

THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH (ECCLESIOLOGY)

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The teaching of the Scriptures concerning the Church is just as plain and positive as that which pertains to any other doctrine, and yet the conception of men, even professing Christians, in regard to it, seems to be very indefinite and vague. This is doubtless due to the fact that, according to human usage the term "*Church*" has numerous and varied meanings.

1. It is used to distinguish the religious people from the non-religious.
2. It is used denominationally, in discriminating between the sects, as the Presbyterian, the Methodist, the Catholic Church.
3. It is used in literature to discriminate between sacred and secular.
4. It is used in relation to buildings, as a designation of a meeting-house where Christians assemble for worship. This terminology, and other somewhat similar usage, tends to obscure the real meaning of the word. When, however, we come to the Scriptural usage of the term we find that this vagueness disappears.

The Meaning of It

The English word "*Church*" is the translation of the Greek word "*ecclesia*" which means "*called out.*" It was used of an assembly or congregation that might be called out for various purposes. The significance of this term as used in the New Testament is twofold.

1. It refers to those who are called out from among the nations as a people for his name who constitute the Church, the Body of Christ. In this sense it is an organism.
2. It also refers to those who are called out of any given community to carry out the principles and precepts of Christ found in the New Testament, as a body of Christians. In this sense it is an organization.

I. As An Organism.

The Church is the mystical body of Christ of which He is the living Head and regenerate believers are the members. I Cor. 12:12-13 *"For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free: and have been made to drink into one Spirit."* (See also Ephesians 1:22-23; 3:4-6)

The Church thus viewed as an organism is "*the people for His name*" which God is now taking out from among the Gentiles, according to Acts 15:14. This is the age of Divine election and selection which has for its objective the formation of the Body of Christ, which is to be His bride.

II. As An Organization.

A Church is a body of baptized believers gathered together by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of carrying out the principles and precepts of God's Word. *"And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily."* (Acts 16:5) (See also Acts 2:41-42.)

"The Church in the New Testament is a very simple organization. Every body who is able to yield himself to Jesus Christ, and who does so, taking him as Savior and obeying him as Lord, is entitled to membership in it. And all members stand on the same level. There is no barrier to admission in differences of race, sex, age, wealth or culture. In Jesus Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, Greek nor barbarian, male nor female, bond nor free. The church administers its own affairs. It bows to no authority on earth higher than itself. Jesus Christ is its only lawgiver. The New Testament is its law book, but it administers the laws which have been divinely given to it. It disciplines its members who are in any way disorderly. According to the New Testament, it has but two kinds of officers—bishops or pastors, whose duty it is to minister in spiritual things, feeding the flock of God, and deacons, who were appointed to look after the temporalities of the Church."— Goodchild

The Church, whether viewed in its larger aspect as an organism, including all true believers gathered out of the nations between the first and second coming of Christ, or in the local aspect, as an organization, including believers in any given community, **is not to be identified either with the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven.** The Kingdom of God is that sphere or realm in which the sovereignty of God is acknowledged and His will obeyed, including unfallen angels and redeemed men of all ages. The Church, however, includes only men who are redeemed in this age, and therefore is only a part of the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of Heaven has a threefold aspect as set forth in the New Testament: **First**, that which was true concerning it in the days of John the Baptist and Christ, when offered to Israel. Then it was *"at hand"* in the Person of the King. **Second**, *"in mystery form,"* as presented in the parables of Matthew 13. Here the Kingdom of Heaven includes the entire sphere of Christian profession, and is synonymous with Christendom. **Third**, the prophetic aspect as set forth in the teaching of Jesus and the other New Testament writers. The only common ground between the church and the Kingdom of Heaven is that which is real in the profession of faith, included in its present aspect or form. The Church is thus within the Kingdom of Heaven in the present-day application of the term.

Doctrinal Statement: The church as an organism includes all regenerate believers gathered out of the world between the first and second advents of Christ, while as an organization it includes local believers united for the service of Christ in any given assembly.

The Fact of It, As Set Forth:

I. In Types and Symbols.

A. The body with its members.

Rom. 12:4-5— *"For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office, so we being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."* (See also I Cor. 12:12-27.)

The Apostle Paul had received a twofold ministry, concerning the Gospel and concerning the Church. These two are inseparably joined and an intimation of both was given at his conversion. Christ in His glory was a part of the saving vision which came to Paul. The Gospel thus received identified the redeemed sinner with his Savior Lord. The message was *"Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"* Paul's persecution was of Christians not of Christ, but there he learned that Christians are one with Christ and He with them.

"When our Lord spoke of the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew 13, He said: 'I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.' The Apostle Paul often speaks of the mysteries made known. He reminds the readers of Ephesians that he had mentioned the mystery before in a few words. Then, he had stated 'the mystery of the Christ,' what is it? Not merely concerning the church, as the body of Christ, but Christ Himself. This mystery of a risen Christ, who has a body composed of believing Jews and Gentiles, is the mystery, which, in other ages, was not made known unto the sons of men. The church was in the counsel of God before the foundation of the world, but He let ages go past till He was pleased to make it known."

—GAEBELEIN

The analogy of the head and the body illustrating Christ and the Church in their mutual relations is very apt. As the head functions through the body and its members, so Christ functions through the Church and its members. As there is a mutual dependence between the head and the body so is there between Christ and the church. Christ is dependent upon the church as the medium for expressing Himself and accomplishing his purposes. The church is dependent upon Christ for wisdom and direction in doing this. Christ is dependent upon the church to do His work. The church is dependent upon Christ for power to do it. As the members of a body are mutually essential to that body and its head so are the members of the church mutually essential to each other and to Christ.

B. The bride in relation to her espoused husband. II Cor. 11:2— *"For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ."* (See also Eph. 5:31, 32; Rev. 19:7.)

(1) Adam and Eve. Gen. 2:18, 21-24.

(2) Isaac and Rebecca. Gen. 24:61-67.

(3) Joseph and Asenath. Gen. 41:45.

The church is now the body of Christ in process of formation, and when completed will be presented as the bride; only the espousal as yet has taken place. The consummation of the marriage relationship awaits a future fulfillment. Its celebration will be at the *"Marriage Supper of the Lamb."* - Rev. 19:7-9; 21:9-24

"If it is objected that, inasmuch as the church is, in the New Testament, called the 'body of Christ' (I Cor. 12:12-27), and therefore Scripture cannot intend that the bride refers to the same group of believers, since the bride is not a part of the husband but separate from him, we must remember that the Scriptures both in Genesis 2:21-24 and in Ephesians 5:28-32 recognize husband and wife as separate persons, yet 'one flesh.' It is quite Scriptural therefore to understand the two Bible metaphors of 'body' and 'bride' as two aspects of the same relationship between Christ and His Church, the body expressing a relationship of life, and the bride a relationship of love." —Sunday School TIMES.

C. The Temple with its foundation and building stones.

Eph. 2:21-22— *"In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth into an holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."* (See also I Peter 2:4-6.)

The symbolic and prophetic significance of the temple was fourfold. It was typical of heaven itself, or the sanctuary not made with hands (Heb. 9:24). It was typical of the believer's body, which is the shrine or temple of the Holy Ghost (I Cor. 6:19). It was typical of the church which is being built for an habitation of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:21-22; I Cor. 3:16). In this analogy individual believers are represented by building

stones which when joined together constitute "a spiritual house," "a holy temple in the Lord." The temple is also typical of the physical body of Christ (John 2:121).

II. In Prophet Utterance.

A. The promise of the Church.

Matt. 16:16-18— *“And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”*

The church was not in existence while Christ was upon earth. At the time of the utterance of the above it was a thing still in the future. Jesus said, "I will build my church." It was a fact of prophecy, not of history, at the time of Christ's death.

B. The Pre-instruction of the Church.

Matt. 18:120 (see especially verse 17): *“And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.”*

In this passage we have instructions given for the church before it came into existence, in order that when established it might have instructions to guide it in certain fundamental matters of discipline. The church referred to is doubtless the body of Christ, but the body of Christ functioning through the body of believers in any community. Further information and instruction concerning the church, which Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would furnish, is to be found in the epistles (John 16:12-14).

III. In Positive Description

Eph. 5:25-27— *“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it: that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word. 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.”* (See Eph. 1:22, 23)

This passage teaches that the church is the object of Christ's sacrificial love, the subject of His sanctifying truth and power, and the recipient of His sovereign grace and glory.

Doctrinal Statement: The church is a fact of revelation, made known through the use of figures, prophecies and plain statements.

The Ordinances of It.

“It is obviously a matter of great importance that we should have sound and scriptural opinions and clear convictions regarding the ordinances; for all through the Christian history, even from the earliest times until now, these sacred rites have been the occasion of great and long, and often fierce debates.” —Dargan

The word "ordinance" comes from two Latin words which in their final meaning signify "that which is ordered or commanded." This term has been used to describe the

two institutions, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, which Christ left to the churches for their observance.

There are certain erroneous views of the ordinances which need refuting. The Romanist conceives that in some way the mere performance of these acts itself brings a blessing, or confers spiritual grace. There is nothing in the acts themselves to bring grace, nothing mysterious, nothing miraculous; God blesses the performance of these acts as he blesses obedience and worship in other things.

Others have considered that these rites were an intended means of impressing the world. This possibly grew out of the saying of Paul in I Cor. 11:26: *"As oft as ye eat this bread and drink this cup ye do proclaim the Lord's death till he come."* But the *"proclaiming"* here need not be to the outside world, but rather means the exhibition to those who are taking part in the ordinance, and thus is for their special benefit.

Some have adopted the practice of a merely formal or ritualistic use of the ordinances, observing them as a custom or churchly performance, without any true conception of their intent. Such observance has no real value, for as ordinances they have an important relation to experience which they symbolize. And if there be no vital experience there can be no true symbolism.

The true view of the ordinances seems to embrace a threefold significance: They are symbolized Christian truths; they are memorials unto Christ, observed in obedience to Him, expressive of love and devotion; they are Christian rites, which designate those who properly observe them as Christ's disciples.

I. Baptism.

"Baptism simply sets forth in visible symbol Christ's death and burial and resurrection, and also our death to the old life of sin, our burial in the likeness of his death, and our resurrection to walk with him in a new life." — Goodchild

It is perpetually obligatory because:

A. It is Commanded by Christ.

Mark 16:15, 16— *"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."* (See also Matt. 28:19, 20.)

B. Practiced by the early Church.

Acts 2:41-42 — *"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers."* (See also Acts 8:35-39; Rom. 6:1-5.)

This passage suggests the following order: conversion, baptism, admission into church membership, orderly walk, observance of the Lord's Supper and united prayer.

II. The Lord's Supper.

"The communion of the Lord's Supper was intended to be a reminder of the Lord's suffering for us. It is a celebration of his death. The Savior knew how short human memory is. And out of consideration of our weakness and aptness to forget he established this simple memorial supper in which we taste of broken bread symbolizing His body which was broken for us, and we sip of the crushed fruit of the vine, which is a symbol of His blood poured out for our sins. It is a reminder of the Lord's sufferings that brings Calvary and its cross very vividly before us. But the supper looks forward as well as backward. It is a commemoration and it is a prophecy. It shows forth the Lord's death 'till He come.' " -- Goodchild

It is perpetually obligatory because:

A. It Is Commanded by Christ.

I Cor. 11:23-26— "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you. That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks he brake it, and said, Take eat; this is my body, which is broken for you; this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying this cup is the new testament in my blood; this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup ye do shew the Lord's death till he come."

B. Observed by the early Church.

Acts 2:42— "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellow ship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayer." (See also Acts 20:11.)

There are a number of questions which may be asked in relation to the two ordinances, such as these: What is the proper method of observing baptism and the Lord's supper? Who is qualified to administer them? Who are fit subjects or recipients of them? And to whom does the responsibility for their proper observance or administration belong? These questions will be answered variously according to the different interpretations of the passages upon which the answers are based. Suffice it for us to say in general that these are church ordinances and are therefore not to be administered or observed in promiscuous assemblies, or by individuals, but by the church in the regular local assembly and according to the pattern furnished by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Doctrinal Statement: The church is the custodian of the two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, and is responsible for their administration.

The Mission of The Church

I. To constitute a dwelling place for God.

Eph. 2:20-22 — "Being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the chief corner stone. In whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord. In whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God in the Spirit."

II. To bear witness unto the truth.

I Tim. 3:15 — "But if I tarry long that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and

ground of the truth."

III. To make known the manifold wisdom of God.

Eph. 3:10— *"To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God."*

IV. To bring eternal glory to God.

Eph. 3:20-21— *"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us unto him be glory in the church by Christ throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."*

V. To edify its members.

Eph. 4:11-13— *"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers, For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:"*

VI. To discipline its members.

Matt. 18:15-17— *"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them tell it unto the church; and if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as heathen man and a publican." (See also I Cor. 5:1-5, 9-13.)*

VII. To evangelize the world.

Matt. 28:18-20— *"And Jesus came and spake unto them saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you and lo I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen."*

*"The purpose for which a church exists is **missions**. Take out of a church the missionary idea and you have a life without an objective, a barren tree that cumbers the ground, and an empty house over whose door is written "**Ichabod**." Limit the gospel in its scope or power and you cut its heart out.*

*Christ lived and died for all men. The business of the church is to make him known to all. Christianity revolves around two facts : '**Come**' and '**Go**.' Everyone who accepts the invitation '**Come**' must hear immediately the imperative command '**Go**.' It is the driving wheel of the machinery of a church or denomination. Stop that wheel and the machinery is motionless and useless. It is the authority for Christian education. Colleges and seminaries were founded to fit men to '**Go**.' When they cease to function they ought to be revitalized or buried."*

— Mc Daniel

Doctrinal Statement: The mission of the church is to glorify God by winning men to Christ building them up in Christ and sending them out for Christ.

Study Questions on the Doctrine of the Church

1. Give the fourfold usage of the word "church."
2. What is the derivation of the word "church" and what is its twofold significance?
3. Define the Church (1) as an organism; (2) as an organization. Describe the simple organization of the New Testament Church.
4. Define the Kingdom of God and show the Church's relation to it.
5. Give the threefold aspect of the Kingdom of Heaven, and show the Church's relation to it.
6. Give and discuss three types of the church and quote one passage with each.
7. How does prophetic utterance set forth the fact of the church?
8. Discuss the word "ordinance"; name the two ordinances, and discuss the erroneous views concerning them.
9. What threefold significance does the true view of the ordinances embrace?
10. Why is baptism obligatory? Quote Acts 2:41, 42, and name the order which it suggests.
11. What is the purpose of the Lord's Supper?
12. Show why the Lord's Supper is obligatory and quote one passage with each reason,
13. What gospel answer may be given to the various questions and perplexities which arise concerning the Lord's Supper?
14. Give the sevenfold mission of the Church: quote one passage with each and give the doctrinal statement.