

Church

Cedar Springs Baptist Church

What We Teach

We believe the church is the most important institution on earth. Jesus Christ, who is supreme over all things, gave his life for the church (Eph 5:25) and serves as its head (Col 1:18). We love Jesus when we love his people, and we joyfully devote our lives to the service of his church.

What the Church Is

Scripture provides a variety of images to convey the unrivaled worth of the church.

The church is the body of Christ (Rom 12:4-8; 1 Cor 12:4-31; Eph 5:29), the bride of Christ (Eph 5:29, 32; Rev 19:7; 21:2; 22:17), and the temple of the living God (1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16). It is God's people (Eph 2:19), God's building (1 Cor 3:9; Eph 2:21), God's house (Eph 2:22; Heb 3:6; 1 Tim 3:15; 1 Pet 2:5), God's flock (John 21:16; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2-3); God's field (1 Cor 3:9), God's vine (John 15:1-8), God's city (Rev 21:2), and the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Tim 3:15).

The church is one, holy, and universal. Despite its numerous divisions and denominations, the church's many members compose one body. Paul explains, "There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph 4:4-6; cf. John 17:20-23; Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 10:17; 12:12-13, 20, 27; Eph 2:14-18; Col 3:15).

Despite its frequent sins and temptation to conform to the patterns of this world, the church is holy, set apart to God and uniquely superior to every other human organization. The church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph 2:20-21; cf. 1 Cor 3:17; Eph 5:27; Col 1:22; 1 Pet 2:5, 9).

Despite its myopic tendency to focus on its own individual corner, the church is universal, stretching across time and denominations to gather up all believers into the communion of saints. We do not merely come to our single assembly. Hebrews 12:22-24 states that we "come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God...to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven...to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel" (Matt 16:18; Eph 1:22-23; Rev 7:9-17).

The church is both invisible and visible. The true church consists of all believers in heaven and on earth who have been justified by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Only God knows who truly belongs to him, so this aspect of the church is invisible to us (2 Tim 2:19). However, the true church does make itself visible in local churches who assemble in the name of the Lord.

The visible church will typically contain some members who are not genuine believers. We strive for a pure church membership by warning against unbelief and disciplining those who fall into repeated and unrepentant sin. However, we give our brothers and sisters the benefit of the doubt and assume they are truly saved unless the fruit of their lives indicates otherwise. There will likely be some weeds among the wheat and some goats among the sheep, so we warn of God's judgment and wait for God to sort people in the end (Matt 13:24-30, 36-43; 25:31-46).

The church is led by elders and deacons. Our church appoints qualified men as elders to guide our church, tend to the Word of God and prayer, and shepherd our members as those who will give an account to God for them (Acts 6:2-4; 20:17-38; Tit 1:5-9; 1 Tim 3:1-7; 5:17-21; Heb 13:17). Our church appoints qualified men as deacons to lead in practical areas of service, such as finance, building and grounds, and distribution of charitable funds (Acts 6:1-7; 1 Tim 3:8-13). All members are encouraged to lead and serve in our church, as they are gifted, as they are able, and as opportunities arise (1 Cor 12; 1 Pet 4:10-11).

What the Church Does

The church at worship. Our local church gathers to worship God (Eph 5:19-20; Col 3:16) and experience his presence through the preaching of the Word, believer's baptism, the Lord's Supper, prayer, and fellowship.

The Word is the center of our worship. We gather first and foremost to hear from God. Everything else we do is a response to God's Word, which the Spirit uses to transform our lives (Acts 2:42-47; 2 Tim 4:1-5; Matt 28:20). We practice believer's baptism, immersing a follower of Jesus in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In this one-time initiatory rite, the Spirit seals upon our hearts our union with Christ, physically portraying our identification with Jesus' death and resurrection and joining us to his local church (Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:1-14; Col. 2:11-12; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:26-29). We regularly celebrate the Lord's Supper, in which the Spirit of Christ uses the physical signs of bread and cup to nourish the faith of baptized believers, uniting our hearts with our Father and with each other (1 Cor. 10:16-17; 11:23-26). We pray, availing our high privilege to speak directly to our Father (Acts 1:14; 4:24; 6:4); we fellowship with each other in meaningful community (Acts 2:42); we serve each other by our spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:1-31); and we encourage each other to renounce sin and follow Jesus.

As we perform these sacred tasks, we join a long line of churches that reach all the way back to the apostles. The first Christians "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.... They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And

the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:42-47; cf. Matt 16:18-19; 1 Cor 3:10-11; Eph 2:20; 3:4-5; 2 Pet 3:2).

The church in the world. Our local church disperses to proclaim the gospel of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension. This is our most important witness, for lost people must hear the good news in order to be saved. Paul declares, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved,” and then observes that people cannot call on someone they have not believed in, they cannot believe unless they hear, and they cannot hear without “someone preaching to them” (Rom 10:13-15). A good life by itself will never win someone to Christ. If we want to lead our friends to Jesus we will have to use our words (1 Thess 2:16).

But our gospel words must be accompanied by kingdom works. Jesus commands us not merely to make converts but to make disciples who “obey everything I have commanded you” (Matt 28:19-20). Disciples of Jesus will embody the kingdom values of loving neighbor, serving those in need, and caring for creation. They will “do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Gal 6:10). They will “look after orphans and widows in their distress” because they know that God is “a father to the fatherless, a defender of widows” (Jas 1:27; Ps. 68:5). And they will find joy in their cultural tasks, following Paul’s command to “whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus,” for “it is the Lord Christ you are serving” (Col 3:17, 24).

These kingdom works will “win the respect of outsiders” (1 Thess 4:12) and “make the teaching about God our Savior attractive” (Tit 2:10). They will draw attention to the gospel and may even persuade others to join our church, where we celebrate the good news that Jesus has redeemed us and will restore all things when he returns (Acts 3:21; Eph 1:10; Col 1:19-20).