

QUICK THEOLOGY

Why Bother With the Church?



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INTRODUCTION

In this booklet, we will explore why Christians should bother with the Church. This is a massive, ongoing discussion, especially in America. When the Holy Spirit draws people to Christ and those people respond, they become part of a new family. Jesus is the Church's cornerstone, and He draws us together to be a part of that community. Yet many hurts have come from people who claim to be Christians—or who are Christians but are not walking in the Spirit. Confusion and pain over church runs like a scar across Christendom. This pain leaves so many confused over what church even is.

This whole topic cannot be condensed into one book, but we will take a high-level look at what the Church is in Scripture and explore how we can be the Church in today's culture.

CHAPTER ONE

What is Church?

Twelve years ago, in Bible college, my professor asked our class, “What is church?” One student answered: “I think this is church. We are in a Christian college class. We are all Christians. To me, this is church.” Another answered: “I like to go to a big church where nobody knows me. No one tries to stop me or talk to me. That is church to me.” Even back then, I was disturbed by these definitions. Something is off about a gathering of people who happen to be Christians as the definition of the Church. There is more to it than existing together as followers of Christ. We also cannot have a consumer mentality of in and out: of taking what you want and not investing or talking to

anybody else. But if those definitions of church aren't quite right, what is? Is church a sermon, a worship service, and an altar call? Is it a small group Bible study? Rather than coming up with our own definition, let's dig into church history for answers.

First, the word "church" comes from a Dutch word, "kirk." That word descends from a Greek word, which simply means "Lord's house." However, the Lord's house is not just a building. Ephesians 2 explains:

"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of His household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In Him, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in Him, you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit."

We, the followers of Christ, are the Church built together into a temple of the Lord. Most of the instructions that are given in the New Testament use the plural word for

you. It refers to you as a collective. Our faith is inherently communal. Our bodies house the spirit of Christ. His spirit is an advantage to us, but His influence is not simply for our self-improvement. It is to unite us with other believers. Christianity was never meant to be a solitary sport.

Once we understand what the Church is, we can look to Scripture to learn the role the Church is meant to fill. In Acts, when Peter preached at Pentecost, three thousand people came to know Jesus. Many of those first Christians, who had come to Jerusalem to partake in the Passover, chose to stay and were integrated into the Jerusalem church. Acts 2:42 describes what they did at the meetings of this first church—the start of the body of Christ: they devoted themselves to the apostle’s teaching (expounding on the scriptures), fellowship (relationship, unity, and support of one another), the breaking of bread (sacraments—observing what Jesus instituted before His death), and prayer. These four components should characterize a gathering for it to truly be a church.

However, these elements were not all that made the Church powerful. Early followers of Christ were overcome by a reverence for God and an amazement at the work of Christ. A sense of awe or reverence filled the Church as

What is Church?

CHAPTER TWO

Change of Priority

Level of commitment is another element that made the first church so different than many churches today. Church life was more than warm-hearted fellowship between believers. When a member joined the early church, they rebuilt their whole lives around Jesus and their new brothers and sisters in Christ—completely transforming their old way of living and their priorities. When individuals do not reorient their lives around this new family, a new family cannot exist. This may be why we feel so dissatisfied with the surface fellowship many of us have found. When we show up, eat some refreshments, listen to a sermon, and leave—like that student in my class—we lack the change in

priority that comes with joining the Church community. Cultivating relationships with one another takes more than consuming a Sunday sermon once a week. Clubs unite around a united vision or goal, and families deepen relationships through consistent exposure and vulnerability. The Church is so much more than either of those things. So why do we so often treat it with less intentionality and care? None of this is to say there are not real, and sometimes very damaging, issues in churches. But we must examine ourselves and challenge the conceptions that would drive us away from the holy, healthy community God would have for His children.

REBUILDING FAITH IN THE CHURCH

Some people who try to dismantle institutional Christianity can champion the cry of: “Church isn’t just showing up once a week.” They are right about that. People who come to church to sit through a sermon once a week and do not do anything else are a problem. But the pendulum’s swung too far when people say, “I won’t just be a warm body in a chair, so bye, bye church, I’m done.” Now, I am not talking about being between churches or church hunting. I am also not talking about people who have been hurt by a church.

If you have gone through spiritual abuse, taking time off as you seek a healthy church community can be good. I am talking about true dismissal of the Church. When we abandon the gathering together for teaching, sacraments, and discipleship we fly in the face of everything Scripture teaches about the Church. We become accountable to no one, we reject authority, and we distance ourselves from those who can minister to us in the Word. We are out freewheeling, and that is not biblical or healthy.

I understand the frustration with American culture, but having been in over a dozen denominations in my life, I assure you that healthy churches do exist. It is possible to find one that honors God and people. Allowing this kind of bitterness in our hearts makes any kind of church experience very difficult. I think we are quick to hold people to a Christian standard that we do not adhere to. When we have this arbitrary checklist of things that we want to have in a church, and when we don't find what we want, we say, "Well, there's no church good enough for me." No church is perfect, and we are not perfect either. Sometimes you must be willing to give a little grace.

HEALING CHURCH WOUNDS

Christians must learn to distinguish between abusive church situations and community disagreement. With the latter, reconciliation may be possible. With the former, reconciliation is not always advised.

Spiritual abuse happens when leaders in a church act from authoritarian power rather than servant leadership. Such leaders might gaslight people who disagree with them, stack their elder team with people who will not question them, use Scripture to support an agenda, and carefully manage their public image rather than live in transparent accountability. In such churches, the pastor or organization takes priority over the people. Sometimes this results in failure to report sexual or physical abuses within a church to authorities.

These kinds of church experiences can be more traumatic than a church split and can affect our view of God, fellow Christians, and the global Church. God has great compassion for those who experience abuse, and Jesus specifically rebuked people who justified their sin in the name of Scripture (Luke 11 and Mark 9). If you have experienced pain at the hands of a Christian leader or group, I am so sorry. God sees. He did not cause this, desire this, or endorse this. But He is ready to heal!

Healing from spiritual abuse takes time and requires separating God's character from the character of those who hurt you. Rehearsing the truth about the God who loves you may help form that distinction:

- God is compassionate, gracious and just (Exodus 34:5-7)
- God loves justice and mercy (Micah 6:8)
- God thinks you are valuable (Matthew 6:26)
- God is a shield to those who take refuge in Him (Psalm 18:30)
- God is with you (Isaiah 41:10)

You will also need to set boundaries with your church or abuser. Reach out to people you trust to ask for support and perspective. Invite their prayers for wisdom, protection, and healing. You may need to see a licensed counselor to continue processing and healing from what happened to you. Through all of this, remember that the global Church contains wonderful, sincere, supportive Christians who will not treat you the way you have been treated in the past. There is hope for a local church family who exemplify a truly biblical love! And the best part? Your story may be

the thing someone in your next church family needs. You could be the one who helps others heal from spiritual abuse or church hurt. Your story could be the light for others to find their way home.

Whether the hurtful behavior of others grows to the point of abuse or not, how could people who claim Christ treat others so badly? How can they violate His standard of holiness in such an obvious and un-Christ-like manner? As someone who constantly receives criticism, negative feedback, and even malicious attacks and assumptions I understand this deeply. Church people are the people who have been the meanest to me. I understand they should not be that way, but they choose to because they are sinners, and they need Christ. Some of them do not even know the Lord, and some of them think that they are God's bulldogs. It is frustrating no matter the reason, but if Christ saw fit to forgive me, He has called me to do the same for them.

It is understandable that we would be angry at or even fear those who deeply wound us. But that fear should not drive us to unforgiveness. In 1 John 4:18 the apostle writes, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love." If the people who hurt me came

to me tomorrow and said they were sorry: that they had repented to the Lord and that they wanted to repent to me, I would happily have them in my community, or at least happily resolve that issue. Even if there is no repentance, I can still forgive them: I can still release them to God's justice. I think we often misunderstand forgiveness as complete acceptance or reconciliation. Forgiveness does not necessarily mean letting people back into our lives with no boundaries. But it does mean letting go of our bitterness or grudges and releasing people to God's justice rather than our own.

There will be no church on this planet that is not full of flawed and sinful people. But most of all, we must recognize our own sinful choices and habits and how we hurt people around us. This does not mean we excuse spiritual abuse, malicious manipulation, or cover-ups. But when we understand that we are all on a journey to become like Christ, despite how we all stumble at times, it helps us give grace to the flawed and sinful people we find in the Church.

Change of Priority

CHAPTER THREE

Reformation and Revival

How do we find, or contribute to creating, a healthy church? Let's look back to the church of Acts. These early Christians were united, they were holy, and they were growing—not always growing in numbers but growing in maturity. That was evident. Out of this healthy relationship with fellow Christians who held them accountable, taught them the gospel, disciplined them, and taught them how to walk as holy people, their ministry and evangelism was birthed. They gathered in this lifestyle of love and from that anchor, they ministered to the world.

Personal holiness is a huge witness to our world. God cares about holiness in the church. We are all flawed people who

need Christ, but it should be evident that we are living in conviction and living more like Christ through the leading of the Holy Spirit. That, in turn, motivates our evangelism and our relationships with one another in the church. This is how the Church becomes the light of the world. Which leads us to the cycle of reformation and revival.

I believe that the American church, at the very least, is on the cusp of a massive reformation and a revival. Currently, we are in the reformation stage. What I mean by reformation is there is a winnowing happening—the good things in the Church are being separated from the bad. There is a winnowing of people who have used the Church to seek a platform, notoriety, money, and fame. Those who have fallen for these sorts of unholy behaviors, motivations, and choices are being seen for what they are. In recent years, we have seen the dismantling of the megachurch model. We recognize how that model can lead to compromise theologically in the case of Andy Stanley. We have seen how it can lead to pride or spiritual abuse in the case of Mark Driscoll. We are beginning to realize that something must change—that something is changing. That is reformation. We are reforming the church. Change can result in the loss of a lot of people, some who were never saved or some

who walk away from Christ. Those who remain will be people who love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. People who love their neighbor as themselves. Those people will be changing this culture.

Francis Schaeffer explained the heart of revival well: “If you only have a reformation, you only have a change of the system, but no revival of the Spirit, no spiritual change in a person.” Any system can only be as good as the people in it. Even good change will peter out eventually. Once the system is changed, we need God to transform the hearts of the people in it—we need revival. I do believe that a revival is coming to the United States. Even if it only influences a small fraction, this renewal will create a faction of people who are so sold out for the gospel and God’s people. And those people cannot help but transform their cities and their streets and their homes.

CONCLUSION

That's why I always say every woman has to be a theologian: every woman has to be an apologist and a minister of the gospel. As Scripture says we are all little temples of the Holy Spirit, but we are also being built together into this greater temple to be the Lord's house on earth. When you are transformed by God, we can show people that it is possible to have love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and goodness. It is possible to have a new family in Christ. And even when we do not live that way, we can repent and be empowered to do better. That is the hope we should offer through the Church and the hope we should live in. When people see the way we live, they will want to experience that, and we can say, "Yes, you can experience that too. You can experience that in the body of Jesus Christ as people who are flawed, but who are being made new and built up into a temple to the Lord, our God."

Certain churches will need reformation, and this will mean winnowing. All of us need to be revived by the Holy Spirit. And in the power of the Spirit, it is possible to leave behind jealousy, bitterness, gossiping, and destructive criticism. When revival and reformation happen together, that is when we truly are a city on a hill and a light to the world. That is when we are the Church God intended for us to be.

CONFUSION AND PAIN OVER CHURCH RUNS LIKE A SCAR ACROSS CHRISTENDOM...

Join Phy as she delves deep into the history and biblical foundation of the Church to understand its origin, purpose, and significance. Build a richer appreciation of what it means to be part of a spiritual family and how the Church should shape our faith and community.

This book addresses common misconceptions and explores challenges faced by believers. It offers practical wisdom and guidance for navigating hurts and embracing healing within the Church community. Whether you are a seasoned believer or new to the faith, you can discover the profound impact of authentic Christian community.

Phylicia Masonheimer is a bestselling author, Bible teacher, and host of the *Verity* podcast. Her blog and shop, *Every Woman a Theologian*, exists to teach Christians how to know what they believe and live that out boldly. Because theology touches every area of life, you'll see content on everything—from baptism to motherhood to marriage! She lives in Michigan with her husband and three children.



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