



Part of the Family 1 Tim 3:15

WHAT IS CHURCH LIKE?

What do you think church to be most like? Here are a few common conceptions of church.

A SHOP
AN EXCITING MATCH
A TEAM
A HOSPITAL
A HOLIDAY RESORT

WHAT IS CHURCH LIKE? Actually, if you were here three weeks ago, you'd know that none of these is a picture of church that is in the Bible. And actually none of the pictures we have just looked are an adequate representation of church. It isn't a consumer service like a shop, football match, holiday, or for that matter a spiritual hospital. They may sometimes perform those functions for individuals occasionally. The team is probably nearest analogy as it is along the same lines as the biblical pictures of a body, an assembly of people called for a purpose and so on. One of the big pictures in the Bible I've not touched yet is the last picture I'm going to consider in our series:

A FAMILY

If we know Jesus as Saviour and Lord, then we are children of God – part of God's family. We're not just another team, another club, another organisation, another charity. We are the children of the living God. Here's how Paul describes it: *.. this letter will let you know how we should conduct ourselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.* 1 Tim 3:15.

God's household – God's family. As usual, what applies to the church universal, applies to the church local. My sister came to visit me yesterday. Whereas my family originates in Wales, there's a scot somewhere in it and of course, a few of us live in Suffolk. We may be part of a larger family, but we're part of the Suffolk branch. How we live our lives here is quite different to my sister's in Wales. We're quite different – but still the same kin. The same is true of God's church. It's everywhere. But we're a local part of the whole and we've chosen to do things "Baptist" but that doesn't make the Methodists any less our family – or people who live in other parts of the country or the world with other customs.

So church is a family. What we learned previously applies now. So if we're Christians then

GOD HAS MADE US PART OF IT – there is no such thing as a lone star or private religion. Church is the God-ordained place for His people to be. Remember the word *ekklesia* – its an assembly of people called for a purpose. God calls us to be church. I was told recently of someone who had dropped out of one of the churches in town and no longer goes to church. I was told "that he couldn't find a church that suited him". Church is the church of Jesus Christ – whatever branch. We are called to it. Pity he hadn't asked himself the question - "what church does GOD want me to be part of". We don't choose our families and all of us know how problematic that can sometimes be. God calls us to church. One thing I can say for sure is that God does not call people to be separate from the rest of His people.

GOD GIVES US FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES

We are part of God's family and as 1 Tim 3:15 told us *this letter will let you know how we should conduct ourselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God*. If God calls us to be part of His church then God gives us family responsibilities – just like a real family! Some people describe it as our sacred duty. We have a duty to discipleship, worship, fellowship, service because Father says we should. The Lord added people to the church. *“And they [those added] continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts. 2:42; 46, 47)*

PART OF THE FAMILY

We're called to be part of the church by God and to play our part in it. If God has called you here, then like Steve and Roz, you should be a member here if you're not already. We don't make it difficult for you either.

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP – IS IT SCRIPTURAL?

But..but. But you may say, if God has made me part of the church then I'm automatically part of this church aren't I? Where does it say about membership in the Bible? It's there. Membership is about being part of a body, recognising each other's call, accepting one another in Christ and accepting the constraints that being a member places on us individually. All churches have memberships although how that works precisely may differ from ours. And membership is there in scripture. Here are two particular items that showed that membership was practised. The first was:

- THE AUTHORITY OF LOCAL LEADERS. Leaders are a God-given part of church. The Bible says lots about the authority and respect leaders should have: Hebrews 13:17 *Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you*. We have commissioned leaders this morning and we have just agreed to: *to trust them, pray for them, encourage and help them in the work of the Lord. Will you, as the church family promise to support your leaders in this way?* You have accepted their role and authority. You can only really do that if you are part of the church – members
- CHRISTIANS BECAME RESPONSIBLE FOR ONE ANOTHER – a large chunk of the NT letters were about the responsibility Christians had for one another and how therefore to behave. Part of the commands given in the letters and actually the gospels too were on the discipline and relationships of members. Not a popular subject but you can only exercise discipline over those who have accepted the authority of leaders and accepted responsibility for one another. Membership is a formal covenant between us that God has called us and that we have responsibilities for each other – and that's really important when he going gets tough in church.

We live in a society where community responsibility is not popular. We don't like the idea of authority and responsibility because it means we can't do as we please but we are part of a community with responsibilities to others. That's one reason why people don't become members of a church – because we don't want to be tied down, be committed. But what does GOD want? I think you have the answer to that – we are called to be part of a local church – to be responsible to God and one another, and we won't thrive as a Christian unless we do.

FAMILY

So what are those responsibilities? I'd list them as these – all familiar I suppose

- ★ TO WORSHIP GOD TOGETHER . Worship is an important way by which we grow together in Christ. Hebrews verse. We've covered that in previous weeks. By not worshipping we not only hurt ourselves but we are not encouraging those we worship with.
- ★ TO MAKE OURSELVES ACCOUNTABLE TO ONE ANOTHER how?

- ◆ service - to serve God and serve one another. Love. Behaviour
- ◆ Prayer - pray for one another
- ◆ giving - to ensure that our needs are met. As a church

★ TO BE WITNESSES TOGETHER

ARE YOU A PART? Are you a member of a church? If you're visiting, are you a member of your home church? If you attend here, are you a part of it and by that I mean a member? If God is calling you here to be part of His family in this branch, then you need to accept the family responsibilities.

PLAYING OUR PART? Before the members here think this doesn't apply to them, let me give you one final task this morning. It's a challenge. You each have covenanted to be a part of this church? Does our behaviour honour Jesus and honour one another? Are we playing our part in the ministry of the church God is calling us to - or are we leaving it to others. Yet in a family, how would you feel if someone else was doing all the housework whilst others sit around watching telly? You know what I mean. If you're the parent of a lazy teenager you know how you feel about that. Then you now realise how Father feels about us when we say no, can't be bothered, can't fit it into my busy schedule (that usually isn't busy).

Challenge

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