

Systematic Theology, Lesson 31: Ecclesiology: The Doctrine of the Church, Part 2

1. The Nature of the Church (What the church is)
 - a. Words and images for the church
 - b. Characteristics of the church
 - c. Marks of the church
 - i. Background
 1. During the Reformation a number of Christian groups arose (in addition to the Roman Catholic Church) calling themselves a church.
 2. Specifically, the Roman Catholic Church said there could be no church where the _____ did not preside as head.
 3. In contrast, the Reformers said that the church was a _____ of saints (i.e., true believers) assembled together.
 4. But where were these true churches to be found? What marks them as a true church?
 5. The Reformers saw in Scripture three marks that identified a true church: preaching of the gospel, proper administration of the ordinances as instituted by Christ, and exercising church discipline.
 - ii. Preaching of the gospel
 1. **1 Tim 3:14-15; 4:13**: I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, *I write* so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. . . . Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.
 2. **Col 1:28**: We proclaim Him, [Jesus] admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.

3. **Acts 5:42:** And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus *as* the Christ.
- iii. Proper administration of the ordinances¹ (baptism and the Lord's Supper) instituted by Christ.
1. Baptism: **Matt 28:18-20:** And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."
 2. Lord's Supper: **1 Cor 11:23:** For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread.
 3. Historically, by "proper administration of the ordinances" this meant several things in distinction from the Roman Catholic Church:
 - a. Two ordinances instead of _____ (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders, Matrimony).
 - b. Ordinances have no intrinsic _____ instead of *ex opera operato* ("by the working work").
 - c. Ordinances are not necessary for regeneration² instead of baptismal regeneration.
- iv. Exercise of church discipline³
1. **Matt 18:15-18:** [Jesus speaking] "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be

¹ More on the ordinances will be covered in a subsequent systematic theology lesson.

² For more on regeneration, see: Dan Burrus, "Systematic Theology, Lesson 25: Soteriology, Part 3," lecture available at gracelakeville.org.

³ More on church discipline will be covered in a subsequent systematic theology lesson.

to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.”

2. **Titus 3:10 (NIV):** Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them.

v. Summary

“In summary, [a church is a true church if] it governs itself according to the pure Word of God, . . .”⁴

- d. Attributes of the church: “one, holy, catholic, apostolic” (Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed)

- i. One church (Unity)⁵

1. The church is one.

- a. **Eph 4:4-6:** *There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.*
- b. **John 10:16:** I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd.

2. The church should _____ oneness.

- a. **John 17:20-23:** “I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.”⁶

⁴ The Belgic Confession of Faith, Article 29.

⁵ For more on church unity, as seen in the modern day ecumenical movement, see: Dan Burrus, “Church History, Lesson 13: The Modern Church, Part 3,” lecture available at gracelakeville.org.

⁶ For more on unity from John 17:20-23, see: Jeff Rich, “That They May All Be One,” two sermons available at the GCBC sermonaudio.com webpage.

- b. **Eph 4:3**: being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
- c. **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.

3. The nature of unity

- a. Unity is not _____. Many members, one body (**1 Corinthians 12**).
- b. Unity is not achieved “through theological vagueness, theological minimalism, or a lack of doctrinal conviction”⁷ (**1 Cor 1:10-13**).
- c. Unity is not anti-denominationalism.⁸

ii. Holy church (Holiness)

1. The church is holy.

- a. **1 Cor 1:1-2**: Paul, called *as* an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, 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* and ours.⁹
- b. **1 Cor 3:16-17**: Do you not know that you are a temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.

2. The church should pursue holiness.

⁷ Christopher Morgan, “Toward a Theology of the Unity of the Church,” in *Why We Belong: Evangelical Unity and Denominational Diversity*, ed. Anthony L. Chute, Christopher W. Morgan, and Robert A. Peterson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 31.

⁸ For more on denominationalism from a historical perspective, see: Dan Burrus, “Church History, Lesson 10: The Reformation Church, Part 3,” lecture available at gracelakeville.org.

⁹ For more on the different types of sanctification, see: Dan Burrus, “Systematic Theology, Lesson 28: Soteriology, Part 6,” lecture available at gracelakeville.org.

- a. **Eph 4:24:** and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of* God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.
- b. **1 Pet 1:15-16:** but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; because it is written, “YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.”

3. Implications of holiness

- a. Because churches are already holy and not yet holy, there are more pure or less pure churches (i.e., a spectrum of purity).
- b. Mark Dever has proposed nine marks of a healthy (i.e., pure) church.¹⁰
 - i. Expository preaching
 - ii. Biblical theology
 - iii. Gospel
 - iv. A biblical understanding of conversion
 - v. A biblical understanding of evangelism
 - vi. A biblical understanding of church membership
 - vii. Biblical church discipline
 - viii. A concern for discipleship and growth
 - ix. Biblical church leadership

iii. Catholic church (Universal)¹¹

¹⁰ Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000, 2004, 2013). Note: these “nine marks” of a *healthy church* are not to be confused with the “three marks” of a *true church*.

¹¹ For more information on the universality of the church from a historical perspective, see: Dan Burrus, “Church History, Lesson 3: The Ancient Church, Part 2,” lecture available at gracelakeville.org.

1. Catholic comes from the Latin *catholicam* meaning “universal.” Thus, the word “catholic” in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed is not referring to the Roman Catholic Church but to the universal church.¹²
2. Church is universal in three ways:
 - a. Geographical
 - i. **Acts 1:8:** “but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”
 - ii. **Rom 10:18:** But I say, surely they have never heard, have they? Indeed they have; “THEIR VOICE HAS GONE OUT INTO ALL THE EARTH, AND THEIR WORDS TO THE ENDS OF THE WORLD.”
 - b. _____
 - i. **Gal 3:28:** There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
 - ii. **Rev 5:9:** And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood *men* from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.”
 - c. Socio-economic
 - i. **Gal 3:28:** There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
 - ii. **Col 3:11:** *a renewal* in which there is no *distinction between* Greek and Jew, circumcised and

¹² The Roman Catholic Church, as we know it today, did not exist when the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed was accepted in 381 A.D. For more on the Roman Catholic Church from a historical perspective, see: Dan Burrus, “Church History, Lesson 10: The Reformation Church, Part 3,” lecture available at gracelakeville.org.

uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.

3. **GCBC Statement of Faith** (“The Church” paragraph 3): We teach that the church is thus a unique organism designed by Christ, made up of all born again believers in this present age. . . .

iv. Apostolic church (Apostolicity)

1. Apostolicity does not mean tracing church leaders all the way back to Peter. Rather, the church is apostolic in the sense that the church is built on the teaching of the apostles contained in the _____.
2. **Acts 2:42**: They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.
3. **Eph 2:20**: having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*.

v. Summary

“The church is already one, but it must become more visibly one . . . in faith and practice. The church is already holy in its source and foundation, but it must strive to produce fruits of holiness in its sojourn in the world. The church is already catholic, but it must seek a fuller measure of catholicity by assimilating the valid protests against church abuse . . . into its own life. The church is already apostolic but it must become more consciously apostolic by allowing the gospel to reform and sometimes even overturn its time-honored rites and interpretations.”¹³

e. Beginning of the church: Pentecost

- i. Throughout the history of Christianity people have thought the church to begin with Adam, Abraham, Christ,¹⁴ John, and Paul. But, strictly speaking, the church did not begin until Pentecost.
- ii. Two arguments for why the church began at Pentecost:

¹³ Donald Bloesch, *The Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2002), 103; cited in Mark Dever, *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2012), 19-20.

¹⁴ Although Christ was the founder/foundation of the church and laid the groundwork for the church, the church did not *begin* with Christ.

1. Work of Christ

- a. There could be no church until the death of Christ. **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.”
- b. In addition, there could be no church until the resurrection and ascension of Christ. In order for Christ to be “head over all things to the church” (**Eph 1:22-23**), Christ had to be resurrected and ascended.

2. _____ of the Holy Spirit

- a. Entrance into the Body of Christ is dependent on the baptism of the Holy Spirit. **1 Cor 12:13**: “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”
- b. When then did the baptism of the Holy Spirit occur?
 - i. It is a future event in the Gospels (**Matt 16:18; John 7:39**).
 - ii. In **Acts 1:5**, the believers “will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”
 - iii. By **Acts 11:15**, Peter reported that the Holy Spirit baptism had taken place “at the beginning.”
 - iv. The only possibly occurrence between Acts 1 and Acts 11 is Pentecost. **Acts 2:2, 4**: And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. . . . And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit . . .
- iii. **GCBC Statement of Faith** (“The Church,” paragraph 2): We teach that the formation of the church, the body of Christ, began on the day of Pentecost and will be completed at the coming of Christ for His own at the rapture.

- iv. If the church began at Pentecost, what about Israel? Is Israel the church? Properly speaking, since the church began at Pentecost, Israel is not the church. Israel is a _____ and _____, and the church is neither. **GCBC Statement of Faith** (“The Church,” paragraph 3): The church is distinct from Israel, a mystery not revealed until this age.