

Church, Mission, and Ministry

Lesson 2: The Church can be found and identified

# Getting going

1. Carson writes, “I haven’t completely “left the church,” but I’ve found myself being significantly less enthusiastic about participating in it and its community. I’m sure there is plenty of selfishness on my own part that causes this hardness, but as far as outside forces are concerned, I think there’s a number of reasons. I just don’t see the point many times. I think the way the western church operates its services is extremely contradictory to what the church (universal) is about: community. I’ve been part of a lot of churches in my life, and the structure of the services is almost always the same, regardless of the denomination: lots of listening, not a lot of participating. As someone who is in a new place and doesn’t really know anyone, “going to church” is nothing more than going to a place to listen to some music and a teaching, then going home.” [The Lost Voices: Stories from the DeChurched – Instrument of Mercy](https://instrumentofmercy.com/2017/11/06/the-lost-voices-stories-from-the-dechurched/)

Carson struggles with local congregations because he thinks that the Church (the universal Church) is about community. He thinks that local congregations fail to picture what the eternal Church actually is.

In your experience, do most people agree with Carson?

1. In lesson 1, we heard that the Church is the body of Christ, something far bigger and awesomer than any club, social movement, hospital, or school - despite the fact that we struggle with local congregations so much. In lesson 2, we want to address one of the most significant criticisms of local congregations (division and failing to live up to the universal Church, and get encouragement for the reality of local congregation life.

# Getting into God’s Word

1. Read 1 Corinthians 11:17-22, especially verse 19. Paul knows plenty about the unity of the church. He wrote the book of Ephesians, which is all about unity. But he has no problem with divisions here, and even says there have to be divisions. What do you think he is saying?
2. The bigger topic here is the Lord’s Supper. I have always found it a little surprising that he expects divisions even at the Lord’s Supper. Why do you think he is so comfortable with divisions at the most intimate time of a Christian congregation?
3. Let’s read Matthew 13:24-30. Jesus also described the kingdom of heaven and good seed and bad seed that grew in it. What does the parable teach us about the kingdom of heaven?
4. If the wheat and the weeds are mixed together in the field, and if they are so obvious, why is Jesus saying in verse 30, “Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’ ”?
5. A classic way to illustrate the truth of the Bible about the Church is with two circles. One circle represents the invisible church. The other represents the visible gathering of God’s people. Which circle is “the invisible church”? Which is “the visible church”? What is good and bad about this illustration?
6. Despite all these challenges of division and differences, the Bible is clear that we can find the Church. Look at the following examples.
   1. In Acts 9:31, what did Luke call the whole body of believers located in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria?
   2. In Acts 15:1-6, 22, how did various churches meet as a larger body to discuss a matter of doctrine
   3. In 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, how did specific churches express their bond with other congregations?

# Going forward in faith

1. CS Lewis had a nice illustration to help us think about the divisions and differences in the church. “The hall is a place to wait in, a place from which to try the various doors, not a place to live in. For that purpose the worst of the rooms (whichever that may be) is, I think, preferable. It is true that some people may find they have to wait in the hall for a considerable time, while others feel certain almost at once which door they must knock at. I do not know why there is this difference, but I am sure God keeps no one waiting unless He sees that it is good for him to wait. When you do get into your room you will find that the long wait has done you some kind of good which you would not have had otherwise. But you must regard it as waiting, not as camping. You must keep on praying for light; and, of course, even in the hall, you must begin trying to obey the rules which are common to the whole house. And above all you must be asking which door is the true one; not which pleases you best by its paint and panelling. In plain language, the question should never be: 'Do I like that kind of service?' but 'Are these doctrines true: is holiness here? Does my conscience move me towards this? Is my reluctance to knock at this door due to my pride, or my mere taste, or my personal dislike of this particular door-keeper?' When you have reached your own room, be kind to those who have chosen different doors and to those who are still in the hall. If they are wrong they need your prayers all the more; and if there are your enemies, then you are under orders to pray for them. That is one of the rules common to the whole house.”
2. What’s a passage from this Scripture that impacted you?
3. How are you going to respond to this message?
4. Who is one person you’d like to share this with?