



THE TEACHING ABOUT

THE CHURCH

commonground
church

GROUNDED 2

Talks 34-38 of Eaton's Whole Counsel of God series
(Talk 35 is a stand alone on The Doctrine of Scripture)

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THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH AND SCRIPTURE

TALK 34

God is revealing Himself and speaking throughout Scripture – it is the voice of God in written word.

The way God speaks generally

God speaks in Creation - Psalm 19

So what happens to people that do not know God?

Scripture says that God has made Himself plain in creation. No one is born atheist – we have to learn that belief – we are born with a sense that there is a God.

We also have a conscience that speaks to us about God and about the fact that we know that there is right and wrong. Amos appeals to the conscience “you ought to know these things”.

The general revelation is enough to condemn, but it is not enough to save them. It doesn't tell you about Jesus. That is why they need people sent to them to preach the gospel.

The way God speaks savingly

God spoke through the prophets but in the last days He spoke through His Son (Heb 1)

1. God can appear and reveal Himself (Moses etc.)
2. God can speak in a voice (Samuel etc)
3. God speaks through Urim and Thummin (Yes, No, No answer)
4. God speaks through writing (Jeremiah etc.). Preaching first and then writing is second is ME's advice.

Some like to say that scripture is personal but not propositional. ME says “No” - part of having a personal relationship is that you speak to the other person. If it is personal, that will mean that you speak. Silence is hatred and love is speaking. God is not just experienced, He is both experienced and speaking to us with the truth of Scripture.

Scripture has a threefold structure/pattern:

- What God will do? Prediction
- What God did? Event
- What God has done? Interpretation

Revelation therefore comes with Word and Deed.

Scripture is progressive and it all comes to a climax in Jesus – there is nothing beyond Jesus. This is not a progression from error to truth – it is a progression from truth to more truth.

The people involved in Scripture were:

- Moses
- The prophets in the OT
- The psalmists
- The wisdom writers
- Jesus – the final revelation
- The apostles – they all point to Jesus – their revelation of Jesus is the “rock” upon which the church is built

ALL OF THIS REVELATION IS THEN PUT INTO SCRIPTURE.

The Bible has teaching concerning itself. Jesus witnesses to Scripture and vice versa. You can't have Jesus without the Bible. ME tells the story about how he was saved with a low view of the Bible and how that was changed.

Jesus reads the OT and says that he will fulfil it. Jesus places Himself under the authority of Scripture. Jesus knew the Scriptures when Satan approached. John 10v35 “Scripture cannot be broken.” This is the teaching of Jesus. Jesus accepted its history and refers to the people, Genesis etc. Paul also places great emphasis on Scripture – it is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, reproof (show where you are wrong), correction (show you the right way) and training (get you back on your feet). This makes you equipped for every aspect of Christian ministry.

Peter says the same thing – it wasn't someone's own idea – it was God carrying them along (2 Peter 1v21).

You still need the veil to be taken away in order to see what the Bible says. When you turn to Jesus, the veil is taken away.

We are to use the Word of God in preaching. We must show that what we say comes from Scripture (i.e. Acts 17 – Paul reasoned with them from the Scripture). We have a great distance today between the scholars and the people and that means that the Bible has become far removed from most people's experience.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH, PART 2

PICTURES OF THE CHURCH

TALK 36 (NOTICE THE CHANGE OF ORDER – LISTEN TO TALK 35 AFTER THIS ONE)

Matthew 16v13-20

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” ¹⁴ And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” ¹⁵ He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” ¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” ²⁰ Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

Ephesians 2v19-22

¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 3v10-11

¹⁰ According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. ¹¹ For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

There are things that God has been doing throughout His plan of salvation – there is the Spirit, The Word of God, at every point the salvation is corporate – once you are in salvation, it is immediately corporate (ME gives the example of natural birth – you are born on your own but are then part of a family). This corporate name is the church.

The word church means an assembly or gathering of people – it is always people. It is not a building, not a doctrinal statement – it is the fellowship of the redeemed. Jesus is the one who is building His church – he is the owner and the builder. “I am building my church”.

Is Jesus doing anything else other than building His church? He is building His Kingdom, not a political party, through the church. That is why you should not say “I love Jesus but not the church” – that cannot be true because the most precious thing to Jesus is the church. Jesus is building His church – is he doing anything else? No, Jesus is building His church. The church is a people – the fellowship of the redeemed– not a building, piece of paper. You can sympathise with the person but they can't stay there.

The word church is used to describe the entire gathering that Jesus is building. It is a congregation that no-one has ever seen – one day we will see it! It is a multitude that no-one can number. The word church is also used to speak of a local congregation. These are the only 2 ways that it is used. Notice that it is never used of a national church (i.e. Church of England) or of a large area (always “The churches of South Africa”). There is never a time that all the congregations meet together and therefore there is no such term as the church of South Africa.

PICTURES OF THE CHURCH

- Like a body – lots of different parts in it but one entity
- Like a bride – like a woman getting ready for the wedding
- Like a field – one sows, another waters, another reaps – God gives the increase
- Like a city –we are no longer strangers, we are fellow citizens (Eph 2)
- Like a family – members of the household with a Father and children – these pictures are getting more and more intimate
- Like a building – not just bricks that are all the same – every stone is different and in contact with one another (not bricks that are all alike)

The picture of a building gets developed further:

1. It has a foundation – it is built upon something. The Matthew passage makes it clearest, the rock is the apostolic revelation of Jesus (you are the “Son of God” – the rock on which the church is built). Peter is speaking on behalf of all the apostles. Jesus then explains what has happened, the Father has revealed this to them, He has opened their eyes. It was not their ability, it was all from God. The apostolic revelation of Jesus is the foundation. Your life will collapse if it is built on anything else.
2. It has a cornerstone – this is the precise, perfect stone that would be the first stone that was placed. What it did was secure all the other stones together. It was the starting point for all that followed. Peter used this picture sarcastically “the stone that you have rejected has become the head of the corner”. We are all different but yet we have the Lord Jesus Christ in common. He puts us together and keeps us close to Him.
3. It has living stones – we are alive and called to fit into the people of God. We all have a part to play in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. It may be friendliness, prayer for others – you are a perfect fit for where you have been placed.

4. It is growing
5. It has a special character – a holy temple
6. It has an owner - Jesus
7. It has a builder and under builders – Jesus uses and involves people. Jesus includes Peter as the first preacher (not the first Pope – after all he did get married!). It is not our church and He is doing the building through us.
8. It has an enemy – the gates of hell are against it. What does that mean? What makes a town is the wall around it and the one way in would be through the gate. If you wanted to see someone, you would wait at the gate. Business would be done there, the parliament would be there. All the power is located at the gate. Jesus teaches that the gates of death will not prevail against it. Satan hates the church, but he shall not prevail. He attacks with persecution, division, heresy, false teaching
9. It has authority – we have our own authority. We are given keys to the gates. What does this mean? The church has the ability under God to get things done. We can stop things from happening through prayer, we can loose the power of the Kingdom of God. It is surely the power of our gospel. When we proclaim, preach and apply this gospel message we release the power of God. What really changes nations is the gospel. Look at the history of Europe – as the French revolution swept through the world, the English had the Methodist movement that stopped it from happening in England. The trade union movement trying to help people also comes from them.

The most amazing thing is that God has moved into His building. It is a holy and clean building where the glory of God is present. This is the most incredible thing. This is where we learn, encourage each other and feast in the spirit. The one thing Jesus is doing is building His Church; make sure that you are building it with Him as well. Be a dwelling place for God in the Spirit.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH, PART 1

RELATIONSHIP OF THE CHURCH TO THE KINGDOM/ISRAEL/ STATE/CHURCHES

TALK 35

(NOTICE THE CHANGE OF ORDER – LISTEN TO TALK 36 BEFORE THIS ONE)

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHURCH AND KINGDOM?

Roman Catholicism believes that there is no difference – the church is an organisation which represents the Kingdom. It still remains true that the Roman Catholic Church will not call any other body the church except themselves. You get saved by joining the church effectively – baptism, mass, submission to the church. All of this is still being taught as much as ever. We need to revise this thinking – the New Testament church is not institutional, it is not full of hierarchy – it is utterly different to the Roman Catholic Church.

ME speaks of how state churches are the only ones that have spires – there is a theology there. It demands authority over everyone by being higher than everything else.

The Kingly power of God produces a people – the church. The Kingdom is not the Church; it is the power of God at work in the lives of people. It is the message of Jesus.

It is a Kingdom of righteousness, peace, it is a heavenly Kingdom, it has tenses (i.e. The Kingdom has come, is coming and will come). The Kingdom and the Church are not identical. The Church is the community that the Kingdom produces. The Word spreads the Kingdom – the parable of the sower who is spreading the Kingly Royal power of God. The Kingdom produces a people that preach the Kingdom.

The Kingdom has to be inherited – it is largely our persistent hearing and valuing it that leads to inheritance, it is hard to value it if we are preoccupied with this world. The Sermon on the Mount is an exposition on the principles of the Kingdom.

The Kingdom is the life of the Church. It is seen and experienced in the ministry of the Church. They mutually supportive and they proclaim each other. The Church is a community of people whilst the Kingdom is pure God.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHURCH AND ISRAEL?

What is the meaning of Israel? It was first the name of one man. It then became a nation that was in bondage in Egypt. It was then redeemed from slavery. At that point they were a nation of believers – they would not have been redeemed if they did not believe in the blood of the Lamb. Hebrews names all of them as heroes as they had all placed their faith in the blood of the Lamb.

But then:

Romans 9v6-8

⁶ But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel,⁷ and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.”⁸ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

Not everyone has the same faith; they are just descended from the Israel that was redeemed from Egypt. The name Israel can therefore have a double meaning – it can mean the believing people of Israel as well as those that are unbelievers but yet part of the nation of Israel.

ME comments on how his wife is descended from the Huguenots' – not all of them still believe what their ancestors believed. It is the original ones that had a relationship with God. Not all who follow are truly Huguenots. It is the same with Israel.

HAS THE CHURCH REPLACED ISRAEL?

No – the Church has joined believing Israel – we are heirs of the Covenant with Abraham. Not because we have replaced Israel, we have been grafted into the People of the Promise. The promises to Israel (those who believe God) can be applied to the Christian. Everyone who turns to faith can be grafted in (Romans 11) and be part of the vine. We are one people, the law has been abolished (this is the theme of Eph and Gal) and so Jews and Gentiles are made one and are the same in the Spirit.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE?

Every society had a state religion back in the time of Israel. It was often state enforced and you would be executed if you didn't worship the state religion. This is one of the great themes of Daniel – the King had setup a state religion with a great assembly and pomp and ceremony. Daniel refused to worship however and got thrown into the fiery furnace. All nations were like this, even Israel, remember Elijah executed the prophets of Baal.

When you come to Jesus, the great question is asked "Shall we pay taxes to Caesar?" The Herodians (pro-state) and Pharisee's (anti-state) ask Jesus this question. Whose state religion will he break? Jesus answers it deftly. "Show me a coin". Notice how it has Caesar's face on it, Jesus has already revealed their hypocrisy because they are using Caesar's system when really they should not be. Jesus then says something amazing – he renders one into two – he separates church and state. You can be loyal to Caesar with regard civic affairs and be loyal to God when it comes to faith. You can be loyal to both in separate realms.

Christ followers are the only ones who really believe in pluralism. We are the pioneers of democracy and the separation of church and state (e.g. The Puritans in the USA originally only wanted people who were members of the church to be able to vote. Roger Williams was the first person to challenge that. He got into a lot of trouble and was thrown out. He established Rhode Island State – the first in the world to separate church and state. It happened in the UK with the Levellers in Cromwell's army. Cromwell wanted a tolerant state church and allowed Jews without persecution. The Levellers wanted one person and one vote. They were radical right-wing Baptists who wanted to tolerate everyone.)

The church and state are distinct:

1. In membership – the state is geographical whilst the church is a believer in a certain area.
2. In officials – the state has kings, armies etc. whilst the church has elders, deacons etc. They have no authority in the other sphere.

3. Their weapons – the state has prison, armies etc. whilst the church has the gospel.
4. Their aims – the aim of the state is to provide peace whilst the church aims to reach nations with the gospel.

They are both under God but distinct. We can preach to the state and must not let them change the message.

There is a difference between something being done by Christians and something being done by the Church. For instance schools, social work etc. can be done by Christians but ME reckons that it is unwise for church leaders to take responsibility for these.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHURCH AND CHURCHES?

There are only 2 usages for the word church. There is not another “middle-management” layer. There is a global church and there is a local church. There is no national or provincial church and therefore there are no officials of these churches. There is no such thing as a lead elder of a denomination – that will not work – you will put an administrator over preachers. Preachers want their freedom.

As an apostolic movement gets bigger it can no longer keep in touch. It therefore tends to appoint National Directors. This is not in the New Testament. Rather let such people arise naturally; don't appoint some people to an admin role. Let there be “Holy Spirit Bishops” where they are respected by people for the gift they are.

The power structure is not in hierarchy, it is in Jesus. There is no need for middle management, it is not in Scripture.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH, PART 3

MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH/LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH/THE LOCAL CHURCH

TALK 37

ME emphasises again that the church is global and local – there is no middle category.

Does the church include the people who are in heaven? The Bible doesn't really address that, it is not clear. Generally we think of the church as those that are now on earth but it could also include those that are waiting for the resurrection.

The church is a secondary doctrine. It is not as important as salvation, justification etc. The church is not as important. Sometimes when people love the church too much, they can be unsaved. ME mentions the “New Look” movement that are really saying that you are saved by attending church. That is wrong, you do not glory in the church first.

1 Cor 12 v27-31

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ²⁸ And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ But earnestly desire the higher gifts.

Paul here is referring to more than the local church here – because it is “the” body. Paul is taking it for granted that “the” church will appear in churches.

Ministers are put into the universal church but they function at a local level. They always have a local base. They should be rooted somewhere.

MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH

The greatest minister of all in the church is Jesus. He is the head of the church, the teacher, the leader, the evangelist etc. No other leader can ever rival Jesus. He is the one who is building His church. The task of the ministers is to be under Jesus and follow Him.

Jesus may lead in surprising way (i.e. a year of persecution could be part of His plan even though we would never plan that).

Ephesians 4v11-16

¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ 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.

These are the 5 fold ministers but note that they are all preachers. Paul is only dealing with preachers here but they are different kinds of preachers.

1. Apostles have great organisational gifts and are key at planting churches.
2. Prophets speak the Word but with less authority for organisation of the church.

3. Evangelists were colleagues of the apostles, they are bigger characters than modern evangelists. They are delegates from churches – with gifts of exhortations, church planting etc.
4. Pastors are very sensitive to people
5. Teacher, we think overhead projectors etc – but it is not an academic thing. More of a trainer than an academic.

They are all given to equip the saints for their work of ministry. The ministers are not the preachers; the saints are the ones doing the ministry. If you have a church of 500 people, it has 500 ministers, the whole people of God.

HAVE YOU ASKED THE QUESTION “WHERE ARE THE ELDERS?”

When you read 1 Corinthians and there is such chaos. Why are leaders sometimes mentioned towards the end of the letter and not sooner? Quite simply, they are not that important. It is different with the church, every single person is involved in the church. This is entirely different to anything else in the world. All the people of God are important, the leaders are not especially important. Notice how the letters are often not even addressed to the leaders – 1 Corinthians is addressed to the saints. Even Timothy and Titus are not addressed to those people alone. They end with “grace to you” with “you” being plural.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE MINISTERS AND THE PEOPLE?

Only one thing is said to both sides and they are not the same.

For example:

- Parents don't anger your children; Children honour your parents
- Husbands love your wife; Wife respect your husband.

There is really one important thing that needs to be in place and the rest will fall into place. You deal with your bit and don't try and get the other person to behave.

- On the side of the church: Obey your leaders (Heb 13 and 1 Thes 5)
- On the side of the leaders: Don't lord it over the flock (1 Peter 5)

These are the 2 commands on either side.

The 5 fold ministers

- We need to be flexible with these things; they are not sharply defined categories. You can vary according to time and place.
- We need to be careful with titles – anyone can give themselves a fancy title. If we start using titles, anyone can use them and we can setup false teachers. Compare that to John the Baptist who had

no title, no church, no denomination – he was a voice. But there was power in that voice. The real thing is not the title, it is the power. So if you are an apostle, it is not a title, it is the way that God uses them. Recognise the power, not the title.

Leadership is about the power of the Spirit and the Word of God – not about our titles!

THE LOCAL CHURCH

If you buy a book on the church, there will be very little on the local church. It will be about the global church. “The church” is almost always referred to as the big global church.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH, PART 4 THE LOCAL CHURCH: ORIGIN/ACTIVITIES

TALK 38

WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF THE LOCAL CHURCH?

Same as the global church, it is the gathering and fellowship of the redeemed.

WHAT IS THE ORIGIN OF THE LOCAL CHURCH?

The way to handle this is to look at the churches of the New Testament to see how they were started. There are three ways:

- Preaching from Apostles – they preach and the church is established
- Apostles will send someone else – Colossae church was established like that (Epaphras was sent by Paul). Paul seems to have a flexible team of co-workers with him. Apostolic teams are not a fixed entity.
- Started by travelling Christians - but then supported by an apostle otherwise they are likely to be poorly grounded (i.e. Rome – notice how Paul does not refer to them as a church)

WHEN IS THE WORK OF THE APOSTLE FINISHED?

When the apostle has thoroughly established the church. Once he has deposited the whole counsel of God. That is why Paul can say that his work is done even though there is still plenty for the church to do. His work as an apostle though is finished.

WHAT ARE THE ACTIVITIES OF THE LOCAL CHURCH?

The activities are almost wholly spiritual – apostles doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, the prayers (Acts 2). Did they do anything else? Not much else is mentioned. They seem to be sounding out the Gospel anew.

DID THE CHURCH DO ANYTHING SOCIALLY, POLITICALLY, ECONOMICALLY?

Not really, although they did do it for themselves. Acts 6 describes how the church organised to make sure that the widows were treated fairly. The apostles don't ignore the problem and neither do they start a social ministry. They appoint others to do it whilst they will continue to do the work of preaching. The people nominated the social ministers and the apostles appointed them – there was a double veto involved to make sure that the right people are appointed to help with the poor.

ME has twice been involved in running a school. He said that when the deacons ran the school it struggled but in another context when they trusted a Christian to run a school it was a different story. It was much better not getting involved directly. He used Acts 6 as a kind of model. It is not in the hands of the preachers.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE LOCAL CHURCH AND SOCIAL ACTIVITY? HOW SHOULD THE CHURCH DO IT?

Social work replaces the Gospel – the work of the church is to be relevant and make a difference. ME remembers days when money was being poured into social activities to bring down Apartheid.

Don't get involved at all with social work – this too was used as a mindset during Apartheid. ME got into trouble when he reached out and helped others during Apartheid. When he got involved he was accused of being a communist.

1. Use it as an evangelistic spearhead
2. This is not necessarily wrong but it can only be temporary. People know exactly what you are doing. People will take advantage of you. ME gives the example of the term "rice Christian" that arose in India as people came to church to get food. This strategy doesn't work in the long-term.
3. Partnership
4. This was the approach favoured by John Stott. It is not seen in the Bible though and the tendency is that the social side tends to get bigger than the Gospel. The Gospel is not seen as being "practical" and the secular swallows up the spiritual. ME tells the story of the social project that eventually kicks out the church. DL Moody started the YMCA but today it is not Young, Men, Christian or an Association. The intention was great but it eventually will rival the church. It is the job of Christians, not the church.
5. Inevitable side-effect
6. This is the approach that ME believes is the best - see your brother in need and do something!

This is in response to the Gospel, not a formal organisation first but rather a response. It is not patronising, it is planting of a church. ME has a rule that he will not provide finance for people unless he knows the person really well. He doesn't want to relate to them in a relationship of dependence. If after they have a relationship and ME see's that they are in need, he will respond and help his brother. ME tells great stories about how this looks in his life – helping a pastor with medical care for his wife, finding safety for children during the unrest in Kenya. You see your brother in need and you take action. The relationship needs to be in place first else the aid money will be never get to the poorest of the poor – ME tells some horror stories of people lying and trying to get money from the church.

THE CONFLICTS OF THE CHURCH

There is persecution (Jerusalem), immaturity and hypocrisy, division (the tension over the widows in Acts 6) and false teaching (Jesus + Jewishness = False teaching).

Paul confronts Peter and false teaching with the Gospel. Sincere people want to bring in the law to make everyone holy but that is not how you make people holy. You need to get rid of it. The Spirit sets you free and you keep the law incidentally. We pray for our enemies, we aim higher!

We must expect these conflicts to arise as the church advances. The mark of a shepherd is that he sees the wolves before the sheep see the wolves.

THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH

It is going to grow; all the saints are going to be brought into ministry. There is a glorious day of blessing for the church. It is building itself up in love. All the nations will be reached and will learn from His ways. The river of people will be flowing uphill – it is a supernatural work. All of Israel will be saved and worldview revival will occur. Jesus shall reign.

The church is not finished, it has got a destiny and a goal.