

# What COVID-19, Black Lives Matter, and 'Woke' America is Revealing About the Church

## The Church – Beneficial or Essential?

According to *Barna Research*, recent data shows that, among practicing Christians – those who identify as Christian and agree strongly that faith is very important in their lives and attended church at least monthly (prior to COVID-19) – over half (53%) say they have streamed their regular church online within the past four weeks. Another 34% admits to streaming a different church service online other than their own, essentially “church hopping” digitally.

Finally, about one-third of practicing Christians (32%) says they have done neither of these things.

**One-third.**

Why? And what is the future of the church in our culture?

**Is church “essential”?**

“In California, churches are in the same reopening category as nail salons, gyms, and movie theaters – “nice to have” luxuries we can presumably live without for a prolonged season. Churches are lumped in with entertainment options – good for people who like that sort of thing, but by no means essential for human and societal flourishing, and certainly not worth the potential health risk. It’s telling that our society has decided we cannot live without “essentials” like liquor stores, marijuana dispensaries, and golf courses, but we can live without physical church gatherings.”

– Brett McCracken, *Why We Don’t See Church as ‘Essential’*

“... roughly forty percent of the year has passed with our church essentially unable to gather in a normal way. Pastors' ability to shepherd their flocks has been severely curtailed. The unity and influence of the church has been threatened. Opportunities for believers to serve and minister to one another have been missed. And the suffering of Christians who are troubled, fearful, distressed, infirm, or otherwise in urgent need of fellowship and encouragement has been magnified beyond anything that could reasonably be considered just or necessary. Major public events that were planned for 2021 are already being canceled, signaling that officials are preparing to keep restrictions in place into next year and beyond. That forces churches to choose between the clear command of our Lord and the government officials. Therefore, following the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, we gladly choose to obey Him.”

– Phil Johnson, Executive Director, Grace to You

"We are intentionally an outward facing organization. Spending time and money to create safe-ish Sunday morning gatherings struck us as insider-focused," said Stanley, who made the decision with fellow leaders and based in part on surveys of staff, volunteers, and attendees. He estimated that 85 percent of the feedback he's received around the news has been positive.

"By suspending Sunday morning in-person gatherings we are able to create a strategy that impacts 100 percent of our attendees and has the potential to impact their friends as well," he said. "In-person services during COVID is neither missional nor evangelistic – unless of course the mission of the church is to gather in a building on Sunday morning."

- "More Pastors Agree With Andy Stanley: No Worship Services Until 2021", *Christianity Today* (July 15, 2020)

## **ECCLESIOLOGY – The Doctrine of the Church**

So, what's a church?

And, what's a church for?

*"A particular gospel church consists of a company of saints incorporated by a special covenant into one distinct body, and meeting together in one place, for the enjoyment of fellowship with each other and with Christ their head, in all his institutions, to their mutual edification and the glory of God through the Spirit."*

- *Charleston Baptist Association, 1774*

The Church is primarily \_\_\_\_\_, not \_\_\_\_\_.

Church is not a product to be consumed or an activity to be enjoyed. It is my *essential* and *eternal* identity.

From the "**What We Teach**" section of our website:

We teach that all who place their faith in Jesus Christ are immediately placed by the Holy Spirit into one united spiritual Body, the Church (1 Corinthians 12:12-13), the bride of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:23-32; Revelation 19:7-8), of which Christ is the Head (Ephesians 1:22; 4:15; Colossians 1:18).

Implications:

Challenges:

The Church \_\_\_\_\_ locally as one body, one flock, and one spiritual building.

Our assembling is an essential part of our *purpose*. We are *more* than a local assembly, but never *less*.

We teach that the establishment and continuity of local churches is taught and defined in the Bible (Acts 14:23, 27; 20:17, 28; Galatians 1:2; Philippians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1) and that the members of the one spiritual Body are directed to associate themselves together in local assemblies (1 Corinthians 11:18-20; Hebrews 10:25).

Implications:

Challenges:

Only Christ has \_\_\_\_\_ over His Church.

All other authority is subject to His. We recognize and respect *temporal* authority, but *ultimate* authority is God's alone.

We teach that the one supreme authority for the church is Christ (1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18) and that church leadership, gifts, order, discipline, and worship are all appointed through His sovereignty.

Implications:

Challenges:

The Church functions under the direction of biblically prescribed leaders who are called to \_\_\_\_\_.

These leaders are not *infallible* but are *responsible* to God for the church. Members are responsible for following their leadership.

We teach that the biblically designated officers serving under Christ and over the assembly are elders (also called bishops, pastors, and pastor/teachers) (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 4:11) and deacons (Acts 6:1-6), both of whom must meet biblical qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-5). We teach that these leaders lead or rule as servants of Christ (1 Timothy 5:17-22) and have His authority in directing the church. The congregation is to submit to their leadership (Hebrews 13:7,17).

Implications:

Challenges:

The Church has a unique and specific, \_\_\_\_\_  
that is not subject to change.

The church must guard itself diligently from all *distractions* and *diversions* as it fulfills its calling in the world.

We teach that the purpose of the church is to glorify God (Ephesians 3:21) by building itself up in the faith (Ephesians 4:13-16), by instruction of the Word (2 Timothy 2:2, 15; 3:16-17), by fellowship (Acts 2:47; 1 John 1:3), by keeping the ordinances (Luke 22:19; Acts 2:38-42) and by advancing and communicating the gospel to the entire world (Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8; 2:42).

Implications:

Challenges:

**Thoughts, observations, questions ...**