

THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

WHAT MAN OUGHT TO BELIEVE CONCERNING GOD

QUESTION # 61.

(*Larger Catechism*)

Q #61. *Are all they saved who hear the gospel, and live in the church?*

A. All that hear the gospel, and live in the visible church, are not saved; but they only who are true members of the church invisible.¹

Question 1—*What is the meaning of the word church?*

Answer—The meaning of the word “*church*,” as found in the Scriptures, admits of several understandings:

First, it sometimes signifies any *assembly* that is met together, whatever may be the design of their meeting, so that it is used of the multitude who are met together at Ephesus, Acts 19:32. In Greek this *assembly* is called a *church*, ἐκκλησία, but it is rendered in this place by our translators as *assembly* because it is used here in an uncommon sense, *cf.* Acts 19:39, 41.

Second, this word, *church*, is also used by the Fathers, some reformed churches, as well as the Papists, for the place in which the church met together for religious worship, supposing that this sense may be found in Scripture, *cf.* 1 Cor. 11:18. This, they think, is farther explained and the sense given by the apostle’s words, 1 Cor. 11:20; concluding that what is in view is the place where they were convened rather than their own houses, *cf.* 1 Cor. 11:22. However, this place does not speak of the place of worship but of the worshipping assembly, 1 Cor. 11:33, 34.

It has also been argued that the word *synagogue* is taken for the place where persons assembled for worship, *cf.* Matt. 4:23. Thus, we are told of one who built a synagogue, Luke 7:5. And, the Psalmist speaks of the burning of synagogues, Ps. 74:8. Yet, this word is not limited to the building but refers to the assembly itself, Jas. 2:2. So that, by parity of reason, the word *church* may be extended to the building or place, but it should be understood that the latter is only improperly denominated such under the New Testament, which knows of no more holy buildings or places, John 4:20-24.

Third, this word, *church*, is most often taken for an assembly of Christians met together for religious worship, according to the rules which Christ has given for their direction, Acts 2:46, 47. The Hebrew word, by which the church of the Jews is signified, in the Old Testament, is קהל which is generally rendered *congregation*, Ex. 12:47. What is there called the *congregation*, or *assembly* of the Israelites, is very properly called a *church*, in the new Testament, Acts 7:38.

Question 2—*What are some ways the church may be considered?*

Answer—There are several considerations of the church which may be gathered from Scripture:

First, the word *church* may signify the whole body of the faithful, whether in heaven or on earth, who have been or shall be spiritually united to Christ as Saviour, Acts 20:28. Thus, it is a society of those who have or will believe in him, Matt. 16:18. It is the society for whom

¹ John 12:38-40; Rom. 9:6; Matt. 22:14; 7:21; Rom. 11:7.

Christ died, which shall be presented to God as holy and without blemish, Eph. 5:25-27. This is the society of the elect, and it is not identical to any outward church or churches of whatsoever name, Rom. 9:6. This *church* is spiritual and invisible, the *church* of the Redeemer, known only to himself, his bride, Rev. 21:2, 9. These are espoused to Christ through the holy union of his Spirit with theirs, 1 Cor. 3:16, 17. This *church* is “the body of Christ” for all members are united to Christ their head, Col. 2:19; 1 Cor. 12:27.

Second, the word *church* denotes the whole body of those, throughout the whole world, that outwardly profess the faith of Christ, 1 Cor. 1:2. This visible *church* of Christ is known by its outward profession of faith in him, and by the practice of those church ordinances and observances which he has appointed for his worshippers, Matt. 28:19, 20. This visible church is not to be identified with the invisible church nor is it to be placed in opposition to it; for they form one church under two aspects, the visible being subservient to the invisible, Rom. 3:1-3. The invisible is spiritually united to Christ, the visible is externally united to him for the sake of the invisible, Acts 2:47. In this sense, the visible church is described under the title of “the kingdom of heaven,” Matt. 13:47-49.

Third, the word *church* is employed to denote the body of believers in any particular place, associated together in the worship of God, even in the case of two or three professing Christians, met together for prayer and worship, whether publicly or privately, Matt. 18:20. Furthermore, it is applied to such even before they are organized and established with regular office-bearers or a minister appointed over them, Acts 14:23. The body of believers in any particular place associating together for worship, whether numerous or not, have the true character of the church of Christ, Rom. 16:3-5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philem. 2, 3.

Fourth, the word *church* is applied to a number of congregations associated together under a common government, Gal. 1:2. Thus, the church of Jerusalem, Acts 15:4; must have constituted more than one congregation in that city due to the sheer number of converts noted in the Book of Acts, 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 21:20.

Fifth, the word *church* is applied to the body of professing believers in any place, as represented by their rulers and office-bearers, Matt. 18:17. Under this sense, the authorized rulers, as distinct from the ruled, are denominated the *church* because they function to ministrate and determine, especially in matters of controversy, 1 Cor. 6:1-4; 3 John 9, 10. Thus, God has made outward provision for the order and government of the *church*, 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11, 12.

Question 3—*Under which consideration of the word church is salvation made sure?*

Answer—Although it is true that the visible *church* is the appointed place, as an assembly of professing believers, in which the Gospel is to be heard, Luke 24:47; Acts 20:7, 8; because none can believe apart from the preaching of the Word, Rom. 10:14, 15; yet, this preaching is only effectual in them who are appointed to salvation, the elect, Acts 13:48. Thus, amongst the congregation of the Jews, only those who were elect were able to believe the Gospel report, John 12:38-40. The masses of Israel constituted the visible assembly of the *church* but salvation was reserved to those who belonged to the invisible *church* of the elect, Rom. 11:7. The Gospel call is committed to the work of the visible *church*, particularly as it manifests itself in the administration of ordinances through its office bearers, 1 Cor. 9:17, 18; however, this call is wider than the election of God, Matt. 22:14. So that it is not membership in the visible *church* but in the invisible *church* that avails unto salvation, 2 Thess. 2:13. It is not living in the *visible* church but the presence of the spiritual life, which belongs to those in the invisible church, which avails unto salvation, Matt. 7:21.