

Fathom Academy: Christian Theology

WEEK 11: THE CHURCH

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Week 11: The Nature and Function of the Church

[Ecclesiology]

Ecclesiology: The Nature and Function of the Church

Resurrection, Ascension, Exaltation [*Soteriology* II]

Part I: Images of the Church in the biblical witness

Part II: Thinking theologically about the Church

Part III: Conclusions: Why the Church matters

Part I: Images of the Church in the biblical witness

The Church in the biblical witness | Biblical Vocabulary

- *qahal*— “assembly, convocation” [Deut. 9:10, 10:4]
- *‘edah*— call to assembly around the cultus or the Law [Exodus 12:3]
- κυριακός [*kuriakos*] — “belonging to the Lord”
- ἐκκλησία [*ecclesia*]— “assembly, called community”
 - “The sum of the individual congregations does not produce the total community of the church. Each community, however small, represents the total community, the church.” [Carl Schmidt, *TDNT*]

Images of the Church in the biblical witness | The Temple of God

- 1 Corinthians 3:16–17: “Do y’all not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you [Οὐκ οἶδατε ὅτι ναὸς θεοῦ ἐστε καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ οἰκεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν]? If anyone destroys

God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.”

- **The Church is a “pneuma-dynamic” community [Gregg R. Allison]**

Images of the Church in the biblical witness | God’s own Priesthood

- **1 Peter 2:9: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”**
- **The People of God is a body whose prime purpose is doxological and priestly [Luke 19:36–40]**

Images of the Church in the biblical witness | The Body of Christ

- **Ephesians 1:22–23: “And he [God] put all things under his feet and gave him [Christ] as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”**
 - **The Church is an *organism*, which entails an organic connection between believers [1 Corinthians 12:12–13]**
 - **“Jesus Christ existing as community” [Dietrich Bonhoeffer]**

Part II: Thinking theologically about the Church

Thinking theologically about the Church | The Logic of the Church's Functions



Function of the Church | Worship

- **Zephaniah 3:17:** “The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.”
- The fundamental purpose of a human being is *doxological* [John Jefferson Davis]
- The fundamental activity of the Church must be *oriented toward the word of God*

- **The Church must be sure that it is doing *theology*, not *anthropology* [Karl Barth]**

Function of the Church | Fellowship

- **Ephesians 4:15–16: “Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”**
 - **κοινωνία (*koinōnia*)**
 - **Serious, intimate, radical commitment [Gal. 6:2; Rom. 12:15]**
 - **Discipline, correction & rebuke [Matt. 18:15–17; 1 Cor. 5:1–2]**
 - **Sustenance [Heb. 5:12–14; 2 Tim. 2:2]**

Function of the Church | Proclamation of the Gospel

- **Matthew 28:18–20: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”**
 - **The Church has been commanded, authorized, and empowered to proclaim the Gospel**
 - **Evangelism necessarily entails discipleship**

Function of the Church | Justice

- **James 1:27, 2:15–17: “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. . . . If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”**
 - **Dysfunctional worship manifests in dysfunctional social practice; dysfunctional social practice delegitimizes “accurate” worship [Amos 5:21–24]**
 - **The Church’s concern for justice is what makes Christian worship true and Christian witness credible**

Part III: Conclusions: Why the Church matters

Conclusions | Why the Church Matters

- **“There is no such thing as one Christian.”**
- **The Church will hurt you (and you will hurt the Church)**
 - **There is no perfect Church—and there never was**
- **“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” [Hebrews 10:24–25]**

Conclusions | “Do walls make Christians?”

Victorinus: “Did you know that I am already a Christian?”

Simplicianus: “I shall not believe that or count you among the Christians unless I see you in the Church of Christ.”

Victorinus laughed and said: “Then do walls make Christians?”

Suddenly and unexpectedly Victorinus said to Simplicianus:

“Let us go to the Church; I want to become a Christian.”

-Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* VIII.ii (4)