

Church - Part 1

by Ken Baird

The sermon explores the nature of the Church, its composition, and the importance of understanding its relationship to Christ.

Duration: 46:35

Scripture: Matthew 13:24-30, Matthew 13:36-43, Matthew 16:13-14, Matthew 17:8, Acts 15:13, Acts 15:16-17

Topics: "Church Government", "Kingdom Of Heaven"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of understanding the reasons behind our actions in the church. He encourages the congregation to be able to give good reasons for what they do. The sermon then delves into the first mention of the church by Jesus in Matthew 16, specifically focusing on the parable of the wheat and the tares. The speaker suggests that this parable encompasses all of humanity and the mystery of the kingdom of heaven. The sermon concludes by mentioning that future nights will cover topics such as the composition, position, practices, functions, government, and history of the church.

Transcript

It's a pleasure to be with you this week on this wonderful subject of the Church. We tried to stir up interest this morning by making the announcement that we were going to deal in the most practical way with why we meet as we do, why we do some of the things that we do. Now, tradition is not necessarily a bad word.

Tradition can be good tradition as well as bad tradition. Now, much of what we do is traditional, but those traditions have been laid down by our Lord Jesus Christ. We read in the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, please notice with me, 2 Thessalonians 2, verse 15, Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or our epistle." Now, in chapter 3, please notice, verse 6, Now, we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which ye received of us.

Now, we have heard the word tradition in connection with the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the scribes until we have given it an evil connotation. It has taken on an evil meaning. There's nothing wrong with the word tradition.

Now, some of the traditions that we carry, the customs that we observe, have been passed on to us. As a matter of fact, the word tradition means the transmission of thought. And the thought is transmitted.

It is passed down from one generation to another. Now, we are traditional in our character, even right here in this local assembly. Now, part of that tradition is founded on direct statements of the word of God.

Part of that tradition is founded upon principles of the word of God. And there's where the trouble comes in. There's where the principles are involved, because there is sometimes a difference of opinion of those principles.

And then part of our traditions are simply a matter of convenience. Now, that doesn't mean that they're wrong at all. We do certain things because they are convenient as a matter of tradition.

Now, these, of course, are not sacred. But a change for the sake of change is not necessarily progress. We want to talk about these things.

Now, in connection with this, there are going to be a lot of questions arise, especially in the hearts of the young people, in the minds of our young people. And we have a question box back on the table just inside the entrance, from the vestibule. It's marked building, but never you mind that, because after all, the church is a building.

So, we'll just take right over where the word building is on the box. Why, we'll talk about the building. So, don't be afraid of the word building on the box.

Put in your question. Now, we may not answer your question on the very night that you submit it, because we're going to talk about a number of different subjects, and we'll try to coordinate your questions with the subjects that we're going to talk about, and it'll make it easier. We want to look tonight, with the help of the Lord, at the composition of the church.

And in the nights to follow, we want to notice... Well, perhaps we'll even notice the position of the church tonight. The practices of the church. The functions of the church.

The government of the church. And the history of the church. Now, that's going to keep us busy this week, very, very busy.

And we trust that you'll not be missing a single night. We're going to try to start at 7 o'clock promptly, and end at 8 o'clock promptly. So, as not to keep you out too late.

Now, it's a good thing to be able to give reasons why you do certain things. And I fear that sometimes in our assemblies, that we don't question... Well, I don't mean that we should question. I mean the question ever rises in our minds as to why we do certain things.

And we want to be able to give good reasons for what we do. You know what's wrong with a person that can't give you a good reason for what he does. Well, let's not be like that.

Let's be able to give good reasons for what we do. Now, the first mention of the church is made by our Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew chapter 16. Let's notice Matthew chapter 16.

And this very first scripture that we're going to refer to in Matthew chapter 16, suggests the composition of the church. What it is composed of. Verse 13.

When Jesus came unto the coast of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am? And they said, Some say thou art John the Baptist, some Elias, and others

Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. He said unto them, At whom say ye that I am? Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed unto thee that my Father which is in heaven.

And I say also unto thee that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Now, of course, there is a great religious system in the world today that says that Peter is that rock. Because the Lord said, I say also unto thee that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Now, if you were to have a Greek Bible, and if you go into the names, the meanings of the words, you'll find out, as the Scofield Bible properly points out, that the word for Peter, and the word Peter, incidentally, means rock, the word for Peter, Petro, means a little rock. But when he says, upon this rock I will build my church, he uses a different word. It's not Peter.

It's not the same word at all. And it doesn't refer to Peter, because Peter means a little rock. But when he says, upon this rock I will build my church, he uses the word Petra, and he's referring to himself.

Now, let's turn to Peter's first epistle, chapter 2. If anybody can clear us up on the subject of what the rock is, certainly Peter can do that himself. First Peter, chapter 2, verse 4, To whom coming, that is, unto Christ, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious, ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the Scriptures, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.

Unto him, therefore, which believeth, unto you, therefore, rather, which believeth, he is precious. But unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense, even to them which stumble at the word being disobedient, whereunto also they were appointed. Now, Peter tells us, he quotes the Scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone.

Now, that's the rock that our Lord is referring to upon which he builds his church, and that rock is himself, because we read right on, and he that believeth on him, on that chief cornerstone, shall not be confounded. But that cornerstone is also a stone of stumbling. It was a stone of stumbling for the Jews, because they stumbled over the Lord Jesus Christ.

A stumbling stone is a low stone. It is a stone that is so low that you don't notice it, and you stumble over it because of its obscurity, and because of the fact that you don't see it. And the Jews stumbled over the Lord Jesus Christ.

He was so humble that they missed him altogether. They were expecting somebody to come along and deliver them from the Roman government. They expected him to come with great pomp and glory, and our Lord Jesus came in all humility, and they stumbled over the Lord Jesus.

So that which is a foundation stone, the chief cornerstone to those who put their faith in the Lord Jesus, becomes a stumbling stone for those who do not see in him a safe repose for their faith. Now, we can stumble over Christ, too. We can make a stumbling stone out of him of sorts ourselves.

We may fail to realize how important it is to come to the Lord Jesus Christ in faith. Let's don't stumble over the Lord Jesus Christ, but let's put our faith on him, because he is that rock upon which the church is built.

The rock of ages is our faith resting upon him.

Now, when our Lord Jesus Christ uses the word which we have chosen to translate, church, he uses the Greek word, the ekklesia. Now, it means to call out. It's an assembly of people who have been called out.

It's a called-out assembly. Now, that in itself gives us a hint as to the composition of the church. It is to those who have been called out.

Called out from what? Well, we get it in Acts. Acts chapter 15, I believe it is. Acts chapter 15.

Verse 13. After they had held their peace, James Vanchish saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me. Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name.

Take out of the Gentile people a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophet. As it is written, after this I will return and will build again the tabernacle of David which is fallen down, and I will build again the ruins thereof, and will set it up that the residue of men may seek after the Lord and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called.

Blessed the Lord who doeth all these things. And that is that group that we've been referring to, that he's going to take out of them a people for his name. Scofield very explicitly mentions the fact that the words to call, or rather, out of the prefix ek and kaleho, to call means that the Lord has called these people who are members of his church.

Now, the church is not a building. It's people who are able to hear a call. It's people who are able to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's people who are called in the scriptures living stone, not dead stone. We refer to this building as a church. Really it's not a church at all.

It may be a building. I say we do. I don't.

And I hope you won't either. It's often referred to. Church edifices are often referred to as the church.

They're not the church at all. They may be a building in which the church meets, but it's simply it's not the church. We should make that distinction.

Now, we have seen something of the composition of the church. It's people who are capable of hearing a call. It's people who have responded to that call, and the Lord Jesus calls them out from among the Gentiles.

Has he called you? Have you ever heard him call? Well, if you're a member of the true church, you're going to respond to a call. The Lord Jesus gives a call. That call is, All ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

We are the called ones. Saints, by calling, he has called us. In one way or another, he speaks to us.

Have we responded to him? Or are we like naughty children who, when their mother calls, make out that they don't even hear her, and they just go on their way? Now, it isn't hard to answer a call, and the Lord calls all of those who are members of his church, the true church. He calls them. Have we responded? Have we said yes to the Lord Jesus? Have we come to him? Have we answered his invitation to come to

him so that he may give us rest? He wants us for his own.

Now, in the 13th chapter of Matthew, we see something of the true church and the historical church. Now, the parable of the tares, suggests, and incidentally I should mention right now, that the 13th chapter of Matthew has been called the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. Now, the Lord Jesus knew that his kingdom was not going to be set up on the earth at his first advent, the first time that he came into the world.

He knew that he was going to go to the cross to die for you and for me. And he prepares them for that in the parables of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. These are truths that have been revealed to us by the Lord Jesus of those who are in the true kingdom of God, but those who are also in the kingdom of heaven.

Now, the kingdom of heaven embraces all of those who profess to own Christ as king. But the kingdom of God, I believe, is composed of those who are born again. Now, there are many people in the world today who claim to be Christians, who claim to be a part of the kingdom of heaven, but they're not.

And our Lord alerts us to this fact. He says in the first verse of the 13th chapter of Matthew, it says there, The same day went Jesus out of the house and sat by the seaside, and great multitudes were gathered together unto him. Now, this is the Sea of Galilee.

This was Roman country. This was where those cities were which are called the Capulets. This was the country more or less associated with the Gentiles.

This is Roman country. And he went out of the house and sat by the seaside, and the sea always suggests the Sea of Humanity. It suggests the Gentiles.

The house would suggest the nation of Israel, but he goes out of the house and he sits by the seaside and he talks about these parables, and this is highly suggestive, that what he's talking about in these parables embraces all of humanity, all of the kingdom of heaven in its mystery form. Now, I trust that this is not burdensome to you. We've got to get an overall view of the church before we get down to the fine points, and I'm sure down to some of the points that are going to interest these young people.

But let's talk about these things. I don't think it will hurt us to know these things. As a matter of fact, we should know these things.

Now, one of these parables is the parable of the tares. Let's read it in verse 24. Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field.

But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. And when the blade was sprung up and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servant of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, this thou not sow good seed in thy field, from whence then hath it tares? And he said unto him, An enemy hath done this.

The servant said unto him, Wilt thou that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay, lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest. And in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles, to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.

Now, here is a picture of something that happens under the name of the kingdom of heaven. Those that claim to own the kingdom, some of them are not real. They're sowed by the devil.

Now, the Lord Jesus interprets this. I think we would just do well to just simply read that interpretation. Verse 36.

Then Jesus sent the multitude away and went into the house, and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of Man. That's himself.

The field is the world, the good seed are the children of the kingdom, but the tares are the children of the wicked one. The enemy that sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the world, and the reapers are the angels.

As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of this world, or this age. The Son of Man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire, there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father, who hath ears to hear, and let him hear.

Now, of course, this has an application to the tribulation as well as to this day, this present day in which we live. And our Lord Jesus is speaking to Jewish people here. Now, never forget this, that Satan is at work sowing tares today in the church, and this makes us realize there is the true church, there is the professing church, which we may refer to as the historical church, and then there is within that professing church or the historical church the true church, the weak, those who belong to the Lord, those that are sown by the Son of Man.

But there's another one that's doing some sowing, and that one is the devil, and he is sowing tare, that which looks like wheat, but that which is not wheat. It has every indication of being wheat, but it's tare, distinguishable to a good husbandman, but most people wouldn't notice it until it's too late to do anything about it. Now, the devil wants to see people go to a lost eternity, and he doesn't care how much religion they get.

He is the one that sows the tare, and the tares and the wheat go together, and oftentimes you see them in a church relationship together, and you can't tell them apart. Thank God it's the angels at the end of the age that gather the tares out from among the wheat. I'm surely glad that I don't have to do the job.

I'm sure if I did, I'd burn a few Christians, but thank God the angels have got the job, and I don't have to do the job. They'll know. But that suggests the fact that right here in this audience tonight, we might have some tares.

People who look like Christians, they pass for Christians. They're among the wheat, and they're not wheat. Now, the devil will give people that kind of an experience.

I know. I was once a tare myself until I was born again. I had a name to live, and I was dead.

I was a professor. I claimed to be a Christian, but I didn't know Christ. I had not answered his call.

I answered the preacher's call. I went forward, not by any urgings of the Spirit of God, but by the pleadings of a preacher. And I joined the church, but I wasn't joined to Christ.

I missed God's salvation. I was a tare. But thank God, the grace of God reached me and saved me.

Now, this is solemn. This is very solemn, because the devil would like to have you have an experience. The devil would like to have you make a profession.

It's not real. Stay with it. We need to examine our foundations.

We need to be very, very careful about this. Now, this suggests to you and me that all the church that claims to be the church of God today is not all wheat. Believe me, it's not all wheat.

As a matter of fact, one wonders where the wheat is because of the profession of all that goes under the name of Christ today. It's a strange situation. Now, we want to talk about our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ.

We want to talk something about the position of the church. We've talked about the composition of the church. It is composed of true wheat, and it is composed of tares.

I'm talking about the historical church now. The true church, the church which is Christ's body, of which he is the head, is composed only of saved people. Now, you don't join that church.

You're born into it. You can join churches in this world, at least I did, and I didn't join anything. That would do me any good for eternity at all.

Now, I want to talk a little while about the relationship of the church to Christ, the position of the church to Christ. For this, we must turn to the Ephesian epistle. And here's something that I trust will exercise our hearts, especially if we don't know the Lord.

Now, in the book of Ephesians, we have two church, really true church epistles in the New Testament. One is the book of Ephesians, and one is the book of the Corinthian epistles. Now, these are so-called Catholic epistles.

They're universal epistles. There's nothing wrong with the word Catholic. If we use it in its right sense, it simply means universal.

I belong to the Catholic church. The true Catholic church, and so do you, if you belong to Christ. Now, I didn't say the wrong Catholic.

I said the Catholic church. And there are two Catholic epistles, Ephesians and the epistles to the Corinthians. Now, he says in the book of Ephesians, Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus.

Now, he goes beyond Ephesus in the scope of this epistle, because he includes the faithful in Christ Jesus, and believe me, they weren't all at Ephesus. It goes beyond Ephesus in its character. Now, the Corinthian epistle, and if I don't look at it right now, I'll forget it.

So, let's look at it right now. The first chapter of Corinthians. Let's notice how this epistle is addressed.

Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and sopherions our brother unto the church of God, which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place, called upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours. Now, it's addressed to the church at Corinth, but in scope it goes way beyond Corinth. Now, it takes into account all of those that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

So, these two epistles are what we call Catholic epistles. They go beyond the church that is addressed. Now, in the book of Ephesians, we have the position of the church, and in the Corinthian epistle, we have the practices of the church.

Now, you young people particularly are going to be interested in the epistle to the Corinthians, I guarantee you. You may not be so interested in the epistle to the Ephesians, but you most certainly will be interested in the epistle to the Corinthians, for therein will lie most of your questions. Now, in the Ephesian epistle, we have three figures of the church given up.

The church is looked at in three different ways. Now, let me say now that when we're talking about the church, someone says, well now, wouldn't it be better if we were to talk about the Lord Jesus and magnify and glorify the name of the Lord Jesus? Well, let me tell you this. You can't talk about the church and not talk about the Lord Jesus, because they are inseparable.

Christ and his church are inseparable, and when we talk about these figures of the church, we are going to talk about our Lord Jesus Christ as well. We cannot omit him. Now, in the Ephesian epistle, the church is looked at as a building.

We've already noticed that from 1 Peter, but not to the extent that we will in the Ephesian epistle. Verse 19 of chapter 2 reads like this, Now, therefore, ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God, and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone in whom all the buildings, fitly framed together, groweth into an holy temple to the Lord, in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. So we see here that Christ is the foundation of the building.

We are the stone. The church is seen under the figure of a building. Now, it's also seen in the Ephesian epistle under the figure of a body.

Now, we read also in verse 22, well, let's see, it's hard to break into the sentences of the apostle Paul. Well, let's say, He hath put all things under his feet and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all. Now, the church is referred to as the body of Christ.

It's referred to as the body of Christ, father over. Now, in chapter 5, the church is referred to as the bride of Christ. Let's notice that.

Verse 21 of the fifth chapter of Ephesians, submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church.

And he is the savior of the body. Therefore, as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it.

That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing. But that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies.

He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it even as the Lord the church. For we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones.

For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall be joined unto his wife, and they too shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Now, the church here is seen as the bride of Christ.

Now, it's very interesting also that the church is seen in a fourth figure. But interestingly enough, this figure is also spoken to the Ephesians. But we have to go to the 20th chapter of Acts to read about it.

Acts chapter 20. Verse 17. And from Miletus, the apostle Paul, sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church.

Now, when he gets these elders together, he gives them some words of admonition because the apostle Paul knew that he was going away and that he would not see them again. Now, he said to them in verse 28, Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. Now, here the church of God is referred to as a flock.

Now, if we refer to the church as a building, then Christ is the foundation. If we refer to the church as the body, then Christ is the head. If we refer to the church as a bride, then Christ is the bridegroom.

If we refer to the church as a flock, then Christ is the shepherd. You see, he takes the predominant place ever and always. Now, let's see if you're a member of his church.

Are you built upon that foundation as a living stone? Christ is a foundation, and other foundations can no man lay, but that that is laid, which is Christ Jesus. Let me ask you tonight, what are your hopes for eternity in heaven built upon? Are they built upon Christ? Are you a living stone resting upon that one foundation, that church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord? Are you depending on what Christ did on the cross of Calvary to save you from your sin? Or are you depending on your own good work, your own high resolve, your own prayer, perhaps your baptism, perhaps some kind deed that you've done? Is that what you're building on? Or are your hopes for eternity built wholly and solely upon Christ? Christ is the church's foundation. Where do you stand in relationship to him? Is he the solid rock upon which you have placed your faith? It must be upon Christ and what he did, his work, his work on the cross.

And if you place your faith anyplace else, your faith is misplaced and you're lost. Christ in Christ alone is our Savior. Are you resting on him? Are you a living stone? I'm asking you now, not if you're the member of a church in this world.

I guess I'm still in him. I never withdrew him a letter. But I'll tell you one thing.

I'm a member of the true church, which is his body. And I'm resting my feet upon that solid foundation, Christ. Are you on Christ's breathing? Are you depending on him tonight? Resting on him like I might rest on this chair? If I was Dave Horne, I'd be sitting in that chair by now.

There's that chair. You look at that chair and you say, yes, I believe that chair will hold me up. But you could stand there and look at that chair all day long until your feet ache and you wouldn't get any rest until you sat down on the chair.

Have you sat down on Christ? Is your weight on him? You see what I mean? You've got to rest your all and all on Christ. Depending on him. He's a 100% Savior.

He's not a 99 and 44 100% Savior. He's a 100% Savior. Are you resting on him, his precious blood, the value of that precious blood? Are you able to say, yes, I'm going to be in heaven, not because I deserve to be there, but because my precious Savior paid the price of my sins.

And I know my sins are paid off. Are you resting on the foundation? If we look at the figure of the church under a body, is Christ your head? Are you a member of his body? This speaks of life. Do you have eternal life? He that hath a son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

Are we a member of his body? Oh, how many truths cluster around these precious, biblically chosen illustrations of the church. Let's take the figure of the bride. Do you love the Lord Jesus? Is he your divine bridegroom? Are you entranced with him? Are you in love with the Lord Jesus? Do you love him? Well, you should.

All of those in the true church love him, as any bride loves her groom. Do you love the Lord Jesus? No, I didn't ask you if you ought to love him. You may be saying, well, I know I ought to love him.

I didn't want to ask you. I asked you, do you love him? Are you ashamed to say that you love him? I'm not ashamed to say that I love him, because he first loved me and died for me on the cross. Do you feel toward the Lord Jesus as a bride does toward her groom? That bride, she admires that groom.

She has eyes for him only. Well, about the truth of the flock. Is Christ your shepherd? Were you like the lost sheep going astray? Lost upon the mountains of doubt and unbelief? Out in the darkness of the night of sin, has Christ found you yet? Are you on his shoulders? Are you one of his sheep? Everyone in the flock belongs to Christ.

You see, in these figures of the church, we're brought face to face that we must have a vital link with our Lord Jesus Christ in order to be saved. We must be linked with him. This gives us a hint.

My house is there. Our time has passed away. This gives us a hint of how closely the church is linked with Christ.

The church is going to be linked with him even as a bride to her groom. Can you think of a closer relationship than that? I can't.

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