



# CENTRALITY *of the Church*

By Matt Knapp

PERHAPS YOU’VE heard something along the lines of “the church must be central.” It is often used in conversations about missions. But it is not always clear what is meant by this phrase. Let’s look at this topic for the purpose of improving clarity and encouraging discussion.

## What is a Church?

The Greek word for church is “ekklesia” and means a calling out or a gathering/assembly. The New Testament uses this word in a global sense as all of the redeemed of God that have been bought with the blood of Christ (Eph 1:22; 5:25) and to refer to the local gathering together of believers (Matt 18:17; Gal 1:2). It is appropriate to say that God speaks throughout the scripture of churches being assemblies that make up the global Church.

When the phrase “centrality of the church” is used in the context of Apostolic Christian missions, it refers specifically to the local church. There, we must have a common understanding of what is a local church. Are there requirements for a building, certain number of people, liturgical structure, or other items? Biblically, we can define a local church as a fellowship of believers in Jesus Christ committed to gathering regularly for biblical purposes under recognized spiritual leadership.

## This Definition Consists of Four Areas:

- **Believers in Jesus Christ** – those gathering together are the redeemed of God through Jesus Christ. He has purchased all believers with his blood and the church is considered his bride (Acts 20:28; Eph 5:25; Rev 19:7-9)
- **Committed to gathering regularly** – church means a gathering and we see the disciples gathering together consistently on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the week (Acts 20:7)
- **Biblical Purposes** – the purpose of gathering includes, but is not limited to, reading, teaching, and preaching the scriptures (1 Tim 4:13), prayer (Acts 12:5), and performing the sacraments of baptism and communion (1 Cor 11:20; 12:3).
- **Recognized Spiritual Leadership** – it is necessary to have leaders appointed that are responsible for the care, teaching, and equipping of the believers (Eph 4:11-16)

## Why does Church need to be Central?

Next, we need to determine what it means for a church to be central. When a church is central it is the focal point and not on the periphery. In Ephesians 3:9-21, Paul states that the church is not only putting God’s glory on display in the world (verse 21) but also to the angelic realm (verse 10). The reason that the church is central is because it is God’s

divine plan that he is glorified through the local churches that make up his global body! Due to this truth, the church should be central to all ministries.

The scriptures demonstrate the centrality of the church through the words of Jesus, in Acts, and in the Epistles. Jesus used the word “church” in Matthew 16:18 and indicates he will build and sustain his assembly. In Matthew 18:15-20, he teaches the church how to apply discipline when someone is unwilling to repent. Jesus taught the concept of the church while on earth.

In Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8, Jesus commands the apostles to go into all of the world, be witnesses, make disciples, baptize, and teach “whatever I have commanded you.” In obedience to Jesus, we see the following progression – the gospel is preached – men and women come

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to saving faith in Christ – **Churches** are established – Letters are written to **churches** – Letters are written to young pastors on how to establish **churches** – **Churches** are visited and encouraged on follow up missionary journeys – **Churches** send out new missionaries – new **Churches** are established.

The result of sharing and living the gospel is that churches are planted where they make disciples, baptize, and teach people to live lives of obedience to Christ. We have been recipients of this in the Apostolic Christian Church. The gospel was proclaimed in Europe, churches were planted, men were sent to America, the gospel was proclaimed, and churches were planted. We then had the gospel shared with us through the local church!

Lastly, we see the church as central in the Epistles and the book of revelation. Paul tells Timothy that the **household of God is the church of the living**

**God** which is the pillar and ground of truth. Paul addressed his writing to the churches in his Epistles and John addressed the 7 churches in Revelation 2 & 3. Finally, the book of Revelation looks at the church as the bride of Christ (Rev 19:7-11).

## Applying this to our Local and International Missions

Since the church is central to the gospel being communicated across the world, it makes sense for outreaches of our local churches and also HarvestCall ministries (which are beyond the capacity of the local church) to focus on:

- Ensuring all ministries we are engaged in support the local church and that the church is the primary means for preaching to the lost and discipling new believers.
- Evangelizing for the purpose of making disciples who observe all Christ commanded.
- Fulfilling the Great Commission with the focus on growing existing church or planting new ones.

As HarvestCall seeks to apply this principle, we expect to see the following in the future:

- Active planting of Apostolic Christian Churches in the USA and other regions
- HarvestCall ministries working together with local churches to reach out to the community with the gospel.
- Some missionaries will be ordained and sent as spiritual leaders
- Where HarvestCall has an existing foreign ministry that has been working with an approved established local church, our missionaries will actively work with that church to effectively support local evangelism and discipleship.

God desires the church to be central to all ministries! May we all be actively thinking through and praying for how the ministries we are involved in keep the church central. May it rekindle our desire for planting churches for the purpose that God will display his glory throughout the earth! *Matt Knapp serves as Executive Director for HarvestCall.*