

Introduction

What in the world is the church?

Who do you think of when you think of the church?

Definition

The church is the community of all true believers for all time.

Invisible, yet Visible

Being in a church doesn't make you a Christian any more than being in a garage makes you a car.

Invisible – The church as God sees it.

"The Lord knows those who are his" (2 Tim 2:19)

What can we know about a person? Outward evidence of inward spiritual change, but we cannot know the heart.

Visible – The church as Christians see it.

Paul: "To the *church* of God which is at Corinth..." "To the *church* of the Thessalonians..." "To Philemon... and Apphia... and Archippus... and the *church* in your house."

*There will always be some unbelievers in the visible church – charitable judgment vs. wanton indiscretion

Local and Universal

"Greet also the church in their house" (Rom 16:5)

"So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up." (Acts 9:31)

"Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." (Eph 5:25)

Metaphors

Family, Bride, Branches on a vine, an olive tree, a harvest, a new temple, Body of Christ

Many metaphors – Why?

Don't focus on just one to define the church; they all coexist to give a multi-faceted picture of the church

The Church and Israel

Major categories of thought:

- 1) Two distinct plans – earthly blessings for Israel and heavenly for the church
- 2) No difference between church & Israel in future eternal state, but OT prophecies concerning Israel will be fulfilled by ethnic Jews in geographic Israel during millennium.
- 3) Same as part 1 of #2 above, but OT prophecies concerning Israel are fulfilled in the church. See large redemption of Israel as grafting back into the vine of Christ's church.

The Church and the Kingdom of God

Kingdom = dynamic reign, kingly rule of God

Church = community of God's people, society of men

Church exists only within the kingdom, but the kingdom goes outside the church.

Marks of the Church

Q: Are there true and false churches? In other words, can a group of people call themselves a church but really not be a church?

Augsburg Confession (1530): The church is "the congregation of saints in which the gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments rightly administered."

Two distinct marks: Word and Sacrament

Q: Which gospel? Salvation by faith alone... when this is concealed, and has been for a long time, the group meeting is not a church.

Q: Which sacraments? Baptism and Holy Communion

Q: How administered? As means of grace, defining visible membership and continued dependence on the gospel... Not as *externally* powerful for salvation.

Q: Is visible line of succession necessary? No...

Purposes of the Church

Worship God

Joyful, deliberate, corporate worship of God (Col. 3:16, Eph. 5:16-19)

Nurture the body of believers

To equip the saints for the work of ministry – Eph. 4:12-13

Minister to the World – Evangelism and Mercy

Matthew 28:19 – Make disciples of all nations

Luke 6:35-36 – Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

Balance of purpose in the church vs. balance in the individual