

WHAT IS A CHURCH?

1. A DISTINCTION: Bible teachers draw a distinction between the *universal church* and particular united manifestations of that universal church in *local churches*.
2. ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ (*EKKLĒSIA*): THE NEW TESTAMENT WORD FOR “CHURCH”
 - 2.1. The New Testament word for “church” is *ekklēsia*.
 - 2.2. What a church is not.
 - 2.3. New Testament Metaphors and Images for the Church
3. THE INVISIBLE UNIVERSAL (A.K.A. “CATHOLIC”) CHURCH (1 COR 12:12-13; ACTS 1:5; 10; 11:14-16)
4. REGENERATE CHURCH MEMBERSHIP
5. APPLICATION
6. **THE LOCAL CHURCH**
 - 6.1. The New Testament plainly teaches the importance of the local church as well. The *Second London Baptist Confession* expresses it: ““In the execution of this power wherewith he is so intrusted, the Lord Jesus calleth out of the World unto himself, through the Ministry of his word, by his Spirit [John 10:16; 12:32], those that are given unto him by his Father; that they may walk before him in all the [Matt 28:20] ways of obedience, which he prescribeth to them in his Word. Those thus called he commandeth to walk together in particular societies, or [Matt 18:15-20] Churches, for their mutual edification; and the due performance of that publick worship, which he requireth of them in the World.”
 - 6.2. We have already seen places in the New Testament that point to local churches (1 Cor 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1; Col 4:15; Phil 1a-2; 3 John 9)
 - 6.3. So what is a *local church*? Preliminaries toward a definition
 - 6.3.1. At the heart of a proper and biblical idea of a church is the concept of *covenant*.
 - 6.3.2. A church is a voluntary society.
 - 6.4. What is a *local church*? A definition:
 - 6.4.1. Body of Believers (see ‘regenerate church membership’)
 - 6.4.2. Organized (Acts 1:23-25; 6:1-6; 14:23; 1 Cor 5; 14:40; 1 Tim 5:22; Titus 1:5).
 - 6.4.3. With the purpose of being a church.
 - 6.4.4. United in an understanding of the church’s purpose and obligations.
 - 6.4.4.1. **Acts 2:41-42**
 - 6.4.4.2. What are some of the church’s purpose and obligations?
 - 6.4.4.2.1. To preach the Word of God rightly (Matt 28:19-20; Acts 2:42; 1 Cor 12:27-28; 15:1-11; Eph 4:11-14; Col 3:16; 2 Thess 2:13-15; 1 Tim 1:3-4; 4:6-16; 2 Tim 4:1-2; 1 Pet 2:1; 4:10-11). The goal of this preaching is evangelism and edification.
 - 6.4.4.2.2. To administer the ordinances truly, according to Christ’s commands (Matt 28:19-20; 1 Cor 11:23; Phil 4:9).
 - 6.4.4.2.3. To discipline and edify its members (Rom 12:9-13; 1 Cor 5; Eph 5:15-21; Col 3:12-17; 1 Thess 5:12-20; 2 Thess 3:13-15; 1 Tim 1:19-20; 5:19-20; Hebrews 10:22-25; 2 John 10-11; Jude 20-23)
 - 6.4.4.2.4. By ministers or pastors of God’s calling and the church’s election (Acts 14:23; Eph 4:11-14; Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:2; 5:17; Heb 13:7, 17; 1 Pet 5:1-4).
 - 6.4.5. An objection: what about Matt 18:15-20?

6.5. The Local Church and Its Covenant

- 6.5.1. *A church is a body of immersed believers organized for the purpose of being a church, united in a common understanding of the church's purpose and obligations. If this definition is true, and then we lose the common idea of the purpose and obligations of a church, of an assembly of Christians, we are not being the church we ought to be.
- 6.5.2. *And, as a church, we have a document that well expresses this common understanding of the church's purpose and obligations, and that's the **church covenant**.
- 6.5.3. In our contemporary American setting, the church covenant has fallen on very hard times, but I think it is a very important part of our existence as church.

7. GOD, CHRIST, AND THE CHURCH.

- 7.1. What does God think of the church? Simply put, God loves the church.
 - 7.1.1. Our covenant rightly says that the church "has a sacred preeminence over all institutions of human origin."
 - 7.1.2. The Son of God obtained the church with his blood. Acts 20:28
 - 7.1.3. Christ loves the church. Eph 5:25
- 7.2. The church is God's.
 - 7.2.1. "Do you despise the church of God?" (**1 Cor 11:22**)
 - 7.2.2. **1 Tim 3:15** refers to us as "the church of the living God."
 - 7.2.3. It is the place where God is going to get glory: **Eph 3:20-21**
 - 7.2.4. It's the place where God dwells. **Eph 2:25**
 - 7.2.5. We are called "God's field" and "God's building" in **1 Cor 3:9**.
 - 7.2.6. We are a spiritual house built upon the chosen and precious cornerstone Jesus Christ. **1 Pet 2:4-5**
 - 7.2.7. God is opposed to those who destroy his church. **1 Cor 3:16-17**

8. APPLICATION

- 8.1. Let us love the church, let us love the assembly of believers.
- 8.2. Let us never scorn the church.
- 8.3. Let us keep our covenant responsibilities to one another.
- 8.4. Let us join up with the church, let us connect to her, and let us spend our lives in support of this body Christ loves, and a local manifestation of it in particular.