

Systematic Theology, Lesson 30: Ecclesiology: The Doctrine of the Church, Part 1

1. The Nature of the Church (What the church is)
 - a. Words and images for the church
 - i. *Kyriakon* (κυριακόν)
 1. The word *kyriakon* literally means “belonging to the Lord.”
 2. The word *kyriakon* is where we get the word “church,” “kirk” (Scots), “kerk” (Dutch), “Kirche” (German).
 - ii. *Ekklesia* (ἐκκλησία)
 1. The word *ekklesia* is not strictly a Christian term. It literally means “called out” or assembly. The word was used in Greek language outside of the Bible.
 2. Eventually, the word *ekklesia* became used for the “Christian assembly” and in two ways:
 - a. A group of people united _____ and spiritually (i.e., local church).
 - i. **Acts 8:1b:** And on that day a great persecution began against the church (*ekklesia*) in Jerusalem, . . .
 - ii. **1 Cor 1:2:** To the church (*ekklesia*) of God which is at Corinth, . . .
 - b. A group of people united spiritual (i.e., universal church)
 - i. **Matt 16:18:** I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church (*ekklesia*); and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.
 - ii. **Eph 1:22:** And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church (*ekklesia*).

3. Not every use of *ekklesia* in the New Testament refers to the “Christian church.” For example, in **Acts 19:32, 39, 41** it refers to a general assembly of people.

iii. Body of Christ

1. **Eph 1:23**: [church], which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.
2. **Col 1:18**: He is also head of the body, the church; . . .
3. **1 Cor 12:27**: Now you are Christ’s body, and individually members of it.

iv. _____ of Christ

1. **2 Cor 11:2**: For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you *as a pure virgin*.
2. **Rev 21:9**: Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, “Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”
3. **GCBC Statement of Faith** (“The Church,” paragraph 1): 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, the bride of Christ, of which Christ is the head.

v. Temple of God

1. **1 Cor 3:16**: Do you not know that you are a temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you?
2. **Eph 2:21, 22**: in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

vi. Building/Household

1. **Eph 2:19-21**: 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*, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, . . .

2. **1 Pet 2:4-7:** And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For *this* is contained in Scripture: “BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER *stone*, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.” This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, “THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER *stone*.”

vii. Flock

1. **Acts 20:28:** Be on guard for yourselves and for 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.
2. **1 Pet 5:3:** nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.

b. Characteristics of the church

i. The essential characteristics of the church

1. Universal and local. The church is universal in the sense of all believers and local in the sense of geographically one assembly of believers.
2. Invisible and visible. The church is invisible in the sense of all the redeemed souls (God’s viewpoint) and visible in the sense of redeemed people meeting together for teaching, prayer, ordinances, and fellowship (man’s viewpoint) (cf. **Matt 13:24-30, 36-43; 25:31-46**).
3. Organism and organization. The church is an organism in the sense of Holy Spirit bonded unity and an organization in the sense of recognized government, officers, covenants, constitutions, and beliefs and practices.

4. People and place. The church is the people of God and a “place” to meet. (Note: there is no such thing as a “church building” but only a building where the church assembles.)
- ii. In each of the four descriptions, both characteristics must exist for a biblical understanding of the church to be maintained. If not, errors result:
 1. Theological errors:
 - a. Roman Catholicism. Rome believes in a universal church (not local church) and in a visible church (not invisible church).
 - b. Landmarkism. Landmarkism believes in a local church (not universal church) and visible church (not invisible church).
 2. Practical errors:
 - a. “Lone-ranger Christian.” Too much emphasis on the universal church may result in a “lone ranger” Christianity. The mentality is: “I am a Christian, but not a member of local church” or “I love Jesus but not the church.”
 - b. Para-church ministries. Too much emphasis on the universal church may result in para-church ministries operating to the exclusion of the local church.
 - c. Local church kingdoms. Too much emphasis on the local church may result in “local church kingdoms,” where a specific local church becomes ingrained and seeks to build their brand, reputation, and name.
 - iii. The characteristics of the church do not mean there are two churches. It means there are _____ of the _____. The relationship can be put like this: the universal church is the local church in a physical place. Or to put it differently, the “[local] church is the gospel made visible.”¹
 - iv. Implications for the local church:²

¹ Mark Dever, *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2012).

² These implications are adapted from: Earl D. Radmacher, *The Nature of the Church* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing, 1996), 338-65.

1. The local church demands a regenerate membership.
 - a. Only the regenerate as members. The New Testament knows of no unregenerate person who is a member of the universal church.
 - b. All the regenerate as members. The New Testament knows of no Christian who is not a member of a local church.
 - c. **GCBC Statement of Faith** (“The Church,” paragraph 4): We teach that the establishment and continuity of local churches is clearly taught and defined in the New Testament Scriptures and that the members of the one scriptural body are directed to associate themselves together in local assemblies.

2. The local church demands an autonomous membership.
 - a. In relationship to other churches. The local church is self-governing, free of external religious authority because Christ is head (**Eph 1:22; Col 1:18**) and Holy Spirit is guide (**John 16:13**) of all Christians, so also is the local church autonomous from external religious authority. (More on the powers of the church will be discussed in “Systematic Theology, Lesson 32: Ecclesiology, Part 3.”)
 - b. In relationship to the state. The church is not the state and the state is not the church. The church possesses ecclesiastical power; the state possesses civil power. **Matt 22:21b**: [Jesus said], “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s.” (More on the powers of the church will be discussed in “Systematic Theology, Lesson 32: Ecclesiology, Part 3.”)

3. The local church demands an _____ and purposeful membership.
 - a. As evidenced in the spiritual gifts. God the Holy Spirit has given gifts to the universal church for order and purposefulness, thus the local church should be ordered and purposeful.

- i. **1 Cor 12:7:** But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.
 - ii. **1 Cor 14:40:** But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.
 - b. As evidenced in church government. **Titus 1:5:** For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains . . . (More on church government will be discussed in “Systematic Theology, Lesson 32: Ecclesiology, Part 3.”)
- 4. The local church demands a _____ membership. Since the universal church is *one* Body, and has *one* Spirit and Lord (**Eph 4:4-6**), the local church should strive for unity. (More will be discussed about church unity in “Systematic Theology, Lesson 31: Ecclesiology, Part 2.”)
 - a. **1 Cor 1:10:** Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.
 - b. **Phil 2:2-4:** make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.
- 5. The local church demands a _____ membership. The universal church is growing both qualitatively and quantitatively, so also should the local church.
 - a. Qualitative growth (i.e., progressive sanctification). Since the universal church is growing qualitatively, the local church should be growing qualitatively
 - i. **Eph 4:11-12:** And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.

- ii. **Heb 10:24-25:** and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.
- b. Quantitative growth (i.e., regeneration and justification). God's people, the universal church, are being regenerated, so the local church should be growing in numbers.
 - i. **Acts 2:47b:** And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.
 - ii. "The local church is the key to missions."³

³ Ibid., 363.