

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

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Introduction:

The church is an amazing gathering of people – under a tree; in a hut; in a home; in a beautiful building; in a stadium; under the stars; in a foreign nation; in a foreign language; in pain; in celebration; in love; in adoration of Jesus; how amazing!

So much could be said, but today I want to give you three pictures that are true, encouraging, easy to remember and challenging, as we answer the question, “What is the church?”

Three pictures of the church – the church is:

1. The Father’s Family!

God’s perspective:

- This is His family.
- He delights in His sons and daughters.
- He loves having them together in community.
- Everyone has a place at His table.
- This was the plan from the start – to restore us to Himself.

Listen to His Word: (Scriptures)

The church as the Father’s family:

Acts 2:46 ESV And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, **47**praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Matthew 12:49 ESV Jesus - And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! **50** For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

Ephesians 2:18 ESV For through him (Christ) we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. **19** So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God (His family – all together under one roof).

1 John 3:1 ESV See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God (and so we are).

1 Timothy 3:14 ESV I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, **15** if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God...

Ephesians 3:14 NKJV For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **15** from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.

Galatians 6:10 NKJV Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Practical implications for us:

- We are not an exclusive club.
- We are a diverse people.
- We share the same Father; we have the same family roots.
- We find unity in Him; prejudice is not for us.
- We celebrate one another's successes; feel one another's pain.
- We do life together.

Experience: How have you experienced the church as God's family?

Dream: How would you want to see 'family' expressed in the church?

2. The Son's Body!

God's perspective:

- Jesus Christ is established as Head of the church.
- Everyone else is a part of the body.
- Jesus has made it possible for us to be part of the family and part of the body.

Quote: Jesus is head of the Church because of his primary role in our creation and our redemption. Jesus founded the Church. He brought forth the Church and gave it life through his death and resurrection.

Listen to His Word: (Scriptures)

The church as the Son's body

Colossians 1:12 NKJV [The Father] has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. **13** He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love, **14** in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. **16** For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. **17** And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist (hold together). **18** And **He is the head of the body, the church**, (He) who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead - **that in all things He may have the preeminence**. **19** For it pleased *the Father that* in Him all the fullness should dwell, **20** and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

Ephesians 1:20 NKJV [God the Father raised Jesus] from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, **21** far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. **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.

1 Corinthians 12:12 For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. **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.

26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with *it*; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with *it*. **27** Now **you are the body of Christ**, and members individually.

Ephesians 4:15 [That we] 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.

Romans 12:4 For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, **5** so we, *being* many, are **one body in Christ**, and individually members of one another. **6** Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*:

Practical implications for us:

- Church leaders should connect people to Jesus.
- Honour and glory belongs to Jesus.
- Everything we do as a church should place the focus on Jesus.
- Worship should be about Jesus, not the worship leader or team.
- Preaching should direct us to Jesus, not to a particular speaker.
- When we minister to others, we should not create loyalty to us, but loyalty to Jesus.

Quote: Today it is the job of elders and deacons to follow the leadership of Christ as under-shepherds and servants of his bride, the church. Elders and deacons are servants of Christ. Does your church ministry model have Christ as head and central to everything?

Experience: What has been your experience of Jesus being the focus of the church?

Dream: What do you see when you think of Jesus as head of our church; the One who is always in focus?

3. The Holy Spirit's home!

God's perspective:

- God poured out His Spirit upon His people so that they would be supernaturally empowered. (I am His temple / We are His temple – dwelling place – dwelling – home)
- God has always wanted to dwell amongst men (Eden, tabernacle, temple, Jesus, New Covenant)
- The gifts of the Holy Spirit have been given for us to serve one another effectively and to show unbelievers the grace and power of God.
- A community of people pulsating with the life of the Holy Spirit

Listen to His Word: (Scriptures)

The church as the Spirit's home:

1 Peter 2:4 As you come to him, a living stone 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.

Ephesians 2:19-22 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, **20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, **21** in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. **22** In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 3:16,17 (All plural 'you') Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? **17** If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

[Do we not know that we together are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in us / our midst / our gathering / our togetherness / our church body?]

1 Corinthians 12 – 14 The body of Christ – the church – a place of amazing Holy Spirit activity!

Practical implications for us:

Church is supposed to be a place of the supernatural.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit must be evident amongst us.

Life in the Spirit and functionality in the gifts of the Holy Spirit is something for all of us.

Experience: What has your experience been of a Spirit-filled church?

Dream: What would it look like for us to have the Holy Spirit perfectly at home in our church?

Conclusion:

What is the church?

- The Father's family – where we are secure, whole, together
- The Son's body – where Jesus is the focus
- The Spirit's home – where life is supernatural

What could that look like for us at CCA?