

THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

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Table of Contents

	Page
<i>Introduction</i>	2
I. The Nature of the Church	2
A. The People of God	4
B. The Body of Christ	6
C. The Temple of the Holy Spirit	9
II. The Role/Function of the Church	11
A. Evangelism	11
B. Edification	14
C. Worship	15
D. Social Concern	17
<i>Conclusion</i>	18
Bibliography	

Introduction

What is the nature of the church? In today's society there is a lot of confusion as to what a church actually is. By no means does the word "Christian" exclusively come to mind when people hear the word "church" in casual conversation. For the term "church" is used for a wide variety of religious groups (such as Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons, etc.) and thus the Biblical use of the word is often not known. In fact, if most people were asked today what a church is, the most common response would be that it is type of building in which a variety of religious groups meet in order to have their services. But what does the Bible say the church is? What is its nature? By looking at various biblical images used throughout the Scriptures, this paper will shed some light on the nature of the church.

Other questions about the church which arise today are: "What is the function of the church?"; and "What exactly are we put on this earth to do?" Once again, the answers to these questions are readily found within the Scriptures and are just waiting to be explored!

I. The Nature of the Church

When one desires to learn about the nature of the church, the first place to turn to is the Bible. It doesn't take long to find out that nowhere in the Bible is there found to be a section which specifically gives a definition of what the church is, or what it is to be. For "the New Testament provides no theological definition of the church. Ecclesiology in the New Testament is shaped by images, not definitional statements. Nowhere are we

told that the church is . . . New Testament ecclesiology is metaphysical, not doctrinal.”¹

Thus, if one wants to learn about the nature of the church, an examination of how the church is describe using biblical imagery is a necessity. And these images abound. “The church is called the body of Christ, the family of God, the people of God, the elect, the bride of Christ, the company of the redeemed, the communion of saints, the new Israel, among others.”² For the purpose of this paper, the overview of images will be limited to those of: the people of God; the body of Christ; and the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

Before beginning this overview however, it is important to emphasize the fact that when studying the biblical images used for the church, one must be careful not to select a single picture as a basis for their theology of the church. “Perhaps it is not unfair to say that a continual danger for the Church of God (even, perhaps indeed especially, in days when it is biblically minded) is to pursue one biblical metaphor to the neglect of the others with which the Bible balances it.”³ It is extremely important to remember that all the images need to be used in order to get a proper biblical perspective of the church’s nature. Looking back into church history, it is generally fairly easy to see where theological distortions took place as images were pushed beyond their proper use in terms of their theological significance. However, it is human nature that we all too often fail to see these same errors made in our own attempts to understand the nature of the church. Hence, we must remember that the images used are only to serve as pointers and should not be prioritized in any way. Every image must be considered in order to get a proper

¹ John E. Toews, “The Nature Of The Church” *Direction* 18 (Fall 1989) : 10.

² R.C. Sproul, *Essential Truths Of The Christian Faith* (Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992), 217.

³ Alan Cole, *The Body Of Christ - A New Testament Image of the Church* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1964), 12.

view of the church's nature. Unfortunately, such a task can not be done at this time. Thus the following biblical images are not to be viewed as an exclusive look at the definition of the church, but rather it should serve to stimulate the desire to initiate a deeper search into the Scriptures.

A. The People of God

Although biblical images should not be prioritized in regards to their importance in developing a definition of the church, some images are naturally used more than others throughout the Bible. The people of God is one such term which can be found numerous throughout the Scriptures. In the New Testament alone it can be found to be used by six different writers in fourteen different writings. One of the main things which this image does is to draw "our attention to the history of redemption through the ages and to God's mighty works at the climax of that history at Calvary and Pentecost."⁴ It also serves to give us a sense of continuity between the Old and New Testaments.

In the Old Testament there are numerous places in which Israel is identified as being God's chosen people (Exod 15:13,16; Num 14:8; Deut 32:9-10; Isa 62:4) who were put into a covenantal relationship with God. Although a new people is not specifically mentioned in the New Testament, a new covenant is, which eludes to an envisaging of a new and eschatological people of God (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6; Heb 8:13; 9:15). However,

⁴ Harold S. Bender, *These Are My People - The New Testament Church* (Scottsdale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1962), 25.

It is a serious error to believe that God has rejected Israel in favor of the church. Yet it is equally problematic to believe that God has two people - Israel and the church - and has different purposes for each.

God has only one people. The people of God are seen as a massive tree rooted in the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Out of that single trunk grow many branches. Some may be labeled 'Israel' and some 'the church'.⁵

A quick glimpse at the New Testament reveals that the Christians during that time clearly saw themselves as being the people of God. Peter plainly states his view that the body of believers is a continuation of the Old Testament people when he writes in 1 Peter 2:9-10 that: "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy." Here he clearly combined various Old Testament passages in order to apply them to "the people of redemption, the Church."⁶ Paul also expresses his belief in Christians being God's people when he writes in his letter to Titus that: "[Jesus] gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good" (Titus 2:14). Numerous other passages could also be sighted which give a clear indication that the people of God and the church are one in the same.

It should be noted at this point, that the church is not a creative act or development of man, but rather it is to be seen as existing because of God's love and choosing:

The thread which binds the whole Bible story together is emphatically not the history of an idea but the history of a people. Let me put this sharply by saying that, in the Bible, the people of God is at no time conceived of as a voluntary association of those who have agreed with one another in accepting and carrying

⁵ David L. Smith, *A Theology of the Church - All God's People* (Illinois: Victor Books/SP Publications, Inc., 1996), 205-206.

⁶ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Church in the New Testament* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1965), 150.

out certain convictions about God. It is conceived of as something which has been constituted by the mighty act of God, an act springing from His pure grace, and preceding the first dawning of man's understanding of it and acceptance of its implications.⁷

Many places within the New Testament support this statement; one being Hebrews 8:10 where it states that: "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people." Clearly God is the one who created and sustains the church, and He makes the inclusion of people into this church a possibility for all. For inclusion into the people of God is no longer based on nationality, but rather it "is inclusion within the covenant of God that distinguishes the people of God; they are made up of all those 'whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles.'"⁸

B. The Body of Christ

Before delving into the meaning of this particular image, it is important to see the relationship that exists between this picture and that of the people of God:

The Church in the New Testament remains God's people but it is a people of God newly constituted in Christ and in relation to Christ. Its new unique form is most appropriately designated as Body of Christ; totality and membership, foundation and goal, life and growth of the Church can best be studied on that basis. Yet it would be a dangerous limitation if for that reason the concept of people of God were abandoned, and the idea of the Body of Christ were treated as absolute and made the sole basis of speculation. The Church is the people of God as the Body of Christ, in a sense which is determined by, or at least grounded on, the idea of the people of God.⁹

⁷ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household Of God* (New York: Friendship Press, 1954), 64.

⁸ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 1036.

⁹ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Church in the New Testament* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1965), 166.

Furthermore, the fact that this is but one of many biblical images needs to serve as a reminder that in itself “it is no exclusive or exhaustive picture: otherwise there would scarcely have been need for the hundred and more other images which are also used to give meaning to this same concept.”¹⁰ However, this uniquely Pauline image, which is reflected in the teaching of Jesus (John 15:1-11), is definitely one big piece of the puzzle of the nature of the church.

Within this one image there can be found the proclamation of many fundamental truths. First of all, it can be said that the “image of the church as the body of Christ emphasizes that the church is the locus of Christ’s activity now, just as was his physical body during his earthly ministry.”¹¹ Although the church is definitely suppose to be “Jesus with skin on”, the truth which is most emphasized in this image has to deal with the unity and the diversity of the body of Christ.

The first thing to be noticed when dealing with this issue of unity and diversity, is that Paul clearly “begins with the oneness of the body which then goes on to discover its diversity.”¹² Hence, he tackles everything in the reverse order that people most often do today. He does not worry about how to make the church become unified, but rather states that it already is and that our diversities “should not lead to strife and dissension, but to the healthy functioning of the body of Christ.”¹³ Instead of seeing diversity as a problem which the church has to face, Paul clearly states that that is not the case. Rather, diversity

¹⁰ Alan Cole, *The Body Of Christ - A New Testament Image of the Church* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1964), 11.

¹¹ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 1036.

¹² John F. Balchin, *What The Bible Teaches About The Church* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1979), 32.

¹³ David Ewert, *The Church In A Pagan Society* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1986), 142.

is essential for the church's existence. For every member of the body must do its part in order for the church to function as it is meant to (1 Cor 12:27; Eph 4:16).

However, Paul has very strict teaching against diversity when it comes to the issue of factions among the church. This can be clearly seen in his first letter to the Corinthians where he makes the point, using rhetorical questions, that Christ is not divided and neither should the church be:

These rhetorical questions show how any breach in unity of the Church was in violent contradiction to the very heart of the Gospel as Paul understood it There is only one Christ, and he has only one body . . . [although] there can be several 'bodies of Christians' in the modern sense of the word 'body' . . . there can only be one Body of Christ, and the Christian life is life within that body.¹⁴

This leads to the point that there is no such thing as a "lone-wolf" when it comes to living the Christian life. For there is an interconnectedness between all the members who make up the body of Christ. Hence, the "Christian faith is not to be defined merely in terms of individual relationship to the Lord. [For] there is no such thing as an isolated, solitary Christian life."¹⁵

Another important point that can be derived from this imagery, is that the body of Christ is:

not so much an organization as it is an organism. It is made up of living parts. It is called the body of Christ. Just as a human body is organized to function in unity by the coworking and codependence of many parts, so the church as a body displays unity and diversity. Though ruled by one 'head' - Christ - the body has many members, each gifted and endowed by God to contribute to the work of the whole body.¹⁶

¹⁴ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household Of God* (New York: Friendship Press, 1954), 73-74.

¹⁵ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 1037.

¹⁶ R.C. Sproul, *Essential Truths Of The Christian Faith* (Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992), 218.

In that this body is organic, there is also the idea that this body must experience growth as it relies on the resources of its risen Head, Jesus Christ. The notion of interrelation between the members also implies that an empathy should exist between all Christians. Hence, Paul states that if “one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it” (1 Cor 12:26). This clearly implies that there must be a universal concern for one another among the members of the body of Christ.

C. The Temple of the Holy Spirit

This image of the church put a dramatic twist on what was commonly thought of the Temple of God throughout the Old Testament and into the early period of the New.

For the Jews, the Temple at Jerusalem had been the centre of national faith and worship, and as a building, in Jesus’ day, the source of considerable pride . . . In the epistles, the whole emphasis has shifted from a place to a people. Because of the indwelling Holy Spirit, the very bodies of individual believers could be described as his temples (1 Corinthians 6:19), a fact which was a powerful moral incentive when it came to the use or abuse of their bodies.¹⁷

Furthermore, Paul paints a picture for the Ephesians of a building, not made with materials, but of individuals: “And in [Jesus] you are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (Eph 2:22). Thus, the idea of the universal church is also supported through the use of this image.

Peter also builds on this imagery as he writes his letter to the believers scattered throughout Asia Minor: “As you come to him, the living Stone - rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him - you also, like living stones, are being built into a

¹⁷ John F. Balchin, *What The Bible Teaches About The Church* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1979), 79-80.

spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:4). Thus Peter was stating that in practice Christians are “not only the true successors to the Old Testament priesthood, but that buildings as places of worship were entirely secondary. Where two or three met together in Christ’s name, he was among them and they together were the spiritual Temple of God.”¹⁸

One last point to be made about the imagery of the Temple is that Jesus Christ is picture as being its cornerstone. In Paul’s letter to the Ephesians he refers to them as being God’s Holy Temple which is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (Eph 2:20). Traditionally, there have been three different ways as to how this cornerstone may be viewed. First of all, it may be viewed as a cornerstone which lies at a lower front corner of a building. Since the rest of the structure seems to be supported by it, it has come to signify something of fundamental importance. Secondly, some scholars believe that this word could be referring to the keystone of an arch. This stone occupies the highest place in the arch and provides support for the other stones. Finally, this term could be understood to mean the capstone of a pyramid. “This stone occupies the highest place in the structure. It is the only stone of that size and shape. And its angles and lines determine the shape of the whole pyramid.”¹⁹ Regardless of which of these views one chooses to take, the importance of Christ being the cornerstone of the Temple of the Holy Spirit can be seen to be of uttermost importance.

¹⁸ Ibid., 81.

¹⁹ William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary* (Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), 1923.

II. The Role/Function of the Church

So what exactly is the church to do? It is interesting at this point to note that only “after Jesus’ earthly activity and departure is the service of the Church in the world necessary for the work of Jesus; only after the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus does it become possible, however, - through the Spirit sent by him.”²⁰ Still the question remains, what is the function or role of the church? The remainder of this paper will focus in on four main functions of the church; those being: evangelism; edification; worship; and social concern.

A. Evangelism

In the last two written accounts of Jesus’ actual words (Matt 28:19; Acts 1:8), evangelism is emphasized in each instance. “It appears that he regarded evangelism as the very reason for [the church’s] being.”²¹ Furthermore, it is interesting to note that these are practically the only general commands that the church was given to spread the gospel throughout the world. “Perhaps the conclusion we are meant to draw is that they did not need commanding. They spontaneously shared Christ in such a way that the church appears to have expanded faster than at any time since.”²² In fact, the book of Acts only gives us a taste for the work/growth that was occurring at that time. This can be supported by observations such as: Paul writing a letter to a church in Rome that was already flourishing; his letter to the church in Colosse which he never visited; or the

²⁰ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Church in the New Testament* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1965), 159.

²¹ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 1052.

²² John F. Balchin, *What The Bible Teaches About The Church* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1979), 133.

mentioning of seven churches in Revelation which are not referred to in Acts. Hence we can assume that evangelism was a major part of the early church from the moment of its conception.

It needs to be noted that Jesus did not just call the church to evangelism, but rather He commanded it. “If you love, me you’ll keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Hence, “if the disciples truly loved their Lord, they would carry out his call to evangelize. It was not an optional matter for them.”²³ Neither is it for us. However, Jesus does not send His people out without giving them the right and the power to perform the duties given to them by Him. For Christ Himself said that: “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matt 28:18). Therefore, with Jesus’ command comes the right and power to go and reach out to a lost world through the power of the Holy Spirit (John 15:7-8; Acts 1:8).

Although the main purpose of evangelism could be said to be to bring others into the family of God, this answer would not be complete. For in Matthew 24:14 we read that “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” As Christians eagerly await the return of their Savior, it is important to remember the work that Jesus gave them to do before His return. What a wonderful encouragement to be all the more active in the daily spreading of the gospel!

That being the case, why does it seem that the gospel is not being shared nearly as much as it could be? Clearly, one main hindrance of evangelism today is “the widespread loss of confidence in the truth and power of the Gospel. When this ceases to be Good

²³ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 1052.

News from God and becomes, instead man's opinion about God, we can hardly expect the church to exhibit much enthusiasm for preaching and teaching the Gospel."²⁴

However, there are many other reasons as well: loss of true love for God; complacency; lack of discipline; fear; the list goes on. So when and how does evangelism occur?

Evangelism occurs . . . when people are so enkindled by contact with the central fire of Christ that they, in turn, set others on fire. We know that something is on fire by a pragmatic test. Other fires are started by it. A fire that does not spread must eventually go out! Christianity without a mission, like fire that does not burn, is a contradiction in terms.²⁵

Thus, evangelism is not just something we ought to do, but something that we must do in order to survive.

In order for evangelism to be effective it must remain faithful to the teaching of Scripture while adapting to the contemporary style of our present day culture. However, it is crucial that we never find our message in a current need in society, but rather it must always come from the Bible. In the power of the Spirit, this message is the most effective when it comes through the medium of personal witness. However, it needs to be noted that our actions always speak louder than our words. Hence, the "Christian has to mirror God's life, or what he says sound unreal . . . life and Word must correspond. They've got to be in harmony."²⁶ When sharing the gospel, it must not come across as being "mechanical" and rehearsed; rather it must be a sincere outflow of love from lives which live in close communion with God.

B. Edification

²⁴ Bruce L. Shelley, *The Church: God's People* (Illinois: SP Publications, Inc., 1978), 113.

²⁵ Ibid.

Although there is a definite emphasis on evangelism in the New Testament, edification is logically prior to such an endeavor. For as people enter into the family of God they need to be able to find a people with whom they can grow. “In a sense, the church is a womb which nourishes the individual - a womb which we never cease to need and from which we are never to separate ourselves.”²⁷ As Christians are involved in a Christian community “[they] can learn, [they] can grow and change. [They] can be molded by what is *there*. The life of God within can be encouraged, strengthened, trained, disciplined, motivated, by sharing the reality of that life with others.”²⁸ However, it should be noted that this community of believers does not necessarily mean a “church” as we are accustomed to think about today. “But it does mean a church as marked out in Scripture: an association of believers gathered together, and involved in the lives of one another, to encourage, to love, to discipline, to strengthen, and to sustain the budding life of God and character of God within each Christian.”²⁹

One other point to make about edification, is that it is the work of the entire body of Christ. Not just those ordained or in places of leadership. God has given every member of the body a role to play in the building up of the church. If people neglect to do their part, the whole body suffers and growth will not occur as it is meant to. For it is from Jesus that the “whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Eph 4:16).

²⁶ O. Lawrence, *A New Face For The Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), 264.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 93.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 94.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 97.

C. Worship

Worship is central to the existence of the church. Paul alludes to this fact when he mentions in his letter to the Ephesians that God has predestined us to be His children in Christ “to the praise of his glorious grace” (Eph 1:6). This suggests “that the ultimate purpose of the church is the worship of the one who called it into being.”³⁰ Throughout the centuries the church has been faithful in the call to worship. This can be most clearly seen in the continued observance of the Sabbath:

Christians have been doing it for two thousand years because they find the meaning of life in weekly worship of Jesus Christ, “the firstborn of the dead . . . This longing within a Christian congregation sets it off from all other human gatherings. Others meet for pleasure, or study, or to plot a course of action. The church meets for worship.”³¹

Although Sunday is most often referred to as the day of worship, the Bible suggests that we should be involved in worship daily (Acts 2:46). Furthermore, in the book of Hebrews we are exhorted to never stop in this practice: “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb 10:25). Looking toward the future, the book of Revelation depicts worship as it will be in heaven. Hence, it can be concluded that worship is, and always will be, an essential part of the Christian life.

So what actually constitutes worship? Worship may involve a large variety of things, such as: enjoyment, plans for action, instruction and equipment - but the heart of the matter “is always the fact of God, and the relationship of the worshipers to Him. The joy of the worshiper is in God. His instruction is in the will of God. His plans for action

³⁰ Robert L. Saucy, *The Church In God's Program* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 166.

³¹ Bruce L. Shelley, *The Church: God's People* (Illinois: SP Publications, Inc., 1978), 70-71.

are in the purposes of God. It is centrality of God that makes worship what it is.”³² It must also be remembered that true worship is not done to gain God’s favor, but rather it is a thanksgiving for the favor and grace which we know God has already shown to us as well as for the blessings that we know He will shower upon us in the future. Overshadowing all other blessings, we worship God for what He has done for us by sending His Son to save us.

As in evangelism, worship must not only come from our lips, but from our lives as well. This may refer to the use of our body in actual “worship” as portrayed in the raising of one’s hands, clapping, dancing, lying prostrate on the floor, and so on. However, more than that, living our lives in obedience to the commands of Christ is also a form of worship to God. Nevertheless, even though much of worship occurs at an individual level, worship “is not a solo, it is a chorus. It is the family of God gathered in His presence to glorify Him, each believer assembling with other believers to realize the oneness of the people of God.”³³

An important point to be made here is that there is a contemporary danger to make worship an activity which is primarily based on meeting our human needs and desires:

The focus of our corporate worship, however, must always be the glory of God. In modern worship services, too much attention is directed toward what happens to the worshipper. Churches resort to sound, lighting, symbolism, liturgy, and pageantry to produce emotional feeling in the worshiper. Those who participate tend to evaluate the service in terms of how it lifted them up or gave them a good feeling or inspired them . . . To evaluate worship by what happens to the worshiper is to make men, not God, the center of worship. This is to use God for human ends. But it is not God’s chief end to glorify man and to make him happy forever. It is rather man’s chief end to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever. And this is the primary purpose of all true worship.³⁴

³² Ibid., 71.

³³ Ibid., 73.

³⁴ Ibid., 72-73.

Although the worshiper will definitely be blessed in his/her time of worship, it must be remembered that this is not the ultimate goal or purpose of such an occasion. Rather, giving praise and honor to God must always be uppermost in our minds as we worship with our lips as well as our lives.

D. Social Concern

It seems to be a sad truth that the church often calls many people to itself (to Christ), but sends very few of these converts back out into the world to serve. It appears that too often the church is overly concerned with preservation instead of growth and even social concern. Although evangelism is at the heart of the Christian life, there is also a place for pure social concern. These two aspects of outreach are very similar and yet differ in some ways. Whereas evangelism is concerned with sharing the gospel with people, social concern covers the needs of the whole person, regardless of their personal response to such help:

Of course, relationship with God *is* crucial. But if we love, if we love truly, it is ‘not in word only, but in deed.’ And we don’t say to a hungry man, ‘Lord bless you, brother. I hope you get some food and clothes.’ We feed him. And we clothe him. Even if he doesn’t listen to us.

And we do all this because it’s right, because God makes His rain to fall on the just and unjust, and because as His children we are also to bless all - with no strings attached.³⁵

And when we give, we are not suppose to give just of our material goods, but of ourselves as well. As can be seen in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), Christians are suppose to love and take care of their neighbors. If we truly want to be faithful to the

³⁵ O. Lawrence, *A New Face For The Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), 274.

life that Christ calls us to, we will always be involved in some type of ministry to those who are in need and suffering.

Conclusion

Since Pentecost, the church has been established for all eternity. The church is more than an organization, its a body of believers created by God in order to give Him praise and honor while being a blessing to the people in this world as well. However, there is much more to the church than that. No simple definition can ever truly reveal the nature of the church. The only way the church can be defined is through the interrelated biblical images which each shed some light as to what, or who, the church really is.

God has given the church many tasks which are suppose to be actively obeyed until the time of Christ's return. Evangelism, edification, worship, and social concern are only four of these functions/roles which the church has been charged with. Even though these roles are commanded of the church, they are not suppose to be thought of negatively; but rather they are suppose to bring joy to the lives of believers while helping them to grow in their walk with the Lord. They also have a positive affect on those who have not yet come to know Christ, and have often been the means by which God has called many into a right relationship with Him. But most of all, these functions of the church serve to bring glory and honor to our Almighty Father. That alone is the greatest incentive that the church needs in order to be faithful to its calling.