

How is the Church Different from the Parachurch

Various Scriptures

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, April 02, 2017

This morning, we are currently in a series called “Foundations of the Church”, where we are looking at some foundational or fundamental issues in the church. Like I told you before, you have a wonderful foundation here at Grace Fellowship Church, and I don’t want to change any of that. I was talking with a friend nearby who knows you and he said, “you have got some mature, godly people at Grace Fellowship Church. You’ve got some seasoned saints over there.” And I said “I know, and I just got here. It’s great. I can’t take credit for any of that. It’s great.” You have done a wonderful job laying the foundation of this church, and I don’t want to take anything away from any of that. I just want to come alongside and add to it. You can’t have too much concrete on a foundation, right? You can’t have too much ground to stand on, and I just want to add to the ground that you are already standing on here at Grace Fellowship Church. I want to help you commit to something.

A little boy once asked his father “Daddy, are we going to church today? It’s raining outside.” To which the father replied, “Yes, we are, son.” So the boy asked him, “When did you decide that?” And the dad said, “Twenty years ago.” He was committed to something, wasn’t he? Rain or shine, he was going to church. My friends, rain or shine, you need to go to church.

You need to be committed to something here, and I want to help you do that. You know the difference between a pig and a chicken when it comes to breakfast, right? The pig is committed while the chicken is just involved. Let that sink in for a moment. The chicken just lays an egg while the pig lays down everything. He gives his life for breakfast. You want to give your life for Jesus Christ. You want to lay down everything and the way you do that is through the church. The way you do that is right here with your brothers and sisters in Christ, and this series is designed to show you what that looks like.

And with that said, so far in this series we have talked about what the church is: it is the people of God for this age. That’s what we mean when we say the word “church”. It is the people of God for this age and it makes disciples. That’s what it does. It makes followers of the Lord Jesus Christ; it makes learners of Him, and it is different from the world. That’s what we talked about last time. The world doesn’t make disciples. It doesn’t deal with the unseen part of man; that’s the church’s job. That’s where the people of God come in. We feed a man’s soul along with his body. We take care of his inner man along with his outer one; his sin, his depravity, his lostness. The church takes care of all of that, and that makes us different from the world. It makes us stand apart. And that leads to our topic for this morning.

Not only is the church different from the world but it is different from another thing that I want to talk to you about this morning, and that is the parachurch. Let me introduce it this way. When I was in high school and college, I saw a lot of bad churches. I have already talked to you about that before so I won’t say much here, but during those years the church was a constant source of heartache for me. I mentioned the church split I saw when a group of people left my home church to follow a pastor who committed adultery and another group left to follow a pastor who got arrested for poisoning his wife (and that sounds strange). But it broke my heart as a young

man. Those guys were supposed to be my heroes; they were supposed to be my mentors in the faith and they weren't acting like that. So I said, "that's it, I'm through with the church." And I began to live my Christian life in the parachurch.

A parachurch is any Christian organization that is not officially recognized as a church. I will say this again for those of you taking notes, that a parachurch is any Christian organization that is not officially recognized as a church. The word "para" means to come alongside, so a "parachurch" ministry, then, is a ministry that comes alongside the church. It supports the church; it helps the church, but it is not the church. It has a different goal. It has different end in mind.

In high school and college, I began to gravitate towards that because I thought the church was finished. I am sorry to say that, but I thought it was through. In fact if you would have asked me, "What is wrong with Christianity?" I would have said "the Church". "There are too many hypocrites in the church. Shut it down. Get rid of it." And I lived that way for years. I got involved in the fellowship of Christian Athletes and the Baptist Student Union, I joined a Christian Rock Band; that's another story for another time. I am sure Katie would love to tell you about that. I got involved with prayer groups, Bible study groups and discipleship groups independent of a local church, and I lived that way for years. But the problem I ran into is that there are no rules for that sort of thing in Scripture. There is no map. You are just kind of floundering when you live that way because the parachurch is never mentioned in the Bible.

The Bible has a lot to say about being a Christian but it doesn't have a lot to say about how to do ministry outside of a local church. Some would argue that the Bible doesn't have a lot to say about church membership either, and that's true if you mean that the phrase "church membership" is never mentioned in the Bible. But the phrase "God exists" is never mentioned, either. At least the Bible never uses that expression. It just assumes it, and it is the same way with church membership. It just assumes it. Everything in the New Testament was written for the benefit of the church, and everything in the New Testament was written to tell Christians how to live as members of the church. So the Bible just assumes that if you want to be with Jesus, you will want to be with His people. It just assumes that if you love God, you will want to join His church. The problem I ran into as a young Christian is that if you get away from that, you don't really have a map to follow; you are on your own. You are just a rogue Christian living by your own rules, doing your own thing, and that is dangerous. It is deadly to live your life that way, which is exactly what I did.

After college, I went to Grace Community Church and The Master's Seminary. And for the first time in my life, I saw a church do what it is commanded to do in Scripture. I was so confused when I first got there that it took me two years to realize they were teaching me the Bible, because it was all so new to me. I grew up in the church but I had never heard of Church Discipline. No one ever talked about that growing up. I can't even remember the phrase being used. I had never heard of Elder Rule either. I think the Presbyterian Church in town had Elders, but I didn't know any Presbyterians, so I didn't know anything about that. I had never heard of expository preaching or Biblical Counseling. I had never heard of creationism or the cessation of the gifts. That was all new to me. It was all foreign and it took me two years to realize that they were getting it from Scripture. It took me two years to realize they were teaching me the Bible. And every time they taught me one of these ideas, they opened up the Bible and showed me

where it was found. Every time they gave me one of these “new-fangled” doctrines, they opened up the Word to chapter and verse and they showed me the map. They showed me where they got it from. And after two years of that, I began to trust them, and my life began to change and so did my views on the church. But I mention all of that because I don’t think my experience was all that different from what many people are experiencing today.

I don’t have to tell you that there are a lot of people out there who are burned out of the church, who think the church is what is wrong with Christianity. I read a statistic recently that said the majority of young Canadians who grew up in church don’t go anymore. One scholar referred to it as the hemorrhaging or bloodletting of the church. People are leaving in droves, especially young people (especially twenty-year-olds), and it has caused many of them to live out their Christian lives in the parachurch. They are leaving the church and replacing it with groups like Young Life or Youth For Christ. They are walking away from the body of Christ and replacing it with books or ministries on the internet. They are saying, “I’m through with the church. I’ve had enough of that. Get rid of it.” And they are turning to something else instead. And the question we need to answer this morning is: what can we do about this? How do we stop the hemorrhaging? How do we stop the bloodletting?

I think one thing we can do is talk about the difference between the church and the parachurch. You need to know that there are a lot of good parachurch ministries out there today. We use some of them here at Grace Fellowship. We appreciate them. We thank the Lord for them, but there is a difference between what they are doing and what we are doing. There are some similarities but there are some differences. The church is not the same thing as the parachurch. At the end of the day, you can be a Christian and never join a parachurch, but you can’t be a Christian and never join a church. Not if you want to be obedient. Not if you want to follow the commands of Scripture. One is essential, the other is preference. And that’s what I want to talk to you about this morning.

This morning I want to give you five differences between the church and the parachurch. The first one is this: a difference in authority.

Turn in your Bibles to Ephesians 2. And as you are turning there, some have said that the apostles were the first examples of a parachurch. As the argument goes, the apostles weren’t really members of the church. They just came alongside the church to help it out like the parachurch does, but that’s not true. If you read in Ephesians 2:19-20, it says: “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone.”

The apostles didn’t serve outside the church, they laid the foundation for the church. They laid the groundwork for it. Jesus Christ is the Cornerstone, and the apostles and the prophets are the foundation. They were as much a part of the church as anybody. Now we know this is figurative language here because other passages say that Jesus is the foundation of the church. But what Paul is saying here is that the church is built on the teaching of the apostles. It is built on their doctrine. If you want to know how the church is to operate, just open up the pages of Scripture where the words of the apostles are and they will tell you. They will spell it out for you. They are not trying to hide.

Go to 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 and see what kind of men are qualified to lead the church, and they will tell you. It's all in there. Read how an elder and a deacon must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, respectable, hospitable, gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money and so forth and so on. Read other passages that lay out their responsibilities and their job description. Go to Matthew 18 and see how sin is to be handled in the church. If your brother sins, go and show him his fault just between the two of you. If he continues in sin, take two or three witnesses along. If he continues, tell it to the church and if he continues from that point, treat him as a gentile and a tax collector. Read other passages that tell you what to do when a man is quarrelsome or commits some gross public sin. Go to Titus 2 and read how the older women are to disciple the younger women, teaching them to love their husbands and their children, to be pure, sensible, and kind. Go to 1 Corinthians 11-14 and see how things are to be done in order in the church; how worship is not to be chaotic but orderly and dignified. Go to 2 Corinthians 8 and see how we are to give our resources to the church. We are to give generously and consistently. Go to 1 Peter 4 and see how we should be fervent in our love for one another. Go to Jude 1 and see how doctrine is to be loved and protected. Go to Hebrews 13 and see how leaders are to be followed and obeyed, but my point is that the church is built on the foundation of the apostles. It is built on their teachings. You can go to all of these books and all of these passages and see how things are to happen in the church. To say this another way, the church has a guide for what it does. It has a map.

I don't know if you've ever put together one of those book cases from Staples but they always come with a map. They always come with a picture of what the finished product should look like. And if you are like me, that does you no good because you can't read it anyway. You have to call someone to help you. I had to call Stan Stewart to help me put the book shelves together in my office, but the church has that in Scripture. It has a map. As a member of the church, you can go back to the Bible to make sure that your ministry is doing the right thing. To make sure it looks like the picture, but you can't do that in the parachurch. There is no map for what they are trying to do. There are no guidelines. That doesn't mean that the parachurch has no rules at all. Of course it does. The Bible tells us how to act no matter what we are doing. And that doesn't mean the parachurch is wrong because it isn't mentioned in the Bible. Computers are not mentioned in the Bible either but a lot of good can come from them, and a lot of good can come from the parachurch. We appreciate it but it doesn't have a map, which can be dangerous. One author said it like this:

The major criticism that Christians have for parachurch ministries and the one that is easiest to make stick, is that they often lack accountability to anyone but themselves. Parachurch groups can be religion gone free enterprise.

And we would all agree that churches can be that way too. Churches can be religion gone free enterprise. They can be accountable to no one but themselves. But when a church goes that way, again we can point it back to Scripture to correct it. We can't do that in the parachurch. It doesn't have a map.

And that leads to another difference between the church and the parachurch: a difference in approach. There is a difference in authority and a difference in approach. Like I said, a lot of good can come from the parachurch. Many of us were saved through their work. I was saved at a

summer camp for athletes. The Lord showed me my sin and my need for a Saviour at a Fellowship of Christian Athletes camp, between my Junior and Senior years of High School. I have met Christians who were saved through ministries to the military and to college students and we have all been disciplined by them to one degree or another. We have all enjoyed ministries like Answers In Genesis, Desiring God, Grace to You, Way of the Master and ACBC. These are all “parachurch” ministries. The same thing goes for the Christian schools or the Christian books or the Christian music that we enjoy; that’s all parachurch. So what I am about to say is not a criticism as much as it is a clarification, but the approach of the parachurch is different from that of the church.

For one, the parachurch is built on its commitment to Jesus and a cause. Now that cause may be a good cause and that cause may be a bad cause, but the parachurch, by nature of what it is, is built around a cause. It is built around a principle and that principle could be anything. It could be reaching athletes, it could be reaching the military, it could be reaching people in foreign countries, reaching orphans, divorced people, prisoners, children, teenagers, politicians, the homeless, alcoholics, drug users. It could be publishing books, publishing music, publishing pamphlets. The cause could be teaching Biblical counseling, Biblical manhood and womanhood, end times, creationism, apologetics, discernment, reformed theology, church history. It could be translating the Bible, stopping abortion, protesting gay marriage. It could be anything. The list is endless because the causes are endless. It is hard to get an actual number of how many parachurches there are because it is hard to figure out how many causes there are.

According to Manta.com, a small business website, in 2016 there were over 24000 religious organizations in Canada; over 24000. And a substantial portion of them were parachurch ministries. They weren’t all churches. Many of them were just coming alongside the church to help it out. To highlight this, when I was in Indiana, I asked our church secretary to keep track of how many promotions we received from parachurch ministries in a given week. She said they received more than twenty. We got more than twenty solicitations a week from parachurch ministries. That’s more than one thousand per year. If we gave all of them one thousand dollars, we’d go broke. But it is mind-blowing at times to think of how many parachurch ministries there are and the reason for this is that their approach is different from that of the church.

The parachurch is built on its commitment to Jesus and to a cause, but the church is built on its commitment to Jesus and that’s it. Period. Jesus is the cause of the church. He is the glue that holds it all together. We are not here because we are all athletes or we are all college students or in the military. We are not here because we are recovering from alcohol abuse or drug abuse or trying to feed the poor, as good as that may be. We are not here because we are starting a Christian school or a Christian publishing company or because we want to teach creationism or end times only. We are here because we want to worship Jesus Christ. That’s what brought us together. That is the tie that binds us. Everything else is secondary to that.

1 Corinthians 12:13 says, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” You see the word “all” repeated several times in that passage. We were “all” brought into one body. We were “all” made to drink of one Spirit. The church is for “all” those who worship Jesus Christ; every last one of them.

Galatians 3:28 says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” You see the word “all” again there. No matter where you come from, no matter what your background - Jew or Greek, slave or free - you are all part of the church if you are in Christ. You all belong. You are all His people and that approach makes the church different from the parachurch. In the parachurch, you have to be part of the cause in order to belong. You have to be an athlete or in the military or a college student, otherwise you don’t fit in. Otherwise it’s not for you. I have seen that before. In sports ministries, if you weren’t an athlete, it wasn’t for you. You had to go somewhere else. It’s not that way in the church. We all fit into this. We all belong here if we are in Christ.

You could look at it this way: several years ago I was speaking at a sports camp in Illinois, where one of the students gave her testimony. She was a college swimmer, and she was saying that she could worship God in the pool with her swim team just as much as she could with her church on Sunday mornings. That’s not true because her swim team didn’t come together to worship Jesus Christ. Her swim team came together to swim. They didn’t come together to take the Lord’s Supper and observe baptism and hear the Gospel preached. They came together to compete. Listen, you can worship God no matter what you are doing but worshipping Him at swim practice is very different from worshipping Him at church because one is commanded and the other is not. Hebrews 10:24-25 says: “And, let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”

That command was given to the church, not to a swim team. It was given to the body of Christ, and we have to remember that as we think about the church and the parachurch.

Let me give you a third difference between the church and the parachurch, and I will try to speed up with the next ones because I want to give you some applications at the end. Third is a difference in leadership.

A third difference between the church and the parachurch is a difference in leadership. Because the parachurch is not mentioned in Scripture, it has to find a leadership model somewhere else, and it often finds it in the business world. To see what I mean, turn in bibles to 1 Timothy 3. 1 Timothy 3 gives us the qualifications for a leader of the church. It gives us the conditions a man must meet if he wants to be an elder or a deacon. And I mentioned these to you before, but we haven’t talked about them in our series yet. So I want to say a little more about them here. Read 1 Timothy 3:1-13 with me:

It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the

devil. Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

This is a picture of what a man has to be if he would lead the church. Those are his qualifications. To say it another way, if a man fits the description given in verses 1-7, he can lead in the office of elder. If he fits the description given in verse 8-13, he can lead in the office of deacon. He must be a man of dignity, not double tongued, and so forth and so on. If he doesn't, then he can't. It's as simple as that. But as I mentioned to you before, there is no list like this for the parachurch. There is nothing in the Bible that says that this is what a sports ministry or a military ministry should look like. So what many of them do is they borrow from the business world, and they create a board of directors instead of an elder board. They put men in leadership who are good at business but not necessarily good at Christianity. They can balance the budget. They can market the product. They can raise a lot of money, but they can't do these things in 1 Timothy 3. Now obviously parachurch ministries are all across the board on this issue. Some have godly men leading them. But at the end of the day, many of them have incorporated a business model of leadership, because they have no other choice.

The "Nine Marks of Healthy Church" website published an article some time ago called "Nine Marks of a Healthy Parachurch" which talked about this. It said:

Modern corporate culture values efficiency, risk management, clean organizational structures, and a strong financial ledger. Corporate culture and structure is routinely imported into parachurch ministry leadership. As a result, many parachurch organizations then also place a high value on what raises the most money, minimizes risk, or produces the most efficient management structure. This past October, I attended the Lausanne Congress in Cape Town (a large parachurch event) and happened to meet an old friend from one of these groups. We sat for coffee. I had written an article about his organization last year with the hope that it would produce some discussion about worrisome trends that they were developing. But the immediate internal response of the group was to distribute a list of counter-arguments to my article to use if their donors asked questions. So I commented to my friend that I was amazed at the gears that began to spin to protect the "30 million dollar donor base." He smiled, patted my arm, and said, "Mack, it's more like 60 million..." He said it like it was nothing personal; just business.

Whether that is typical of most parachurch ministries or not I don't know, but it's a problem in many of them. They don't care about our worrisome trends, they just care about the donor base. They don't care about the direction they are going in, they just care about the 60 million dollars.

Now churches can be that way too, no doubt. There are a lot of churches out there that care about nothing but money, but the church can go back to 1 Timothy 3:3 and say that if a leader is a lover of money, then he can't lead. Get him out of here. Remove him from office. The church can turn to 1 Timothy 5:19 where it says: "Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the

basis of two or three witnesses. Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all..." The church can go to Titus 1:8 and say that a man must love what is good and be sensible, otherwise he is unaccustomed to lead. The parachurch can't do that. It has no commands for that sort of thing, and it can lead to a lot of confusion.

A friend of mine works for one of these organizations. And he was having a fundraiser and wanted to show some appreciation to his donors, so he asked me:

What would the Bible say about giving out the names of our biggest supporters at the banquet? What would it say about listing them by name? You know, this person gave \$1,000, that person gave \$5,000.

And I said:

Nothing. The Bible says nothing at all about that. If you were a church, then it would tell you not to show favor to the rich over the poor in James 2. If you were a church I would say don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing in Matthew 5, but you're not a church. So the Bible says nothing about that. I don't know what to tell you.

The church has a different concept of leadership. It also has a different concept of discipline.

A fourth difference between the church and the parachurch is that they have a different concept of discipline. Church discipline can be a pretty sensitive subject to talk about. To mention someone's sin and to call their name publicly from the pulpit sounds awful, but a lot of that concern comes from a misunderstanding of what church discipline actually is. Church discipline is the attempt to restore someone to a right relationship with God. In fact church discipline could be called "church restoration" because that's the goal. We want to restore someone; bring them back into the church. In Matthew 18, Jesus talks about this right after giving the parable of the lost sheep where He says:

What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying?

Church discipline is the church's attempt to do that. It is the attempt to go after the lost sheep. It is the attempt to find the one who is straying. And for an example of this, turn in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 2.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul tells the church to throw a man out who has been sleeping with his father's wife. "Discipline him", Paul says. "Put him out." And in 2 Corinthians, Paul mentions that man again in verses 5-8:

But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree—in order not to say too much—to all of you. Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him.

Paul says: “Okay, you threw the man out and he repented. You did your part, he did his. Now forgive him. Restore him. Let the lost sheep come home.” That’s the point of church discipline: to let the lost sheep come home; to restore the sinner. You put him out to bring him back, and I mention that because the parachurch doesn’t have a process like that.

It doesn’t have guidelines for how to handle sin and restore someone back to a right relationship with God, so it can do whatever it wants. If a member gets into sin, it can fire him. Just let him go. If a member gets into sin, it can ignore him and hope he goes away; hope the problem solves itself. If a member gets into sin, it can redefine the sin. You know, call it something else. Cheating on your wife - it’s something else. Embezzling money - it’s something else. It’s not “sin”; it’s not that bad. Again, there aren’t any rules for this sort of thing and because of this, parachurches can be all over the place on the issue of discipline.

In some of the more popular ones that I’m aware of, you can join if you are a Mormon or a Roman Catholic or a liberal Christian. You can join if you deny the resurrection and the deity of Christ. You can join if you are living in sin, divorcing your spouse, embezzling money. There aren’t any rules. There is no discipline. As I was studying this a couple of years ago, one very successful parachurch ministry that employs over one thousand people came out in the news saying that they wouldn’t require their employees to restrict marriage to one man and one woman. I think they recanted of that, but going back to what I keep saying, they had no map. They had no guidelines for what they were doing. Churches say things like that too, but they have a map.

In 1 Timothy 1:20, Paul says to hand blasphemers in the church over to Satan. That’s how you handle it if someone comes into the church teaching blasphemies and false doctrine. Hand them over to Satan. Throw them out.

2 Thessalonians 3:6 says when someone professes to be a Christian but lives in rampant sin: “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life.” That’s how you handle it. Keep away from them. Don’t have anything to do with them. Romans 16:17 says the same thing: “Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turned away from them.” Turn away from a divisive man. Keep your eye on him. The church handles discipline differently from the parachurch. It doesn’t handle sin the same way.

And that leads to a final difference between the church and the parachurch, and we will round it off with this one: a difference in goals. Any parachurch ministry, if it is Christian, will have the goal of making disciples. It will have the goal of carrying out the Great Commission and making followers of the Lord Jesus Christ and many of them are doing it well. The Navigators, which is a ministry to the military, has some excellent tools for Bible study and memorization - some really good stuff. The Way of the Master does a great job of training people on how to evangelize. I think we have all enjoyed that ministry The Association of Certified Biblical Counselors - does the same thing with counseling. Answers in Genesis does it with Genesis. 9 Marks of a Healthy Church does it with the church. Grace to You does it with expository preaching. The difference between them and the local church is that they are there to help you temporarily, while the church is there to help you permanently.

What I mean is that the goal of the parachurch is there to help you while you are in the military or College or working through issues like creation and evangelism and stuff like that, but the church is there to help you through all of it. That's its goal. That's its ministry. The parachurch is there to help you in specific areas like counseling or reformed theology, but the church is there to disciple you through all of that. It helps disciple you on a permanent basis but the parachurch doesn't do that. It is only temporary. That doesn't mean it's bad, that's just not what it's here for.

I have talked with College Students who said, "When I graduated College, there was no one there to help me, because all my time was spent in Campus Crusade, or Young Life." You don't want to say that. You want someone to be there for you after you graduate College. I have talked with military people who said the same thing. "When I was discharged from the military, that was it. I had no idea what to do." You want people to be there for you when you are discharged. In every phase of life. And that's what the church is there to do. It is an ongoing ministry. It's an all-encompassing thing. That's its goal.

So five differences between the church and the parachurch. I could mention more, but those are the ones that we had time for. The church has a different authority, a different approach, a different leadership, a different discipline and a different duration from the parachurch. Like I said, that doesn't make the parachurch wrong. That just makes it different. That just puts it in another category. I think we all appreciate the ministry of the parachurch. I know I do. I have no idea where I would be if it were not for the conferences and the books and the websites of the parachurch ministries that are out there. They have helped me. I thank God for them as I know you do, but it is no substitute for the church. That is no replacement for what the people of God can offer and it leads me to some application for all of this.

The church is different from the parachurch. That's important. We need to know that, but so what? What does that mean for us today? How does it impact our lives?

A couple of ways: for one, you should thank God for the church because it gives you a map. It gives you some guidelines to follow as you go through life. Do you know how many people go through life without a map? Do you know how many people go through life with no guidelines; with no direction at all?

A college professor from Northeastern Illinois University once asked some other professors what the meaning of life was and they said: "I don't know the meaning of life. I have never found the meaning of life. I am afraid it still alludes me." You don't have to talk like that if you are a Christian. You have found the meaning of life. The meaning of life is to make disciples of the Lord Jesus and you do it through the church. You did it with the map. You do it with the rulebook, and you should thank God for that. Not everyone has a map. Not everyone has a rulebook to follow. You should also find ways to serve the church. That's another way to apply this.

Find ways to serve the church. If this is God's map for you, find ways to live it out. You don't follow a map sitting down; you have to get up and go somewhere. In the last ten years or so, I have only had a few times when I could just go to church without having to preach or do announcements or something, just sit there and do nothing. And I am amazed at how easy it is to do that. There's no commitment to that. There's no sacrifice - don't talk to anybody, don't ask

them how they are doing. Just show up and leave. And I am also amazed at how many people think that is enough for God.

God gave you 168 hours in a week and you can only give Him one, and you think that's enough. It's not. You want to serve the church. Not just show up, but serve. You want to get plugged in. Find out what we've got going on here and commit to it. Find one of the ministries we have, and join it. Be a part of it. Help with the music, help with the hospitality team, help with the children. Our children's ministry is bursting at the seams. We've got children hanging off the rafters; climbing the curtains. So go help with that. Go see Brent Nelson and get involved, but give God more than one hour a week. And finally, encourage people in the parachurch.

That's one more way to apply this: encourage people in the parachurch. Encourage the ones who are doing it well. How many of you have been blessed by The Way of the Master? Anybody? Write a thank you note and tell them you appreciate them. How many of you enjoy Answers in Genesis? Creation Ministries? Do the same thing for them. What about Al Mohler's blog? What about Grace to You? And Desiring God? And those are the ones off the top of my head, but tell them that you appreciate them. Tell them all they have done for you. There are a lot of good parachurch ministries out there, so be a blessing to them. Give honor where honor is due. Well, next week we are going to talk about the "ideal church" and look at what the perfect church should look like. If you ever wanted to see a perfect church, come back next week, and I will show it to you. But for this week let's close in a word of prayer and thank the Lord for the ministry of the church and the parachurch.

Let's pray.