



CHURCH: GOD SENDS

Part 1 of Doctrine

Pastor Mark Driscoll | June 08, 2008

CHURCH: GOD SENDS

Number ten. In this lecture we'll deal with the church, that God sends. God sends us on a mission. Now let me explain the origin of the church. Let me say this, I deal with this more thoroughly in the book *Vintage Church*, so I'll give you some of the summaries of the big ideas in that book.

I love the church, give my whole life to Mars Hill Church, plan on serving at Mars Hill for my whole life. My lovely wife, Grace, and I, we started in our living room with just a handful of people in 1996, I think it was. I want to be a guy who gives his whole life to one woman and one church, to be faithful like Jesus is faithful to his bride, the church.

For me, it really does grieve me when Christians overemphasize the personal relationship with Jesus and don't care about the church. You need to have both, a personal relationship with Jesus and a community of people with whom you walk as a member of the church. This is because the gospel does two reconciling acts. It reconciles us to God as Christians, and it reconciles Christians to one another as the church. And both are true. It's great to be in the church, but you need to know Christ, and it's great to know Christ, but you need to be in the church. You need both.

Now in explaining this, let me explain how the church began. Thirty-nine times in John's Gospel Jesus says things like this, the Father has sent me, the Father has sent me, the Father has sent me. That's language for missionary. Jesus leaves the culture of heaven, comes to earth, and he comes on a mission to reveal God and to save sinners. Jesus later says, in places like John 20:21, "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." So to be a Christian is to be a missionary. It's to be a sent one. Like Jesus is sent, you and I are sent.

Now the way that this works, if you take Luke and Acts together, Luke and Acts are actually one book in two parts. Luke tells the chronological story of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke and the chronological history of the church in the Book of Acts. What happens at the beginning of Luke is that the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus at his baptism, anointing, empowering, commissioning him to be sent on his mission.

Likewise, Jesus dies for our sins, rises for our salvation, and before he ascends back into heaven, the early church gathers together, numbering about 120 at that time in the Book of Acts and he says, "Don't go be my witnesses yet." A witness is a martyr. A witness is the one who trades their life for God, and they go as a missionary to tell others about God. You're all missionaries. If you're a Christian, you're a missionary. And he says, "But don't go be a witness or a missionary just yet, you need to wait for the Holy Spirit and he will give you the power to live life as a missionary in the culture."

Fast forward, Peter gets up on the day of Pentecost, Jewish feast and holiday, preaches about Jesus. The Holy Spirit descends on the church just like the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus, just like the Holy Spirit empowered, enabled Jesus' life of ministry and mission, the Holy Spirit empowers, enables the church to continue the mission of Jesus, to keep doing what Jesus did, loving, serving, preaching, teaching, healing, the stuff that Jesus did. The church follows in the wake of Jesus, and the church exists by the power of God, the Holy Spirit.

In that way, we're not as much an institution as a movement. We don't exist just to remember Jesus, but to also continue his work by the power of the Holy Spirit. So what it means for us to have a Spirit-filled, Spirit-led life is to be like Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit, be on mission with Jesus, like the Holy Spirit commands and compels us to, and to see others meet Jesus. That what's the church is. The church is Jesus' people doing Jesus' stuff by the same power that Jesus did, God the Holy Spirit. We love God the Holy Spirit and we want to follow him to be like Jesus.

So what is Jesus' relationship to the church, these regenerated, born-again, saved, new lovers, followers of Jesus who are filled by, led by, gifted by, empowered by, equipped by, enabled by, unified by the Holy Spirit? Jesus' relationship, we are told in Colossians and Ephesians, he's the head of the church. He's the preeminent one. I'm not your senior pastor. That actually is a really good feeling to tell you that. First Peter 5 says Jesus Christ is chief shepherd, senior pastor, Jesus. I've had people say, "Well, we're a multi-site church and the church is big, and I don't know my pastor." Sure you do, his name is Jesus. And under him, there are other pastors and elders and deacons and leaders, but Jesus Christ is the senior pastor.

Somebody asked me recently, said, "What happens if you get hit by a car? Well, who then will be our senior pastor?" The same guy who's your senior pastor before I got hit by the car. I hope I don't get hit by the car, but if I do, the role of senior pastor won't change, Jesus. Guy who yells at you for a living, that will rotate, but senior pastor, that doesn't change, it's Jesus. He's chief shepherd, 1 Peter 5, the rest of us are under-shepherds. He's senior pastor, the rest of us follow him and encourage you to follow us as we follow him. That's what Paul says, "Follow me as I follow Christ." That's all that leadership is, follow Jesus.

So we pray to Jesus, we sing to Jesus, we listen to Jesus. We follow Jesus, we want to encourage you to follow Jesus. He's the head of the church. Mars Hill is his church. It's his church, it's not mine, not yours, not the elders, Jesus' church. This church belongs to Jesus. Our job is to serve well so that the church will be healthy and on mission with Jesus, that the Holy Spirit would have his way with us.

Now, we see the record of the early church in Acts 2, where the Holy Spirit descends and commissions the church. Acts 2:41–47. I'll read it at length. "So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls." The best week we've had in the history of Mars Hill, we grew by two thousand in one week. They had three thousand in one day.

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching." That's the New Testament. "Fellowship," loving one another and doing life and community together, "to the breaking of bread," having meals together and communion, "and prayers," praying for each other.

"And awe came upon every soul." They're amazed at how much God loved them and how wonderful it was that God the Holy Spirit would enable them to be working with Jesus on the earth. "And many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles." There were miracles. We believe in miracles and we see them. People do get healed. We pray for those who are sick, like James tells us to. We believe in the miraculous.

"All who believed were together and had all things in common." They shared. They fed one another and housed one another and clothed one another and they looked after one another. And this is not communism where the government makes you, this is the Holy Spirit where you want to.

"And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together." So they got together for big meetings. That's why we have Sunday services, big meetings. "And breaking bread in their homes," community groups. Jesus had one. He hung out with twelve guys for three years. The early church had them, they met in homes and got together.

Some people say, "Well, we should only do little meetings." Others say, "No, it's fine. We go to church on Sunday. We go to the big meeting." The early church said big meetings and temple courts, thousands, and in homes, singles and dozens. It's both big and small. We come together for preaching and worship. We meet together for love and relationship. You need both. If you only come on Sunday, you're halfway there. If you're only in a group, you're halfway there. It's both. It's both.

"They received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." That's the mission. Glorify God, love one another, reach the lost, that's it. That's everything.

The functional definition of the church then is very important. If we don't define what the church is, we can't defend what the church is. The definition that my co-author Gerry Breshears and I put in the book *Vintage Church* is this:

"The local church"—as opposed to the global church, which is all God's people and all places and times—"The local church," like Mars Hill, "is a community of regenerated believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord. In obedience to Scripture they organize under qualified leadership, gather regularly for preaching and worship, observe the biblical sacraments of baptism and Communion, are unified by the Spirit, are disciplined for holiness, and scatter to fulfill the Great Commandment and the Great Commission as missionaries to the world for God's glory and their joy." That's our definition of the church. There are eight characteristics. I'll hit them briefly.

Number one: regenerated church membership. Regenerated church membership means this: you have to be a Christian to be a member of Mars Hill Church. You can attend, you can go to Bible studies, you can come on Sunday, in fact, we love that. We have a lot of non-Christians who come to Mars Hill and that's wonderful, but to be a member of the church, a leader in the church, to teach others and lead others, you have to be regenerated. You have to have a new heart, be a member of the new covenant, have experienced the new birth, and how do you know that? You love Jesus and he's your God and savior. First thing's first.

Number two: you're under qualified leadership, this includes elders. First Timothy 3 and Titus 1 talk about qualified male elders. It's called complementarianism. Under the elders are deacons that work with the elders. There are men and women who are deacons, also leaders in the church, and then members of the church. They're leading community groups, leading worship, caring for people, serving. So we have three levels of leadership: elders, deacons, members. Under qualified, godly, biblical leadership.

Number three: gathering for preaching and worship. So we get together every Sunday to come under the authority of Scripture as an act of worship. We listen to the teaching of the Bible and we respond in worship. We sing to God. We give tithes and offerings. We partake of communion every week to remember the crucifixion of Jesus. So we gather, that's why we do.

Number four, the sacraments are rightly administered. We baptize people, we believe in credobaptism, not paedobaptism. Paedobaptism is the baptism of babies, credobaptism is the baptism of those who can profess and demonstrate faith in Jesus. If a little kid loves Jesus, we'll baptize them, but we don't baptize babies. I don't believe there's any evidence of any baby ever being baptized in the Bible. Those churches that believe that, we disagree with them, we love them. It's a secondary issue, but in our church we only baptize those who can profess and demonstrate that Jesus Christ is their personal Lord and Savior. Communion as well is for Christians only. We repent of our sins and take communion every week to remember the body and blood of Jesus. Paul says to the Corinthians if we don't consider our sin before we partake, we drink judgment on ourselves, so we need to repent of our sin before we take communion.

Number five: we're unified by the Spirit. This doesn't mean that we agree on everything, but we agree to love one another. We agree to love one another. If God has loved us all, then we should love each other. That's the big idea. So unity is not uniformity. We don't all believe the same thing on everything but on that which matters, we agree and we love one another and we treat one another with love and respect and friendship. Uniformity is what cults require; dress the same, speak the same, only read the same books. Everybody believes the same. We don't believe in uniformity, we believe in unity. Just as the Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct but one, we have distinctions, but we're one because we're unified by the Holy Spirit.

Number six: practicing church discipline for holiness. Most churches don't practice church discipline. Church discipline is not through trying to punish someone but correct them. If they're in ongoing, unrepentant habitual sin and they claim to be a Christian, they're hurting themselves. They're hurting their family. They're hurting their friends. They're hurting the witness of Jesus to the world. They're grieving God.

And discipline is where we lovingly try and correct them. The goal is not to drive people away but to get them to repent. The last resort, the thing we hope never happens, is that you would become hard-hearted and rebellious and stiff-necked, that you would be teaching false doctrine or living in habitual, ongoing, unrepentant sin, and that for the sake of holiness in the church and the witness to the world, we would have to separate from you and say, "You know, until you want to change and act like a Christian, we can't welcome you anymore." In

the history of Mars Hill, that's only happened a very, very few times. When it does, it is devastating. As a leader, it is one of the most painful, sorrowful moments of ministry, and we do so not maliciously or mean-spirited but we do so in hope that they would come to their senses, come back to Christ so that they could come back to church.

But you need to know that we do practice church discipline. Some people think, "We're a big church so I can commit adultery and I can rip people off and I can do all kinds of things and they'll never catch me." Our goal is not to catch you, but to be in community with you, to help you be sanctified, to be more like Jesus and if you're unwilling to do that and say you're a Christian, then it doesn't make any sense. It doesn't make any sense to say, "I love Jesus and I don't want to do anything that he says," and "I love Jesus and I don't want to be anything like him." At that moment we get involved and say, "Do you really know Jesus? If not, we'll evangelize you. If so, then we need to discipline you."

Number seven: obeying the Great Commandment to love. To love your brothers and sisters in Christ, to live life with them, to do community. That's why community groups are important. You can't love people hypothetically; you gotta get to know them personally. This includes loving strangers. We call that hospitality. Opening our home to welcome people in as God in Christ has welcomed us into relationship with him. It includes loving our enemies, people who don't like us 'cause we're Christians. Hopefully they, like Saul, become Paul and meet Jesus too. It includes loving God and Jesus said it all comes down to loving God and loving people.

And then number eight: obey the Great Commission to evangelize and make disciples. Once you become a member of Mars Hill, here's the big idea, it's not all about you. We're not an organization that exists for the purpose of the happiness of the members. We exist so that people would meet Jesus.

By God's grace, in the history of Mars Hill, thousands of people have met Jesus. We have baptized a few hundred people on any single day. I grew up as a non-Christian. God didn't save me 'til I was nineteen years of age. You need to know that one of my great burdens is what Paul tells Timothy and that is to do the work of an evangelist. We love non-Christians. We want Mars Hill to be a church that non-Christians come to. We want Mars Hill to be a church that they come to and hear about Jesus. We want Mars Hill to be a church where lots of people become Christians.

One of my great joys is that some of our elders, some of our deacons, some of our staff, they came in as non-Christians and over the years they meet Jesus and God raises them up. That's amazing. Some of you have never been in a church where non-Christians come. They come to Mars Hill. Some of you have never been in a church where non-Christians meet Jesus. They meet Jesus at Mars Hill. We don't boast or brag in this, but we're really excited about this. We know it's not us, it's the Holy Spirit and the power of the gospel, but we need to never lose heart for non-Christians.

It just—it so frustrates me. Most churches don't give a rip about non-Christians, they don't. They're arguing about things that don't matter when it really comes down to it. They fight over things that are secondary, not primary. They lose sight of their mission to introduce people to Jesus. Most churches are plateaued; most churches are declining. There are a large number of churches that don't see one convert in a year. One convert. That's heartbreaking. That's heartbreaking.

People don't know Jesus, they don't have a new heart. They've not experienced new birth. They don't have the Holy Spirit. They're going to hell. They're separated from God. And if you want to be a member of Mars Hill, we would say that needs to break your heart, that needs to matter to you. You can't join Mars Hill and simply say, "I think I'll get all my goods and services here as a consumer."

My hope would be that you join Mars Hill saying, you know, "I don't agree with everything you guys do. I don't like the way some things operate. Maybe the music or the preaching or the style's not my thing, but I'm a Christian who wants to see people meet Jesus and I think this is a good place to get that done." Ultimately, that's what holds us together. People are gonna meet Jesus. That is a cause we can all rally around, because then God is glorified and people are saved and we are happy, and that's what it means to be the church.

Note: This transcript has been edited for readability.