



Systematic Theology

A study of the major doctrines of Scripture

TOPIC 6 – THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH
LESSON 95 – INTRODUCTION

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Ecclesiology

- ▶ For all who know and love the Lord Jesus Christ, no place in the world should be sweeter or more cherished than the church.
- ▶ Spurgeon said the church “is the dearest place on earth,” first and foremost because the Lord Jesus died on her behalf (Eph. 5:25).
- ▶ Spurgeon went on to say, “Nothing in the world is dearer to God’s heart than His church; therefore, being His, let us also belong to it, that by our prayers, our gifts, and our labors, we may support and strengthen it. If those who are Christ’s refrained, even for a generation, from numbering themselves with His people, there would be no visible church, no ordinances maintained, and, I fear, very little preaching of the gospel.” (Spurgeon’s Sermon No. 2234)

Ecclesiology

- ▶ Throughout the New Testament, the church is primarily designated by the Greek word *ekklesia*, a term meaning “those who are called out.” Specifically, while the church is not a building, it is an assembly. The word refers to “a gathering of people meeting for matters of common interest; people congregated for a meeting.”
- ▶ The New Testament model is for the members to be assembling together (congregating) on the first day of the week and also at other times, continuing “steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine [preaching/instruction] and fellowship [koinonia = close association, sharing, generous giving, participation with one another], in the breaking of bread [communion/food], and in prayers [refers to the activity of prayer and the place where prayers are made].” (Acts 2:42).

Ecclesiology

- ▶ The church is the gathered congregation assembled for the worship of God in spirit and truth and the equipping of the saints for service to God, and then to each other.
- ▶ Corporate worship, fellowship, and communion require physical proximity by their very definition. By live streaming our services, we are passing along biblical content and assisting our families in family worship, but we are not being the church. The danger here is that in the perceived need of the moment we are setting a precedent for "remote worship", for scattered saints that feel that they have done their part, "gone to church," and can worship virtually and separately, thereby truly forsaking the assembling of themselves together.

Ecclesiology

- ▶ Used in the specific context of the New Testament church, the church of God refers to the community of those who have been called out by God from their slavery to sin through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Peter 5:10).
- ▶ The church is the assembly of the redeemed – those whom God predestined in eternity past, called and justified in this present life, and promised to glorify in the future (Rom. 8:30; Eph. 1:11).
- ▶ The word “church” comes from the word *kuriake*, which means “belonging to the Lord.” The church is the purchased property of God, the building and Temple of God.
- ▶ The church, while comprised of all who have been united to Christ by faith, was manifest in the New Testament era on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-21, 38-47).

Ecclesiology

- ▶ Souls are added to the church one at a time, by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit as the Lord graciously draws individual sinners to Himself (Acts 2:39). Thus the Lord “grows” His church, by adding to it those He is saving as He saves them.
- ▶ From the start, the church has always faced internal and external challenges. Internally there is the threat of false teacher and teaching, and externally there is the threat of persecution. However, the true church can never be defeated or overcome, not even by death (Matt. 16:18).

The Church and the Kingdom

- ▶ What is the relationship between the church and the kingdom of God?
- ▶ George Eldon Ladd summarizes it: “The Kingdom is primarily the dynamic reign or kingly rule of God, and, derivatively, the sphere in which the rule is experienced. In Biblical idiom, the Kingdom is not identified with its subjects. They are the people of God’s rule who enter it, live under it, and are governed by it. The church is the community of the Kingdom but never the Kingdom itself. Jesus’ disciples belong to the Kingdom as the Kingdom belongs to them; but they are not the Kingdom. The Kingdom is the rule of God; the church is a society of men [saved sinners].”
- ▶ Ladd goes on to give us 5 specific aspects of the relationship between the kingdom and the church:

The Church and the Kingdom

- ▶ 1. The church is not the kingdom. Jesus and the early Christians preached the gospel of the kingdom, not the gospel of the church.
- ▶ 2. The kingdom creates the church for as people enter into God's kingdom they become joined to the human fellowship of the church.
- ▶ 3. The church witnesses to the kingdom for Jesus said, "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world," (Matt. 24:14).
- ▶ 4. The church is the instrument of the kingdom for the Holy Spirit, manifesting the power of the kingdom, works through the disciples to heal the sick and cast out demons, as He did in the ministry of Jesus.
- ▶ 5. The church is the custodian of the kingdom for the church has been given the keys to the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 16:19).

The Church and the Kingdom

- ▶ Therefore we should not see the church as the kingdom, nor should we see the kingdom as entirely a future reality. Rather we should see that there is a close connection between the kingdom of God and the church.
- ▶ As the church proclaims the good news of the kingdom, people will come into the church and begin to experience the blessings of God's rule in their lives.

The Visible and Invisible Church

- ▶ The New Testament recognizes that not everyone who externally associates with the church is a true believer (Matt. 13:24-30; Jude 4). Consequently, not all who are part of the visible church (the company of those who outwardly profess faith in Christ) are actually members of the invisible church (the community of those who truly possess saving faith in Christ).
- ▶ There are always false professors and hypocrites who associate themselves with the visible church. Jesus Himself warned that many will claim to know Him who in reality do not:
- ▶ Matt. 7:21 “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ 23 And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’

The Visible and Invisible Church

- ▶ The New Testament also strongly warns against false teachers who deliberately seek to threaten the church from within (Matt. 7:15; Mark 13:22; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 4:1).
- ▶ When a local church, or even an entire denomination embraces false teaching, thereby abandoning the purity of the gospel (Gal. 1:6-9) and denying the authority of Jesus Christ (Titus 1:16), they are to be labelled apostate, heretical, and false.
- ▶ The true church exalts the Lordship of Christ, submits to the authority of His Word, and upholds the truth of the gospel.

The Church Universal and Local

- ▶ The universal church includes all genuine Christians throughout all time, being all believers throughout history, both those alive today on the earth, and those alive in heaven.
- ▶ The New Testament gives specific instructions to those who are part of the universal church in every generation, scattered throughout the world, to meet together regularly in local assemblies.
- ▶ This was the clear pattern of the church in the New Testament – see Acts 14:23, 27; 20:17, 28; 1 Cor. 11:18-20; Gal. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1).
- ▶ The local church is designed to equip believers by feeding them through the teaching of God's Word (Acts 2:42; 1 Tim. 4:13), leading them in corporate praise (Eph. 5:18-20; Heb. 13:15), protecting them under the shepherding oversight of godly elders (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:7, 17; 1 Peter 5:1-4), and providing them with opportunities to serve one another (1 Peter 4:10-11).

The Church as the Body of Christ

- ▶ There are many metaphors used to depict God's relationship to His people.
- ▶ King and subjects – Matt. 25:34; 1 Cor. 4:20; Phil. 3:20; Col. 1:13-14
- ▶ Creator and creatures – 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:10
- ▶ Shepherd and sheep – John 10:3, 11, 14, 26; Heb. 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:2-4
- ▶ Master and slaves – Matt. 10:24-25; Rom. 14:4; Eph. 6:9; Col. 4:1; 2 Tim. 2:21
- ▶ Father and adopted children – Matt. 6:9; Rom. 1:7
- ▶ Members of His household – Gal. 6:10; Eph. 2:19; 1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Peter 4:17
- ▶ The Bride of Christ – 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:23-32; Rev. 19:7-8; 21:9
- ▶ The Body of which He is the Head – Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12, 27; Eph. 4:12, 25; 5:23, 30; Col. 1:24; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:15; Col. 1:18; 2:19

Coming Next (Subject to Change)

- ▶ 96. Purposes of the Church
- ▶ 97. Church Structure and Life
- ▶ 98. Unity and Purity
- ▶ 99. Membership
- ▶ 100-103. Spiritual Gifts
- ▶ 104. Means of Grace within the Church
- ▶ 105-106. Marks of a Healthy Church