

DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH (ECCLESIOLOGY) – Part 1

1. WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

- a. In the Bible, the church is used in a number of ways. Look at the following passages and describe how you think it is using the term “church”:

Acts 13:1	
Acts 9:31	
Col 1:18	

- b. **The Universal Invisible Church.** Col 1:18 uses the term in the most general sense – the entire people of God – all the true believers – the invisible church. The universal invisible church comprises all the elect. Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) Chapter 25.1. “The catholic or universal Church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse (bride), the body, the fulness of Him that fills all in all.”

- Scripture proofs: Eph 1:10; 5:22-23, 27, 32; Col 1:18.
- Note: “catholic” here means universal, not the Roman Catholic church.

c. **Visible Church**

- i. Body of Christ. Ephesians 1:22, 23.
- ii. Bride of Christ. Ephesians 5:23.

Both these figures suggest being in union with Christ. Thus the church in this sense is all who belong to Christ; who are in Him. How did we become part of the church? Eph 1:4-8 tells us it began with God choosing us before the foundation of the world, predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself.

2. THE VISIBLE CHURCH.

- a. A visible church is a congregation of believers who believe and teach the gospel, worship God, observe the sacraments (baptism & Lord’s Supper), and practice church discipline.
- b. **Q: Although one is elected and redeemed in Christ, how does one enter into enjoyment of being part of the body of Christ?**
 - Answer: By being born again by the Holy Spirit, believing in Christ and confessing Christ before men.
 - We find an example of this in Acts 2:41, 47. “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls. ... Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” The new Christians were described as baptized, received the Gospel and added to the number that believed.
- c. **How does WCF 25.2 describe this visible church?**
WCF 25.2. The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; (1 Cor 1:2, 12:12-13; Ps 2:8; Rev 7:9, Rom 15:9-12), and of their children (1 Cor 7:14, Acts 2:39, Rom 11:16, Gen 17:7) and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ (Mt 13:47, Isa 9:7) the house and family of God (Eph 2:19, 3:15) out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation (Acts 2:47).
- d. **What are the words the Bible uses to describe the visible church?** Answer: universal, visible church; those who profess faith in Christ, and their children, the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God. Baptism and profession of faith must take place in the church.

- e. **What is required in Church membership?**
 - i. Believers must be in a local church because they are to obey and submit to their church leaders.
 - ii. **1 Thess 5:12** And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you;
 - iii. **Heb 13:7** Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of *their* conversation.
- f. **Marks of the local church.**
WCF 25.4 This catholic Church has been sometimes more, sometimes less visible (Rom 11:3-4). And particular Churches, which are members thereof, are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the Gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them (1 Cor 5:6-7; Rev 2 -3).
 - i. Doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced.
 - ii. Sacraments of baptism and Lord's Supper are administered.
 - iii. Public worship is performed.
 - iv. Discipline is practiced.

3. WHAT THE CHURCH DOES

- a. **What does the church do?** Answer. According to Matthew 28:19-20, the church's task with respect to the unconverted is to teach them the gospel; and when they make a creditable profession of faith, the church is to baptize them and make them members of the church.
- b. **What is the church's responsibility to believers?** Answer: The church's responsibility is to equip the saints, teaching them to observe all that Christ commands.
- c. **According to Ephesians 4:11-16, how should the church equip the saints?** Answer: The church equips the saints by giving them a place to worship God, to receive the sacraments, to understand the Bible, to share their God-given gifts with others, and to grow in grace.
- d. **What is the church's purpose in equipping the saints?** Answer: The church's purpose in equipping the saints is to glorify God. God is glorified the most when the saints are mature, well-grounded in doctrine, serving Him and speaking the truth in love.
- e. **According to Acts 6:1-7 and Gal 6:6-10, what other responsibility does the church have?** Answer: Ministering to the material needs of the congregation.

4. HOW THE CHURCH SHOULD BE GOVERNED.

- a. **The Bible tells us the officers the church should have and how they should govern.**
 - Acts 14:23 they had ordained them elders in every church.
 - Acts 20:28-31 elders are made overseers of the church.
 - Titus 1:5, 7 ordain elders in every city, ... For a bishop (elder) must be blameless
 - Phil 1:1 bishops (elders) and deacons.
- b. **According to 1 Tim 5:17 and Acts 20:28, what tasks are assigned to elders?**
 - The elders are the spiritual rulers of the church who preach and teach, the overseers who shepherd and rule the flock.
 - Teaching/preaching elders and Ruling elders:
 - In addition to the work of ruling and pastoring, the teaching elder (minister /pastor) preaches and administers the Lord's Supper.
 - The ruling elder does not have the authority to preach or to administer the sacraments.
- c. **According to Acts 6:1-6, what is the task of deacons?** Answer: The task of the deacons is to minister to the physical needs of the congregation.
- d. **The Bible outlines a form of church government that has given rise to 3 types:**
 - i. Episcopal. ii. Congregational. iii. Presbyterian. [to be continued in part 2]