

**A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL  
EXAMINATION  
OF  
THE WORK AND NATURE  
OF  
THE CHURCH**

**By**

**ELLIS OROZCO, D.Min.**

**Copyright, 2006. All rights reserved.**

## INTRODUCTION

**This is a collection of blog posts that build on each other. The goal is to pursue a Biblical and Theological understanding of the work and nature of the church.**

**In an attempt to help the members of Calvary Baptist Church, McAllen, Texas better understand themselves as a community, Dr. Orozco takes a look at the major Biblical motifs for the church. From these metaphors Dr. Orozco gleans sixteen principles that define the work of the church (what the church was created to do) and the nature of the church (what the church was created to be).**

**From these basic principles Dr. Orozco paints a portrait of the church and identifies an overarching metaphor that encompasses all of the characteristics of the church and serves as a model for how the church operates and exists.**

**These blog posts appeared on the personal blog of Dr. Ellis Orozco ([www.elliso.typepad.com](http://www.elliso.typepad.com)) between July 28<sup>th</sup> and August 25<sup>th</sup> of 2006. The blog posts were not edited in any way for this publication.**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Ellis Orozco was born in Houston, Texas. He is a graduate of South Houston High School in Pasadena, Texas (1980). He holds a B.S. degree in Mechanical Engineering from Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas (1986). He also earned an M.Div. from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas (1993), and a D.Min. from George W. Truett Theological Seminary of Baylor University in Waco, Texas (2004). He was the pastor of Corpus Christi Baptist Church in Corpus Christi, Texas from 1993-2000. He has been the pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in McAllen, Texas from 2000-present. He is married to Priscilla and they have three children.**

## **A BIBLICAL/THEOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF THE NATURE AND WORK OF THE CHURCH**

July 28, 2006

### **THE WHYS**

Why do we have six weekly worship services at Calvary (four on Sunday)? Why do we take mission trips to the interior of Mexico and China and Africa? Why don't we do more for the needy in our own town? Why do we still have Adult Bible Fellowships (Sunday School) on Sunday mornings? Why do we go to church on Wednesday nights? Why do we have Church Business Meetings and what do we do at these meetings? Why, why, why ...

The answers to these questions are important and key to the direction of any church. Change for the sake of change is not healthy. We want to be purposeful and strategic in all we do. Most of all, we want to follow God. I am convinced that the heart of the answer to these questions is found in an understanding of the purpose and nature of the church. Until we have a fixed and common image in our minds of what the church is (nature) and what the church does (purpose) we will always be in confusion as to why we do the things we do, the way we do them.

So, in order to answer all these "whys" I feel that we need to spend a considerable amount of time discussing the nature and work of the church. Once we have a solid and common understanding of that, the rest of the questions will be answered rather naturally and quickly.

There are four major motifs that the Biblical writers use when describing the church. In no particular order they are: Agriculture, Organics/Familial, Military, and Athletics. The theme of construction or building is used to a lesser degree. In order to understand the nature and role of the church we must examine each of these motifs in their context and then attempt to synthesize them into one overarching concept of the church. This may take a while, but be patient and stay with me. Anything worth having takes time and work.

In my next BLOG I will begin with the biblical motif of "agriculture." Stay tuned...

July 29, 2006

## **AGRICULTURAL, Pt.1**

In order to understand why we do what we do, we must come to a solid and common understanding of the work and nature of the Church. Let's look at the four major motifs that the Biblical writers use to define the Church. We begin with the biblical motif of agriculture.

It was natural for the biblical writers to make comparisons to sowing, planting and harvesting because their entire world revolved around these activities. Plowing, planting, sowing, pruning and harvesting were very familiar terms. Their calendars were marked by the seasons and by the times of planting and harvesting. Even today, those who work in agriculture live by these seasons.

Jesus, for instance, described the Kingdom of God like a man sowing a field. The seed falls on all kinds of ground. Only the seed that falls on good soil takes root and becomes productive (Matthew 13:1-23). He describes the Kingdom of God as a mustard seed that is planted and even though it is a tiny seed, through the mysterious workings of God it becomes a large plant (Matthew 13:31-32).

Jesus, talking to his disciples, looks out at the world and tells them that the "harvest is plentiful" and that we are to pray to the Lord of the harvest for workers to pick the crop (Luke 10:2). He indicates that there are those who sow and those who reap but when the eternal harvest comes those who sow and those who reap rejoice together for the lives that have been saved (John 4:36).

Again, Jesus compares our relationship to Him and to the heavenly Father as the relationship between a vine and its branches. He is the vine and we are the branches so that apart from Him we wither and die (John 15:5). He and John the Baptist indicate that there is a pruning that God does when we are disobedient to him (Matthew 3:10). Jesus even curses the fig tree that refuses to bear fruit (Matthew 21:19). The fig tree is an obvious allusion to the people of Israel, but the same fate can befall any group, including the church, that refuses to bear fruit.

That's enough for now. Tomorrow we will take a look at how Paul and others picked up on this motif. Then we will draw some general conclusions about the church derived from the agricultural motif. Stay tuned ...

July 31, 2006

## **AGRICULTURAL, Pt. 2**

Paul continues this motif in his writings when he tells the Roman Christians that he will come to them in God's timing because God is planning a great harvest in Rome, just as he has done in other places (Romans 1:13). Paul encourages the church to not grow weary in their good work because in time they will reap a harvest (Galatians 6:9). After all, we reap in direct correlation and proportion to what we sow (Galatians 6:7-8).

In describing the work that he and Apollos nurtured in Corinth, he comments that it was he who planted the seed and Apollos who watered it, but it is ultimately God who makes it grow (1 Corinthians 3:6). This is an important theological passage because it teaches us how the church is founded and edified. When comparing the Gentile Christians to the Jews (the chosen people of God), Paul uses the analogy of a tree with roots and many branches. Some of the branches have been cut off and have died, but others are growing. There are new shoots sprouting off the tree all the time, but they all depend on the same root. No branch is to feel superior to another branch (Romans 11:1-32).

John in his Revelation describes the ultimate rewards for the church as fruit that flows from the Tree of Life and provides eternal happiness for every believer. The source of its life comes from the throne of God and the Lamb who is Jesus Christ (Revelation 22:1-5).

This is a rudimentary overview of the agricultural motif as it is found in the New Testament. I could go on and on. I haven't even touched on another aspect of the agricultural motif known as "animal husbandry." Jesus calls himself the shepherd and we are the sheep of his pasture. He knows and loves the sheep and the sheep recognize his voice (John 10:11-5). He tells his disciples that he is sending them out to preach and they will be like "sheep among wolves" (Matthew 10:16). On judgment day Jesus will separate us like a shepherd separates the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:32-33). Jesus looks at the world and he sees them as a scattered flock, like "sheep without a shepherd" (Mark 6:34). These comparisons give us a deeper understanding of the nature of the church.

We could go on. However, let's stop here and formulate some basic principles about the church that we have learned from the agricultural motif.

1. The church has some very hard work to do. Fields don't plant themselves and the harvest doesn't happen without some hard work. The church has been given the specific spiritual task of sowing, planting, and harvesting.
2. The church has the immense responsibility of preparing the soil, planting the seed, watering the plants, and harvesting the fruit at the appropriate time.

3. The church can only function when it is connected to Jesus. Without Him we can do nothing. When we take our focus away from Jesus we begin to wither and die.
4. The church must understand its relationship to Jesus and learn to recognize His voice. Ultimately, the church is charged with hearing and obeying Jesus.

We see that the agricultural motif teaches us something about the work of the church (what the church is created to do, points 1 and 2), and the nature of the church (what the church is created to be, points 3 and 4).

Next time we will look at the Organic/Familial motif found in Scripture.

August 01, 2006

## **ORGANISM, Pt. 1**

The Church is an organism, not an organization. The Biblical writers' favorite metaphor for the church is that of a body – a living, breathing creation. Closely related to this metaphor is that of the church as a Family. Both metaphors are organic in nature and should be studied together. The motif of church as organism or family is found over and over again in the teachings of Jesus as well as the writings of the Apostles.

Jesus teaches us that we are connected to him and each other in an organic way. When his mother and brothers and sisters couldn't get into the house to see him because of the crowd, someone said to Jesus, "Your family is here." Jesus responded, "Who is my mother? Who is my sister or brother?" Pointing to his disciples (his church) he said, "Here is my mother, brothers, and sisters, for whoever does the will of God is my family" (Matthew 12:46-50). We are connected to each other because we have the same spiritual DNA.

Paul picks up on this idea when he says that when we are in Christ we have become "new creations." The old has passed away and the new has come into being. We are not made of the same spiritual matter as before. With Christ we are a new spiritual being and we are related to every other person who has that same Christ-DNA (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Jesus confirms this when he says that we are one with him as he is one with the Father (John 17:21). This connectedness is not a purely metaphorical connection. We are tied to Jesus in his physical death and resurrection. When Saul was persecuting the Church Jesus stopped him and asked him, "Why do you persecute ME?" When Saul persecuted the church he was, literally, persecuting Christ (Acts 9:1-9).

Paul also teaches us that our organic connection to Christ and to each other impacts us in many different ways. Your body, for instance, is the temple of the Holy Spirit which means that you are no longer your own. You have a larger responsibility both to God and your community of faith (1 Corinthians 6:19). Christ, living in our bodies, is strong in our weakness and we are, therefore, able to overcome the adversities of life (2 Corinthians 4:8-18).

Jesus chooses the organic metaphor when he institutes the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:26ff). The wine is a symbol of his blood. The bread is a symbol of his body. His body living in us connects us to the Spirit of God and eternal life. We are, therefore, the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22). When it comes to the church, there is only one body and one spirit (Ephesians 3:6; 4:4; 5:30). Jesus holds the body together (Ephesians 4:16), leads the body through life (Colossians 1:8), and makes the body grow (Colossians 2:19). The church is made alive (1 Corinthians

15:20-34) through the sacrificial death and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 10:15-22).

This means that the Christian Church (all over the world) is made of many members, each with his or her own gifts, which form one body. Some of the “body parts” may be more prominent, but each part is equally important to the overall work of the body. The church, therefore, is a body – a living, breathing, thinking, active organism – with many parts or members working in unison to be the presence of Christ in the world (Romans 12:4-10). When one part rejoices, all the parts rejoice, and when one part suffers, all the parts suffer (1 Corinthians 12:12-26). This is the very nature of the church!

Next time we look closer to the metaphor of the church as Family ... stay tuned ...

August 04, 2006

## **ORGANISM, Pt. 2**

Jesus establishes the church (his followers) as family when he says, “Whoever does the will of my father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (Matthew 12:50). This leaves little doubt that Jesus saw his disciples as his personal family. It’s not that he disowned his own family. Even on the cross he was caring for his mother (John 19:26-27). It’s just that he saw his spiritual family as taking the highest priority. In the end, the two were barely distinguishable.

Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to a family when he tells the story of a father who had two sons. The older son serves the father faithfully, but the younger son insults the father and turns away from him, living his life in a reckless orgy of self-indulgence. In the end, the younger son comes back to the father and the father forgives him and welcomes him back into the family with a great banquet. The older son is confused and angry because the father is willing to forgive and forget so quickly. The father tells his older son that he loves him and would do anything for him, but that they had to celebrate and be glad because the younger son was dead, but now is alive again. This is what it means to be a family (Luke 15:11-32).

Again, Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to a family when he says that it is like a father asking two sons to do a task. One answers “no,” but does it anyway. The other says he’ll do it, but never gets around to it. Which one was the obedient son (Matthew 21:28-32)? Jesus uses other such examples to illustrate the Kingdom of God in familial terms.

Jesus also alludes to the family motif for the church in all of his commands to love each other and serve each other. His teachings are full of exhortations to the kind of relationships that are found in healthy family life. When we love others the way we wish to be loved and treat others the way we wish to be treated and serve others the way we wish to be served, we establish healthy personal relationships. This is true with any relationship, but is vitally important in the intimate relationships that form our family life.

The other New Testament writers pick up on this motif. Paul encourages us to carry each others burdens the way you would in a family. He tells us to do good to all people, but “especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Ephesians 6:10). He acknowledges that we derive our name from God and are, therefore, his family (Ephesians 3:14-15).

The writer of Hebrews tells us that the one who makes us Holy (God) and the ones who are made holy (the church), are of the same family. For that reason Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers (Hebrews 2:10-13). Peter tells us that we are not to be ashamed to bear the name of Jesus. It is because of his name that we

are part of the family of God (1 Peter 4:16-17). John refers to the church as a “chosen sister” (2 John 1:13).

So, obviously, the Scriptures are replete with comparisons of the church to organisms and familial relationships. What conclusions can we draw from this motif about the nature and work of the church?

1. The church is to exhibit the love, care, honor, loyalty, and intimacy that are found in healthy family relationships. We are to take care of each other.
2. The church is to fully accept anyone that God calls family. We don't choose our brothers or sisters or parents ... we are simply called to love and honor them.
3. The church, as a living organism, needs to be fed, nurtured and encouraged in its quest to fulfill its reason for existence.
4. The church, as a living organism, has a reason for living and a mission to fulfill.

Next time we'll look at the military motif ... stay tuned ...

August 06, 2006

## **MILITARY, Pt. 1**

The military motif is one that is difficult for me to understand but it is undeniably present, both in the life and teachings of Jesus and in the writings of the apostles. In fact, in one of his earliest sermons to his disciples Jesus says that he did not come to bring peace to the earth, but rather to bring the sword (Matthew 10:34).

On another occasion Jesus drove out a demon from a man and the religious leaders accused him of working with Satan. Jesus was perplexed. How could he be working with Satan and at the same time be active in the work of driving Satan out of people? He responded that any Kingdom divided against itself will come to ruin. It was a very well-known military concept – any army divided against itself would come to ruin. He then gives the analogy of a man who has armed himself against attack. But when someone stronger comes along he overpowers the man and takes away the armor and divides the spoils. Here he uses the imagery of battle to show that whoever is not with him, is against him. It's a page right out of military law (Luke 11:14-26).

A Roman Centurion came to Jesus asking him to heal his servant who was sick. This man of authority seemed to understand the power that Jesus had. He understood how it worked in the Kingdom of God. He told Jesus that he was not worthy to have him come to his house, but that if he would give the command he knew that his servant would be healed on the spot. This Centurion understood what it was to have authority, and knew that Jesus had it. (Luke 7:1-10)

Paul describes the battle that the church faces when he calls on each Christian to put on the “full armor of God” (Ephesians 6:11). He goes on to describe this armor as the belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, shoes of readiness that comes from the gospel of peace, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. Each of the most important elements of the Christian life (and life as the church) are listed in terms of military paraphernalia (Ephesians 6:13-17).

In addition, Paul reminds us that the church's battle is not against other human beings (flesh and blood), but against the rulers, authorities, and powers of this dark world and against the “spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12). At the end of his life Paul comments that he has “fought the good fight,” and that he is now ready for his reward (1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 4:7). The return of Christ is described in military terms as an approaching victorious army. It was a trumpet call that announced the victorious army's approach followed by the glad shout of the soldiers who had fought the battle (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Nowhere is the military motif for the church more prominent than in the book of Revelation. There John describes both Christ and the Church in stark military terms. We'll take a look at that ... next time ... stay tuned ...

August 07, 2006

## **MILITARY, Pt. 2**

Jesus told us that we were in a battle against the darkness of this world. We are the light that fights against the darkness (Matthew 5:14-16). The world will hate us because of our affiliation with Jesus and the army of the light (Mark 13:13).

Paul picks up on this motif and calls us to ready ourselves for the battle we face (Ephesians 6:11). John tells us that we wage a war against the evil in this world and if the world hated Jesus then surely it will hate us (1 John 3:13). Over and over again, the New Testament writers refer to the spiritual battle that the church must fight. Nowhere is that call to arms more evident than in John's Revelation. I'll begin by saying that this is not meant to be an exposition or explanation of the End Times. I am not trying to set down a rigid interpretation of the book of Revelation. I simply want to show you how John obviously saw the church as an army fighting against Satan and his evil grip on the world as we know it. John tells us, for instance, that the Dragon (Satan) makes war against the inhabitants of the earth. Most succumb to his power without a fight. However, he intensifies his attack on those who remain faithful to Jesus (Revelation 12:12-17). This remnant that remains loyal to God is the true Church and she is definitely portrayed as an army in a great battle against evil.

The Anti-Christ and his followers will make war against the Lamb (Jesus) and his followers (the Church). This war will be horrific and violent, but Jesus and the Church will prevail (Revelation 17:14-18). John portrays the final battle between good and evil. Satan and his army of millions stand ready to destroy the Saints (the Church). The battle lines are drawn and the battle is about to commence when God intervenes and casts Satan and his followers into the fire of eternal torment (Revelation 20:1-10).

I could go on, but I think you get the point. Let's pause here to list some basic principles about the church that we have learned from the military motif.

1. The church is in a global and epic battle against Satan and his reign of evil.
2. The church is under constant and aggressive attack from Satan and his powerful allies.
3. The church was created and equipped for this battle.
4. Ultimately, the battle will be won by the power of God.

That's a lot to chew on ... next time we'll look at the metaphor of athletics and teamwork ... stay tuned ...

August 09, 2006

## **ATHLETICS, Pt. 1**

Well, we're almost there. I hope you have been able to follow my sometimes rambling thoughts on the nature and work of the church. We have seen the church from three Biblical metaphors: Organism/Family, Agriculture, and Military. Now we turn to one that is used to a lesser degree but is still prevalent enough to consider: Athletics/Team.

Jesus did not speak directly to this metaphor but we do see the idea of team and working as a team in his ministry. He sends his disciples out "two-by-two" to do ministry in the villages (Mark 6:7-13). When they return, he calls them "together" so that they can debrief and spend time with the father (Luke 9:10). He speaks repeatedly to the importance of unity within the group and, in the end, he prays most earnestly for this unity (John 17:23).

The concept of athletics is developed in more detail by the apostle Paul. The most common form of athletics was track and field ... it was the race. Paul talks about the Christian life in the church as the running and finishing of a race (Acts 20:24; 1 Corinthians 9:24; Galatians 2:2; Galatians 5:7; 2 Timothy 4:7). Paul compares the Christian life to a boxing match (or more likely a gladiator battle), when he speaks to the strategic nature of the work (1 Corinthians 9:26). There is a discipline (1 Corinthians 9:27) and a persistence (Philippians 3:14) necessary to finishing the race or winning the fight. Ultimately, Paul is satisfied to have finished the race and the good fight (1 Timothy 1:18; 6:12; 2 Timothy 4:7).

Paul uses the language of the gymnasium when he exhorts the church to train themselves to be godly (1 Timothy 4:7-8), and to follow the rules so as to not be disqualified after having run (2 Timothy 2:5). Paul emphasizes the importance of the unity of teamwork (Ephesians 4:16-17) so that the church will reach her potential and fulfill her mission. John echoes Paul's words (3 John 1:3-8), as does the writer of Hebrews (Hebrews 12:1).

Paul tells us that Christ is the head of the church (Colossians 1:18) and if we lose touch with Him we cease to grow (Colossians 2:19). This is reminiscent of the words of Jesus when he said that he was the vine and we are the branches. Apart from Him we can do nothing. (John 15:7). Jesus tells his disciples that they are no longer his students, but have become his friends (John 15:17). Paul confirms this when he calls us co-heirs with Jesus in all the God owns (Romans 8:17) – We are on the same team and share in the rewards of the victory!

Next time we'll draw some conclusions and begin the process of synthesizing the motifs we have examined over the last week. Stay tuned ...

August 10, 2006

## **ATHLETICS, Pt. 2**

Let's talk about what we have learned from the Athletics motif for the church.

1. The church experiences spiritual growth (success) when operating in unity, like a team.
2. Christ is the head of the Church. He alone is the captain of the team.
3. The life of the Church is like a race that requires discipline and training to gain victory.
4. The common goal of the team is to run a good race, cross the finish line, and gain the reward.

Well, there it is. We have seen the church described in terms of agriculture, organics/family, the military, and athletics. From each motif we have extracted certain timeless principles. These principles will form the basis of our understanding of the nature and work of the church. The next task is to attempt a synthesis of the 16 principles we have learned (4 from each of the 4 metaphors), and then see if we can find an overarching metaphor that will effectively describe and encompass all 16 principles.

For the record let me state all 16 principles again:

1. The church has some very hard work to do. Fields don't plant themselves and the harvest doesn't happen without some hard work. The church has been given the specific spiritual task of sowing, planting, and harvesting.
2. The church has the immense responsibility of preparing the soil, planting the seed, watering the plants, and harvesting the fruit at the appropriate time.
3. The church can only function when it is connected to Jesus. Without Him we can do nothing. When we take our focus away from Jesus we begin to wither and die.
4. The church must understand its relationship to Jesus and learn to recognize His voice. Ultimately, the church is charged with hearing and obeying Jesus.
5. The church is to exhibit the love, care, honor, loyalty, and intimacy that are found in healthy family relationships. We are to take care of each other.
6. The church is to fully accept anyone that God calls family. We don't choose our brothers or sisters or parents ... we are simply called to love and honor them.
7. The church, as a living organism, needs to be fed, nurtured and encouraged in its quest to fulfill its reason for existence.
8. The church, as a living organism, has a reason for living and a mission to fulfill.
9. The church is in a global and epic battle against Satan and his reign of evil.
10. The church is under constant and aggressive attack from Satan and his powerful allies.

11. The church was created and equipped for this battle.
12. Ultimately, the battle will be won by the power of God.
13. The church experiences spiritual growth (success) when operating in unity, like a team.
14. Christ is the head of the Church. He alone is the captain of the team.
15. The life of the Church is like a race that requires discipline and training to gain victory.
16. The common goal of the team is to run a good race, cross the finish line, and gain the reward.

There they are. You can probably already see some repetition and potential synthesis in these principles. Look over them. Pray over them. Next time we'll attempt a synthesis. Stay tuned ...

August 12, 2006

## **THE CHURCH, Pt. 1**

Let's begin an attempt to synthesis and summarize what we have learned about the Church. We can divide what we learn into two basic areas: 1. The Nature of the Church. In other words, what is the church made of, what does it look like, and how does it work? 2. The Work of the Church. In other words, what was the church made to do, what is its purpose, and why does it exist? Once we answer these questions based on the sixteen principles we have gleaned from Scripture then we can begin to develop an overarching metaphor for the church.

There are a number of things we have learned about the NATURE of the church. We have learned that the church is a living, breathing organism with a life of its own. That life is connected to God through Jesus' life. It is made up of ANYONE and EVERYONE who calls Jesus Savior, and each member is vital to the healthy functioning of the organism. As an organism, the church needs to be fed, nurtured and encouraged. It needs love. God has given the church everything it needs to survive, grow and fulfill its mission in life. Christ is both the head and heart of the church and without Him, the church dies.

O.K., I think we can see some overarching principles developing from our understanding of the nature of the church. **The church is a living, breathing thing made up of many people who are mysteriously connected to each other through Christ. In this connection alone they have everything they need to live, grow, and accomplish all that God created them to do.** That is a simple summary of the nature of the church. I didn't read it in a Theology book. I didn't make it up out of thin air. It's just what I think describes everything we've been learning from Scripture about the nature of the church.

IF I'VE LEFT SOMETHING OUT PLEASE LET ME KNOW. I want us to use this working definition of the nature of the church as we move forward in search of an overarching metaphor. It's not written in stone. We can tweak it later if we find we have forgotten something or left something out.

Next time we talk about the WORK of the church. Stay tuned ...

August 14, 2006

## **THE CHURCH, Pt. 2**

**The church is a living, breathing thing made up of many people who are mysteriously connected to each other through Christ. In this connection alone they have everything they need to live, grow, and accomplish all that God created them to do.** This is our working definition of the church. Behind it and foundational to it are the 16 principles we extracted from the four biblical motifs (for a review of those go to the August 10th blog).

Now let's begin to talk about the possible metaphors for the church that encompass this definition and the 16 principles. One metaphor that is particularly popular is that of a FAMILY. This is certainly a biblical metaphor and contains many of the principles discovered in Scripture. With FAMILY we find a certain connection that the Scripture identifies with the church as well. There is a biological connection with family which encompasses the idea of being an organism. There is a sense in which we do not choose our family but are "born into" the family God prepares for us. There is a love, care, nurture, loyalty and intimacy in the family that is virtually unparalleled in other human relationships. A family is most healthy when it operates in unity, each member doing its part ... so it is with the church. All of these satisfy many of the characteristics of the church.

But the FAMILY motif is not enough to cover all the biblical principles learned from Scripture. The idea of being engaged in a battle against evil is difficult to completely incorporate into the FAMILY motif. The idea of marching into a dangerous battle armed for eternal conflict is missing in the FAMILY metaphor. FAMILY brings feelings of warmth and love and nurture and care. These are all a wonderful part of family life, but if all we ever accomplish are "warm fuzzies" and personal spiritual growth, then we will miss a large part of who we are in Christ.

Another area of concern is that of the discipline of preparation for the Christian life. The language of athletics that we found in Scripture is not usually found in the metaphor of FAMILY. The idea of running in a race (and it's a marathon, not a sprint), exercising, and disciplining your body for the battle is not immediately found in the FAMILY metaphor. It could be argued that there is a type of discipline involved in family life, and that's true. But it's not the image that immediately comes to mind. There are other metaphors that better serve this aspect to the Church.

No, the metaphor of FAMILY, alone, is not enough to encompass the sixteen characteristics of the church. Although, any accurate metaphor MUST contain within it a sense of being FAMILY. In the end, whatever metaphor we choose to use must portray a feeling of family.

Next time, we'll take a look at some other potential metaphors. Stay tuned ...

August 16, 2006

### **THE CHURCH, Pt. 3**

Another metaphor that is often used for the church is that of an army. I have to admit a biased against this metaphor. I'm not anti-military. Not at all. I thank God for all those who have served their country through the armed forces. I believe that we still have the freedoms we have because of those who have been willing to sacrifice their lives in military conflict. I am proud to live in a country that values freedom and am proud of those (some of my own family) who have served our country in the armed forces. The military is a vital necessity of our freedom.

I'm just a person of peace and believe that we should exhaust all avenues of peace before choosing war. However, I would also note that many who are career military and who have served in WWII, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, or Iraq -- those who have seen actual combat -- would be the first to tell you that as much as they love the military, they hate war. Those who have fought in war are some of the strongest advocates of peace. I applaud that.

Having said all that (and admitting my biased ahead of time) I would also say that the metaphor of the church being an ARMY involved in an eternal, and sometimes, violent conflict is certainly a strong biblical truth. And if you think about it, the ARMY is a place that has a lot of the biblical characteristics of the church. Let me list a few.

1. The army is involved in a battle against a very real enemy -- so is the church.
2. The army operates as one unit with many members, each member doing his/her job, and each job is very important to the whole. It is vital for every member to carry his/her weight for the army to be victorious. So it is with the Church.
3. The army becomes a family. There are very few things that will make you "closer than a brother" than being in a foxhole with someone. When you depend on each other for your very lives, you become, sometimes, closer than family. So it should be with the church.
4. The army has a mission to complete. There are objectives, goals, and tasks that must be completed when you are a part of an army. It becomes imperative that everyone do whatever it takes to win the battle and defeat the enemy. Every member of the army understands that they exist to make a contribution for the fulfillment of the mission. The old military saying reveals this truth -- "Lead, Follow, or get out of the way." So it should be with the church.
5. The army preaches discipline. If there is one thing you learn in the army it is discipline. When the nation is at war and you are going through "boot camp," you know that everything you are learning could save your life. In that setting, the army is hard work. The old army slogan says it all: "In the army we accomplish

more before 8am, than most people do all day." The army is the symbol of hard work and discipline. So it should be with the church.

6. The army is not a place of discrimination. Now I know that there are those in the U.S. Army who are racist and those who would discriminate. You find folks like that in all walks of life. But when you are in the heat of battle you don't care the color of skin of the guy who is watching your back. And when he/she saves your life, you go completely color-blind. Also, when the country is at war the army will take anyone who loves this country and is willing and able to fight. So it should be with the church.

7. The army understands hierarchy. The army understands authority and command. The army understands who is at the head. When the Commander-and-Chief (President) gives a command, everyone listens and obeys. Jesus is the head of the church. He is our Commander-and-Chief. The church must understand the authority of Christ and be prepared to hear his voice and obey.

8. The good army is well equipped for battle. It makes sure it has every tool it needs to win the war. So it is with the church.

9. The army has a tremendous responsibility. In times like WWI and WWII, the fate of the entire free world rested on the armies of the allied forces. The church also carries the immense weight of responsibility. The eternal future of the entire world rests on the church's broad shoulders.

10. An army must be fed. Wars have been lost and armies defeated for lack of food and water. Armies can lose a war, not on the battlefield, but in the mess tent for lack of food and water. So it is with the church.

WOW! I have to admit that the ancient metaphor of an ARMY for the church is powerful. It seems apparent that any overarching metaphor for the church will need to somehow incorporate the idea of an army. We'll talk more about it next time ... stay tuned ...

August 17, 2006

## **THE CHURCH, Pt. 4**

We have looked at several possible metaphors for the church in search of an overarching metaphor. Let's take a look at another: The TEAM. We live in a world where athletics is huge. Those who can excel in the arena of sports become millionaires and are worshipped by multitudes (sometimes on Sunday). But that's not the correlation I want to make. Let's look at some of the more positive aspects to being a part of a team.

1. A team can become a lot like a family.
2. A team has to work together.
3. A team has many members each doing their part.
4. A team has one primary goal: winning.
5. A team is often in some kind of struggle against an "enemy."
6. A team must be disciplined in order to win.
7. A team must equip itself for the contest.
8. A team has to understand leadership and be willing to follow the leaders (coach, quarterback, etc.)

As you can see the TEAM as metaphor has a lot of the same characteristics as the ARMY metaphor. That's probably because an ARMY is, in many ways, a TEAM. The idea of team dynamics and teamwork must somehow be incorporated into any thorough understanding of the church.

Next time we will take a closer look at trying to synthesize the idea of TEAM, ARMY, and FAMILY. I believe we can come up with a picture that will encompass all of these and incorporate the 16 Biblical principles. Stay tuned ...

August 18, 2006

## **THE CHURCH, Pt. 5**

We're getting closer and closer to an overarching metaphor for the church. Please understand that whatever we end up with it will not be comprehensive. Any metaphor begins to fall apart at a certain point. That's because no matter how accurate a metaphor it may be, it is NOT the real thing. For instance, Jesus calls us sheep. He is the shepherd. There are many ways in which that metaphor works. But, according to what the experts tell me, sheep are basically dumb, smelly animals. I don't think that Jesus meant to say that we are dumb and smelly. Just one example of how a metaphor always has limits. Please keep that in mind.

We know that our metaphor must encompass the ideas of FAMILY, ARMY, and TEAM. Also, the ideas of growth (AGRICULTURE) and connectedness -- our being an ORGANISM are very important. I can't help but keep coming back to the MILITARY motif. It was such a strong comparison with at least ten points of commonality. Overwhelmingly more than any other. The ATHLETICS motif had seven points of commonality with the church, but all of them were also found in the MILITARY motif in that an ARMY is very much like a team.

Let's think for a moment on this analogy: Two ships at sea. One is a Cruise ship, the other a battleship. The Cruise ship has many of the characteristics of the church. There is a warm sense of family. There is a closeness and a spirit of cooperation. There is a feeling of belonging and fulfillment. But there are some very important characteristics missing. Perhaps the Battleship analogy can cover them.

The Battleship will contain all of the characteristics of the Army because it operates on the same MILITARY motif. But I think it gives us an overarching picture of how all of those characteristics work together to keep the battleship moving, working and on mission. The military uses the Biblical language of Mission and Spirit and Corps. I'm told that the control center of the ship is even called "the Pulpit." It may be that we have found a great word picture of the church and our place in the world. It is the picture of a BATTLESHIP cruising at sea, guided by the PULPIT, in sync with the SPIRIT of the corps (comes from the Latin, CORPUS or BODY), in order to complete its MISSION.

Pray and reflect on that ... and we'll talk more about it next time. Stay tuned ...

August 20, 2006

## **THE CHURCH, Pt. 6**



O.K. ... so do we want to be on the Cruise Ship (a Caribbean Cruise) OR on the Battleship? I have to admit the Cruise Ship is tempting. Look at it. It's beautiful and you can tell it belongs in clear aqua-blue waters and white sandy beaches. It has all the latest technology so that it can steer away from storms and promise you waters like glass all the way to your destination. Your cabin comes equipped with a king sized bed and a Jacuzzi tub. It's a place of comfort and fellowship and fun. It's a ship built to cater to your every whim. You don't have to bring much on board because everything is provided. All you can eat at every meal. The best entertainment every night. Organized fun on the Lido deck.

Everyone once in awhile you stop at a beautiful port and rub shoulders with the natives. But not for too long. As soon as you tire of that you can get back on the ship where you are protected from the rest of the world. It's a great place to be. There's no real mission except your comfort and relaxation ... but, hey ... what's wrong with that?



Now look at the battleship. Yuck. It's an ugly gray and it has all those bulky guns that just get in the way making things too crowded. There are no cabins, just row after row of bunk beds where you sleep with dozens of others who are on the same journey. You eat mass production food that is served on long, crowded tables. No private bathrooms. No organized fun. No Lido deck parties. When you stop at a port it is to re-supply the ship for the journey. You are not there to have fun. You are there to accomplish a mission.

You become family with the several thousand on the ship with you. Even though you may not know everyone on the ship, they are your brother or sister because they may save your life. You are there to get a job done. There is something that needs to be done and it is your job to do it and if you don't do it -- if you are not at

your station at the right time -- people die. So when the captain asks you to do something ... you do it. If there is a battle to be fought ... you are there and you are ready to fight ... if necessary ... even die for the cause of the whole. It is called a BATTLESHIP because of what it was created to do.

Now, which metaphor sounds more like the church? We'll take an even closer look next time ... stay tuned ...

August 22, 2006

## **16 PRINCIPLES ON THE CHURCH**

For the record and your review let me state again the 16 principles gleaned from Scripture on the nature and work of the church. Here they are:

1. The church has some very hard work to do. Fields don't plant themselves and the harvest doesn't happen without some hard work. The church has been given the specific spiritual task of sowing, planting, and harvesting.
2. The church has the immense responsibility of preparing the soil, planting the seed, watering the plants, and harvesting the fruit at the appropriate time.
3. The church can only function when it is connected to Jesus. Without Him we can do nothing. When we take our focus away from Jesus we begin to wither and die.
4. The church must understand its relationship to Jesus and learn to recognize His voice. Ultimately, the church is charged with hearing and obeying Jesus.
5. The church is to exhibit the love, care, honor, loyalty, and intimacy that are found in healthy family relationships. We are to take care of each other.
6. The church is to fully accept anyone that God calls family. We don't choose our brothers or sisters or parents ... we are simply called to love and honor them.
7. The church, as a living organism, needs to be fed, nurtured and encouraged in its quest to fulfill its reason for existence.
8. The church, as a living organism, has a reason for living and a mission to fulfill.
9. The church is in a global and epic battle against Satan and his reign of evil.
10. The church is under constant and aggressive attack from Satan and his powerful allies.
11. The church was created and equipped for this battle.
12. Ultimately, the battle will be won by the power of God.
13. The church experiences spiritual growth (success) when operating in unity, like a team.
14. Christ is the head of the Church. He alone is the captain of the team.
15. The life of the Church is like a race that requires discipline and training to gain victory.
16. The common goal of the team is to run a good race, cross the finish line, and gain the reward.

Study them. Pray over them. We'll look at them over and over again as we refine our metaphor for the church.

---

August 23, 2006

## **THE CHURCH, Pt. 7**

There are two foundational, biblical truths we have discovered about the **NATURE** of the church.

1. The church is a living, breathing, moving, working organism.
2. The church's life is sustained by Jesus Christ alone.

There are two foundational, biblical truths we have discovered about the **WORK** of the church.

3. The church has the immense, eternity-impacting responsibility to prepare the soil, plant the seed, water the plants, and harvest the fruit. This is called, "making disciples," and it is our mission.
4. The church is in an epic battle against evil, and is under constant attack from Satan.

All sixteen principles flow from these four truths which define the **NATURE** and **WORK** of the church. Read [the 16 principles](#). You can take all 16 and fit them under one of these four truths. I think we can simplify these even further. We could say:

1. The church is alive.
2. The church is the body of Christ.
3. The church is on a mission.
4. The church is in a battle.

From these four we need to see how well our metaphor fits. We'll do that next time ... stay tuned ...

August 25, 2006

## **THE CHURCH, Pt. 8**

The overarching metaphor for the church is a BATTLESHIP on the high seas ready for battle. This metaphor encompasses the overarching characteristics of the work and nature of the church.

The first is that the church is ALIVE. The battleship also is alive. It has a synergy that brings an effectiveness essential for the completion of the mission. No one person on the battleship can accomplish the mission. In fact, no one person can keep the ship moving or defend the ship. It takes a larger "life" of the battleship community to make the ship work. Every person on the ship has a job to do and a part to play. Each member depends on the others. When they are all working in concert, the battleship community takes on a life of its own. The CHURCH is different from the battleship in that the battleship is "like" a living organism in the way it works, whereas, the church IS a living organism. But the metaphor still works.

The second is that the church is the BODY of Christ. Christ is the head of the church. The church does not have a life of its own. The church is lead by only one voice -- the voice of Christ. The church is led by only one mind -- the mind of Christ. Without Christ, the church dies. The Battleship knows and understands this life-flow from Head to body. The commander of the ship is the mind, heart, and soul of the battleship. He gives the commands and everyone obeys. The hundreds of little jobs that must be done are all based on the voice of the commander. There is a "spirit of the corps" on the battleship. "Corps" comes from the Latin for "body." When the commander issues a command the "Corps" (BODY) springs into action. Once the commander makes his will known it affects every person on the ship. Without his commands the ship is a sitting duck.

The third is that the church is on a mission. The battleship is clearly on a mission. In fact, if there is no mission everyone gets off the ship and takes a vacation. There is no reason to be on the battleship if there is no mission. Once on the ship and out to sea the ONLY thing that matters is the completion of the mission. Every decision from the commander and every action from every member are directly related to the completion of the mission. If one person fails to do their part the mission is in jeopardy. If even one player refuses to do their part, people die. The mission is everything.

The fourth is that the church is in a battle. Satan is working to destroy the church. The battleship is built for battle. Fighting for what is right is the very reason the battleship was created. Everything on the battleship is designed and built for the battle. Once in the battle everyone on the ship understands the gravity of their work. They understand that they are in a battle. They have prepared for the battle. They are ready to sacrifice everything to win the battle. They understand that all of eternity hangs on winning the war.

This is the CHURCH. If you agree with this portrait of the church then it will greatly impact the way we operate. It will inform every decision we make. It will

determine how we "do church." It will effect how we invest ourselves in God's Kingdom work. And it will make a difference in the way we look at each other and the way we treat each other.

## **EPILOGUE**

These writings establish the biblical/theological basis for an understanding of the work and nature of the church. The church must then work out the ramifications of this understanding.

There are a multitude of questions that arise with respect to both how the church lives and acts, and what the church does. It was beyond the scope of this work to attempt a systematic process for discovering those ramifications.

This is left to an ongoing conversation between pastor, congregation and Holy Spirit.

If you want to learn more about how these principles flesh out in real life church work go to Pastor Ellis' blog:

[www.elliso.typepad.com](http://www.elliso.typepad.com)

Find the CATEGORIES link and click on THE CHURCH. There you will find more blog posts discussing the practical ramifications of this biblical and theological exploration.

Again, this is an ongoing conversation as we seek to be everything God created us to be, so feel free to add your thoughts and insights.