too will impact the church negatively, but if I do obey, then that blesses the church and I become a role model to others who are learning. This illustration can be carried throughout every facet of your life. The church is to have impact on every facet of your life and therefore your life has impact upon the church and those outside.

The church of our Lord Jesus is crucial to our redemption and sanctification. But most Americans don't think that way. We see our salvation as very personal, using even personal terminology, we call Jesus our *personal Savior*, a term you don't find in the New Testament. He is a personal Savior, no doubt, He has personally saved me and He is a person who saves, but the Bible does not define the Christian in personal, individual terms. So what is critical to our Christian maturity and development? The church. The church is, according to the Apostle Paul in Galatians 4:26, "the mother of us all."

*"but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all."*

Calvin said the church, "brings them to the new birth by the Word of God, educates and nourishes them all their life."

I have no fear saying that Oak Grove Baptist church is a church trying to understand who she is. That's where we are. None of us really have a clear idea, including me, because God is turning my life upside down. As I learn these things I'm going to share them with you, but the Lord is really helping me to see that we need to forsake the Americanized traditional church and at the same time avoid the emergent type of church. If we believe what the Scriptures truly teaches concerning the church of Jesus it will lead us to our Land of Promise.

If you've come to believe that the way you view church is acceptable, how is it working? It isn't working. Not even here. So we are on a journey together. Our journey is to take the Bible seriously. If the Bible is good enough show me salvation from my sins and old life, then certainly it's good enough to teach me how to live the new life in community.

But it is critical that we all have the same biblical definition of what the church is. To come to a definition let's examine our text and first see—

## I. The Nature of the Church

### A. The Body of Christ.

*“for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,”*  
(Ephesians 4:12)

The “body of Christ” is one of many metaphors you find in the New Testament to describe the church. You find other metaphors like the family of God, the flock of God, the temple of God, the bride of Christ. These are all metaphors used to describe the nature and function of the church. Here, Paul uses the most frequent metaphor, *the body of Jesus Christ*, and he says that we the church, if we’re to understand who we are, have to see ourselves as having an organic and spiritual union with Jesus.

That means, first of all, we have a natural connection to Jesus, a physical connection—God became man. He became one of us and identified with Adam’s fallen race. Not only did He identify with us by becoming one of us, He went so far as to say not just in His baptism but on the cross, “I will identify with your sins.” God in Christ became like you so that even though He didn’t do what you have done He could be identified with what you have done and pay the ultimate price. There is an organic union in that He became one of us and He is still one of us. Some wrongly conclude that when Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to the Father that somehow He went back to His pre-incarnate state and the human body was no longer necessary. Not true.

This isn’t true because one of the reasons for Him to come to this earth in the first place was not just to die for your sins but to be your High Priest who ever lives to make intercession for you. If He’s going to be a High Priest He must be one of us because He has to be able to identify with those for whom He intercedes. Not only that, He has to be like the One to whom He intercedes—God. And in the God-Man we have the answer: Jesus. I have a Brother who sits on the throne of heaven!

In Psalm 8 we see that it was given to man the command to have dominion over all the earth, but the writer of Hebrews asks what do we see under the feet of man? Absolutely nothing. We rebelled against the God of our creation. But we see Jesus—“who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.” The glory and honor that God promised Adam, Adam forfeited. What Adam forfeited, Jesus reclaimed for us. There is an organic union here but also a spiritual union.

This spiritual union is much more difficult to explain because we are dealing with a realm we don’t have full understanding, we just get glimpses in Scripture. But the truth is today, beloved, you are seated at the right hand of God. Somehow, someway, spiritually there is a connection, for “he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.” On October the eighth, last month, when Juliana received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, something she did not see and probably wasn’t conscious

of at the moment when she was converted, but something in the spiritual realm happened—she became a full functioning participant in the ruling and reigning of Jesus. She became seated in heaven as much as she is really seated here this morning. So are all of you who are converted.

Again, we don't know what all that means. We don't even understand what it means with what has been revealed. We don't understand the authority we have in Christ or His power that He will manifest through us because we are connected with Him. Jesus doesn't manifest Himself on the earth apart from the church. This is the spiritual union we're talking about. We are His body and He is our Head.

*“but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—”  
(Ephesians 4:15)*

Here we see the body is not headless, it has a Head and it's Jesus. We are the body of Christ therefore that is our nature. We are many that make up one.

## **B. It is One Community.**

The one community is made up of many parts.

*“for the equipping of the **saints** (plural suggesting many) for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body (singular) of Christ,” (Ephesians 4:12)*

*“till we all (many) come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man (singular), to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;” (Ephesians 4:13)*

*“from whom the whole body (singular), joined and knit together by what every joint supplies (many), according to the effective working by which every part does its share (many), causes growth of the body (singular) for the edifying of itself in love.” (Ephesians 4:16)*

It is obvious that Christ is building a church that is a community of one, comprised of many individual parts. I understand this doesn't excite us altogether right now, especially if you have no connection with Christ. You may be religious and understand certain things about the Bible but right now there is no vital, organic, spiritual union between you and Christ so this doesn't mean a whole lot. But for me, it really means something very special and I want you to listen even though you may not understand because this is what God is offering you today.

God is offering people here this wonderful fellowship called the *community* or the *body* of Christ. You don't have to be alone. Life is un-navigable and treacherous for a person out there by their self. In fact, you can't survive by yourself. God invented the human *race*. We think of God creating individuals, but God made Adam and Eve one man, one race. He meant there to be a collection of many comprising one. You can't survive out there by yourself, so God, in His beautiful and redemptive plan, created not just your own personal salvation but your community salvation by

putting you together with other individuals who have been washed in the blood, saved from their sins, and He's made a compact, a covenant one with another that we do not navigate this life and its treachery and deception by ourselves. We are one, together moving forward to the prize of the high calling, which is in Christ Jesus.

So I know you don't understand everything I'm saying, I don't expect you to, but I do expect God to speak and give you understanding so that you may get some of this and know *I want that*. So let me get a little more personal.

There is a huge difference in the definition of *church* that most of us are accustomed to and the New Testament definition. It's obvious Jesus is building a community of one not a collection of isolated individuals meeting together two or three times a week. There is a huge difference between a meeting and a church. I can build a meeting. I know how to get 200 people here on a regular basis, I can do that, and I was doing that until God stopped me in my tracks in the year 2000 and showed me I was not following the Scriptures. If you weren't here, I know that sounds odd, but this is my confession to you. It's all I knew, I was just living out what I knew and what my definition of church was. But God wants to build something here that He builds, not men. I am a firm believer that only God births churches, not men. Only Christ builds His church. You can have gatherings and all who attend can be Christians but that doesn't mean you have a church. You're not a church until you, the body, are flowing in the nature of Jesus Christ, who is the Head. Until the Head and the body work together in synchronization there is not a church, just a meeting. We have too many meetings, in my opinion.

The majority concept of church that leaves the believer joining a church like one would join a club or civic group or support group is unbiblical. It is an affront to Jesus' intentions.

Church is not an event but a community. It is not a building it is a people.

I said it this morning with the family and you probably did too, "It's time to go to church." What do we mean, "go to"? We mean come here to this building and have a meeting. But that's not how Scriptures defines what we are. We're not talking about what we do right now and how we function, don't get confused, we're not talking about that yet. We'll talk about it more next week. We're talking about what we are, and what we are is not an event. You don't *have* church and you certainly don't *do* church. You either *are* or you're *not*. It doesn't matter if everybody is saved, that doesn't make it a church. Church is not an event, it's a community.

The very idea that someone does not feel like they are a part of a church is mainly a problem of definition. How do you define church? If you define church as a place you attend, your definition is wrong. If you define church as a place where you can be ministered to, your definition is wrong. It is these wrong concepts that lead to feelings of isolation because you want the church to do something God did not design it to do. The Lord Jesus saved you to be a part of His church.

He did not save you apart from the church but through and in a local church. There are exceptions. I'm sure there are some people whose testimonies are like mine. When I was converted I wasn't in a church and didn't know where to go after I got saved; nobody wanted me. So there are exceptions to the rule. But I was still saved by the influences that happened earlier in my life by a local church and a grandmother who had taught me the Word of God. No one is saved apart from the ministry and work of a local church. You were placed in His body to function according to His design to be a blessing to the whole, that's what Paul says here, "to the edifying of the body." Every person, every part, is to be disciplined so that they can do the work of the ministry, which will lead to the building up of the body. Joint supplying joint, strength and health and vitality. You were placed in His body, the church—I'm not talking about the local body but the universal church—to function according to His design to be a blessing to the whole and in that way the whole is designed to bless you.

It's not that the church isn't designed to care for the weak, the sick, and the hurting, it is. But Jesus' prescription of how you do that is by another principle or law of the Kingdom. That law is "freely you have received, freely give." So if you want to give you have to receive. What have you received? Participation in the very life of Christ, the body of Jesus, and His Spirit. Now what you have received you are to freely give and that's the principle because Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

I truly believe that the principle of the kingdom is that no matter how weak I may be I need to be looking to the needs of someone else more than my own. I know this is strange theology, but it's New Testament theology. Isn't it strange that what's true sounds odd these days? The truth is, if I look out for you and I'm not consumed with the weight of my heart the Lord will take care of the weight of my heart because I trust in God and live by faith.

The whole system we call church, which God designed, is a community that lives by faith. Therefore, if it is not of faith it is not of God, it's sin. It's not sin that you hunger for prayer, it's not a sin that you say you have a need and ask for prayer, we've made it absolutely clear that's New Testament, but the emphasis of the heart is, "Not me, Lord, but my brother who is hurting, my sister who has fallen." This should be our focus coupled with the assurance that God will supply your need according to His riches in glory. Faith believes the Word of God that He will send to you a brother or sister or a word, He will do whatever He has to do in His loving goodness to take care of you if you will do what He commanded—take care of others. That's how the system works.

It doesn't work like a normal organization because it isn't normal it's spiritual. It works on the principle of faith and unless you can believe God and trust God with your hurts and pains then your hurts and pains won't be relieved, because you haven't trusted God's mechanism by which they will be healed.

## **II. The Function of the Church**

How do I define the church? Well, I understand a little bit more of its nature now. It's the body of Christ, it's the community of one made up of many parts. But how does it function?

## **A. It Serves.**

What does the church do? It serves. The question is who does it serve? Look at verse 12 and be surprised. You think it would say, "it serves humanity and the broken and sets the captives and prisoners free," and all those things that are worthy and part of our resume, but it's not what Paul states here.

*"for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,"*  
(Ephesians 4:12)

It functions in such a way that those whom God has gifted and called into special, equipping ministries equip the body—the individual parts—so that the individual parts can do the work of the ministry. In other words, I am not to do the work of the ministry, you are. My ministry is to equip you. When that happens, notice who gets served.

The answer:

### **I. It first serves itself.**

This sounds odd because we just established the principle, "Don't worry about yourself—give." But we're not talking about individuals in the body, we're talking about the body as a whole. The body as a whole has to be well in order to function so there has to be this shared principle among us that the whole is more important than the individual parts. If the whole is not well, the whole can't do what God has called it to do—be the physical representation of Jesus on this earth. The body has to serve itself and here is where it does care for the weaker among them. Here it does care for the poor and those who are broken and contrite in heart and those who are going through difficulties. Yes, we absolutely do with the goal in mind that they don't stay that way so when they have been strengthened they will do what has happened to them—strengthen the weaker. This is the way the whole is ministered unto. It serves itself by making itself well.

This is not so strange when you stop and think about how God made your human body. It heals itself in most cases, does it not? If you cut yourself, what's happening? It's healing. Did you put something on it? Did you take a drug? No, it's does it by itself. If you cut yourself and you bleed a little bit, but then all the sudden it stops bleeding. Who shut the pump off? Thankfully nobody shut the pump off, the pump is still working fine, but the body has this amazing ability to close off the puncture of the wound so the pump doesn't drain dry. Then in a few days there is nothing left of that cut.

God designed His spiritual body to work the same way, to be spiritually self-healing.

*“till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;” (Ephesians 4:13)*

*“from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.” (Ephesians 4:16)*

This is seemingly a selfish motive, but it's not. A whole and healthy body reproduces. Therefore, the Apostle Paul says the ministry of the church is secondly to serve the world.

## **2. It serves the world.**

A sick church can't minister to dead people. Sickness cannot call life out of death. Only life can bring life. It's not me, it's not you, it's the life of God in us that's flowing out of us. We are the eyes, ears, mouth, knees, elbows, He is God and He is still here on this earth doing His Father's will through a body. God gave Him a human body designed for what purpose? To do His will. He still has a body to do His Father's will while He is seated at the right hand of the Father and that's you and me. A healthy body can do what His human body did on this earth, touch a world that is broken, that is imprisoned, that is blind, that is not at liberty.

*“And He Himself gave some to be **apostles**, some prophets, some **evangelists**, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,” (Ephesians 4:11-12)*

What is an apostle? An apostle was someone God sent into an area where the Gospel had not gone and oversaw the planting of churches. That's what Paul did, that's what Peter and John did, this is what an apostle did. The purpose of an apostle is to take the Gospel to frontiers unknown, where the Gospel has not been heard and establish New Testament churches. The healthy church sends out God-called individuals to establish outposts, forts in enemy territory. The closest thing we have to an apostle, because we don't have apostles in the sense that they did then, is people with apostolic-like ministry—we call them missionaries. They go where the Gospel has not gone before and establish an outpost of the kingdom of Christ in enemy territory, behind enemy lines, called churches. What an amazing system God has designed here. But only a healthy church does that.

What are evangelists? The best we can tell, it's people God called and gifted to proclaim the Gospel like Phillip. He was not an apostle he was called an evangelist. What does Phillip do? He goes from Jerusalem to Samaria and preaches the Gospel to the Samaritans and there is a great revival and people get saved. Then God tells him to go to the desert and there he meets one man and leads him to the Lord. The next thing you know you saw Phillip and then you didn't see him. God had another plan for him and takes him somewhere else. Evangelists are people who proclaim the Gospel with the ability to reap a harvest.



We see that the body is serving itself in order that it be a whole, healthy, mature body, so that it can then minister to the world.

The word *edifying* comes from two words, *house*, and *to build—to build a house*. Paul is saying the purpose of Christ is to build a house. It's another metaphor—the temple of God. How does God build the house? In Ephesians 2 you see an example. Paul went to this city of Asia Minor preaching the Gospel where it hadn't been preached and a church was planted called the Ephesus church.

*“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” (Ephesians 2:19-22)*

Here we see a healthy church goes out and brings new stones into God's construction. Juliana, you're a new living stone in what God is doing here. Your purpose and importance is as important as mine. It is. Because this is not about individual men, it's about the community. And if God adds you to the community He intends for you to add by faith to the community.

## **B. Redemption is God's Mission.**

This is not about us having a good time and being whole and healthy, it's about redemption. That is God's mission and God is missional in this way. His enterprise is with a group of people not individual persons. It's a church that goes behind enemy lines and establishes many microcosms of itself. The church is at the very center of all God is doing through Christ.

## **III. How Do You View Yourself?**

Not “how do you view the church?” Let me follow that question with this one, how do you view yourself? How would you answer the question, “Who am I?” How do you define you? How do you see yourself? I pray that one day, because I know most of you can't today, you will no longer see yourself and answer that question individually but relationally. I pray that one day you will no longer see yourself as one but as one part of many. I hope that one day we answer this question, “I am a member of the body of Christ.”

Ask yourself this question: How did the Ephesians see themselves putting on the armor in Ephesians 6? Specifically ask, did they see themselves putting on the armor as an individual soldier of Christ or collectively soldiers of Christ? The answer is simple, they had to see themselves as just one among many who were commanded to put on the armor of God, because what good is one soldier against the army of Satan?

We Western Christians, on the other hand, read those verses very individually and we take it out of context when you do. The context is the local church. It is you against hell, that's how we

perceive this. We don't see ourselves as one soldier among many. You think, feel, and fight as if it is you against "the principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." It's not you against the devil. That's not biblical. If you do see it as you against the devil, you're going to lose. We all will.

Look how we live. We, like a circus clown, trying to juggle all the different facets of our life, striving not to let one thing drop. Work, family, money, hobbies, possessions, entertainment, social media etc. And along with the different categories we are trying to keep up in the air is our relationship with Christ and the church. Church life is just another category we trying to juggle.

I remember as a child watching a variety show called the Ed Sullivan show. Sullivan had a man named Erich Brenn who spun plates and bowls on thin rods while he also performed other unusual feats of balance. He would run back and forth between bowls and plates and keep them spinning. Talk about multi-tasking. That's how many of us feel as we try to keep our lives in order. But if we have to let something go, what's the first plate to drop? Church life. I'm not saying you cease to be a Christian; you cease your church life, your life with other believers.

Rather, the Bible teaches that we should view life more as author, Tim Chester says, an old-fashioned spoke wagon wheel with church as the hub. That's how the church is to function. That's how you are to function. Everything is to revolve around life in God's body, the church.

I know I have my work cut out for me to convince us of this but if you will listen with an open heart you'll see and then find the disconnect of why God's presence doesn't always seem to be there. It's because you're working off a different agenda. It's through the church God saves and it's through the church God sanctifies those whom He saves.

How committed are you to Jesus' body? Which means, how committed are you to Jesus, because you can't separate the body from the Head?

Some of you say, "I'm too old to change. I've lived this life, I'm comfortable with how church is." I'm asking you to take your faith up to another level and trust God for more. I want to invite you on a journey that will be thrilling. It will be difficult but rewarding. And I want you to see that if you don't think you can make Christ and His body the hub of your life, you need to look at your relationship with Him. Let me tell you, if you're really a Christian then there is something in you that is resounding saying, "Yes, this is it! I know it's it, but I don't know how to do this. It sounds like a total paradigm shift and I'm too settled, too old." Please, it's not a matter of age it's a matter of faith. Do you trust God to be able to help you move in this direction?

I want to give you one last illustration from the life of Jesus that ought to answer that question. Yes, He will help you. Yes, you can trust Him. He loves you that much.

In Luke 14, a story is told where Jesus in the last week of His life before the cross was in the house of one of the ruling Pharisees. This man is probably one of the Sanhedrin who will judge

Him later that week. Many of the important dignitaries of Judea were there and there was one man sick with dropsy, and it just so happened to be the Sabbath. Jesus looked at that man and healed him. Then He looked at the ruling Pharisee, the host, and said, "Which of you, having a donkey or an ox fall into a pit, will not lift him out even on the Sabbath?" Did you hear what Jesus just said? The translation is this: if you, being evil, know how to have compassion on a dumb animal so that you're willing to break your own "religious traditions," how much more will a loving God care for you, His own body, and help you do what He's called you to do?

If you don't know Christ but you love animals, how much more does God love His creation and how much more does He love those whom He gave His Son for and lost His life in order to redeem? If He will do that He will help you. Your life is not over yet. If you're here breathing today, God still wants to do something with you that blows your mind and requires of you confidence not in yourself but in your God. Will you believe God? It's not about churches and what name is on the door, it's not about any of that, it's about whether or not you believe Jesus will take care of you if you simply do what He tells you to do. And what does He tell you to do? He says to make His body your life because your life flows from His body, both the one broken on Calvary and the one living here on this earth.

We are on an exciting ride. Some have prophesied our doom but God hears it and He will vindicate Himself. Help me, Lord, to trust You. Amen.