

**Displaying the Gospel (pt. 1): The Church's Place in *Framing* Christ's Face
1 Corinthians 1–10 | 11.13.2016 | Body Life @OBC**

You may remember . . . at the onset of this year . . . we said a major reason for selecting 1 Corinthians was its gospel-centered focus on life in the local church.

As elders we believed then and now . . . we have much to learn about Scripture's priority on the LC and meaningful membership.

And so this year we have been on journey to better understand the nature of the church and the value of membership . . .

So for instance . . . in 2016

1. We have studied together **1 Corinthians** and discussed its application in our **FLOCKS**.
2. We have rolled out a **NEW** new members class – what we call **Discover OBC**
3. The **elders and deacons** have been discussing baptism, membership, and the church
4. We have urged members, regular attenders, visitors alike to **read *Church Membership*** by Jonathan Leeman and to talk to the elders about it. (There are free copies in the foyer).
5. Most recently: Our **current SS class** focuses on this subject – how the gospel creates the church . . . and how our church is organized to best display and declare the gospel.

Now for all this focus on the church . . . we should clarify . . .

We don't believe organization of the church is an end in itself . . .

. . . but we **DO** believe how we organize ourselves will highlight or hide the gospel.

And so . . .

Instead of wading into the complex issues of 1 Corinthians 11–14, only to stop abruptly in two weeks when we turn our attention to the birth of our Lord

We are going to review what we have seen thus far, making application of 1 Corinthians 1–10 to our own church.

If you are taking notes, the title for this message is

Next week . . . **The Local Church as Christ's Picture FRAME**

The Local Church as Christ's family PICTURE

As a community made alive by the Holy Spirit, we have a responsibility to live, move, and have our communion, such that our church displays the God who saved us . . .

And we display his grace and truth in TWO fundamental ways:

1. By caring about the structures of the church – membership, baptism, Lord's Supper, discipline, church polity, etc . . . **we FRAME the gospel we believe**
2. By caring about the people of the church – loving one another, serving one another, preaching the gospel to one another . . . **we PICTURE the Christ who has saved us**

Next week . . . we will look at this PICTURING . . . at the way holy love and life-giving service to another displays the power of the gospel to the world.

This week . . . we look at FRAMEWORK of the church itself . . . to see how membership is designed to assure the faith of God's elect and distinguish God's family from a world spiritual counterfeits.

For sake of simplicity . . .

I have seven points about the LC taken from the first ten chapters of 1 Corinthians.

I pray these points are clear . . . but more than that . . . that they are compelling.

So that we not only see the truthfulness of church membership in the Bible,

. . . but also its beauty and wisdom.

1. The church is both local and universal.

It might be helpful to begin by defining terms. In the study of ecclesiology, which is the study of the church, the *ekklesia*,

Universal church is that countless multitude that God set his love on before the foundation of the world. These elect of God in all places, throughout history, are the ones for whom Christ died and who will stand in glory with him forever.

The **local church** is a gathering of God's redeemed who meet together in the name of Christ as an outpost of God's kingdom here in this space and this time.

NOW Membership in the LC doesn't guarantee / earn a place in heaven . . .

Rather . . . our aim as a LC is to be a gathering of true disciples who faithfully represent our Lord on earth.

So **Matthew 16:18** promises victory to the universal church – “On this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” That's not an absolute promise to a local church. That's a promise that when all the sheep come home, not one will be missing. He will build his eschatological, universal church.

And then **Matthew 18:17** speaks of the local church as the people gathered together who hold one another accountable. If a brother or sister does not repent of their sin, when 2 or 3 approach him, then they are to take it to the church – the local church.

So then, in our letter, Paul as an apostle of Christ is writing to a local church.

In fact, 1 Corinthians is one of 13 letters he wrote . . . and none of them are written to the UC. All of them are written to local churches or to individuals serving in LC's.

Moreover, of the 114x *ekklesia* is used in the NT, about 100 focus on the local church.

And the reason why the NT is so slanted towards the local church is because you and I experience the universal church by our communion in a local church.

So in **1 Corinthians 1:2** . . . he writes to the church of God (UC) *IN* Corinth. The LC is a part of the UC . . . and the universal church is comprised of many local churches.

This is our second point . . .

2. The universal church is made of local churches.

Four times in 1 Corinthians we see Paul speak of the church at large . . . and in each case he speaks of particular local churches.

1:2 – the church that is in every place – *topos* . . . sense of location

4:17 – Paul teaches the same “everywhere in every church” . . . he could have spoken about the church everywhere in generic terms, but he chooses to make it particular.

7:17 – “this is my rule in all the church” . . . again the international church of God is – in Paul’s mind – found in local churches

11:16 – “we have no such practice [of being contentious], nor do the churches of God”

In each instance (and others in 2 Corinthians) . . . Paul could have spoken of the church generically (in the singular), but he doesn’t.

His pattern is to speak of the universal church as a coalition of discrete churches, not a generic description of Christians spread abroad.

This means that local churches should work together . . .

Through prayer, giving, and receiving teachers / members from other churches . . . we build up the body of Christ universal . . . by being a faithful local church.

Indeed, rightly understood . . . an emphasis on the local church does not undermine a doctrine of the local church . . . rather it should strengthen the whole body of Christ.

At the same time . . . individuals experience the universal church in and thru the local church

3. We experience the Universal Church thru the Local Church.

Look at **1:17** . . . God did not send Paul to baptize but to preach the gospel.

Meaning . . . Paul didn’t baptize often because he was not called to serve a LC.

He was not a pastor of a particular church. He was an apostle to the universal church . . . but as a missionary evangelist, he planted local churches.

THEREFORE If he baptized, it was b/c a church didn’t yet exist in the place he was preaching

But as soon as a church formed, he handed that ordinance to them.

Thus Xians baptized into the Spirit (12:12–13) are members of the universal church . . . and water baptism confirms that universal reality in space and time.

To turn it around . . . water baptism CREATES the LOCAL church as disciples of Christ are marked out from the world.

4. The local church calls the universal church to walk together as disciples of Christ.

In **1:18–31** . . . Paul contrasts the wisdom of the world with the wisdom of Christ.

He speaks of the necessity of the cross and the power of God’s effectual call.

This call is unmistakably universal . . . it is has gone out and is going to the ends of the earth.

In the NT we watch the gospel go from J . . . S . . . Antioch . . . Rome . . . BEYOND . . .

But more than just being universal, God’s call is also effectual . . . where God raises the spiritually dead to life and unites them to his Son by giving them faith in Christ.

And when the called of God come to faith, they begin to gather in local assemblies called churches – this the pattern that carries all throughout the New Testament.

We never see Xian who isn’t attached to a church or commissioned to start one

In 1 Corinthians 1, Paul reminds the Corinthians of their humble beginnings . . .

He seeks to humble them with the doctrine of election . . . so that they would not boast in themselves but in Christ.

Indeed, this is one of God’s greatest designs for the local church . . . to bind Christians together so that pride would decrease and love would increase.

Indeed, only by abiding in close proximity with OA will spiritual maturity occur. And the LC – with all its warts and blemishes – is the place God has designed Xians to grow.

More specifically, as the church watches God call people to himself through the gospel, we are called to call out the CALLED . . .

Often we think of CALLING OUT THE CALLED in terms of vocational ministers, but it is equally true the LC is commissioned to make disciples and baptize them . . .

In this . . . the LC is an outpost of disciples who recognize other kingdom disciples and invite them into their church to be a part of what God is doing.

For us . . . this is what our membership process aims to do

To identify believers . . . who have been called by God . . .

To baptize them . . . if they have not publicly identified themselves with Christ

And To teach them . . . to obey all that God has commanded.

Now truthfully . . . the process of identification differs with every person . . . and the goal is never to keep anyone out . . . but rather to discern who are the called.

If you identify with Christ and his people . . . why wouldn’t you want to commit yourself to God’s people for growth in godliness and help in calling out the called.

5. The local church has been given leaders who know their sheep.

In 1 Corinthians 4 Paul outlines the characteristics of a true apostle and he reminds us of how personal a pastor's love is for the people given to him.

Now, to be clear, Paul is not a pastor but an apostle. But that being acknowledged, he has a deep affection for the Corinthian church. He calls them his beloved and sees himself as their father in the faith.

Look at 4:14–17 . . . READ

He corrects the Corinthians as someone who knows them, has spent time with them, and loves them as his own family.

Such affection is a mark of a true spiritual leader. But it is also created by close proximity. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 16:7 – **“For I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits.”**

Likewise, he says to Thessalonians: “Being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.” (2:8)

These expressions of warmth and affection are the mark of shepherd who has been with his sheep . . . and this can only take place as the church does life together.

Practically . . .

This exposes the folly of a present trend. Let's call them iPod pastors.

Because of the gift of technology . . . you can find preachers whose skills far exceed my preaching or any of the elders at OBC. What is more . . . you can listen teachers whose slant on the text is more to your liking . . .

But is such an iPod preacher a good pastor? Is that what God intends?

If you are in the hospitable, on the battlefield, or on a business trip, listen to them. By all means, avail yourself of sound biblical teaching.

But don't confuse good expositional preaching . . . with pastoring.

God didn't give us qualifications for elders so we could test Internet personalities . . . elder qualifications are for churches / members to discern who should lead them.

And then in appointing those men to preach and lead . . . church members are called to submit themselves to their leaders, the ones who teach the Word of God.

Elders, in turn, must know their sheep. And sheep must submit . . . not in theory, but to actual pastors, whose lives are marked by the Spirit.

6. The local church has power AND wisdom to exercise the keys of the kingdom.

Look at **1 Corinthians 5:4–5**: **READ**

The action here is church discipline that is exercised – NOTICE – “when you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

When you are assembled in the Lord’s name, there is a spiritual authority to exercise discipline. That is what Jesus meant when he said in Matthew 18:20 – “**For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.**”

[I don’t believe he means . . . in a church of 200/300 2 or 3 people have the authority of the whole church . . . but rather that a church of 2 or 3 people has equal authority in God’s site compared to the largest mega church]

Jesus has promised to be with his church, and even when it is as small as just two or three disciples . . . he comes with power.

Matthew 18 says the authority to bind and loose has been given to the church. What is that? **It is the delegated authority to affirm/deny someone’s profession of faith.**

That is what church membership is . . . it is a statement of affirmation to all who submit to Christ in the local -- “**this one is one of the Lord’s**”

It is not to say, that all those outside the local church are not Xians . . . but it is to say that all Christians outside the local church MISS this gift of spiritual assurance.

So, the first point: the LC is not just a worshiping body; we are a political body.

Together, we form an embassy of God’s kingdom that has mandate to make disciples, love one another, and hold one another accountable.

This is the authority God has given the LC . . . but he also given the LC wisdom.

Look at 6:5: What a tragedy it would be if a church had spiritual authority to exercise discipline, but no teachers or elders or counselors skilled to handle the word of God.

Thankfully, God gifts his church with teachers. He gives mature leaders to his church who know God’s Word . . . and who can teach/counsel/correct others.

Therefore, in times of crisis, the first place a Christian should go is his or her church.

At OBC . . . I am blown away by the gifted counselors we have . . .

He has filled us men and women able and willing to counsel . . .

WHY would you run outside the church, when you have wise brothers and sisters who love you ready to care for you?

7. The local church provides visible boundaries for the universal church.

In many ways, the universal church is currently a concept more than a concrete reality.

Ekklesia . . . in its truest sense . . . means gathering or ASSEMBLY.

And so today, there is not such thing as a UNIVERSAL assembly.

And there hasn't been a universal gathering of God's people since Jerusalem.

One day . . . there will be a universal assembly.

When Jesus Christ returns . . . he will gather all his people . . . and there will be a UC.

Until that day . . . LC's are called to assemble as living, worshiping, loving gatherings.

The local church provides a refuge for individual Christians and it demonstrates to the world the power of the gospel . . .

. . . As people from every nation and walk of life gather together, we proclaim that Jesus Christ is LORD . . . until he comes.

FTR, It's vital churches do not blend in with the world or take their cues from the world.

Local churches are alien invaders from the future. And we believe strange things.

For instance: we believe a previously dead man we've never met personally is preparing to split the eastern sky, riding on a white horse, so he can throw his enemies in a lake of fire . . . and dine with all those who wear white robes covered in his blood!

This is who we are . . . and it is vitally important that those who are defined as the church believe the same thing . . . about God, his Word, his gospel, and his church.

Such peculiar beliefs are what enables a local church make visible the boundaries of the UC.

And we see it most clearly in **1 Corinthians 5:12–13** . . . READ

In the text, we read . . . there is an inside and an outside. In the context of church discipline, the local church is accountable to one another and responsible for those inside the church . . . not those outside.

In my understanding . . . this verse stresses the importance of making these boundaries clear

At the same time . . . we must not go too far.

When I preached this passage earlier this year . . . I didn't to clarify this point well enough:

Namely . . . there are true Christians who are not members of any LC.

While Paul stresses the reality of local church boundaries; he is not categorically denying non-members as unbelievers.

There IS a category of born again believers who are not members of a local church.

I don't think I was clear enough about that before.

That being said . . . I believe Scripture teaches Christians should join a local church . . . this is the biblical pattern . . . the best way for spiritual growth and protection . . . and that refusal to join a church is a mark of concern . . . not freedom in Christ.

ATST for LCs, we have the abiding commission to call individual members of the universal church to join a local church . . .

And we do that for at least, three reasons:

- [1] THIS calling towards membership is **for God's glory** . . . only a regenerate church – church made up of genuine Christians – can display God's holiness, love, and unity.

We put up the boundary of membership . . . not to keep Christians out, but to make clear who the Christians are!

- [2] This calling to membership is also **for your good** . . . God does not intend for you to pursue Christ on your own . . . but with others in the local church.

The LC is his design for communion and discipleship.

- [3] This calling towards membership is **for the sake of the church itself.**

It enables members to know who they are called to minister to . . . who they can call on in their hour of need . . . who has pledged themselves to labor and suffer together in times of crises . . . and who is looking for the instruction and correction of the elders.

Friends . . .

I know this teaching has at times seemed confusing . . . perhaps even heavy-handed.

But . . . I pray . . . you know that the reason why we have focused our energies on it . . .

. . . is because we believe it is BIBLICAL . . . and that it GLORIFIES GOD.

A Family Portrait

Let me close with an illustration.

When we look at the church, what should we see?

In short, we should see the face of Jesus Christ.

In the lives and liberties of the church, we should see a people whose holy love and life-giving service reflects the character and cross of Jesus Christ.

This is what it means for the people of God to be remade in the image of God; Christ's face and faithfulness is on display in his church . . . because his Spirit abides with us.

To say it differently,

The church should be a family portrait of Jesus Christ.

While each family member has their own unique characteristics, it should be evident who their spiritual father is . . .

Jesus is the source of our life and love . . . and by means of gospel faith . . . he makes us a part of his father's family.

Each church, therefore, IS a family portrait of Christ.

And thus . . .

To display the beauty of Christ to the world, we must give attention to our doctrine, our ethics, our worship, and our witness.

All those things are what fit inside the frame . . . and they are most important.

But . . . like the portrait of any sizeable family . . . we must also have a sturdy frame.

It's one thing if a family has a few dozen people in it; the strength of the frame does not have to be as great.

But as soon when you get to hundreds of people in the family, the frame matters.

This is what church membership is . . .

The local church does not exist to get people on our rolls . . .

We exist to display Christ to the world. We gather together, so that the realities of heaven can be seen on earth.

But to do that faithfully . . . we must consider who is in the picture.

In fact, because we care deeply about the holiness, love, and unity of the church . . .
. . . we spend great time and effort to think about who our church is.

And we should do that . . . not because we love the frame, but because we love the Lord whose picture is seen inside the frame.

And therefore . . . the frame matters . . . because the picture of Christ matters!

In so many ways, the picture at the center of our frame is a collage of disciples who display Christ better together than by themselves.

Indeed, Christ has not called us to be 200 individual Christ-like selfies.

He has called us to be family members in local households of faith,

. . . to learn how to love and serve, to disciple and be disciplined,

. . . to give and receive . . . to forgive and be forgiven.

And . . . in God's plan . . . is to center itself in and through the local church

This is what membership is . . .

a refusal to follow Christ in your own way,

and instead . . . glad-hearted submission to Christ in a local gospel-believing embassy of kingdom faith.

Don't you want to be a part of that? . . .

Don't you want to be in the family portrait?

I know I do . . .

And I pray you do too.