



November 3, 2024

“The Importance of Church”

Sunday school at 9:30, Service at 10:30.

News:

Fall Family Gathering & Potluck today after the service.

Wednesday Evenings at Alêtheia 6:30-8:00

Ladies Night Tomorrow ~ Elder/Deacon/Staff Meeting Thursday, November 7th

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For the majority, the concept of being a disciple is either misunderstood or disregarded. There is a general complacency in Christianity.

We think that we encounter and endure “many trials and tribulations” just as described, but is that so?

The church universal at the local level has always been an essential, integral part of being a disciple.

ACTS 14:21–28 ~

Christianity has always been about individual people being Born Again into the Family of God.

The phrase, “after they had preached the gospel to,” is εὐαγγελίζω (ü-än-gě-lē-dzō). It means to proclaim the excellent Message.

Evangelicals, evangelize...

Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate or the prayer/suggestion box in the lobby or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.

God Bless You!

Organizational relationship was, and is, vital to the success of Christianity.

Elder is πρεσβύτερος (přēs-bü-tě-řös), meaning a man of ripe age and experience, called to lead group affairs (I Clement 44:1&2).

This was not seen as a position of power and authority, but as an appropriate man agreeing to serve the group as a leader for them.

Christianity is not, nor has it ever been a democracy.

The “church” is ἐκκλησία (ěk-klā-sē-ä). It means “called out.”

The world is therefore divided into two distinct camps inhabited by two distinct groups of people.

Christianity has never been about individuals blindly following the herd, nor was it ever about abandoning the herd.

Communion:

Baptism:

The bigger challenge to church unity today is church leadership.

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| 1) We are different... | 2) I'm not infallible... |
| 3) You don't have all the information... | 4) My priority is the church... |
| 5) Maybe disagreement is a symptom of unhappiness, not a cause for it... | |
| 6) Respect? | 7) The social media culture... |

You, my friends, will be the evidence that is used to help convict, or exonerate...

The Apostolic party returned to their sending church that had made it possible...

Write a brief note – detach and place in the offering, or the prayer box, or give it to a Deacon or Elder.

Name _____ Address _____
 Phone _____ Email _____

Last week I finished with a little section on what it is to be a disciple because we read in Acts 14:22 where God, through Luke, called the brand-new Believers, “disciples.”

In most of Christianity over the centuries, and certainly in America today, the concept of being a disciple is either misunderstood or disregarded. It stems from ignorance in many cases and from complacency in all cases.

There is a watered-down Christianity that has prevailed through the annals of history. At times it has taken the form of focusing on the observing of rituals that tie God’s hands, at other times it manifests in a legalistic moral code, of late it is mostly a perception of God that He’s a big teddy bear – a consummate softie – all bark and no bite.

We take the Love of God and the Grace that His Love fostered for granted. It’s just His nature to forgive us of every misdeed we commit in the service to our own self-interest. Because we have no real respect for God, we live our lives almost identically to the way those who denounce God live.

To be a “Born from Above,” “Holy Spirit filled,” “Child of the Living God,” “Sealed in Christ Believer,” you must be His disciple. In this very same verse Almighty God declared that as a disciple of His, “It is through many tribulations that we must enter the kingdom of God.”

It’s not a typo – it’s not hyperbole – Again, as we saw last week, Jesus commanded us to be disciples when He said in Luke 9:23–26, “If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me.

Jesus went on to talk about abandoning this physical life in favor of serving His Kingdom purposes and if you do that, you will inherit the Kingdom that He builds, partially, through you.

We think that we encounter and endure “many trials and tribulations” just as the Scripture describes – that we are suffering for the Kingdom. Really? The trials and tribulations of this life that most of us deal with are just those that are part and parcel to this life and are the plight of every human being. The world is a terrifyingly uncontrollable place. No wonder we’re all afraid... freaked out, frustrated and stressed. We have no idea what’s going to happen next! Is it a car

accident, cancer, loss of a loved one, divorce, road rage, a constitutional amendment to allow partial birth abortions, the wrong candidate being elected, a third world war? But whatever it is that is just life in this fallen and depraved existence.

How many of us have suffered because we follow Jesus and do His bidding? How many of us can say that we have encountered a “fiery ordeal,” or have shared in “the sufferings of Christ,” or have been “insulted for the name of Christ”?

According to the Bible, we disciples are supposed to suffer for the Kingdom as a means of testing for us and as a means of demonstrating to non-Believers the Truth we hold is completely true to us.

Imagine the conviction of the Holy Spirit on the conscience of unbelievers seeing Christians so dedicated to Christ that they were willing to die on the spot for Him.

Are you willing to be stoned to death for Jesus right now? Stephen was, Paul was, are we? The cost of truly following Jesus just might be far greater than we assume.

The community of Believers, the Body of Christ on earth, the church universal at the local level was always an essential, integral part of being a disciple.

I'm going to reread verses 21&22 along with the remainder of chapter 14, so... Acts 14:21–28, 21And after they had preached the gospel to that city and had made a good number of disciples, they returned to Lystra, to Iconium, and to Antioch, 22strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "It is through many tribulations that we must enter the kingdom of God."

23When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they entrusted them to the Lord in whom they had believed. 24They passed through Pisidia and came into Pamphylia. 25When they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. 26From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been entrusted to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished. 27When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all the things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. 28And they spent a long time with the disciples.

Super key element here... Christianity has always been about individual people being Born Again into the Family of God.

Just for your edification, the phrase, “after they had preached the gospel to,” is a single Greek participle derived from the verb εὐαγγελίζω (ü-än-gě-lē-dzō). We could easily spend 20 minutes talking about this complex word and the nuances of the participle form, but I only brought it up to point out that this base verb εὐαγγελίζω directly gives us our English word Evangelize. The Greek word literally means to proclaim the excellent Message.

Evangelicals, evangelize, meaning that we are disciples who work to make disciples of other people.

So, Paul, Barnabas and the rest of the gang, had gone as far as they were led by God to go, and so, they redirected their efforts into “strengthening the souls” of the new disciples and “encouraging them to continue in the faith.” They retraced their steps from Derbe, to Lystra and from Lystra to Iconium, and from Iconium to Pisidian Antioch and from Pisidian Antioch to Perga and Attalia, their entry point in Asia Minor. Going back

to each place with the purpose of solidifying the organizational relationships.

A bunch of individual Believers on their own would not have lasted very long. Some would have been isolated and picked off, others would have been overwhelmed by their persecution and recanted, others would have mixed their limited Christian knowledge with other ideas creating false doctrines.

Organizational relationship was and is vital to the success of Christianity. Both for the individual Christian person and for Christianity as a whole. The Apostles “appointed elders for them in every church.” Don’t miss the little words. The reason that they appointed elders was for the people – for the Community of Believers.

“Appointed” is a word used only twice in the entire Bible. It means to hand select by way of a vote. The Apostles prayed and fasted seeking the Lord’s Will in the matter and then they voted.

The process is one of seeking to learn the Lord’s decision already made in Heaven and enacting that on earth. It is an ordination by God recognized by men.

These elders were ordained to lead each and every church. “Every” means that there were no Christians without a church and there were no churches without elders.

Elder is πρεσβύτερος (přēs-bü-tě-řös), meaning a man of ripe age and experience who was called to lead and manage group affairs, whether of a town, or a business organization, a synagogue, or a church. Generally, elders were capable men over the age of 50.

The document that came closest to being universally accepted as a Bible Book in the New Testament that didn’t end up making the cut was a letter written by Clement, the Bishop of Rome, to the Corinthians in 95 A.D. I’ve mentioned it before. It’s widely available if you’re interested. In the letter, Clement largely addresses the same problems that Paul addressed 40 years earlier.

I Clement 44:1&2, “1Our apostles likewise knew, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that there would be strife over leadership in the church. 2For this reason... they appointed Elders giving the offices a permanent character; that is, if they should die, other approved men should succeed to their ministry.”

This was not seen as a position of power and authority for the elder, but the elder being called to serve the group as a leader for them. The appointing of such men was always done humbly, prayerfully, and in an orderly way, to discern the Lord's choice of men to sacrificially lead His Holy church.

The Apostles prayed and fasted showing their dependance upon Jesus to discern which men He had already selected. To that point, Clement, agreeing with the Apostles, went on to write that it was a grievous sin to refuse to submit to such leaders.

Christianity is not, nor has it ever been a democracy. It is and always has been a Theocracy. Christ is the Head and He ordains men to lead in various roles within His church. We can get onboard with Him or not... But make no mistake about it the "or not," is willful disobedience. To sit at home, or church hop to avoid submitting to church leadership is willful disobedience.

The "church" is the Greek word ἐκκλησία (ĕk-klā-sē-ä), made popular locally by Larry Lautaret. He really liked the name of this church, so I guess there's a

compliment in there. ἐκκλησία literally means “called out,” speaking of those people who have been called out away from the other people to be God’s people, is the idea.

This concept goes hand-in-hand with the idea of being disciples, and the idea of evangelizing. We Christians were fallen humans who have been “Born Again, from Above.” We are a new creation in Christ and as such we are different than we were, and so, we are different than those who have not yet been “Born Again from Above.”

The world is therefore divided into two distinct camps inhabited by two distinct groups of people – those Alive in Christ and those still dead in their sins. The Christian group has been called out by God from the world to live for Christ – to accomplish His purposes on earth, rather than pursuing their own interests as the heathen do.

His purposes begin and end with the Kingdom of God That has been built by Christ through His church – through those who He has called out for that purpose. Generations of disciples have made disciples and that’s the reason that there is a church today. It is now our turn to be those instruments through whom Christ

continues to build the Kingdom of God so that there is a church tomorrow.

I said earlier that Christianity has always been about individual people being Born Again into the Family of God. That's two things. It was never supposed to be people blindly following the herd and it was never supposed to be people abandoning the herd.

To the first point, Christianity isn't Christian if it's done simply to go along with others. This is why small children are not Christians in their own right – they're simply riding the coattails of their parents and the church.

We assume that they are Christians, we accept them as Christians, we treat them as Christians, and they may be Christians sure enough, but we don't know that for sure, because they don't know that for sure.

There will come a day when they must make that Christian commitment for themselves as an individual. Not because that's the way they were raised, or that's the community they know, or that's what their family and friends do, but because that's who they are. Who they have personally chosen to be.

Modern American Christians outside of Catholicism and Old Mainline Denominations pretty much get that. Where we have a serious lack of understanding is the second half. No Christian in the last 2,000 years was “Born Again from Above” and filled with the Holy Spirit as an independent free agent individual.

It is every bit as wrong to think that a Christian can go it alone unconnected with the Body of Christ on earth as it is to believe that a person can be a Christian just because they go along with the crowd.

There are only two fully agreed upon and universally accepted sacraments, ordinances, rites, in Christianity. Communion and Baptism. There are many other sacred moments of grace, but only these two are accepted by nearly all Christian communities and both have everything to do with community.

To administer Communion to yourself, by yourself, is to completely miss the point of Communion altogether. Communion is a rite of remembrance of Christ, Who binds us together as a family of Believers. It is a Christian community communing in unity celebrating the One Who bought us and then brought us together

into His Body on earth to serve His purposes. It is all about the church.

Baptism is not about an individual being Saved – that idea is so incredibly wrong it astounds me. We have this moronic idea that a new Christian convert can be baptized in some handy bit of water by some random Christian acquaintance and then go on to live their life without ever darkening the door of a church. Wrong!

Baptism is an initiation into Christianity conducted by a church accepting the new Christian into the church. We are Baptized into the Body of Christ, which is the church. That is precisely why it's possible to correctly baptize a baby as we did at church camp.

Like Communion, it's not a Salvific Sacrament in and of itself that forces God to accept the person. Both things are about being a Christian within the community of Believers. Both are sacred and holy because both have to do with humans recognizing and embracing the unity of the church desired by God. "Love one another" cannot possibly be done alone.

Baptism is the church accepting the person into the church as a member of the church. When it comes to

those below the age of accountability it is a dedicatory rite by acknowledging two very important distinctions that make what we did right and make what some other denominations do wrong. 1) First, we recognize that the baby is not yet a member in his own right – he will have to square that one day for himself. Second, we recognize that we, as a local church, are not infallible. Just because we baptize a person whether an infant based upon his parent's confession of Christ, or an adult confessing Christ for themselves, it doesn't mean that we are always right or that our actions have somehow tied God's hands.

The church is trying to conform itself to His Will, not the other way around. You can see, with that understanding, there is no difference at all between the baptism for little Brady and a typical baby dedication. It is for all a rite where Sarah committed to raising Brady in the admonition of the Lord, where we, all surrogate Godparents committed to helping Sarah raise her son accordingly and that all of us accepted Brady into our church as part of our family on behalf of the universal church.

He, like so many children in this church dedicated to the Lord before him, will grow to become a full-fledged

member of the universal family of God in his own accord. That's what we are counting on, that's what we believe will happen, that's why we're doing what we're doing, but we are not infallible and one day Brady will decide to confirm or deny his baptism.

It's only when you think that the act of dunking has some magical qualities that it would be offensive to you. You can get baptized until the fish know your social security number and it will do you no good at all. If you baptize yourself, you're just taking a bath in your clothes. It is all about the church.

The point I'm really making is that Christianity has always been intended by God to be a community affair. There are many reasons for that, not the least of which, is to enable iron to sharpen iron. So, of course, it isn't all fun and games in the church. It isn't supposed to be. If it was easy, we wouldn't need the Holy Spirit. If it was easy, none of us would grow.

Part of the challenge of church life is your fellow Christians – just the difficulty in getting along, being patient and gentle with each other.

The bigger challenge nowadays is probably with your church leaders. What I can tell you, and I know that you could take this as self-serving on my part, but I assure you that it is simply Truth... What I can tell you is that there is no way possible for all of you to agree with every leadership decision that we make in this church. That's a fact and you can either quit, or stay and be grumpy, or thank God that somebody is making decisions that you don't have to make and support them.

And so as not to throw anyone else under the bus, I'll restrict it to decisions that I make. The buck stops here anyway – I always take full responsibility. So, what I promise you is that it is impossible for you to agree with every decision that I make.

1) That's partly because we are different people and so we come to different conclusions and it's 2) partly because I'm not infallible and I do make mistakes. I'm sure there are other things, but if we're honest, it has more to do with your attitude than my leadership.

3) Most of you don't have the information that I have. It's easy to disagree with a decision when you haven't heard all sides of the issue.

4) The vast majority of times that people have angrily disagreed with a decision, it was because of how it affected them, not seeing the other side and also forgetting that my priority is the church as a whole. I have to think about everyone and beyond that, I do what God wants even if that requires everyone some discomfort.

5) Oftentimes disagreement with me over decisions is a symptom of a negative attitude, not a cause for one. I cannot begin to count the number of people over the years who have found fault because they are unhappy. If you start looking for what's wrong, you will find it.

6) Some of you have little to no respect for me personally and that extends to my role. When I was a Marine, people would ask me, how can you call officers sir and salute them, when they're just people too? I always said that it is the office, or position, or rank, that I respect, not necessarily the person. You don't have to respect me personally, but you had better respect the role that God has called me to play. One day, much sooner than you think, the Lord Jesus Christ will have a face-to-face with you and you will get to explain why

you treated the pastor He gave you the way that you did, whether good, or bad.

7) I am appalled and shocked by the horrific damage the social media age has done to our culture. Now, everyone believes that they are entitled to harshly and publicly judge everyone and everything, whether they know anything about it or not. James 3:6&8, 6And the tongue is a fire, the very world of unrighteousness; the tongue is set among our body's parts as that which defiles the whole body and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell... no one among mankind can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

The Apostles appointed leaders in each and every church and then entrusted the churches to the Lord. At the end of the day, that's all I, or any other leader can do. I pray that the Lord keeps you – that's my only concern.

I freely confess that at times in the past decades I have had other concerns along with my concern for you, as you all are the church, but at this point, I only care about you. I could not care less about my career, or about my future, or about my legacy as a pastor. I have

no agenda other than knowing that I will soon stand before Jesus and give an accounting to Him of my teaching and my leadership among you. You, my friends, will be the evidence that is used to help convict me, or to help exonerate me.

I'm speaking Truth to you because I care more about you hearing the Truth, than I do about what you think of me.

The Apostolic party returned to Syrian Antioch and reported everything to their sending church. That church had made it possible for the Apostles to share the Gift of God with thousands of people hundreds of miles away free of charge. This church continues that same work.

Your support, spiritual, physical, and financial, enable Alêtheia to exist. To continue encouraging the saints with Biblically accurate teaching and sharing the Gospel with outsiders free of charge. Without all of you this ministry will die. There is no other source of support – what you all choose to give is all that there is. This is your church – do with it what you will.