

### 1 Corinthians 1:1-3

Sec 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; & is the spouse, the body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all.”

Sec 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; ...”

A. Paul in **1 Cor 1:2** addressed his letter **“To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their *Lord & ours*”**

1. He addressed a physical body or church in Corinth: **“To the church of God which is at Corinth.”** This is no doubt the church visible.
2. His letter was not intended only for the Christians there in Corinth. It was also addressed to, **“all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their *Lord & ours.*”** This language also fits with sec 2 which says the visible church “consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion.”
  - a. We may differ on many doctrines (i.e. modes of baptism & even the doctrine of election) yet those who truly **“call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”** are part of the broader church which is not only outside these walls but also outside the walls of our denomination & sister denominations.
  - b. Sec 2: “The visible church, which is also catholic or universal” is sometimes referred to as the church as mankind sees it.
  - c. Sec 1 says, “The catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect.” This is the church as only God sees it.
    - 1) For those who deny the visible / invisible church distinction, one of the texts they wrongly use to support this error is **John 15:4-9**. Turn there.
    - 2) This interpretation destroys the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints which is also found in John’s gospel (**10:27-28**): **“My sheep hear My voice, & I know them, & they follow Me; & I give eternal life to them, & they will never perish; & no one will snatch them out of My hand.”**
    - 3) This same John later said that those who left the church never truly had a saving spiritual union with Christ in the first place:  
**1 John 2:19** **“They went out from us, but they were not *really* of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but *they went out*, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.”**
    - 4) All this is given to show that the WCF visible / invisible church distinction makes the best sense of the Bible as a whole.

B. Sec 2 goes on to state the importance of the visible church & who belong to it: “The visible church ... consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children ...”

1. In Gen 17:7, God told Abraham: **“I will establish My covenant between Me & you & your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you & to your descendants after you.”**
2. Acts 2:38-39: **“Repent, & each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; & you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you & your children...”**
3. There is a promised salvation to the children of believers here; being a member of the visible church gives the promise of salvation to members as well. Neither covenant membership automatically or objectively saves you.
  - a. Being a child of the covenant gives the promise yet the child must embrace the Christian faith of his or her parents when grown-up.
  - b. Being a member of the visible church gives you the promise of salvation; however, each individual member must embrace the Christian doctrine by faith.

C. We are not saved by merely having a part in the visible church; however, sec 2 stresses the importance of being a part of this visible, catholic or universal church which “... is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house & family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.”

1. It is because the church offers the means of grace which are primarily the Word, the sacraments, & prayer.
2. Turn to Romans 10:11-15.
3. Is it possible for someone at home to listen to preaching on the internet, the radio, or TV & be saved? Yes, absolutely; however, that is not “ordinary” according to sec 2.
4. If you love Jesus, you will love His bride—the church.

D. It is vital that you pursue membership with a visible church yet **“be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling & choosing you” (2 Pet 1:10)**. It is right to pray & diligently endeavor that you are a member of the invisible church which “consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof.”

1. 2 Cor 13:5 **“Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?”**
2. I like to call it covenant presumption to say “I am alright with God because I am a member of x, y, or z church.” That is not enough. Test yourselves to see if you have the Spirit of Christ in you. That is not “morbid introspection” as some wrongly call it. That is doing exactly what the Word of God tells you to do.
3. Pastor Al Martin rightly said that a genuine dollar bill only gains value when tested that it is authentic.