What is the purpose of the church?

Week 1: Who owns the Church?

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Production Notes:

* Green highlighted text on the screen.
* Underlined text as blanks to be filled in on a handout.

Introduction:

By 1947, an idea rooted in Marxist ideology was gaining momentum in many parts of the world: the belief that justice for the common person could be achieved by abolishing private ownership of major resources and placing them under state control. The hope was that governments would act objectively to distribute wealth and power equally.[[1]](#footnote-2) However, in practice, this idea—known as “communism”—often led to inefficiencies, corruption, and authoritarian rule.[[2]](#footnote-3) In many cases, policies such as forced collectivization and centralized planning caused widespread suffering, including famines and economic collapse.[[3]](#footnote-4) As the Cold War unfolded (1947–1991), conflicts and policies tied to this ideological struggle resulted in millions of deaths, with some estimates exceeding 20 million.[[4]](#footnote-5) In the aftermath, many societies came to value personal ownership and the ability to control the goods and services they interact with daily—a principle central to free-market economies.[[5]](#footnote-6)

Simply put: People care a lot about personal ownership. It is in our cultural DNA to want personal control over the goods and services we interact with everyday.

Let me pose a question to you.

Who owns our church? Is it the state? Is it me, as the pastor? Is it you and the laity? Is it the denomination? Every one of these has influence, but none of them are the actual owner of the church.

Lectio:  
Matthew 16:13-20  
Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ [[6]](#footnote-7)

13Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” 14And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” 15He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” 16Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” 17And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 18And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. 19I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” 20Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

Meditatio:

* Caesarea Philippi, the setting for this passage, was a city filled with pagan worship, including temples dedicated to Greek and Roman gods. Jesus’ statement about His church stood in stark contrast to the religious and political powers of the day.[[7]](#footnote-8)
* Christ claims:
  + Jesus accepts authority as King: “Son of Man.”
  + Jesus accepts authority as the prime prophet. “John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, etc.”
  + Jesus accepts authority over creation as God’s son. “Christ, the Son of the Living God.”
  + Jesus the Christ explicitly says He owns the church and her purpose in Matt. 16:18. Paul, the prolific and prime church planter, supports this in Col. 1:18.
    - Paul reiterates Jesus’ claim by declaring that Christ is the head of the body, the church, emphasizing His supreme authority and ownership.
* “The church does not belong to us; it belongs to Christ. We are stewards, not owners.” – Charles Spurgeon [[8]](#footnote-9)

What does this mean for us?

* A truth to know: In the days of kings, the church belongs to Jesus. In Communist countries, the church belongs to Jesus. In a free-market, for profit Western democracy, the church still belongs to Jesus. A million years from now, when all human powers and principalities pass away, the church (the bride of Christ) will still belong to Jesus.
* A way to think: Every member of the church is called to serve with the mindset that we are stewards, not owners, of the church’s resources and mission.
* A job to do: The job of church leadership, both paid and volunteer, is not to please you, the surrounding culture or even our own preferences. The church is not a free-market business or a country club. The job of church leadership is to obey Jesus.
* “The church is not an accidental gathering but a divine institution. Its foundation is Christ Himself, who bought it with His blood.” – John Calvin

Actio:

Church members who understand Biblical authority do not first pressure pastors to their preference, they come alongside church leadership to seek out the purpose and heart of Christ, the true owner of the church.

Illustration:

I had the awesome privilege of serving under a pastor by the name of Russell Johnson. He loved to mentor us younger guys. He would often simply take us along while he was doing ministry. He called it “windshield time”. It was often in these unstructured times together that I learned a lot. Not all my peers took advantage of this. Some of them bemoaned what felt like extra work or labeled the unstructured time as unintentional and their heart posture caused them to be blind to the growth opportunities. Honestly, I was that guy for awhile. There was a season in that church where Pastor Johnson was taking the church in a direction that was Biblically solid but caused church members some discomfort. While in the car having unplanned conversation, he said something to me I will never forget. “You must seek the applause of the nail scarred hands above all else.”

Who owns the Church?

The Church, her mission and purpose belong to Jesus and we are invited to join.

Congregational Response:

Christ be glorified! Christ be magnified! Christ will come and claim His Church!

(Rev. 19:7-9)

Jesus is the creator, owner and head of this home and gives us our prime purpose.

(Matt. 16:18; Col. 1:18)

1. Pipes, Richard. Communism: A History. New York: Modern Library, 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Applebaum, Anne. Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956. New York: Doubleday, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Nove, Alec. An Economic History of the USSR, 1917–1991. London: Penguin Books, 1992. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Gaddis, John Lewis. The Cold War: A New History. New York: Penguin Press, 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Pipes, Communism: A History. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](https://ref.ly/res/LLS:1.0.710/2019-04-30T20:46:24Z/4443338?len=968) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 16:13–20. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Gaebelein, Frank E., ed. The Expositor’s Bible Commentary. Zondervan. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Spurgeon, Charles. Spurgeon’s Sermons. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)