

The Doctrine of the Church

I. The Nature of The Church

A. Terms and titles used to describe the Church.

1. Church, *ekklesia*: A “called out assembly,” originally a non-religious term that took on a sacred meaning by its application to the followers of Jesus.

Matthew 16:18

...on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

Romans 16:5

Likewise greet the church that is in their house.

2. *The Way* (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22), signifying that Christianity is a path, a way of life.

Acts 9:2

...so that if he [Saul] found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Acts 19:23

And about that time there arose a great commotion concerning the Way.

Acts 24:14

But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets.

3. The *Body of Christ* (Colossians 1:18, 24), signifying that we are in Him, He is in us, and we are His representatives on this earth.

Colossians 1:18

And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

4. The *Bride of Christ* (2 Corinthians 11:2; Matthew 9:15; Ephesians 5:22-32), signifying His love for the Church, and the destiny of the Church.

Ephesians 5:23; 31-32

For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church....
For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

5. The *Elect* (Colossians 3:12; 2 Timothy 2:10), signifying the place of the Church in God's eternal plan.

Colossians 3:12

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies...

B. Distinction between the Visible Church and the Invisible Church.

1. The visible church has both "wheat and tares" (Matthew 13:24-30); both "good and bad" (Matthew 13:47-50), and it will have them to the end.

2. The Invisible Church will be presented as glorious, spotless, and holy (Ephesians 5:27) and includes all the redeemed from all ages.

Ephesians 5:27

That He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.

C. Structure of the Church.

1. The Head of the Church is Christ (Ephesians 1:22); the Foundation of the Church is Christ and the apostles (Matthew 16:13-19; Revelation 21:14).

Ephesians 1:22

And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church.

Matthew 16:18

And I also say that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

Revelation 21:14

Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

2. Leadership.

a. Titles and positions: Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor-teachers (Ephesians 4:11-12); Elders (Acts 14:23); Overseers, bishops (Acts 20:28); Deacons (Acts 6:1-7; 1 Timothy 3:8-13).

Ephesians 4:11-12

And He himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

Acts 14:23

So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Acts 20:28

Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

1 Timothy 3:13

For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

b. Qualifications: Spiritual giftedness (Romans 12:4-8); Exemplary character and morals (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; James 3:1).

Romans 12:4-6

For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them...

1 Timothy 3:2

A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach;

c. Models: Both Jewish (elders) and Greek (overseers) models were used in the leadership of the Church.

d. Leaders in the Church are to be submitted to and respected (Hebrews 13:17; 1 Timothy 5:17-20; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).

Hebrews 13:17

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake.

1 Timothy 5:17

Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.

3. The organization of the church in New Testament times.

a. While there were no “denominations” in the apostolic church, it is incorrect to think that all the Christians in one city all met together in one meeting, at one place.

b. The house-church organization was widespread, being displayed in Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:19; Acts 20:20); Rome (Romans 16:3-5); Jerusalem (Acts 2:46; 5:42); Colossae (Philemon 2) and Laodicea (Colossians 4:15).

c. It is likely that each individual house-church had its own overseer or pastor; these are the leaders of the Ephesian church that Paul addressed in Acts 20 (see verses 17, 20, 28).

Acts 20:17, 20, 28

From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church...”and how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house.... Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

D. Growth of the Church

1. It is organic, after God's will (Acts 2:47).

Acts 2:47

And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

2. It is the result of mature, equipped believers (Ephesians 4:11-16).

Ephesians 4:11-16

And He himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ – from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

E. Thoughts on Today's Church.

1. Denominationalism: Good or bad?
2. Incredible growth and expansion, but not so much in the western world.
3. The rise of "parachurch" organizations.

II. The Mission of The Church

A. The continuation of Christ's work.

1. We are sent as Jesus was sent (John 20:21). The Gospels only mark what Jesus began to do and teach (Acts 1:1). He continues His work through His body on earth, the Church (Colossians 1:18).

John 20:21

Then Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."

Acts 1:1

The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach...

Colossians 1:18

And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

2. Jesus's ministry was a ministry of reconciliation (Colossians 1:19-20; Ephesians 2:16; Romans 5:10; 2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

Colossians 1:19-20

For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

Ephesians 2:16

And that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.

3. We are to continue this "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). The Gospel is our message of reconciliation (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). Making disciples is our method of reconciliation (Matthew 28:19).

2 Corinthians 5:18-20

Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

Matthew 28:19-20

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.

a. We are to enjoy past reconciliation (Romans 5:11) by our worship and obedience.

Romans 5:11

And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

b. We are to deepen present reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:20; Romans 8:29; Ephesians 4:11-16) by building up the saints, into increasing maturity and Christ-likeness.

2 Corinthians 5:20

Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

c. We are to witness to Christ's work of reconciliation (Colossians 1:28-29; Acts 1:8) by testifying of what Christ has done for the world, what He has done in us and by living as witnesses.

Colossians 1:28-29

Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.

Acts 1:8

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

B. To be a lesson and an example to spiritual beings (Ephesians 3:10-11; 1 Peter 1:10-12; 1 Corinthians 11:10; 4:9).

Ephesians 3:10-11

To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1 Peter 1:12

To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven -- things which angels desire to look into.

1 Corinthians 11:10

For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.

1 Corinthians 4:9

For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and men.

New Testament - Church Era

Some features of Christianity in the 15 years from Pentecost to Paul's first missionary journey.

There Was a Remarkable Response to the Gospel

- Pentecost
- Acts 3
- Among the priests

Acts 6:7

Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

The Church Was Almost Exclusively Jewish

- The first Christians were Jews and not Gentiles
- Then the Samaritans – “half Jews”

Acts 8:5-6

Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.

- Then the God-fearers – “three-quarter Jews” (Acts 10)

Christianity Was Attacked, Opposed

- Persecution from the Jews, not yet from the Romans
- The standing of Christianity under the Romans in this period
- Satan also attacked through sowing corruption (Ananias and Saphira) and division (dispute over the Hellenistic widows)

Christianity Was Centered at Jerusalem

Christians Met in Homes and in Public Places

Acts 2:46

So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,

Christianity Showed Ongoing Evidence of the Miraculous

Christianity Was Connected to the Teaching of Jesus, As Seen in James

- Most people think James was the first New Testament letter (and book written), probably about AD 44-45.

The letter of James shows some of the problems among Christians in the early church

Impurity

James 1:21

Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness

Empty Religion

James 1:22

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves

James 1:27

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

Partiality and Favoritism

James 2:1

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with partiality.

Unwise and Ungodly Speaking

James 3:2

For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he *is* a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.

Bitter Envy, Self-Seeking

James 3:14

But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth.

Conflict

James 4:1

Where do wars and fights *come* from among you? Do *they* not *come* from your *desires for* pleasure that war in your members?

Worldliness

James 4:4

Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Speaking Evil

James 4:11

Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law.

Selfish, Greedy Living

James 5:4-5

Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter.

Grumbling Against Each Other

James 5:9

Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!

People Falling Away

James 5:19-20

Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins