

Lake Cities Community Church  
Series: Ecclesiology 101  
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## Ecclesiology 101

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The beautiful town of Boerne Texas is located in the Hill Country - about 25 miles northwest of San Antonio. The city was founded in 1852 in honor of a German poet, Ludwig Borne. These leaders established the town with one surprising rule -- no churches were allowed inside the town limits! In fact, local legend says that citizens posted signs outside town that warned preachers not to be in Boerne at night or risk being shot (Source: *AAA Magazine*, Texas Travel, 2008).

The Germans who originally settled this town wanted nothing to do with religion or churches. Can you imagine yourself at the town council meeting when they agreed "In our town, there will be no churches." I wonder why? Maybe some were atheists riding on the wave of rationalism and naturalism. Or maybe they had just had one too many bad experiences in church – whether in Germany, or perhaps excessive Camp Meetings on frontier. We don't know the reason. But they came to the conclusion they would be better off without it.

Society has always had a love / hate relationship with the Christian Church. The church has done great good but it has also been corrupted to the point of doing great harm. Involvement in the church can bring great joy, but also great pain and hurt. It can be invigorating and frustrating. The church is a paradox. Have you ever wondered why we do this thing called the local church? Why do we try to gather and teach and share the gospel, to

love one another and share life together – a group of people that if not for church, may not see each other at all?

During this first year my main teaching about the church has been with respect to its purposes – worshiping, growing, loving and sharing. They are critical and I hope by now you now know them well. But they are only the skeleton – and now we need to put some flesh and muscle on them. They are the framing and now we need the drywall and paint.

This message is called Ecclesiology 101. Ecclesiology is a theological word – simply meaning the study of the church. For the next four weeks we will seek to mine the depth of the church and discover the treasures that are there.

In our introduction today – we have three D’s – We will start with a definition of the church. Second we will look at the dimensions of the church – how large or small is it? Finally we will examine the date of the church – when did it begin?

### **Definition – What Are We Talking About?**

Let’s start with a definition of the word church. It comes from the Greek word “*ekklesia*” which is a compound word. *Ek* is a preposition meaning out of. *Klesia* is from the verb *kaleo* which means “to call.” Together the word that we translate “church” literally means “to call out of.” In the first century an *ekklesia* was any group or assembly of people called out of the general population to meet together for a specific purpose. The local craftsmen guild met as an *ekklesia*, the political council was an *ekklesia*. The word was not primarily religious until Jesus adopted it and applied it to His church. After the first century, the word *ekklesia* became almost exclusively tied to the Christian church and not a general assembly of people.

Now we know the basis for the term ecclesiology – the study of *ekklesia*, or if you hear of an ecclesiastical meeting – it is has to do with church matters.

So, in simple terms, a Christian church is a group of people who come from out of the world at large and gather together in a formal way to worship God. Let me share a good definition of the church from Edward Hayes, President Emeritus of Denver Seminary: “The church consists of believers in Jesus Christ, baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, committed to one another in love and called out of this world into a worshiping, caring and witnessing fellowship.” (Edward Hayes, *Understanding Christian Theology*, 1086.)

I like that definition quite a bit – it talks about believers in Jesus – recognizes the importance of baptism – being called out of the world – to accomplish the purposes of the church. But there is one problem with this definition of *ekklesia* did you spot it? This definition only works for the local church – Is *ekklesia* only applied to the local church? Let’s turn to examine the dimensions of the church.

### **Dimensions – What is included?**

How big is this *ekklesia*? From a study of the Scriptures we can find the *ekklesia* to extend to at least four different levels.

The first application of the *ekklesia* is to the local church. For example, in Romans 16:5 we read, “also *greet* the church that is in their house.” That very defined assembly of people was a local church, just as we are a local church – a specific congregation in a particular area. But, second, *ekklesia* also pertains to a broader church body - a regional church – several churches in a geographical area. For example, in Acts 9:31 “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of

the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.” There are 33 churches in Rowlett, but you can speak of “the church” in Rowlett, or the church in the Dallas / Fort Worth area. From a missionary perspective we could ask Tim and Jenny, “How is the Church in Japan doing?” A geographical area. Third the *ekklesia* can refer to all the churches in the entire world rolled up in one – the global church. Paul says in Ephesians 5:25 “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” We join with all the worshiping saints this morning as part of the global church. But, fourth, there is one more level I believe Scripture teaches and that is a Universal Church. Not just those alive today - but all who have believed in Christ – living or Dead are part of a Universal Church. This is probably what is referred to in Hebrews 12:23: “to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of *the* righteous made perfect.” One day there will be a great church meeting of people from every language and tongue gathered to worship God! I like how theologian Wayne Grudem puts it, “We should not make the mistake of saying that only a church meeting in houses expresses the true nature of the church, or only a church considered at a city-wide level can rightly be called a church, or only the church universal can rightly be called by the name “church. Rather, the community of God’s people considered at any level can be rightly called a church.” (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p.858)

### **Date – When did this all start?**

We have seen the definition of church – *ekklesia* and have explored its dimensions. There is one more question we want to explore this morning and that is – when did the church begin? Are Old Testament believers in the church? Is the church only a New Testament program? Here we must be careful. One of the best theologians on the church, Robert Saucy said, “Much disagreement exists over when the church began.” My professor of *ecclesiology* Dr. Robert Lightner called it a “major area of difference among evangelicals.” Let me explain.

Some feel that the question “when did the church begin” is all-wrong, because they hold that the church really did not *begin* so much as *evolve* from the Nation of Israel. This view generally falls into a system of theology called Covenant Theology. It holds that the church really began in Genesis. The promises God gave to Israel back in the Old Testament were transferable and now will be fulfilled in the church. In support of this is New Testament teaching such as from Peter who said to the church “You are the chosen race, a royal priesthood a holy nation – you are God’s possession.” The church is the New Israel.

On the other side of the debate is Dispensational Theology – which argues that the church is a New Testament work of God that began on the Day of Pentecost, with the coming of the Holy Spirit. They will cite Christ’s proclamation in Matthew 16:18 – “On this rock I will build my church.” That is future tense – in Christ’s view – the church was yet coming and could not arrive until after His death and resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the promises given to Israel in the OT are not transferable, but God will keep His promises to Israel!

A middle view is called progressive dispensationalism – articulated by Darrell Bock, a professor at Dallas Seminary (and others), that recognizes that while there is some continuity between Israel and the New Testament Church, there are also differences between the two, and God has plans for both ethnic Israel and His church. This is probably closest to where I stand at this time.

This may all seem a little technical and it is. The pastor asked the child, “Do you know when the church was founded?” “When it was founded?” said the boy, “Wow – I didn’t even know it was lost!” Does it matter what you believe regarding the start of the church? Yes it

does – but not necessarily for your ecclesiology but your eschatology. How you view the start of the church has a tremendous impact on *how you view the end times*.

The key point, though, is something that we can all agree on. It is well stated by theologian Augustus Neander, “The church is not of human origin. Now Christianity we regard not as a power that has sprung up out of the hidden depths of man’s nature, but as one which descended from above, because heaven opened itself for the rescue of revolted humanity.”

## **Conclusion**

**We have only barely scratched the surface** of an introduction to ecclesiology – the study of the church. I encourage you to do your own study about the church, its origins and scope. If you are interested, I would be glad to talk with you in more detail about the theological issues that we have brought up.

But here is where our conversation lead us: When Christ envisioned the time between his ascent up into heaven and the next 2,000 + years until his return – he had one plan in mind to accomplish his purposes. He put all his eggs in one basket. He set up one organization for carrying out His will on earth. He crafted one key to unlock the kingdom of God on this earth *and that was His church*. The church is central. The church is a priority. The church is strategic.

The center of God’s plan does not revolve around the para-church ministry - as important as they are. God central tool is not your private devotional life as critical as that may be. The most important organization for Kingdom work is not the family. It is not the seminary. *Jesus said, “I will build my ekklesia – and the gates of Hell will not stand against it.”* The Holy Trinity set out to establish the church. The Father appointed the Son Head of the

church. The Son promised to send the Spirit to indwell the church. It really is all about the church!

How does God receive glory – through the church. How does He plan to take his message of hope to the world – through the church. Where are believers to grow in love and to become mature in their faith? In the church. The church is central to God's plans for this world. And it starts here in the local church. From the local church the regional church is built and the national church, the global church and ultimately the universal church – but it starts in places like this – just a few people *ekklesiaing* together – gathering to worship God.

So what is the point to all this? Ready – here it is: **Embrace the Church of Jesus Christ.** Or if you like, **“Don't Give-Up on the Church.”** Why do I say this?

I heard a speaker a few years ago state that half of those in high-school youth group will not be worshipping in a church by age 30. Our youth are giving up on the church, and so are the adults. Christian sociology Alan Jamieson published a book called “A Churchless faith” documenting the growing number of believers who are leaving the church - estimated at 112 million world-wide. William Hendricks wrote a book called “*Exit Interviews - Revealing Stories of why People are Leaving the Church.*”

Just like those German Immigrants – people all over are giving up on the church. They envision, many of them - a Christianity without a church.

They have been hurt by the church. They have been disappointed by the church. Or, they just have better things to do - they just don't care for the church. It is not relevant enough – or it is too relevant and watered down. The fact of the matter is the church is an

imperfect place, yet that was God's one and only plan! Embrace the church, don't give up on her.

Hendricks writes: "There's no getting around the fact that the church is just a collection of imperfect and actually sinful people – like you and me. It may be that some of those sinners saved by grace have thoroughly abused you, misled you, or rejected you, such that you now will have nothing to do with a church." He continues, "Perhaps it will be helpful to remember that not all churches or believers are the same. Furthermore, not everyone is dissatisfied with their church. A great many people remain who derive tremendous spiritual benefits. – but you'll never find the perfect church – No in this life you never will. We may taste a sample of it from time to time; we can never have it all – not in this life."

I hope LCCC is a blessing to you. I know it is to many of you, because you have told me that, and I praise God when I hear those comments. But, I know our church is not perfect!

How do you embrace the church and not give up on it? Paul tells us – use your gifts to build up the body. First, Be part of the solution when you recognize a problem Share criticism, but in love. Share with me or any of our elders. Second, Hold loosely to expectations. Let God be God and work with you and through you. Paul didn't understand the thorn in his side, but he recognized the pain as God's sovereign design. Third, pray – pray for me, pray for our elders, pray for our church. If you stop praying for the church – then you have given up on the church. If you keep praying – there is always hope.

Just 8 years after the city of Boerne was founded, in 1860, George Wilkins Kendall built St. Peter's Catholic Church just outside the Boerne city limits. (This beautiful church stands on Boerne's Main Street today.) Then finally, in 1881, British settlers built an Episcopal church—

the first church inside the Boerne city limits. Today, the church in Boerne is doing well – about 15 local congregations. Don't give up on the Church – Christ hasn't and we haven't either!