Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology

With a Focus on Its Very Practical Dimensions, Including God's Answers to Our Great Questions of Life—for Now and Eternity

Lesson Seven: Ecclesiology—The Doctrine of the Church (An Overview)
What or who is the church; and What is its purpose?

<u>For Reading Prior to Class</u>

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Remember where Ecclesiology fits within systematic theology.

Review the logic of the loci in the next slides.

The Six Loci of Historic Christian Systematic Theology

1. **Theology**: What the Bible Reveals about God
2. **Anthropology**: What the Bible Reveals about Mankind
3. **Christology**: What the Bible Reveals about Jesus Christ
4. **Soteriology**: What the Bible Reveals about Salvation (This doctrine is also called **Pneumatology** and **The Application of Christ's Redemption**, What the Bible Reveals about the Holy Spirit, the key agent in applying Christ's redemption for our salvation)
5. **Ecclesiology**: What the Bible Reveals about the Church
6. **Eschatology**: What the Bible Reveals about the Last Things or The End Times

The Integration of the Six Loci of Historic Christian Systematic Theology

The Logic of the System and a Summary of the Six Main Doctrines of the Bible

1. **Theology**: Everything starts with God. Essential aspects of God include his triune being; that he is creator; owner; most holy, righteous, and just, such that nothing unholy ever enters his presence; steadfast love to the core of his being; and for his being completely perfect in every way.
2. **Anthropology**: God created humans perfect, even to a limited extent in his image, but the first ones disobeyed God; this sin, which has resulted in cosmic disharmony, so corrupted themselves and their posterity that we cannot come into God's presence and have eternal life without his help. In love, God gave his law to teach his will, his plan of restoration, and to restrain sin to prevent chaos in the now sinful and evil world. What's his plan?
3. **Christology**: Since God is love, he is unwilling to destroy sinful humans who bear his image, but to preserve his holiness, righteousness, and justice, he instituted his plan to have one perfect human being represent all others, fulfill all the law, and credit that righteousness to all people who believe in and follow him. To accomplish God's perfect will for human beings, that one righteous human also had to be divine; the only One who could fulfill all God's law is his only begotten Son, the Redeemer, Savior, and Lord Jesus Christ, who did so in his First Coming to earth in his life, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension. The whole Bible focuses on Jesus Christ. Thus, Jesus, and only Jesus (John 14:6), makes salvation, living forever in the presence of God, possible. How?
4. **Soteriology**: This explanation of salvation explains how the Third Person of the triune God, the Holy Spirit, applies the redemption and salvation Christ has provided to all individuals who believe in and follow Jesus.
5. **Ecclesiology**: This doctrine explains how God calls out, sets apart, brings together, and equips those whom he has redeemed in a new (i.e., renewed) covenant, the church, all those from every race and nation, to work together to most effectively bring to and implement the Good News of salvation throughout the whole world.
6. **Eschatology**: When the time is right in God's sight, he will bring the present age to a conclusion and restore his original plan in a new (i. e., renewed) heaven and new (renewed) earth. How he has already begun to do so, is seen in what the Bible reveals about the Last Things, or The End Times, including what occurs when we die and what occurs at the end of history, when Christ Jesus returns in his Second Coming.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

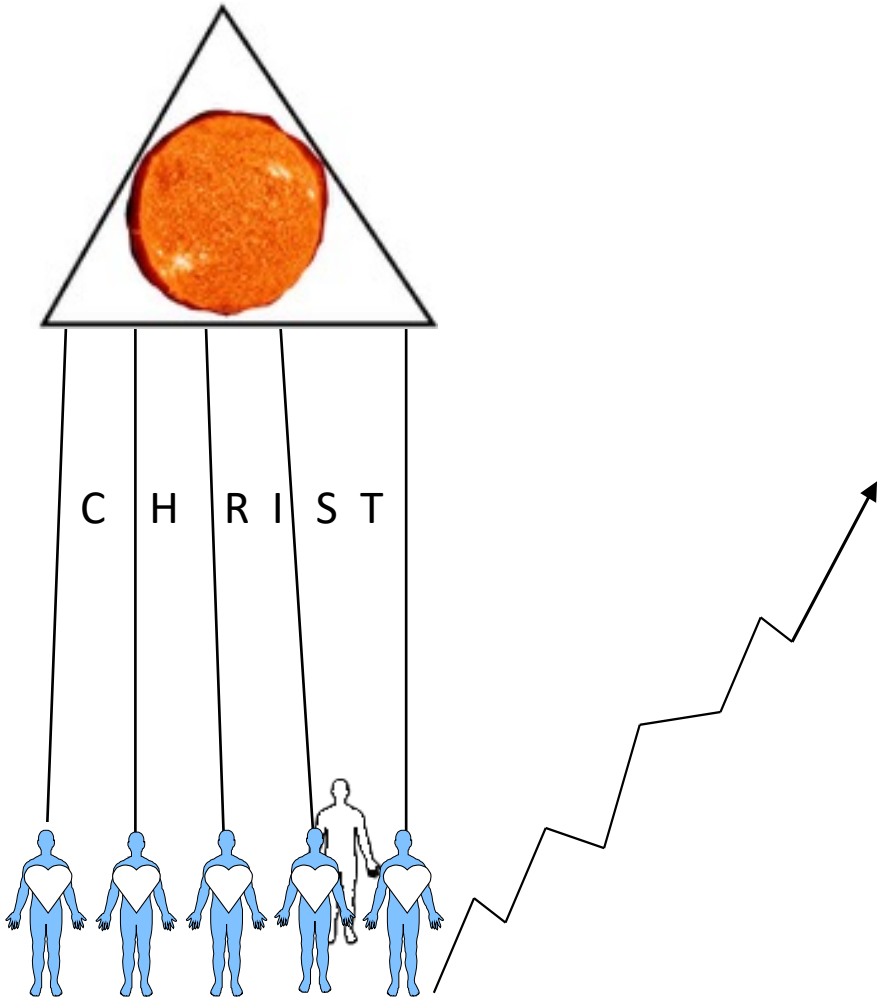
Ecclesiology is the study of all the Bible teaches about the church (< Greek: ἐκκλησία (*ekklēsia*) = assembly, congregation, church < ἐκ (*ek*) = from, out of, away from + καλέω (*kaleō*) = call, name, summon, invite = literally, the ones called out by the Lord, those saved individuals who are called out by God to be holy, i.e., separated to him, and gathered together as his church. The church is the entity God employs as the main means through whom he works to accomplish his redemption of his creation. The church is both an organism, the body of Christ consisting of his believers united in and called to serve God, and an organization, as the many individuals organize to accomplish with planned purpose what they could not do individually. Through Holy Spirit-guided worship, learning, and nurture, the church grows more Christ-like and serves the Lord ever more effectively in the mission God has given it to bring the Good News of redemption and reconciliation with God to every nation, tribe, people, and language, for it is God's will that all come into his Kingdom. (Revelation 7:7; 1 Timothy 2:4) The church sometimes has people in its communion who are not Christians and others who are Christians but so immature, stuck in an elementary stage of sanctification, that the congregation must be vigilant to lovingly establish certain limits, e.g., with the sacraments, and, when necessary, employ the Biblical use of church discipline. This section comprises highlights, implications, and very practical applications of the Biblical doctrine of Ecclesiology.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The church is the primary means through whom God is working to accomplish his redemptive purposes and is especially helpful in discerning the will of God. He has given us the Bible through both the Old Testament church and the New Testament church, though since the end of the first century A.D., he is no longer giving any new revelation. He not only helps us directly through the Holy Spirit and his Word but also indirectly through others. Involving others, he primarily uses fellow believers whom the Bible calls the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27; Romans 12:5; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:12; Colossians 1:18,24) to guide us.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

- In order to accomplish more corporately than could be done individually, God calls his saved people who are being sanctified to work together in a great global mission, to be the main means through whom he will accomplish his plan of redeeming his creation through Christ Jesus.
- Four important distinctions about the church should be remembered.
  1. The church is the visible manifestation of the covenant God made with Abraham.
  2. The church is both militant and triumphant.
  3. The church is both visible and invisible.
  4. The church is both an organism and an organization.



Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.” (Genesis 17:7)
- “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (Galatians 3:26-29, esp. v. 29)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

1. The church is the visible manifestation of the covenant God made with Abraham. This is why some Biblical scholars use the word Church also in the OT, e.g., in Calvin’s commentary on Genesis 17:7. He writes, “as soon as it was said, ‘I will be a God to thee and to thy seed after thee,’ the Church was separated from the other nations.”
   a. The word covenant is another example of what Biblical scholars call a major motif, or theme, a doctrine that runs throughout the entire Bible, Old and New Testaments. The most common Hebrew word for covenant, בְּרִית(*berît*), occurs 286 times in the Old Testament and as διαθήκη (*diathēkē*) 33 times in the Greek New Testament. On numerous other occasions, references occur to covenants and covenantal relationships apart from the use of the word covenant.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

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Meaning and Practical Benefits

1. The church is the visible manifestation of the covenant God made with Abraham.
   b. When God tells us something over 300 times, we can conclude he’s trying to get our attention, right?!
   c. Do you recall your mother telling you, and have you said to your children, “How many times have I told you…?!”
   d. The covenant is a key to understanding the meaning of God’s revelation, but many Christians, including dispensationalists (*op cit.*), ignore this key teaching and its implications.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

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Meaning and Practical Benefits

e. The unity and connection between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church is seen very clearly in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament Hebrew, which was the Bible that Jesus and the early church used, “the holy Scriptures” to which Paul refers in 2 Timothy 3:15. In the Septuagint the Greek word, ἐκκλησία (*ekklēsia*), meaning assembly, congregation, church, and translated church in the New Testament, is used to translate the Hebrew word, קָהָל (*qāhāl*), assembly, congregation some 100 times throughout the Old Testament.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “The LORD gave me two stone tablets inscribed by the finger of God. On them were all the commandments the LORD proclaimed to you on the mountain out of the fire, on the day of the assembly.” (Deuteronomy 9:10)
- “I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you.” (Psalm 22:22)
- “Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly.
16 Gather the people, consecrate the assembly; bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber.
17 Let the priests, who minister before the LORD, weep between the temple porch and the altar. Let them say, 'Spare your people, O LORD. Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'' (Joel 2:15-17)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

Thus, the word *ekklēsia* is also used in the Septuagint (abbreviated LXX), the third century B.C. Greek translation of the Old Testament, to refer to God’s covenant people whom he has called and set apart to be holy to him. See, e.g., Deuteronomy 9:10; 18:16; Psalm 22:22; 26:12; 68:26; 149:1; Joel 2:16.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new [*kainos*] covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.” (Luke 22:20)
- “Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new [*kainos*] covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” (2 Corinthians 3:4-6)
- “…For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new [*kainos*] covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.” (Hebrews 9:11-15)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

f. The essential unity of the covenant (which God said, e.g., Genesis 17:7, is “an everlasting covenant”) throughout the Old and the New Testaments (testament meaning covenant) is also seen clearly in the Greek of the New Testament and in the LXX. In all but one (Hebrews 12:24) of the references to the new covenant in the New Testament, the Greek word, καινός (*kainos*, new), is used. The word *kainos* means new in nature or quality (i.e., renewed), not new in time or origin, which is designated by another Greek word also translated new, νέος (*neos*, i.e., brand new). See Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Hebrews 8:8 (quoting Jeremiah 31:31 [38:31 in the LXX]); 8:13; 9:15. The word *neos* signifies something that was not there before in contrast to *kainos*, which signifies renewed, albeit constituting a genuine newness. The context of Hebrews 12:24 indicates that *neos* is used to emphasize how greatly the work of Christ impacted, indeed transformed, the original and everlasting covenant God made with Abraham. The excellent Lutheran Biblical scholar, R.C.H. Lenski, points out that the use of *neos* here “…does not deserve serious consideration. The newness of this testament has nothing to do with the testament that was given to Abraham, for this stands forever and cannot be called old in any sense since Christ fulfilled its promise and sealed the inheritance to all the heirs.” (459).

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- "'The time is coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah…[33]'This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,' declares the LORD. 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. [34]…'For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.'" (Jeremiah 31:31-34)
- "'This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.' [Quote from Jeremiah 31:33] [17]Then he adds: 'Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.' [Quote from Jeremiah 31:34] [18]And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin." (Hebrews 10:16-18)
- "Therefore He [Jesus] is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." (Hebrews 7:25 NASB)
- "Jesus…now crowned with glory and honor, because he suffered death…for everyone." (Hebrews 2:9)
- See also Matthew 28:18-20; Genesis 12:3; Revelation 7:9.

Meaning and Practical Benefits

f. While the main covenant throughout the Bible, the covenant God made with Abraham, is "an everlasting covenant" (Genesis 17:7; Matthew 5:18), Christ has made it a καινός (kainos, new) covenant by fulfilling the purpose of the old covenant, which no one else could do, and thereby forever bringing us, who believe in and follow him, into the covenant and granting to us the covenant blessings together with the covenant responsibilities.

1) Jesus' once for all sacrifice of himself to redeem us for our sins, replaced the old covenant repeated sacrifices of bulls and goats that were not sufficient to forgive our sins and only foreshadowed Jesus' all-sufficient sacrifice that is credited to us by our faith. (Rom. 4) The sacrifice of animals was preparatory, temporary, and insufficient, because it was humans that sinned and thus humans needed to make reparation for their sins, but only a perfect, sinless, human could do so to satisfy God's righteous wrath against sin. Only Jesus, being both human and divine, was able to make the perfect sacrifice, doing so vicariously, substituting for us.
2) Jesus' sacrifice in the new covenant is all that is needed and makes possible our entry into the presence of God.
3) Jesus' work and his sending of the Holy Spirit to make it effective in our lives enables us to be God's children and to accomplish the original mission of the old covenant. (Genesis 12:3; Matthew 28:18-20; Rev. 7:9)

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. [2] Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” (Genesis 1:1-2)
- “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.” (Acts 2:1 NIV)
- “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.” Acts 2:1 (KJV)
- “Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads.” (Revelation 4:10)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

g. We have further Biblical evidence that the church was not born at Pentecost. Acts 2:1 uses a rare and important Greek word, not well translated in many new versions of the New Testament: συμπληρόω (*sumplēroō*) = fill completely, become entirely full, complete. With New Testament scholar, R.C.H. Lenski, the verse is better translated, “And when the day of Pentecost was being fulfilled.” The King James Version translates the verse more accurately than most newer versions. Thus, we see the link with the rest of Scripture, in particular the immediate context in the beginning of Acts, and the entire Old Testament. The Holy Spirit did not just arrive in the first century A.D.; he’s been everywhere from the beginning. (Review Theology and Soteriology.)

The number 12 in apocalyptic literature, the genre in which Revelation was written, refers to the church (e.g., 12 apostles) in the NT and also in the OT to the 12 tribes. The number 24 refers graphically to the unity of the OT church and the NT church.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

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Meaning and Practical Benefits

h. Thus, Pentecost is <u>not</u> the church’s birthday.
   1) The church is not being birthed on the day of Pentecost, but rather empowered (cf. the context of the passage, e.g., Acts 1:8) and equipped, thus Christ is strengthening his still emotionally beaten up and timid post-crucifixion disciples by sending the Holy Spirit to give his church what they needed to “get the job done” in accord with their, indeed our, high and holy calling.
   2) This reality about the church is very important for many reasons, not the least of which is to help dispensationalists understand that this is not a new, a church, age; the church has been in existence since Abraham.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.” (Acts 2:1 NIV)
- ‘And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.” Acts 2:1 (KJV)
- “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:25)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

i. In Ephesians 5:25 we read that “Christ loved the church…” If the church didn’t begin until Pentecost, how likely is it that Paul would say Christ loved [Greek aorist, past, tense] her?” The context of the passage indicates he is not speaking in a vision of the future.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- "'Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites." (Exodus 19:6)
- "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:9)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

j. Much more Biblical evidence of the continuity between the church in the Old Testament (OT) and the New Testament church can be adduced. One more shall suffice. Among many similar Scripture passages, notice the obvious connection the apostle Peter made (in 1 Peter 2:9) with Moses' account in Exodus 19:6. Moses records the LORD revealing to the Israelites "you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites." With unmistakable clarity and obvious linkage with this Old Testament terminology and the church's calling and mission, not only in Exodus 19:6 but elsewhere in the OT, Peter writes what the Holy Spirit inspired him to reveal in these words, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

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- "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'" (Matthew 28:18-20)
- "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:9)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

k. These and many other Bible passages are the basis of the church's mission to witness for God's plan of salvation in Jesus Christ, a witness that is done in many ways, individually and corporately.

1) Individuals engage, e.g., in private or group conversations (1 Peter 3:15) as Christ's witnesses or evangelists.

- It is important to distinguish between witnessing and evangelism.

Ecclesiology: The Mission of the Church

The Mission of the Church Conducted Individually and Corporately

Distinguishing between Witnessing and Evangelism

Two Means of Lovingly Proclaiming the Good News about Jesus Christ

Individual Mission: Witnessing

1. Witnessing is communicating about Jesus Christ, which all believers in Christ are called to do. (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; 1 Peter 3:15)
2. While the verbal aspect of witnessing can be facilitated by conversational gambits, Scripture indicates a witness for Christ is usually passive until requested, a response to the query of others, typically as they observe the difference between our lifestyle and that of the world and ask us why. (1 Peter 2:9-12; 3:15)
3. Witnessing is done largely on an individual basis, where a believer explains his or her faith in Christ to one or more others in conversation, typically and especially effectively within relationships.

Individual Mission: Evangelism

1. Evangelism is a gift of the Spirit that some but not all believers receive. (Ephesians 4:11) This understanding relieves guilt in those who feel pressure to be assertive in proclamation of the Gospel of Christ but who don't have the gift of evangelism.
2. Evangelism, as seen in the Bible and in those throughout church history who have been given the gift, is a proactive initiative by individuals.
3. Yet individuals often do so in dyads (cf. Luke 10:1, 17). When done in larger groups (e.g., small groups, Vacation Bible School, and other outreach programs, even large groups as in the crusades many lead), the work is seen to be part of the corporate mission of the church.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- "'Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites." (Exodus 19:6)
- "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you…." (Jeremiah 29:7 NASB)
- "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'" (Matthew 28:18-20)
- "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:9)
- "Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit." (Mark 13:11)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

k. These and many other Bible passages are the basis of the church's mission to witness for God's plan of salvation in Jesus Christ, a witness that is done in many ways, individually and corporately.

1) Individuals engage, e.g., in private or group conversations. (1 Peter 3:15)

a) See the discussion that follows this slide.

b) We are also to engage the public square. See Jeremiah 29:7 and the related slides that follow.

2) Corporate missions are widespread, e.g.,

a) local church food pantries for poor people and their families.

b) local councils of churches to provide shelter, counseling, and education for homeless people and their families.

c) denominational programs, such as Thrivent. (financial management)

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

DISCUSS: How can we witness most effectively for Jesus Christ in personal interactions with others? Include the following in the conversation.

1. In conversations always be looking for comments people make that we can use as a catalyst for mentioning a word for Christ. For example, if someone expresses worry or concern, offer a reply such as, “I’ve had those struggles too; however, I’d like to say that what helps me in that situation is knowing that the Lord Jesus Christ is sovereign, that he loves us, and that he can and does help us.” (Refer to passages such as John 16:33.) If the other person indicates interest in what you have said, tell him or her more about Christ. Ask him or her if he or she has any questions about the Lord. If no interest is indicated, take pleasure in your attempt to be Christ’s witness and that you have the assurance that you have given the other person vital words to think about and a catalyst the Holy Spirit will use to work in that person’s mind and heart and upon which the Spirit will build, e.g., through another’s comments. As God has said, his word will not return to him void. (Isaiah 55:11)
2. During your conversation, pray mentally that God will guide you as to what to say and not say, what to do and not do.
3. Don’t feel obligated to press for an answer in your initial conversation. If you have the opportunity, you might say, “What do you think about this good news?”

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

4. Communicating within a relationship helps us witness for the Lord. A relationship involves friendship and trust, which facilitates communication on important subjects. The Navigators mission organization in their July 2019 issue, *Discipleship Resources*, included an article entitled, "Redefining Evangelism," in which they referred to research by the Barna Group. The article said, "The *Barna Group* recently released a fascinating report on how adults respond to evangelism. Among the findings, adults preferred faith interactions sparked out of sincere engagement rather than depersonalized outreach efforts. The takeaway? Nonbelievers are most receptive to faith conversations when they occur in the context of genuine relationship…the world is filled with millions of people who are on a spiritual journey. Many are not yet ready to attend church or make a decision to follow Christ, but they are open to relationships and to making small decisions that will move them closer to Christ." (The Navigators <email@navigators.org> July 2, 2019) This reality thus also applies to witnessing for Christ. Try to develop relationships whenever possible, as with a relative, neighbor, or coworker. Look for opportunities to speak a good word for the Lord and how he helps you. Ask the person if he or she has a church home; if not, ask if he or she would like to visit your church home with you.
5. Look at the brief but very helpful videos church educator, Jim Found, has provided on his Website at www.foundbytes.com that offer valuable and practical tips on effective witnessing for Christ.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

Part of our witness should be engaging the public square pertaining to issues that affect the welfare of the city where God has sent us. (Jeremiah 29:7) We must remember that we are in a spiritual warfare with Satan and his demons. (Ephesians 6:10-18 and Revelation 12-20) Jesus said we are "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world." (Matthew 5:13-16) We are to speak the truth in love. (Ephesians 4:15) Many other passages in God's Word indicate his will that we do all we can to promote the good and oppose the evil in the society in which we live.

When we are opposed with false accusations, e.g., "You can't force me/us to believe and do this…," we can explain that neither we nor God want to force them to obey his will. First, our Biblical theology and anthropology (*op cit*.) reveal that God has built into us his image, part of which is a limited but genuine freedom that he respects. He wills that we obey him out of love, not constraint.

Second, in the light of Revelation 22:11-15, and related passages, we can prove that we're not trying to force anyone to do anything. Nevertheless, we must say that while God gives freedom for people to disobey, doing so will harm them sooner and later, and they will not be able to do it in his kingdom. Due to God's great love and holiness, he will not allow them to corrupt heaven or the new heaven and the new earth. If people choose to sin and do evil, they will do it in a place without God's presence. He will make sure of that at the final judgment. We should also forewarn them, as we have opportunity, that without God's presence and without his restraint upon their evil, where sinful people are all doing whatever they want to do, it will not be pleasant; indeed, it will be like existing in a "fiery furnace" (Matthew 13:42), a "lake of fire" (Revelation 20:15), and with "weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 8:12)

For much more information on why and how Christians need to engage the public square, i.e., effectively communicate God's Word and will in the current issues in our community, state, and nation, see the documents on the Christian Action and Current Issues pages of my free and secure general and academic Websites. See in particular both the lecture and the course, "Christian Witness in the Public Forum—Increasing Your Comfort Level to Speak the Truth in Love: Is Pleasing God Your Highest Priority?"

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- "'Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites." (Exodus 19:6)
- "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'" (Matthew 28:18-20)
- "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:9)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

k. These and many other Bible passages are the basis of the church's mission to witness for God's plan of salvation in Jesus Christ, a witness that is done in many ways, individually and corporately.

2) Corporate missions are widespread, e.g.,

d) national/international parachurch ministries

1- Focus on the Family (marriage and family)

2- Family Talk (marriage and family)

3- American Center for Law and Justice (legal action to address personal, corporate, and governmental injustices)

4- Dave Ramsey (financial management)

5- Family Research Center (research and action on family and social issues)

6- Habitat for Humanity (affordable housing for poor people)

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

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2) Corporate missions are widespread, e.g.,

e) worldwide parachurch ministries (most do more than the primary focus indicated below)

1- American Bible Society (Bible distribution)

2- Samaritan's Purse (disaster relief)

3- Luke Society (medical missions)

4- Exodus Global Alliance (helping people abandon homosexuality)

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Practical Implications of Witnessing and Evangelism

NOTE: This is not an exhaustive list; what other questions should be added?

1. If the church doesn't witness, evangelize, and promote Christian missions to facilitate the extension and nurture of God's kingdom, and the society in which it exists becomes more and more unregenerate, what will the cost be to that society? (Consider, e.g., the serious harm to people and additional number of police that have to be hired.)
2. If the church fails to witness, how will entertainment change, corporately (e.g., in stage plays, TV, movies) and individually, i.e., what unregenerated people do to have fun?
3. If the church fails to witness, what non-Christian religions will fill the vacuum with their views as to what America should look like? For example, what would America look like if Islam were to expand and institute Sharia Law?
3. If the extension and nurture of God's kingdom is mitigated, how will minority groups in the society be affected?

[If time: Start in groups of four, then debrief in the large group. If time is short: begin in dyads, then ask for volunteers to share with the whole group what they think.]

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

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Meaning and Practical Benefits

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1) Individuals engage, e.g., in private or group conversations. (1 Peter 3:15)

2) Corporate missions are widespread.

3) Corporate church art and architecture has always expressed an impressive witness for Jesus Christ by presenting the message of the Bible in visual form.

a) Notice the inspiring paintings, e.g., by Michelangelo on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican in Rome.

b) Recall the breathtaking architecture of the Gothic cathedrals.

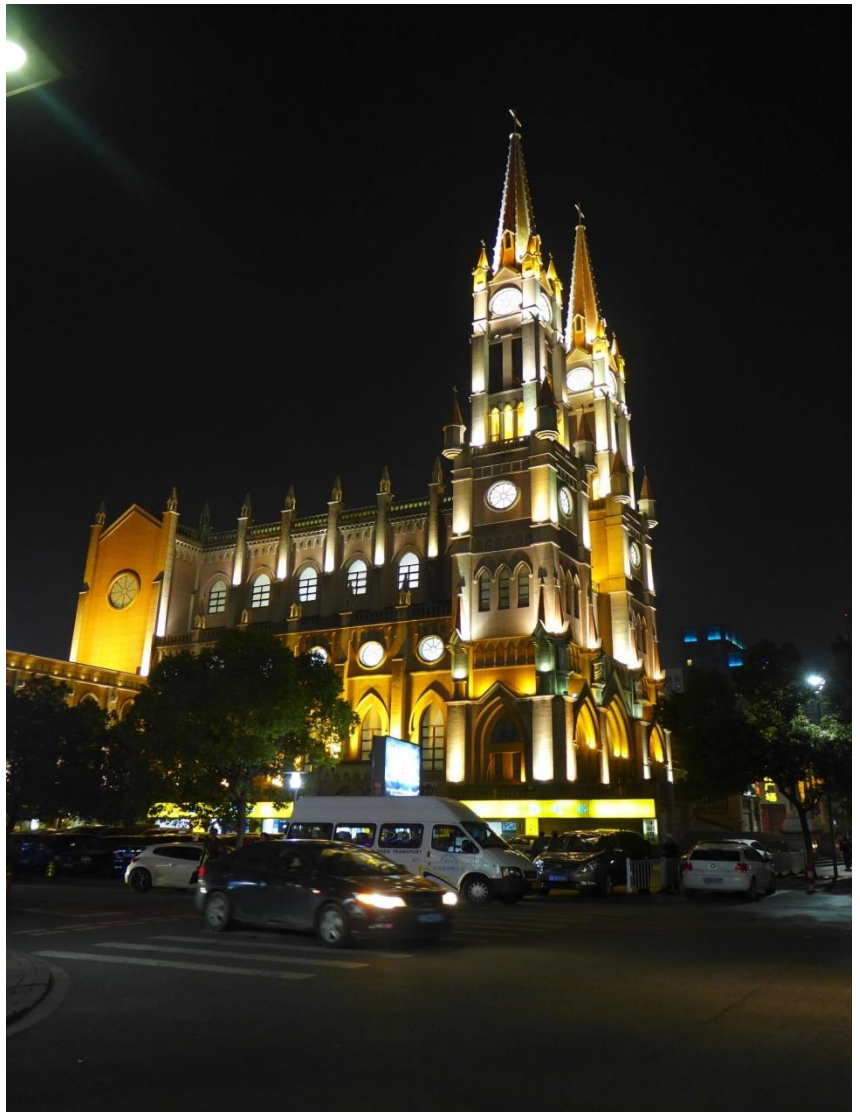
Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’” (Matthew 28:18-20)
- “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” (1 Peter 2:9)

Notice how impressive and inspirational is the Roman Catholic Cathedral Church of the Assumption in Ningbo, China. The light emitted, one of the characteristics of Gothic church architecture, continues in the evening via modern electricity, standing in sensational contrast to the darkness of the night in the heart of the city, drawing the attention of passersby and pointing their vision to the ascended and reigning Lord Jesus Christ.

Meaning and Practical Benefits



Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’” (Matthew 28:18-20)
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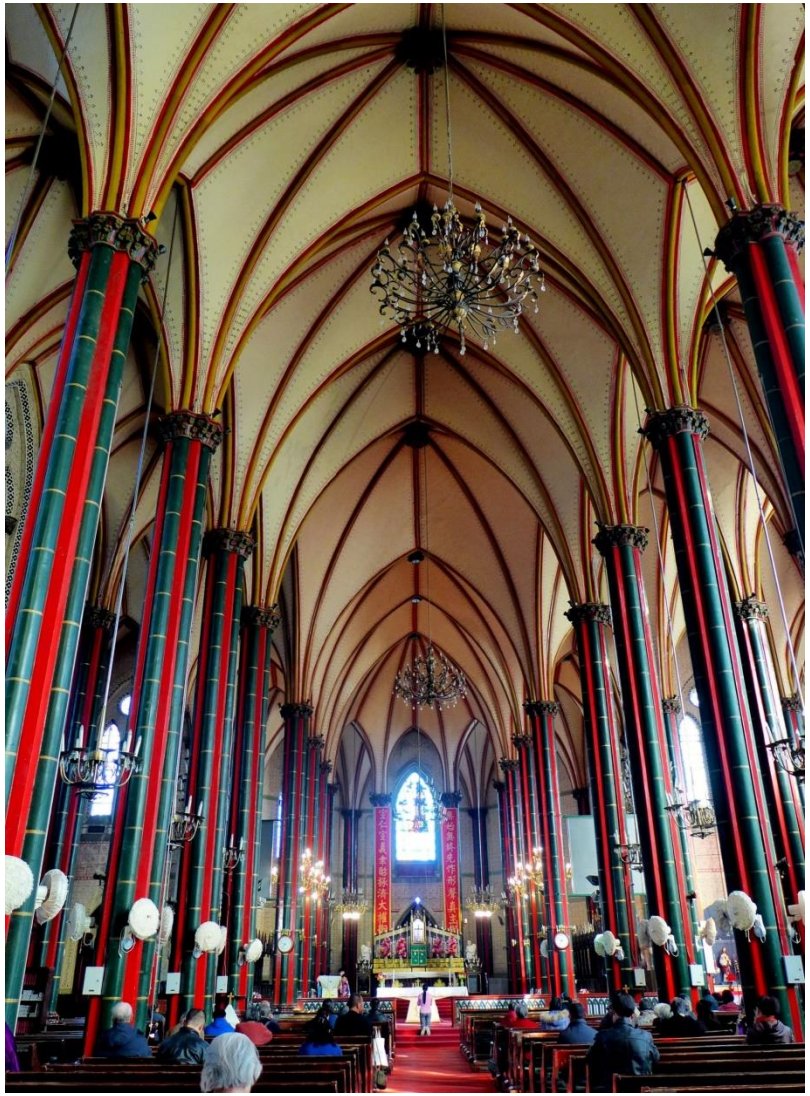
Meaning and Practical Benefits



The same impression, inspiring worship occurs inside Gothic churches, as in the historic Roman Catholic North Church in Beijing, China. The light and magnificent vertical lines support the liturgy and facilitate worshipers’ engagement with the Lord Jesus Christ. Around 3,000 Beijing Christians were besieged in the cathedral during the Boxer Rebellion at the beginning of the 20th century, and it was used as a government school for girls during the Cultural Revolution and for a while afterward. One of the original buildings on the church grounds, a children’s orphanage, remains.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

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- “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” (1 Peter 2:9)

The same impact, inspiring worship occurs outside in the historic Roman Catholic North Church in Beijing, China. The breathtaking vertical lines draw the vision of worshipers toward heaven and help them keep the Lord Jesus Christ in their worldview and lives.

Meaning and Practical Benefits

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “all the people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded for Israel. So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. He read it aloud from daybreak till noon…And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.” (Nehemiah 8:1-3)
- “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’
  All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: ‘Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!’” (Revelation 7:9-12)

As indicated throughout the Bible and this photo the church has always been for all ages and nations.

Meaning and Practical Benefits

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

Doctrine of the Church

- "…Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand….And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law." (Nehemiah 8:2-3)
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  All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They…worshiped God, saying: 'Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!'" (Revelation 7:9-12)

As seen throughout the Bible and this video the church has always been for all ages and nations. This almost three hour worship service is at the Chikuluti CCAP (Church of Central Africa Presbyterian) in Malawi. Their worship is in the Chichewa language.

Meaning and Practical Benefits

View at: https://youtu.be/nMAHqs5SB5Q

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

"[10]Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. [11]Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. [12]For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. [13]Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. [14]Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, [15]and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. [16]In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. [17]Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. [18]And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."
(Ephesians 6:10-18)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

2. We also see a distinction in the Bible between the church militant and the church triumphant.
   a. <u>The church militant</u> is the theological term referring to the conflicts the church on earth faces in carrying out its calling from God.
      1) The church is engaged in a holy (spiritual) war. (Ephesians 6:10-18)
      2) We need to discern both the visible and the invisible dimensions of this conflict to understand and be best prepared for the battle God has called us to engage.
         a) **This is a matter of life and death**—spiritually and eternally for everyone—and physically in the present for many in the horrendous persecution of Christians globally, many being put to death because they believe in Christ, which is one of the reasons Paul urges continual prayer for all the saints. (6:18)

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

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Meaning and Practical Benefits

2. a. 2) We must continually keep in mind and teach both the visible and the invisible dimensions of this conflict **to understand reality**, be best prepared for the fight ourselves, and to help God's people prepare for and win the fight as he has called us out (*ekklēsia*) to do. This is our identity, our raison d'être.

b) Conflicts with people (flesh and blood) are not the main problem we face.

c) As Paul points out in Ephesians 6:12 and John in Revelation 12-20, our main struggle is with Satan and his demonic forces.

d) We must explain this reality to people who dislike military terms and who don't like fighting. We cannot disobey and be unfaithful to God and disregard and ignore his Word on a subject we find uncomfortable. Neither is it realistic to do so.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

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Meaning and Practical Benefits

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e) The failure to discern this reality brings much harm to many people, i.e., engaging in activities that are portrayed as being "innocent" and "fun" but are deceptively demonic, e.g., astrology; aura reading; tarot cards; crystal balls, and any other form of fortune-telling, e.g., Ouija boards, mediums, seances, black (and much other magic, except for Christian "magicians," who actually refer to themselves more accurately as illusionists and who use their program to show the dangers and deception in magic); false religions; Yoga (which is based on and is a form of Hinduism); any unbiblical sex; and married people flirting with members of the opposite sex. Cite local examples.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

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Meaning and Practical Benefits

2. a. 2) We need to discern both the visible and the invisible dimensions of this conflict to understand and be best prepared for the daily struggle.

3) Militant is a necessary term to help church people become aware, and to **keep reminding us, of the unseen (<u>thus unknown without God's revelation</u>) but very real and crucial spiritual battle that has an eternal dimension in which we are engaged.**

- Too many people think the church is a nice club that will look good on their resume and which they can attend when it fits into their crowded schedules.

  Little is farther from the truth.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

"Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne
a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven
seals. [2]And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud
voice, 'Who is worthy to break the seals and open the
scroll?'…[5]Then one of the elders said to me…'See, the Lion
of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He
is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.'
[6]Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing
in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living
creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven
eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all
the earth. [7]He came and took the scroll from the right
hand of him who sat on the throne. [8]And when he had
taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four
elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and
they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are
the prayers of the saints.
[9]And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the
scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and
with your blood you purchased men for God from every
tribe and language and people and nation. [10]You have
made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,
and they will reign on the earth." (Revelation 5:1-2,5-10)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

2. We also see a distinction in the Bible between the church militant and the church triumphant.
   b. <u>The church triumphant</u> refers to the church in heaven celebrating victory in and through Christ Jesus. (Revelation 4 and 5) See also Eschatology below.
      1) The church celebrates the victory ***<u>of</u>*** ***<u>and</u>*** ***<u>with</u>*** the Lord Jesus Christ!
      2) The church celebrates its vindication and coming reign in the new heaven and new earth.
         + Reflect and Discuss: What blessings for the church militant come from this doctrine <u>now</u>? Consider the encouragement knowing what lies ahead for us and the great joy our loved ones in Christ are already having!

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

“Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' (Matthew 7:15-23)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

3. The militant church is both visible and invisible.
   a. <u>The church visible</u> refers to the typical congregation gathered together for worship and various other aspects of its life and work together.
      1) As such, unbelievers are mixed in with true believers.
      2) Unbelievers are present with many motivations including, but not limited to, the following among others:
         a) those genuinely seeking the truth but not yet committed to Christ,
         b) those looking for personal gain, e.g., business contacts, a pure spouse, trustworthy friends, information.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

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Meaning and Practical Benefits

3. The militant church visible includes true Christians at all levels of development, from very immature to mature. It also includes non-Christians.
   a. 3) Sometimes people have had painful experiences when associated with the visible church. This distinction helps people understand and be on guard. The Bible teaches that all people sin and fall short of the glory of God. (1 Kings 8:46; Romans 3:23). Some true believers are not far along in the sanctification process.
   4) Non-Christians, who are also present, are either unaware of or not committed to following Christ’s command to love.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

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Meaning and Practical Benefits

3. The militant church is both visible and invisible.
   a. 5) Nevertheless, it is good that immature Christians and non-Christians are present in the visible church for many reasons, including that they both hear the Word of God and see mature Christians modeling an engaging Christ-like lifestyle that the Holy Spirit can lead them to embrace and in which to mature in Christ. But important implications must be kept in mind.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

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Meaning and Practical Benefits

3. The militant church is both visible and invisible.
   b. <u>The church invisible</u> (spiritually) consists of true believers in and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. The church invisible constitutes the kingdom of God, those who live and act willingly ruled by God in their minds and hearts.

      The kingdom is here in part (Luke 17:21) but not yet in its fullest, so we pray regularly, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come [in its fullest], your will be done on earth as it is in heaven…." (Matthew 6:9-10)

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “[7]Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?
[8]Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.
[9]Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. ‘If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk,
[10]and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.” (Isaiah 58:7-10)
- “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,” (Matthew 25:35)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

3. The militant church is both visible and invisible.
   b. <u>The church invisible</u> (spiritually) consists of true believers in and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. The church invisible constitutes the kingdom of God, those who live willingly ruled by God in their minds and hearts.

The concept of the kingdom of God, though not mentioned in those words in the Old Testament (OT), is a major motif and theme running through the whole Bible. Key principles of the kingdom are mentioned in the OT, including in Deuteronomy 23:24. Thus, those principles that pertain to the kingdom in both testaments apply today and will forever. (Isaiah 58:7,10; Ezekiel 18:7,16; Matthew 5:17-18; 25:35-40)

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

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Meaning and Practical Benefits

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   b. <u>The church invisible</u> (spiritually) consists of true believers in and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. The church invisible constitutes the kingdom of God, those who live willingly ruled by God in their minds and hearts. At first it's not evident who do and who don't belong to the true church, but the true church becomes visible in
      1) the profession ***<u>and</u>*** conduct of the members,
      2) the ministry of the Word (rightly taught—no heresy) and sacraments (rightly in a worthy manner [1 Corinthians 11:20-34]), and
      3) the organization and government of the true church.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?
Why does the church need leaders and managers/administrators?

4. The militant church is both an organism and an organization.
   - The church is an *Organism*: It is "the body of Christ." (1 Corinthians 12:27; Romans 12:5; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:12; Colossians 1:18,24) We are his hands and legs here on earth. The church is not a club. Neither is it a purely human phenomenon. The church is very special. Those who believe in and follow the Lord are indwelt by him in his Spirit; he has a very special relationship with his people. When Jesus appeared to Saul (who became Paul) on the road to Damascus, he said, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me [not 'my people' or 'my followers' but me]?" (Acts 9:4) It is "God's household…the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:13). It is composed of people who sin, who are called by God to be holy and who are in various stages of the sanctification process, who have problems, needs, thoughts, feelings, and gifts from God, whom He has called to serve Him. (Special Revelation and General Revelation)
   - The church is an *Organization*: In order to serve God most effectively and efficiently, the church has to function in ways that produce the results (Biblical term: fruit) the Lord expects. The church organizes in such a way to best accomplish its mission. The larger a church becomes, necessary modifications need to be made in order to function more effectively and efficiently. (Special Revelation, Acts 6:1-4, and General Revelation)

For further information on the leadership and administration of the organized church, see the PowerPoint presentation, *Leadership and Administration in the Church: Balancing Task Accomplishment and Caring*, by Edward D. Seely, and related essays available for free on the Church Leadership and Administration page of the author's Website at www.fromacorntooak12.com.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- "…there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. [26]If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. [27]Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." (1 Corinthians 12:25-27)
- "Let all things be done decently and in order." (1 Corinthians 14:40 KJV)
- "So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. [3]Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them [4]and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.'" (Acts 6:2-4)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4. The militant visible church is both an organism and an organization.
   - <u>The church is an organism</u>.
     * The church is the body of Christ; it is people, believers called by God to gather together to be blessed by and serve in fellowship with him. (1 Corinthians 12:25-27)
   - <u>The church is also an organization</u>.
     * God's people can serve more effectively working together in a coordinated and planned manner than they could as individuals in order to use the gifts of the Holy Spirit most effectively. (1 Corinthians 14:40; Acts 6:2-4)

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” (Acts 2:42)
- “…there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. [26]If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.
  [27]Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” (1 Corinthians 12:25-27)
- “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” (2 Corinthians 13:14)
- “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” (1 John 1:7)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4. The militant visible church is both an organism and an organization.
   - <u>The church is an organism</u>.
     1) The church is the body of Christ; it is people, believers called by God to gather together to be blessed by and serve him in worship and in the mission to which he is calling them.
     2) The church has both a vertical and a horizontal dimension; it is a special fellowship of believers in communion with God.
     3) Nowhere in the Bible is the church referred to as a building.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” (Acts 2:42)
- “…there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. [26]If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.
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- “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” (1 John 1:7)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4. The militant visible church is both an organism and an organization.
   - <u>The church is an organism</u>.

     4) The church is also referred to with the Greek word, κοινωνία (*koinonia*), i.e., fellowship, communion, association, partnership, sharing, participation, contribution, close relationship, generosity, fellow-feeling, altruism (e.g., Acts 2:42). This dimension of the church is especially recognized in the Russian Orthodox Church with the word *sobornost*, considered untranslatable but the words fellowship or group consciousness are typically understood as coming the closest to its meaning. Theologian Bernard Ramm explains that “It is the feeling of oneness and communion which all worshipers have towards the assembled Church during the performance of the liturgy. This quality of *sobornost* distinguishes the Russian Church from the authoritarianism of Roman Catholicism and the individualism of Protestantism (ODCC, p. 1266).” (Ramm, p. 119)

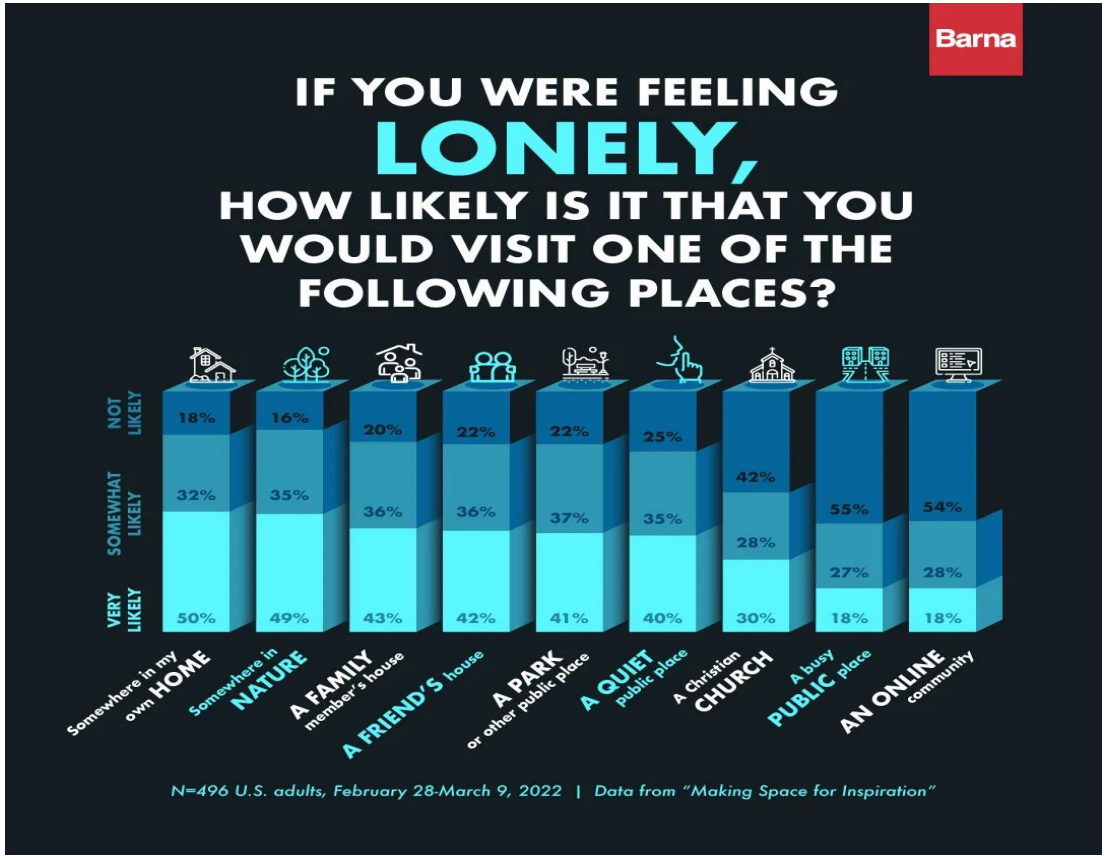
Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

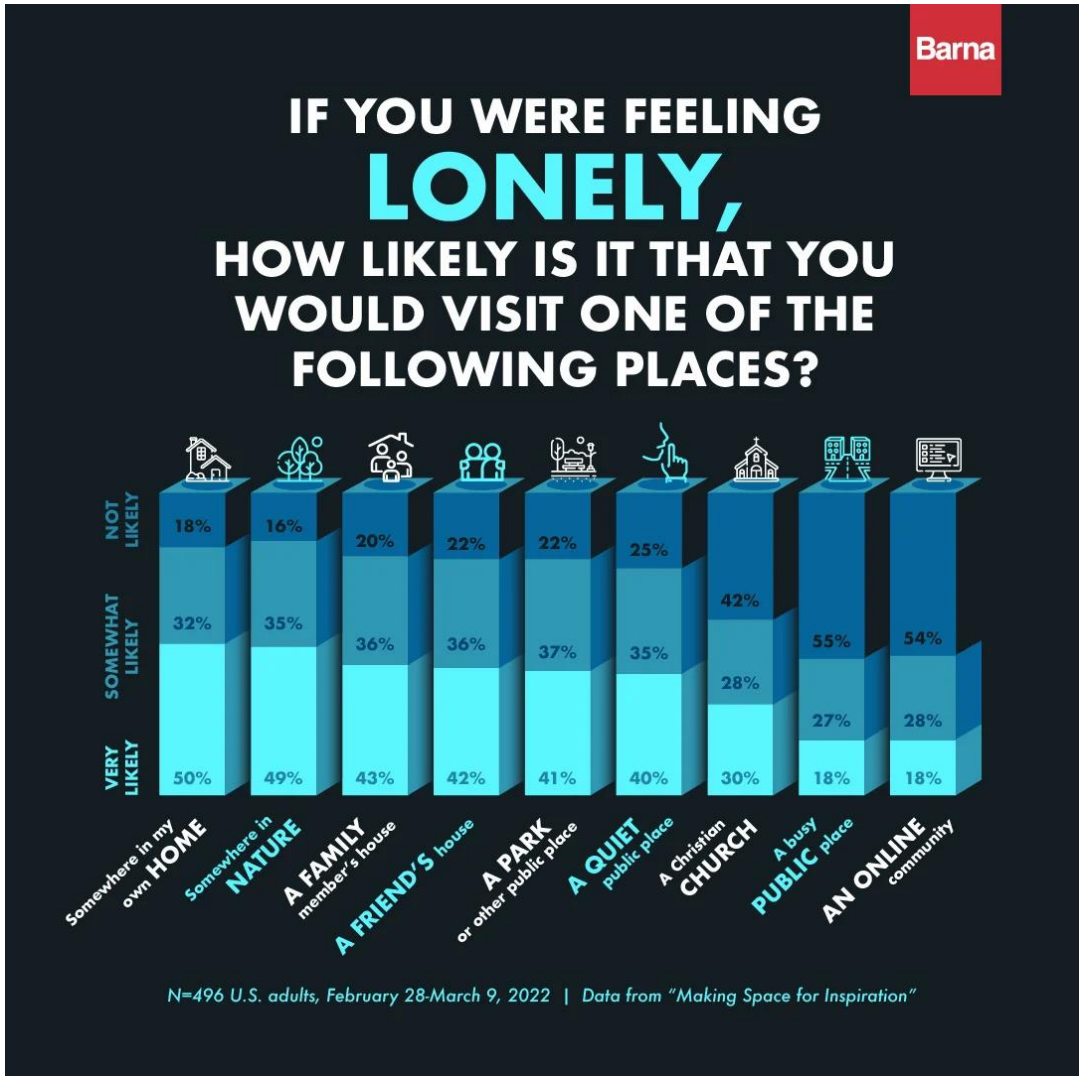
- "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." (Acts 2:42)
- "…there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. [26]If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.
  [27]Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." (1 Corinthians 12:25-27)
- "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." (2 Corinthians 13:14)
- "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin." (1 John 1:7)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4. The militant visible church is both an organism and an organization.
   <u>The church is an organism</u>.
   5) The body of Christ offers much more to meet one of human's most important needs: the need to belong, and to overcome one of the top emotional/social needs of people today: loneliness. Leaders: Take note.



Question for Church Leaders: What can we do in our congregation to help more people turn to the church proactively to head off, and during, such experiences?



Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- "For God is not a God of disorder* but of peace. As in all the congregations of the saints,…" (1 Corinthians 14:33)

  * < (Greek) ἀκαταστασία (*akatastasia*), disturbance, confusion, unrest, rebellion, insurrection, tumult, disorder

- "Let all things be done decently and in order." (1 Corinthians 14:40 KJV)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4. The militant visible church is both an organism and an organization.
   - <u>The church is an organization</u>.
     + God's people can serve more effectively working together in a coordinated and planned manner than they could as individuals.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- "Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that *they may be* one as we are one." (John 17:11)
- "There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." (Ephesians 4:4-5)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4. The militant invisible church is both an organism and an organization.
   a. The attributes (character traits) of the true church are characteristics primarily, but not solely, of the invisible church and help people distinguish between a true and a false church. Since 325 A.D. Christians have professed belief in these four Biblical attributes in the Nicene Creed.
      1) The church is ***one***, a unity. In John 17:11, the Greek verb, "*they may be*" (present tense, active voice) and Jesus' statement "as we" (he and the Father) indicate that the unity already exists, rather than something to accomplish; i.e., Jesus is praying for the Father to protect his people, the church, that they continue to be one rather than that that they become one. As the excellent Lutheran Bible scholar, R.C.H. Lenski says, Jesus "prays only for this, that the oneness already established may remain unbroken by the guardian care of the Father."

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- "Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one." (John 17:11)
- "There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." (Ephesians 4:4-5)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4. The militant invisible church is both an organism and an organization.
   a. The attributes (character traits) of the true church are characteristics primarily, but not solely, of the invisible church and help people distinguish between a true and a false church. Christians continue to profess belief in these four Biblical attributes cited in the Nicene Creed.
      1) The church is ***one***, a unity. Lenski continues, "How will [the oneness] be kept intact? By keeping the disciples 'in the name,' in the Word, in the utterances of Jesus (…v. 8). How may this oneness by endangered, how may a disciple drop out of it? By any teaching or doctrine contrary to the Word…The entire prayer has the one great burden that we may be preserved in oneness by complete adherence to the Word." Heresy hinders the preservation and growth in oneness.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

On the view that Jesus prays for the oneness which already exists among all believers by faith, instead of for the oneness that is to be the result of this faith in perfect adherence to the Word, see [John 17:11]. It is true, indeed, that even the smallest measure of faith joins us to God and to the mystical body of the church. But this is only the beginning. Our apprehension of the Word is to grow, the range and the inner power of our faith in that Word likewise. As this advances and is perfected, our oneness with God and with Christ and our oneness with each other becomes more and more what Jesus wants it to be. This is the burden of Jesus' prayer [John 17:17]. The mystical side must never blind us to the medium, the Word. We have no Christ and no God without the Word and no oneness among ourselves without the Word. On the other hand, the more we have of the Word in our hearts by faith and thus also ruling us in our lives, the more perfect is our oneness. Being spiritual and mystical, this unity is of necessity invisible and does not consist in any form of outward organization. How far, however, it is from being merely imaginary appears the moment we look at the Word. We are as much one with each other and with God and with Christ as we believe, teach, live, and confess all that is contained in the Word. Every deviation in doctrine, life, and practice from the Word mars and disrupts our oneness and hinders the fulfillment of Jesus' prayer. Those rend the church who deviate from any part of the Word, also those who demand things other than the Word demands. Those permit Jesus' prayer to be fulfilled in them who bring every thought and every act of theirs into subjection to the Word. "That they be one" means one in the Word; "that also they be in us" means in us through and by the Word. Thus Jesus prays.

R. C. H. Lenski, *Lenski New Testament Commentary* – The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

- The third ἵνα [that] introduces a purpose clause, “in order that the world may believe that thou didst commission me.” [John 17:21] “This is the fruit which is to follow from this oneness, namely that Christ’s Word is to break forth more and more and be accepted in the world as God’s Word, in which an almighty, divine, unconquerable power and the treasure of all grace and blessedness reside.” Luther. What stirs the world is not our faith but our faith arrayed as a unit behind the Word. This oneness of faith voicing the Word, adhering to it in every part, obeying its every precept, is bound to act powerfully upon the world. The greater our oneness in the Word, the greater our victories in the world. The more schism, heresy, and ignorance prevail, the less will our victories be.

Lenski New Testament Commentary – The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- "Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one." (John 17:11)
- "There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." (Ephesians 4:4-5)
- "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters." (Romans 14:1)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4. The militant invisible church is both an organism and an organization.
   a. The attributes (character traits) of the true church are characteristics primarily, but not solely, of the invisible church and help people distinguish between a true and a false church.
      1) The church is ***one***, a unity. The oneness of the true church must be remembered especially today with all its divisions. The true church includes the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), the Eastern Orthodox churches that split from the RCC in 1059, and the Protestant Churches, unregistered and registered, that hold to the Bible as their highest authority and whose authoritative doctrines, creeds, and official documents (including constitutions and by-laws) conform to God's Word. Even though we differ in some "disputable matters," (Romans 14:1ff.) we accept those others in these denominations as our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- "Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one." (John 17:11)
- "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters." (Romans 14:1)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4. The militant invisible church is both an organism and an organization.
   a. The attributes (character traits) of the true church are characteristics primarily, but not solely, of the invisible church and help people distinguish between a true and a false church.
      1) The church is ***one***, a unity. We therefore treat all true Christians, i.e., all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as their only Lord and Savior, e.g., holding to the texts such as Romans 10:9, John 3:16 and 14:6, as brothers and sisters in Christ. But concerning the "disputable differences" Paul mentions in Romans 14, this does not mean that we minimize the importance of our theological differences, e.g., by ignoring these differences. I like to say in such cases, "Well, we'll agree to disagree on [this matter], but let's continue the conversation."

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. [4]There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called— [5]one Lord, one faith, one baptism; [6]one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.
[7]But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.
[8]This is why it says: 'When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.'
[9](What does 'he ascended' mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? [10]He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) [11]It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, [12]to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up [13]until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.
[14]Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.
[15]Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. [16]From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." (Ephesians 4:3-16)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4. The militant invisible church is both an organism and an organization.
   a. <u>The attributes (character traits) of the true church</u> are characteristics primarily, but not solely, of the invisible church and help people distinguish between a true and a false church.
      1) The church is ***<u>one</u>***, a unity, but unity does not mean uniformity. Unity is to be maintained, but uniformity is not a goal: neither in the Bible nor in life. For the richness in diversity, see Ephesians 4:11. Diversity is to be valued, but not diversity that is in opposition to the Bible, God's Word.

Church Unity

Always keep in mind the church unity for which Jesus prayed so fervently, as recorded in John 17. We should avoid church divisions and splitting churches if at all possible. To do so, it is important to distinguish between these two very distinct matters and function accordingly.

1. "Disputable Matters" between and among true believers are allowable. (Romans 14:1ff.) Where true believers in Christ interpret the respective Bible texts differently, i.e., where two different interpretations are possible, then out of Christian love simply agree to disagree and maintain the unity of the church.
2. Heresy and apostacy **must not be allowed** in the church. (1 Corinthians 5:9)
   a. First, correct the misunderstanding of those who say, "The church should not judge others." That is a misreading of Jesus' statement in Matthew 7:1. Many places in the Bible, including Jesus himself later in the same chapter, indicate that there are times when we must make judgments pertaining to what is right and wrong, including for the sake of the other person(s). We are told to admonish one another. (Colossians 1:28; 3:16) For more on the Biblical teaching pertaining to judging, see my free e-book, *What Is God's Will Concerning Homosexuality? Help for Church Leaders and Others to Speak the Truth in Love*.
   b. Next, attempt to correct the heretical teaching and/or evil behavior. Speak with the church leaders and follow the guidelines in the Bible, together with the church's denominational policy, for bringing such people under church discipline.
   c. If the person(s) who have been disciplined do not change, the last step is excommunication, with the prayer and objective of restoring the one(s) sinning so seriously. (1 Corinthians 5:5)

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- "'Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: "Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy." (Leviticus 19:2)
- "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. [10]Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.
  [11]Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. [12]Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us." (1 Peter 2:9-12)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4. The militant invisible church is both an organism and an organization.
   a. <u>The attributes (character traits) of the true church</u> are characteristics primarily, but not solely, of the invisible church and the calling of God to the whole church militant, and they help people discern between a true and a false church.
      2) The church is ***<u>holy</u>***. The word holy means separate, uncommon, pure. It does <u>not</u> accommodate its teaching to conform to cultural norms. Young people especially are looking for authenticity. Here it is. Peter explains perfectly and clearly what holiness means for the church; it seems like he could have written this passage this morning! People want to see their leaders maintain their courage and not capitulate the teaching of God's Word. They do not respect theological cowardice.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19]Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,’” (Matthew 28:18-19)
- “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)
- “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.” (Revelation 7:9)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4. The militant invisible church is both an organism and an organization.
   a. The attributes (character traits) of the true church are characteristics primarily, but not solely, of the invisible church and help people distinguish between a true and a false church.
      3) The church is ***catholic***; it has a global perspective, presence, and purpose. In order to appease former Roman Catholics who have very strong negative feelings about that denomination, some congregations substitute the word “Christian” for “catholic” in the Nicene and Apostles’ Creeds. However, Christian is not a substitute for catholic, which means universal or global. We should rather teach the difference and help fellow believers to distinguish in their minds “catholic” from “Roman Catholic.” Such instruction may need to be done weekly for a while just prior to reciting the creed.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- "…from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. [16]All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness," (2 Timothy 3:15-16)
- "For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1:21)
- "Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. [16]He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. [17]Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position." (2 Peter 3:15-17)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4. The militant invisible church is both an organism and an organization.
   a. The attributes (character traits) of the true church are characteristics primarily, but not solely, of the invisible church and help people distinguish between a true and a false church.
      4) The church is ***apostolic***. The term addresses the question of the validity of the church's authority. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the authority of the church comes directly in a succession from the apostle Peter, whom they call the first pope. Protestant churches derive their authority directly from being committed to and following the Word of God that was written by the apostles who were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write the Scriptures recorded in the New Testament together with the Old Testament that was approved by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.” (1 John 4:1-3)
- “if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.” (1 Timothy 3:15)
- “Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.” (2 John 9)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4. The militant visible church is both an organism and an organization.
   b. <u>The marks (authenticating behaviors) of the true church</u> are primarily, but not solely, aspects of the visible church and help people discern between a true and a false church.
      1) ***True preaching and teaching of the Word of God***. The failure to make the church’s preaching and teaching congruent with God’s Word is the primary human cause of heresy, discord, and dishonoring God where churches wind up departing from being a true church.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.” (1 John 4:1-3)
- “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” (Romans 12:2)
- “Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.” (2 John 9)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4. The militant visible church is both an organism and an organization.
   b. <u>The marks (authenticating behaviors) of the true church</u> help people discern between a true and a false church.
      1) ***True preaching and teaching of the Word of God***. David French insightfully exposes another disastrous error of those who fail to understand and teach historic Christian theology, “the temptation to forsake Christian doctrine to seek the approval of a hostile culture. This is the old argument that the world would embrace the Church if only the Church were more like the world. It is embraced by much of Mainline Protestantism, and it’s the path to religious extinction. In the effort to appeal to the world, the Church becomes the world, and the logic for its distinct existence disappears. Thus the rapid decline of denomination after denomination that has decided to essentially merge with America’s secular culture.” In doing so, the church loses its holy mark—holy (*op cit*.) in both the OT and NT means set apart.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” (Matthew 28:19)
- “For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, [24]and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ [25]In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ [26]For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.
[27]Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. [28]A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. [29]For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. [30]That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.” (1 Corinthians 11:23-30)
- See also Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38-39,42.

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4. The militant visible church is both an organism and an organization.
   b. <u>The marks (authenticating behaviors) of the true church</u> are aspects primarily, but not solely, of the visible church and help people discern between a true and a false church.
      2) ***Right administration of the sacraments.***
      The number of the sacraments in most Protestant theology is two, baptism and the Lord’s Supper, based on the number of sacraments Christ specifically commanded to be celebrated. They always should be celebrated in accord with the Word of God, given only to believers and their children, and administered by lawful ministers of the Word and ordained church elders.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- "'Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt.'" (Leviticus 19:17)
- "'If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. [16]But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that "every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." [17]If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.
[18]'I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.'" (Matthew 18:15-18)
- "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another…." (Colossians 3:16)
- Cf. Proverbs 15:1; Luke 17:3; Galatians 6:1; 1 Timothy 5:20; 2 Timothy 3:16; James 5:19-20

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4. The militant visible church is both an organism and an organization.
   b. <u>The marks (authenticating behaviors) of the true church</u> are aspects primarily, but not solely, of the visible church and help people discern between a true and a false church.
      3) ***Faithful exercise of church discipline*** This mark of the church occurs individually and corporately. <u>Individually</u>, it occurs as we care for one another, speaking up when a brother or sister needs a word of admonition. We do it by "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15), or as David Augsburger says, "care-fronting," (contrasted with confronting in the pejorative sense). Admonishing is not what Jesus meant when he said, "Do not judge…" (Matthew 7:1), where he was talking about not being judgmental. For more on the difference between admonishing and judging, see section on judging in my free e-book, *What Is God's Will Concerning Homosexuality? Help for Church Leaders and Others To Speak the Truth in Love*, p. 316 ff.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. [2]And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? [3]Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. [4]When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, [5]hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord."
(1 Corinthians 5:1-5)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4. The militant visible church is both an organism and an organization.
   b. <u>The marks (authenticating behaviors) of the true church</u> are aspects primarily, but not solely, of the visible church and help people discern between a true and a false church.
      3) ***Faithful exercise of church discipline***
      <u>Corporately</u>, the church cares for its members when it collectively observes that a member has seriously departed from the teaching of God's Word in a way that is publicly noticed and whose behavior is harmful to him or herself, to others, that dishonors God, and is counterproductive to the church's mission of redemption in Christ Jesus. The church then disciplines that member in order to restore him or her and witness well for God in the world. When the church fails to discipline it fails the Lord and the accomplishment of his purposes, the church, and the sinner and his or her family.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. [2]And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? [3]Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. [4]When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, [5]hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord." (1 Corinthians 5:1-5)
- "Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord." (1 Corinthians 11:27. See also vss. 28-30.)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4. The militant visible church is both an organism and an organization.

   b. <u>The marks (authenticating behaviors) of the true church</u> are aspects primarily, but not solely, of the visible church and help people discern between a true and a false church.

      3) ***Faithful exercise of church discipline***

      <u>Corporately</u>, the church's caring discipline includes, but is not limited to the following:

      - Meeting with the pastor, pastoral counselor, or other authorized church leader(s).
      - Counseling leading to repentance.
      - Not permitting persons under church discipline, or continuing to commit unrepentant sin, to receive the elements of the Lord's Supper, until they repent and change their wrong ways. The church must not offer the sacrament to such unrepentant sinners, thereby affirming and rewarding their sinful disobedience to God; misleading them, the church and others; and enabling the continued sinful behavior, resulting in dangerous outcomes. (See 1 Corinthians 11:28-30.)

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. 32When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.” (1 Corinthians 11:31-32)
- “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father’s wife. 2And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? 3Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. 4When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, 5hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 5:1-5)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4. The militant visible church is both an organism and an organization.
   b. 3) <u>The marks (authenticating behaviors) of the true church</u> are aspects primarily, but not solely, of the visible church and help people discern between a true and a false church.
      a) The proper use of church discipline keeps us from coming under judgment.
      b) The marks as well as the attributes of the true church need to be taught more than they are in order to eliminate the confusion people have with all the “churches” from which to choose and with all the other religions of the world that that are being mentioned in the daily news.
      c) The world observes many who claim to be Christians but act contrary to what Jesus taught and did. This observation turns many away from the Lord and his church, the exact opposite of the Lord’s will. We must emphasize sanctification and, as needed, admonishment, all done speaking the truth in love. (Eph. 4:15)

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- "'Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable." (Leviticus 18:22)
- "A woman must not wear men's clothing, nor a man wear women's clothing, for the LORD your God detests anyone who does this." (Deuteronomy 22:5)
- "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. [2]Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." (Romans 12:1-2)
- "Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord." (1 Corinthians 11:27. See also vss. 28-30.)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4. The militant visible church is both an organism and an organization.
   b. <u>The marks (authenticating behaviors) of the true church</u> are aspects primarily, but not solely, of the visible church and help people discern between a true and a false church, now needed as much as ever previously.
      - We also must help people discern the Satanic and demonic activity in the world and that which is being done also in the visible church, when church leaders teach "political correctness" instead of Biblical correctness, and when many twist the Scripture, trying to make the Bible conform to their ideas as to what is right (e.g., homosexuality, "same-sex marriage," transgenderism, divorce, abortion), rather than conform their ideas to God's Word. Doing so, we must highlight the benefits of the historic systematic theology of the true church of Christ.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

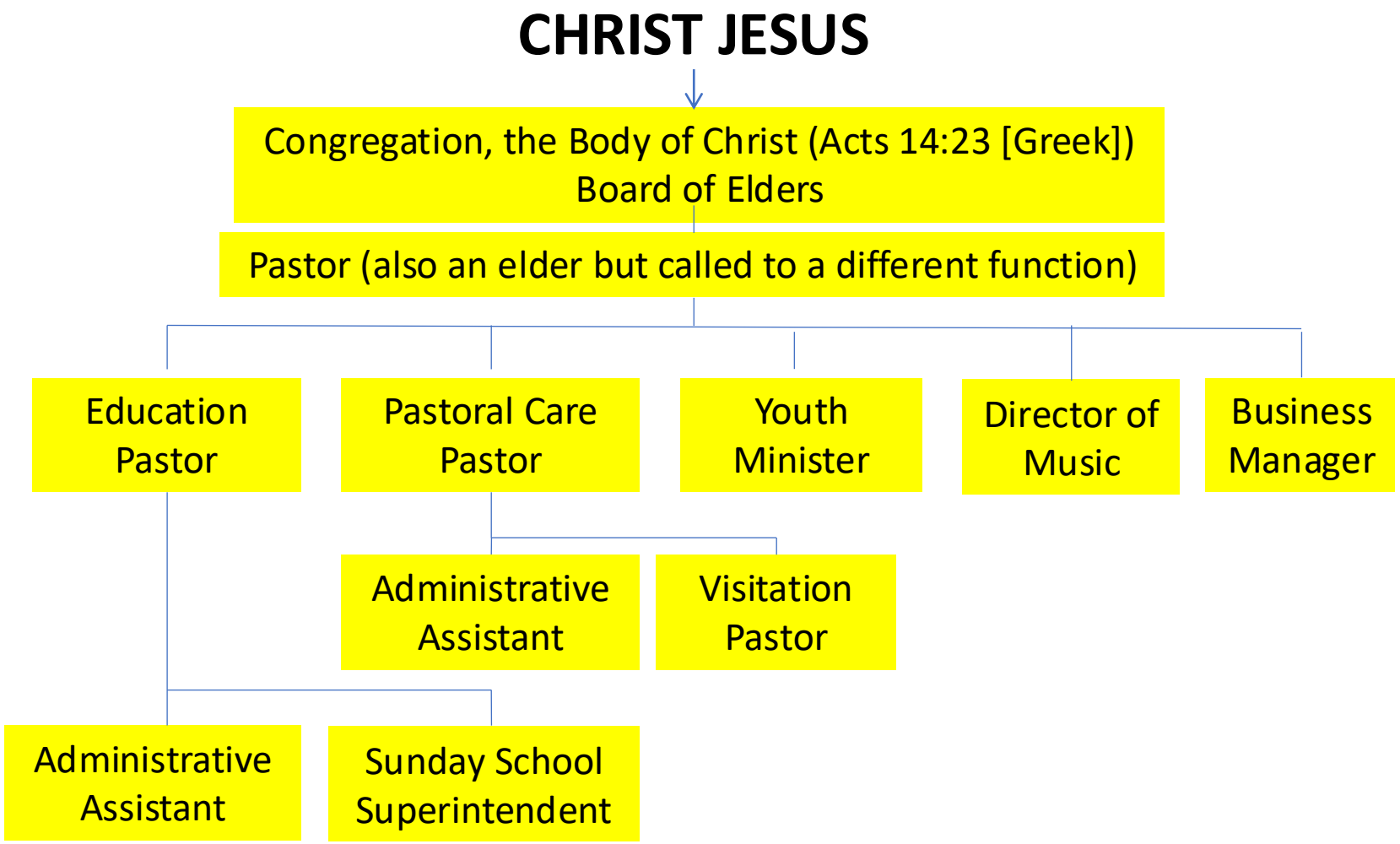
- “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.” (Acts 20:28)
- “The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.” (1 Timothy 5:17)
- “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.” (2 Timothy 2:2)
- “And God placed all things under his [Christ’s] feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, [23]which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.” (Ephesians 1:22-23)
- “‘just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’” (Matthew 20:28)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4. The militant visible church is both an organism and an organization.
   c. The government of the church refers to how the church organizes itself to function most efficiently and effectively including faithfully. ***Power must not be confused with authority and function, as illustrated in the following flow charts.***
      1) Christ is the head of the church. (Ephesians 1:22)
      2) Local churches have at least three offices.
         a) A Board of Elders is responsible for the spiritual well being of the church. (Acts 11:30)
         b) Teachers proclaim and explain God’s Word and help people understand its implications and applications to their lives. (Ephesians 4:11; 1 Timothy 5:17; 2 Timothy 2:2)
         c) Deacons are responsible primarily for the material well being of the church. (Acts 6:1-6; 1 Timothy 3:8) Deacons are sometimes included in the Board of Elders, i.e., some elders’ responsibilities are diaconal in nature. In addition, some churches have deaconesses.

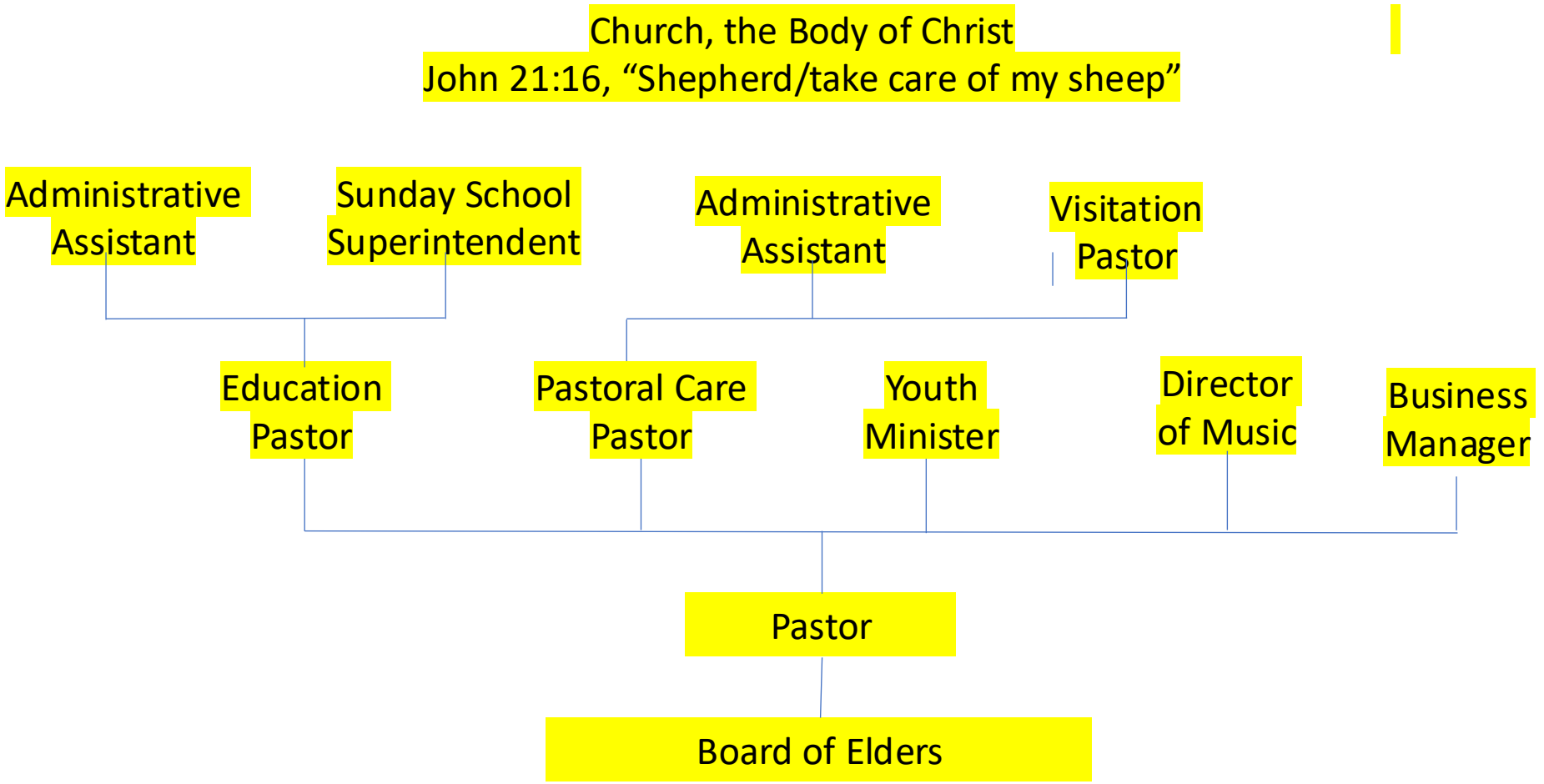
Authority Flow Chart of Church Leadership

Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:7,11; Acts 14:23



Functional Flow Chart of Church Leadership

1 Peter 5:3; According to Matthew 20:25-28, Christlike Servanthood, cf. vs. 26: ἔστω (*estō*, must be: imperative [command]; present tense [constantly])



Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.” (Acts 14:23)
- “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.” (Acts 20:28)
- “The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.” (1 Timothy 5:17)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4. The militant visible church is both an organism and an organization.

   c. The government of the church refers to how the church organizes itself to function most efficiently and effectively.

      3) Ecclesiastical assemblies consist of deliberative bodies in the local congregation and in regional, national, and in some denominations international judicatories.

         a) Local church government is run by the pastor(s) and elders (overseers), and in some denominations deacons acting together in consistory, as a board. (Acts 14:23)

         b) Major assemblies are regional, national, and in some denominations international deliberative bodies judicatories of a denomination.

         c) Most of the deliberations governing the local church are done by the board officers, but once or twice a year most congregations meet in a plenary session to vote on key issues such as to call a new pastor, approve recommendations from the boards, and the church budget.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

"In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."
This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. (Acts 6:1-6)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4. c. 3) c) One of the most important functions of the local assembly and the major assembly is to certify a person's claim to be called of God to be a church leader.
   1- God calls vertically, working in the heart and mind of a person, leading him or her to desire to serve him in church ministry.
   2- God also works horizontally, working in the hearts and minds of church leaders to confirm his call upon the individual who claims to have received a call from God.
   3- In an age of sin, this vetting is especially important to safeguard the church and God's work.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.” (1 Timothy 4:14)
- “[21]I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favoritism. [22]Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.” (1 Timothy 5:21-22)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.c.3)c)3-
In an age of sin, this vetting is especially important to safeguard the church and avoid corruption of God’s work.

a- The horizontal vetting of pastors should begin in the local congregation, which knows the needs they have.

b- The local congregation’s decision should be confirmed by the next highest church judicatory, with pastors and elders examining candidates and approving all pastoral appointments, offering wise Spirit-led corroboration and impartiality, without a hint of favoritism.

c- Laying on of hands is a strong ancient ceremony, symbolizing the confirmation and affirmation by the church of God’s direct and indirect call of the individual who is being appointed to that office in the church, the body of Christ.

Is God Calling You to Professional Ministry?

A Guide for Individuals and the Church to Confirm a Call from God to Ministry

(See the whole guide in the unabridged version of *Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology* on the Christian Theology page of my Website, From Acorn to Oak 12.)

God Calls Paul

As he [Paul] neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. [4]He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"
[5]"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.
[6]"Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."
[7]The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. [8]Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. [9]For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.
[10]In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered.
[11]The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. [12]In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."
[13]"Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. [14]And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."
[15]But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. [16]I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."
[17]Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord--Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here--has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." [18]Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, [19]and after taking some food, he regained his strength.
Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. [20]At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. [21]All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" [22]Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.
[23]After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him, [24]but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. [25]But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.
[26]When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. [27]But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. [28]So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. (Acts 9:1-28)

Reflect and Discuss: (1) How did God call Paul? (2) How did he confirm his call of Paul to the church?

Is God Calling You to Professional Ministry?

God's Word

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Application to the Church

1. Throughout the Bible God works 1-1 with the person he is calling, communicating with that person's mind and heart.

   a. God prepares those whom he calls to ministry by giving them spiritual gifts, knowledge, and experiences that they will draw on in ministry long before God calls them to the ministry he has for them.

   b. Frequently, but not always, God calls people to ministry who are not at all thinking about ministry as a career, and, when questioned even oppose the thought, as we see in the Bible.
      + From childhood I was periodically asked if I had considered becoming a minister, and throughout the years I said "No, not me," until an experience I had in college.

Is God Calling You to Professional Ministry?

God's Word

"[8][Elijah] traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. [9]There he went into a cave and spent the night.

And the word of the LORD came to him: 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'

[10]He replied, 'I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.'

[11]The LORD said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.'

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. [12]After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. [13]When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave." (1 Kings 19:8-13)

Application to the Church

1. Throughout the Bible God works 1-1 with the person he is calling, communicating with that person's mind and heart.

   c. In the 1-1 aspect of the call to ministry, how does God work in the person he is calling?

   Sometimes, but not always (and it seems to me rather rare), God calls someone dramatically (as with Saul/Paul). Usually it is more like the "still small voice" or "a gentle whisper" (1 Kings 19:12 NIV) that Elijah heard (though not necessarily at his calling) rather than the flashing light from heaven that Saul experienced.

   + Have any of you had a dramatic call like Paul's?
   + My own call was not so dramatic, and it took much time before I sensed that call.

Is God Calling You to Professional Ministry?

God's Word

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[5]"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.
[6]"Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."…
[8]Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. [9]For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.
[10]In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered.
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[15]But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. [16]I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."
[17]Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." [18]Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, [19]and after taking some food, he regained his strength. (Acts 9:3-19)

Application to the Church

2. At the same time, God works through others in the church. He calls leaders for his church vertically (1-1) and horizontally.
   a. He thus communicates through fellow believers in Christ who know us well and who see in us gifts we sometimes don't see in ourselves.
   b. He also communicates through fellow believers in Christ whom God has put in places of authority to discern and approve God's call of those who claim he has called them to ministry. This is a very important function in the church, whereby candidates for ministry are "vetted," i.e., evaluated for approval, in the process of verifying God's call of them and their gifts, education, and experience.

Is God Calling You to Professional Ministry?

God's Word

"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. [16]By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? [17]Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. [18]A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. [19]Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. [20]Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. [21]"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. [22]Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' [23]Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' (Matthew 7:15-23)

Application to the Church

2. At the same time, God works through others in the church. He calls leaders for his church vertically (1-1) and horizontally.

   b. He also communicates through fellow believers in Christ…to discern and approve God's call of those who claim he has called them to ministry.

      1) This process is based on the Bible's view of sin that we studied in the anthropology section. Some who claim to be called by God to ministry in the church are "wolves in sheep's clothes" (cf. Matthew 7:15), teach false doctrine, and have not been called by God.

      2) Others, more well-meaning but still wrong, think they've been called by God but have not.

Is God Calling You to Professional Ministry?

God's Word

- "As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer" (1 Timothy 1:3)
- "But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, [9]realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers [10]and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, [11]according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted." (1 Timothy 1:8-11 NASB)

Application to the Church

2. At the same time, God works through others in the church. He calls leaders for his church vertically (1-1) and horizontally.

   b. He also communicates through fellow believers in Christ…to discern and approve God's call of those who claim he has called them to ministry.

      3) The vetting process, when undertaken by leaders who remain true to God's Word and will, protects the church from leaders who would lead the church astray.

      4) The vetting process also helps the person who thinks he or she has been called by God to ministry. Affirmation gives encouragement, and being declined with love offers helpful guidance and redirection.

Is God Calling You to Professional Ministry?

God's Word

- "If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, [4]he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions [5]and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain." (1 Timothy 6:3-5 [*NOTE: 6:5 relates directly to, and exposes the deception of, the false so-called "prosperity gospel."*])
- "Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. [11]You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned." (Titus 3:10-11)

Application to the Church

2. At the same time, God works through others in the church. He calls leaders for his church vertically (1-1) and horizontally.

   b. He also communicates through fellow believers in Christ…to discern and approve God's call of those who claim he has called them to ministry.

      4) The vetting process also helps the person who thinks he or she has been called by God to ministry. Affirmation gives encouragement, and being declined with love offers helpful guidance and redirection.

         + If I think I'm a leader and called by God, but no one is following me, and the authorities in the church do not concur with me, then God has not called me to this ministry.

Is God Calling You to Professional Ministry?

God's Word

- "Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house." (Luke 10:7)
- "and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them." (Acts 18:3)
- "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. [18]For the Scripture says, 'Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,' and 'The worker deserves his wages.'" **(**1 Timothy 5:17-18)
- "But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ." (1 Corinthians 9:15)

Application to the Church

3. In the 1-1 process where God works with the person he is calling, he communicates with that person's mind and heart.
   a. God calls people to professional as well as volunteer ministry. Often the two types of ministry involve the same work but with significant distinctions. Let's consider first <u>professional</u> ministry.
      1) In professional ministry the worker is paid, since he or she is doing that work so extensively that no other time is available for earning one's living.
      2) Professional ministry is one's life work, and compensation is needed and expected, either as a salary, or per hour, the latter being usually for part-time work that involves a significant time commitment.

Is God Calling You to Professional Ministry?

God's Word

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- "But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ." (1 Corinthians 9:15)

Application to the Church

3. Throughout the Bible God works 1-1 with the person he is calling, communicating with that person's mind (knowledge) and heart (affect, desire, motivation—he doesn't force someone to serve him against his or her will.)
   a. God calls people to professional as well as volunteer ministry. Often the two types of ministry involve the same work but with significant distinctions.
      3) Those called to ministry as professionals typically have received formal education that further equips them with the knowledge and skills to accomplish the work in that aspect of ministry.
      4) With compensation comes much more accountability in a formal reporting structure (as illustrated in the Authority organizational chart above).

Is God Calling You to Professional Ministry?

God's Word

- "Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house." (Luke 10:7)
- "and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them." (Acts 18:3)
- "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. [18]For the Scripture says, 'Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,' and 'The worker deserves his wages.'" **(**1 Timothy 5:17-18)
- "But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ." (1 Corinthians 9:15)

Application to the Church

3. Throughout the Bible God works 1-1 with the person he is calling, communicating with that person's mind (knowledge) and heart (affect, desire, motivation—he doesn't force someone to serve him against his or her will.)
   a. God calls people to professional as well as volunteer ministry.
      5) For those professional ministers who seek ordination, they must be members in good standing of a local church.
      6) He works through others in the ongoing accountability that we need to keep in accord with his Word and his will, e.g., the local church board and denominational judicatories that also serve as gatekeepers in the selection process.

Is God Calling You to Professional Ministry?

God's Word

"This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me. [4]Don't we have the right to food and drink? [5]Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? [6]Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living? [7]Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk? [8]Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? [9]For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned? [10]Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us,… [11]If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you?...

[13]Don't you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? [14]In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel." (1 Corinthians 9:3-14)

Application to the Church

3. Throughout the Bible God works 1-1 with the person he is calling, communicating with that person's mind and heart.

   b. God calls people to professional as well as volunteer ministry. Often the two types of ministry involve the same work, but with the amount of time involved being a key distinction. Now let's look briefly at <u>volunteer</u> ministry.

      1) Volunteer ministry is not usually compensated, or if an honorarium is given for exceptional and extensive service, it is not intended to be sufficient for full salary.

      2) Volunteers serve in most types of ministry, but in limited ways, typically due to time constraints or to not having the education required for doing that ministry professionally.

Is God Calling You to Professional Ministry?

God's Word

10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord
called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered.
11 The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street
and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. 12 In
a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his
hands on him to restore his sight."
13 "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about
this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in
Jerusalem. 14 And he has come here with authority from the chief
priests to arrest all who call on your name."
15 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen
instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings
and before the people of Israel. 16 I will show him how much he
must suffer for my name."
17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his
hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who
appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent
me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."
18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he
could see again. He got up and was baptized, 19 and after taking
some food, he regained his strength. (Acts 9:10-19)

Application to the Church

3. Thus, God works through others in the church in selecting the leaders he gives his people. He calls leaders for his church vertically and horizontally.

   c. He works through others in the ongoing accountability that we need to keep in accord with his Word and his will.

      1) Regarding professional ministers, he does so in and through the local church board and also on the "higher" interchurch judicatories, of which local congregation is a part, that also serve as gatekeepers in the selection process.

Is God Calling You to Professional Ministry?

God's Word

"Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." 2This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. 3The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad. 4When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them." (Acts 15:1-4)

Application to the Church

3. Thus, God works through others in the church in selecting the leaders he gives his people. He calls leaders for his church vertically and horizontally.

   c. He works through others in the ongoing accountability that we need to keep in accord with his Word and his will.

      1) Regarding professional ministers, he does so in and through the local church board and also on the "higher" interchurch judicatories, of which local congregation is a part, that also serve as gatekeepers in the selection process.

      2) Volunteer accountability is to the professional minister in whose area of ministry the volunteer serves.

Is God Calling You to Professional Ministry?

God's Word

- "For God is not a God of disorder* but of peace. As in all the congregations of the saints,…" (1 Corinthians 14:33)

  * < Greek: ἀκαταστασία (*akatastasia*), disturbance, unrest, confusion, rebellion, insurrection, tumult, disorder

- "Let all things be done decently and in order." (1 Corinthians 14:40 KJV)

Application to the Church

3. Thus, God works through others in the church in selecting the leaders he gives his people. He calls leaders for his church vertically and horizontally.

   c. He works through others in the ongoing accountability that we need to keep in accord with his Word and his will.

      3) Thus, whether I am a professional or a volunteer minister, I cannot just go and do anything I want. If everyone did that (and many are trying) there would be disorganization that would dishonor God and the body of Christ, and it would be counterproductive to accomplishing the mission of the church.

Is God calling you to professional ministry?

Twelve Important Questions to Help You Discern Such a Call from God

If you think God may be calling you to professional ministry, consider these guidelines for discerning your call, assuming you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead. (Romans 10:9) You need to be a member of a Christian church in good and regular standing. There are at least 12 questions that are especially helpful in order to ascertain whether God may be calling you to ministry as a profession.

1. Do you sense an urge to consider or do ministry professionally? Is it a persistent interest? Could you be content doing anything else? If so, do that other work.
2. Have you prayed about this question? Do you pray regularly?
3. Have others in your home church, who know you well, asked you to consider becoming a minister (professionally)? Were these comments unsolicited? However, if no one ever says anything that you didn't prompt him or her to say, don't automatically conclude you shouldn't consider professional ministry.

Is God calling you to professional ministry?

Twelve Important Questions to Help You Discern Such a Call from God

4. What does your family say?
   a. If your parents and sibling(s) are believers in and followers of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, have you received encouragement from any of them as well as other close relatives who are Christians?
   b. VERY IMPORTANT: *If you are married, or if you have a serious relationship with someone that could lead to marriage*: How does he or she feel about being married to a professional minister?
      1) Even though churches today typically do not require a minister's spouse to be as involved in the ministry as in the past (e.g., many churches thinking they are "getting two for the price of one"), and are inclined to expect the spouse will be "involved to the extent of any other church member," nevertheless the minister's spouse is not an average church member from the point of view of the church. Further, most spouses understand this expectation, at least intuitively, and often have strong feelings about it. Many spouses of seminary students and ministers resent the situation they are and/or will be in, and these feelings negatively affect their relationship with their husband or wife.
      2) Further, a ministry with a dissatisfied spouse will negatively affect not only your personal relationship but other aspects of your life as well, including your work. This is why interviewers will always ask about how your spouse feels about your calling and work and why they will at some point want him or her to be included in the interview process as well.

Is God calling you to professional ministry?

Twelve Important Questions to Help You Discern Such a Call from God

4. What does your family say?
   b. VERY IMPORTANT: *If you are married, or if you have a serious relationship with someone that could lead to marriage*: How does he or she feel about being married to a professional minister?
      3) Thus, be careful to talk with your spouse, or "significant other" who could become your spouse, about your sense of calling to professional ministry. If he or she has strong negative feelings about your becoming a minister professionally that continue over time, reconsider whether you have a call to such ministry, or, if you are not yet married, whether this person should be your husband or wife. If necessary, obtain professional counseling with your spouse or significant other. As Campus Crusade for Christ executive Howard Ball wisely said, "If your spouse is not in favor of such a decision, it cannot be considered God's will [at least at this time]; God is not in the business of breaking up marriages."
5. Have friends in Christ, who know you well, suggested you consider the ministry? (Unsolicited, without your asking them first.)
6. Have you asked a church member, who is mature in Christ, what he or she thinks about you becoming a minister professionally? (This person should be someone who has the ego and other strength to say what you need to hear, including that you should not consider the ministry if that is true.) If you have asked such a person this question, what did he or she say?

Is God calling you to professional ministry?
Twelve Important Questions to Help You Discern Such a Call from God

7. Do you love to study God's Word and explain it to others?
8. Are you a self-starter?
9. Do you manage conflict well?
10. Do you have a servant's heart? (Matthew 20:26-28)
11. Are you a team player?
12. Are you a leader? Are any others following you? Do people ask you for your opinion?

Vocation: God Also Calls to Other Occupations

God calls people to other occupations as well as to those in and associated with the church. Obviously, these other occupations are much more numerous than those in the church, and they, too, are significant and important.

It is a life-transforming and shaping experience to realize and include in our worldview, that our daily work is serving God and contributing to his work in his world. This is what in historic Christian theology is called our vocation (< Latin, *vocare* = to call), our calling from God. ***No*** work a Christian does here on earth, whether as a homemaker (which is unsurpassed in importance), or an occupation for which one is paid, or volunteering, is unimportant; on the contrary, it is very important, for it is a service to God. When our work is done with that awareness, we have the strongest basis for finding meaning and joy in our work, even when some times are challenging, when we encounter various trials. At those times, we can say with the Apostle James, "I count it all joy." (James 1:2) This perspective is further reinforced when the apostle says several verses later, "…the brother [generic; sister is also included] of humble circumstances is to glory [Greek, καυχάομαι (*kauchaomai*) = boast (The verb is emphatic, indicated by being the first word in the sentence in Greek, and in the Imperative mood, a command.] in his high position." (NASB, v. 9) What a wonderful way to manage and overcome stress, disappointment, discouragement, and a host of other problems. At those times remember also such comforting words from God's Word as John 16:33 and 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. For added joy: memorize them! Be sure to read a portion of God's Word and pray every day.

Ecclesiology: What are some of the practical implications and applications of this doctrine?

The Doctrine of the Church

"'Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. 29I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. 31So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.
32'Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.'" (Acts 20:28-32)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4. The militant visible church is both an organism and an organization.
   c. <u>The government of the church</u>
      4) The power or authority of the church is from Christ the head of the church (Ephesians 5:23) through the Holy Spirit. (Acts 20:28)
         a) Teaching power: Berkhof explains it well: "The Word of God was given to the Church as a precious deposit of the truth, and the Church is commissioned to guard the truth, to hand it on faithfully from generation to generation, and to defend it against all forces of unbelief, 1 Tim. 1:3,4; II Tim. 1:13; Tit. 1:9-11." (301). See also Acts 20:28-32; 2 Timothy 3:16.

            + **<u>Reflect and Discuss</u>**: What contemporary applications to you see of this text?

            (Consider the attempts of many church leaders to distort the teaching of God's Word on homosexuality, trying to accommodate to cultural trends.)

Ecclesiology: What are some of the practical implications and applications of this doctrine?

Berkhof offers additional insights into the teaching power or authority, the expression I prefer, of the church.

“It has the further duty of preaching the Word for the conversion of sinners and for the edification of the saints, and to provide translations of it, [which now exist in audio form for those who can’t read] so that the work of preaching may be carried on among the nations of the world, Isa. 3:10, 11; II Cor. 5:20; 1 Tim. 4:13; II Tim. 2:15; 4:2; Tit. 2:1-10. Furthermore, it must draw up creeds and confessions, in which it formulates its faith, so that the world may know exactly what it believes. The need of such creeds is felt especially in times of defection, when many depart from the historic faith of the Church. Finally, it is also the duty of the Church to develop the truth by theological study. It owes this to the truth itself as a revelation of God, but also to the training of its future ministers. According to Scripture the Church is in duty bound to provide for and to supervise the training of successive generations of teachers and pastors, II Tim. 2:2.”

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Lewis Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine*, pp. 301-302.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

God's Word

- "Let all things be done decently and in order." (1 Corinthians 14:40 KJV)
- "I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another." (Romans 15:14)
- "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." (Colossians 3:16)
- "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood." (Acts 20:28)

See also John 21:15-17; 1 Peter 5:2.

Application to the Church

4. The militant visible church is both an organism and an organization.
   c. <u>The government of the church</u>
      4) The power/authority of the church is from Christ the head of the church (Ephesians 5:23) through the Holy Spirit. (Acts 20:28)
         b) The governing power/authority of the church contains two aspects. (1 Corinthians 14:33, 40)
            1- The governing authority of the church contains a <u>regulatory</u> power. Thus, as Berkhof writes, "the Church has the right to carry into effect the laws which Christ has ordained for the Church." (302)

Ecclesiology: What are some of the practical implications and applications of this doctrine?

Berkhof offers other observations into the regulatory aspect of the church's governing power or authority, the expression I prefer, of the church.

"All the members of the Church possess this power in a measure, Rom. 15:14; Col. 3:16; I Thess. 5:11, but it is vested in a special sense in the officers, John 21:15-17; Acts 20:28; I Pet. 5:2. This power also includes the right to draw up regulations for the proper application of the law, such as canons or Church Orders. These serve to *stipulate who can be recognized as members in good standing* [italics mine, an especially important regulatory need in our time], on what terms persons are permitted to bear office in the Church, how public worship should be conducted, and how discipline should be exercised. While these regulations must be based on general principles found in the Word of God, their details will always be dictated in part by considerations respecting the special needs, the well-being, and the edification of the Church."

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Lewis Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine*, pp. 302-303.

Is God Calling You to Professional Ministry?

God's Word

- "Let all things be done decently and in order." (1 Corinthians 14:40 KJV)
- "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. [2]And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?...[7]Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast--as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed….[13]God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you." (1 Corinthians 5:1,2,7,13)
- "Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him." (Titus 3:10)

Cf. Matthew 16:19; 18:18; John 20:23; 2 Corinthians 2:5-7; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15; 1 Timothy 1:20.

Application to the Church

4. The militant visible church is both an organism and an organization.
   c. <u>The government of the church</u>
      4) The power/authority of the church is from Christ the head of the church (Ephesians 5:23) through the Holy Spirit. (Acts 20:28)
         b) The governing power/authority of the church contains two aspects. (1 Corinthians 14:33, 40)
            2- The governing authority of the church contains a <u>judicial</u> power. Thus, Berkhof observes, "The Church is in duty bound to guard its holiness by the exercise of proper discipline." (303)

Ecclesiology: What are some of the practical implications and applications of this doctrine?

Berkhof offers further guidance for the church into the judicial aspect of its governing power or authority. This aspect of the church's government is neglected too much today.

"The purpose of discipline in the Church is twofold. In the first place it seeks to carry into effect the law of Christ concerning the admission and exclusion of members; and in the second place it aims at promoting the spiritual edification of the members of the Church by securing their obedience to the laws of Christ. Both of these aims are subservient to a higher end, the maintenance of the holiness of the Church of Jesus Christ. If there are diseased members, the Church will first of all seek to effect a cure, but if this proves impossible, it will put away the diseased member for the protection of the other members. While all the members of the Church are in duty bound to warn and admonish the wayward [*e.g., Leviticus 19:17b*], only the officers of the Church can apply Church censures. The latter can deal with private sins only when these are brought to their attention according to the rule given in Matt. 18:15-17, but are in duty bound to deal with public sins even when no formal accusation is brought.

Ecclesiology: What are some of the practical implications and applications of this doctrine?

The Doctrine of the Church

- "'Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood." (Acts 20:28-32)
- "Again Jesus said, 'Simon son of John, do you truly love me?' He answered, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.' Jesus said, 'Take care of my sheep.'" (John 21:16)
- "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; [3]not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock." (1 Peter 5:2-3)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4. The militant visible church is both an organism and an organization.
   c. <u>The government of the church</u>
      4) The power of the church is from Christ the head of the church (Ephesians 5:23) through the Holy Spirit. (Acts 20:28)
         c) Ministry of mercy (John 21:16; 1 Peter 5:2-3)

Ecclesiology: What are some of the practical implications and applications of this doctrine? Ministry of Mercy

The power or ministry of mercy in the church is exercised today largely, but not only, by the pastoral care ministers of the church. This ministry consists primarily of the pastor(s) and elders, but also by members of the church who have the gifts of the Spirit for such work (e.g., Romans 12:7-13; 1 Corinthians 12:9;28,30; 14:1,3-4,26,31; Ephesians 4:11), and by the body as a whole who love one another (e.g., 1 Corinthians 8:1; 13:7,8,13; John 14:21; Romans 13:9-10; Galatians 5:6; Ephesians 4:15; 5:28; Philippians 2:1; Colossians 3:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:8; Philemon 1:7; 1 Peter 4:8; 2 John 1:6).

What about the spiritual gifts, such as healing? Some Bible scholars and theologians, e.g., Berkhof, believe that what are called the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit, e.g., healing, the ability to perform miracles, and tongues, the special gifts God gave the apostles and some other early Christians, ceased with the end of God's special revelation, that was written down and became the Bible, at the close of the first century A. D. Other scholars, such as Peter Wagner, see the extraordinary gifts as still occurring. From my own study of the Bible and systematic theology, many conversations, and teaching for over half a century , I hold to a position somewhat between these two positions, but closer to the one espoused by Berkhof and others, where I observe some, but limited, evidence of the extraordinary gifts being employed by God today, albeit not frequently or widespread. Much talk has been made in the last century of the use of the extraordinary gifts, especially tongues speaking, but a considerable number of occurrences, purporting to be an expression of the gift, has been shown to be mistaken, as discussed above in the section on gifts of the Spirit in Soteriology.

Ecclesiology: What are some of the practical implications and applications of this doctrine? Ministry of Mercy

Since the first century A. D., the ministry of mercy, or pastoral care, of the church has focused on caring for the poor (see Matthew 26:11 and Mark 14:7, as an indication of one of the church's chief tasks after the Lord returned to heaven). See also the following texts that teach the importance of the church ministering to the needs of the poor: Acts 4:34; 6:1-6; 11:29; 20:35; Romans 16:1; 1 Corinthians 16:1,2; 2 Corinthians 9:1,6,7,12-14; Galatians 2:10; 6:10; Ephesians 4:28; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8-12; 5:10,16; James 1:27; 2:15,16; 1 John 3:17.

Ecclesiology: What are some of the practical implications and applications of this doctrine? Ministry of Mercy

New Testament Terms for Church Elders

All three of these terms refer to the same person but convey slightly different aspects of the leader's work. As the church grew, and more challenges arose requiring more time than volunteers could afford to spend, certain elders were paid.

- **ἐπισκοπή** (*episkopē*) = position or office as overseer, bishop (Acts 20:17,28; 1 Timothy 3:1); refers to the structural work to be done. (Emphasis on task)
- **πρεσβύτερος** (*presbuteros*) = elder (Acts 14:23; 20:17,28; 1 Timothy 5:17); refers to the dignity of the office and the leader holding it and pastoral care (James 5:14).
- **ποιμήν** (*poimēn*) = shepherd, pastor (Acts 20:17,28; Ephesians 4:11); refers primarily to the function of the leader as teacher and caregiver. (Emphasis on people)

Ecclesiology: What are some of the practical implications and applications of this doctrine? Ministry of Mercy

New Testament Term for Other Church Leaders/Ministers

- **διάκονος** (*diakonos*) = servant, deacon, minister
  + In Greek culture the *diakonos* was the servant of the king. The church used the term but shaped its meaning according to its service of the King of kings, Jesus Christ. (Matthew 20:28; Romans 15:25; 16:1; Acts 6:2; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:12)

Ecclesiology: What are some of the practical implications and applications of this doctrine? Ministry of Mercy

God's Word

- "Again Jesus said, 'Simon son of John, do you truly love me?' He answered, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.' Jesus said, 'Take care of [Shepherd (NASB)] my sheep.'" (John 21:16)
- "shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of* God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock." (1 Peter 5:2-3 NASB)

Meaning and Practical Application

- In the Bible the Pastoral Care Ministry of the church is called shepherding. (John 21:16 [*poimaine*, take care of]; 1 Peter 5:2 [*poimanate*, shepherd]) > **ποιμαίνω** (*poimainō*), shepherd, herd or tend sheep; rule, govern; care for, look after, nourish
- Be a model of a caring servant leader for the rest of the church. (1 Peter 5:3)

Ecclesiology: What are some of the practical implications and applications of this doctrine? Ministry of Mercy

The Doctrine of the Church

- "Again Jesus said, 'Simon son of John, do you truly love me?' He answered, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.' Jesus said, 'Take care of [Shepherd (NASB)] my sheep.'" (John 21:16)
- "shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of* God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock." (1 Peter 5:2-3 NASB)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

- The ministry of mercy functions informally in the church as organism as the believers in and followers of Christ act in caring ways to meet the needs of their fellow church members and others associated with the church.
- The ministry of mercy functions formally in the church as organization as pastors, elders, deacons, and others organize to meet people's needs on specific occasions and over time.
- For more specific information on the above caring occurs, see my PPT, "How to Be a Caring Christian Friend." The URL is www.fromacorntooak12.com.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: 18‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, 19to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.’ 20Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, 21and he began by saying to them, ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’” (Luke 4:17-21)
- “The LORD said to Moses, 2‘Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.’” (Leviticus 19:1-2)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4. The militant visible church is both an organism and an organization.
   d. Though the term, *means of grace*, is sometimes used in a general sense to refer to the many ways God’s people are blessed, the term is generally used in a more restricted and technical sense referring to the Word of God and the sacraments.
      1) The Word of God, when referring to the means of grace denotes the written Scripture, all of which points to Jesus Christ, who is also referred to the Word of God.
         a) The Holy Spirit uses the proclamation of the Word of God to produce the desired fruit in the lives of people and accomplish God’s purposes, contrary to the Rationalists and others who think that the Word is enough to effect change in people’s lives, and contrary to the antinomians who disregard the Law and hold that the inner working of the Spirit is enough.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,” (2 Timothy 3:16)
- “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. [18]I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.” (Matthew 5:17-18)
- “He replied, ‘Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.’” (Luke 11:28)
- “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— [9]not by works, so that no one can boast. [10]For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4. The militant visible church is both an organism and an organization.
   d. The term, means of grace, refers to the Word of God and the sacraments.
      1) The Word of God, when referring to the means of grace denotes the written Scripture, all of which points to and reveals Jesus Christ, his work and his will.
         b) Both parts of the Word of God, the Law and the Gospel, are means of grace. We must guard against seeing the Law and the Gospel as complete and polar opposites, as is too often heard today, especially by Christians rightly concerned to maintain the Biblical truth that salvation is only by faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9), but they ignore verse 10 and many other Old and New Testament texts which teach that God expects his people to do good works, including according to the moral laws.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,” (2 Timothy 3:16)
- “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. [18]I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.” (Matthew 5:17-18)
- “So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.” (Galatians 3:24)
- “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— [9]not by works, so that no one can boast. [10]For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4. The militant visible church is both an organism and an organization.
   d. The term, means of grace, refers to the Word of God and the sacraments.
      1) The Word of God, when referring to the means of grace denotes the written Scripture, all of which points to and reveals Jesus Christ, his work and his will. (Galatians 3:24)
         b) Both parts of the Word of God, the Law (sometimes used as a metonymy for the Old Testament) and the Gospel (metonymy for the New Testament), are means of grace.
            1- The Law, coming from God, is an expression of his character and his will.
            2- The promises of the Gospel are in the forefront of our thinking, but, as Berkhof reminds us, “this does not mean that there are no demands in connection with the gospel, nor that [we are]…free from the law. The law requires that we shall believe the gospel, and the gospel aims at the fulfillment of the law in our lives.” (308)

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.” (Romans 3:20)
- “So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.” (Galatians 3:24)
- “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.” (John 14:21)
- “Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.” (1 John 3:4)
- “This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome,” (1 John 5:3)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4. The militant visible church is both an organism and an organization.
   d. The term, means of grace, refers to the Word of God and the sacraments.
      1) The Word of God, when referring to the means of grace denotes the written Scripture, all of which points to and reveals Jesus Christ, his Word and his will.
         b) The <u>function</u> of the <u>Law</u> includes
            1- serving as a visual aid to convict people of their sin and need for God’s grace in Christ Jesus,
            2- restraining sin, and
            3- a rule of life for believers in and followers of Christ Jesus that promotes righteous and holy living in God’s people, which is a means of grace. *Motivation is the key: We obey the Law NOT to earn salvation BUT out of eternal gratitude to God for his free gift of our salvation in Christ, and for our own health.* (*A holy lifestyle is healthier*.)

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. [18]Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. [19]For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.” (Romans 5:17-19)
- “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.” (Romans 1:16)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4. The militant visible church is both an organism and an organization.
   d. The term, means of grace, refers to the Word of God and the sacraments.
      1) The Word of God, when referring to the means of grace denotes the written Scripture, all of which points to and reveals Jesus Christ, his Word and his will.
         c) The <u>function</u> of the <u>Gospel</u> includes relieving the burden of the Law for those still in the covenant of works and are unable to keep the Law. (Luke 11:46) The Law, e.g., the ceremonial sacrifices, points to the Gospel of Christ, who fulfills the whole Law. The present and future benefits of the Gospel are bestowed on us who repent and believe in Christ; we receive the joyful relief from the burden of having to earn salvation, and motivated by thanksgiving to the Lord we obey the moral aspects of the Law with great joy and eternal gratitude to and with God.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness," (2 Timothy 3:16)
- "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20]and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)
- "While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.'
  [27]Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you.'" (Matthew 26:26-27)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4. The militant visible church is both an organism and an organization.

   d. The term, means of grace, refers to the Word of God and the sacraments.

      2) We should discern the distinctive differences between the Word and the sacraments.

         a) The Word is the authority for, basis of, and explanation of the sacraments; the latter should not be administered without the Word. The Word goes out to the whole world, but the sacraments are properly administered only to members of the covenant of grace in Christ. Luther: "…without the Word of God the water is simply water, and no baptism. But with the water it is a baptism, a gracious water of life….[and quotes Titus 3:5-8]." (164)

         b) The word sacrament, not found in the Bible, comes from the Latin word, *sacramentum*, originally a sum of money deposited by two parties in a lawsuit. After the court decision, the winner's money would be returned; the loser's money was forfeited as a type of offering to the Roman gods. (Berkhof, 310)

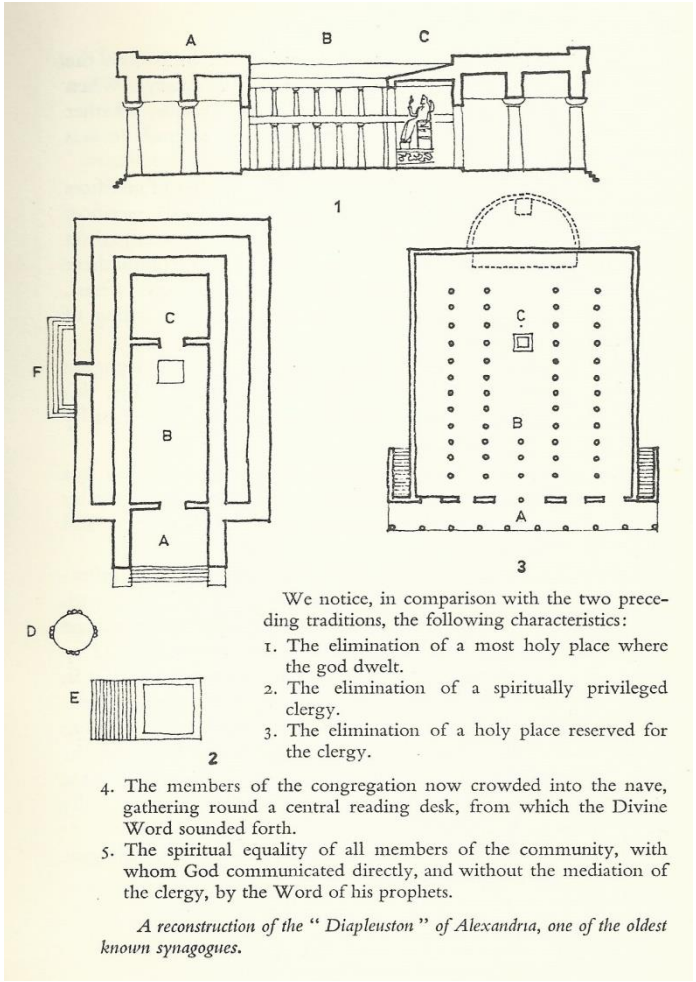
Ecclesiology: What does church architecture teach?

The Doctrine of the Church

- "Set up the tabernacle according to the plan shown you on the mountain. [31]"Make a curtain of blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen, with cherubim worked into it by a skilled craftsman. [32]Hang it with gold hooks on four posts of acacia wood overlaid with gold and standing on four silver bases. [33]Hang the curtain from the clasps and place the ark of the Testimony behind the curtain. The curtain will separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. [34]Put the atonement cover on the ark of the Testimony in the Most Holy Place. (Exodus 26:30-34)
- "And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. [51]At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split." (Matthew 27:50-51)
- "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, [20]where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." (Hebrews 6:19-20; 7:25-27; 10:14,17-25)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

Church Architecture Portrays Biblical Theology



We notice, in comparison with the two preceding traditions, the following characteristics:

1. The elimination of a most holy place where the god dwelt.
2. The elimination of a spiritually privileged clergy.
3. The elimination of a holy place reserved for the clergy.
4. The members of the congregation now crowded into the nave, gathering round a central reading desk, from which the Divine Word sounded forth.
5. The spiritual equality of all members of the community, with whom God communicated directly, and without the mediation of the clergy, by the Word of his prophets.

A reconstruction of the "Diapleuston" of Alexandria, one of the oldest known synagogues.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. 12For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring.” (Genesis 17:11-12)
- “And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them.” (Romans 4:11)
- “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” (Matthew 26:28)
- “And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” (Mark 1:4)
- “Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” (Romans 6:3)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2) Protestant Christians typically celebrate two Sacraments, the only two Jesus commanded.

c) The essence of each sacrament is seen theologically in the union of the sign and the reality signified. In what way this union occurs is viewed differently by theologians and the churches they represent and influence.

1- Physical—where the external is viewed as naturally including the internal (e.g., Roman Catholic)

2- Local—where the external and internal are seen as present in the same space (e.g., Lutheran)

3- Spiritual—where the grace of God is seen as internally accompanying the external element of the sacrament when it is received in faith. (e.g., Reformed)

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness," (2 Timothy 3:16)
- "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20]and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)
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- the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; [24]and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." [25]In the same way *He took* the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink *it,* in remembrance of Me." [26]For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. (1 Corinthians 11:23–26)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

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+ Two related occurrences likely link the term, sacrament, with the church: the military use of the word to indicate a soldier's solemn oath of obedience to his commander and the Vulgate (Latin) version of the Bible translation of the Greek word meaning mystery with the word sacrament. The early church viewed the sacraments as both pledges of obedience and having a mystical dimension. (Berkhof 311)
+ What is a sacrament? Berkhof defines it as "a holy ordinance instituted by Christ, in which by sensible signs the grace of God in Christ is represented, sealed, and applied to believers, and they in turn, express their faith and obedience to God." (311) A sacrament is often explained with this mnemonic device: it is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. 12For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring.” (Genesis 17:11-12)
- “And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them.” (Romans 4:11)
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Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2) Protestant Christians typically celebrate two Sacraments, the only two Jesus commanded.

d) Each of the sacraments contains one or more external elements (water in baptism; bread and wine and/or red grape juice in the Lord’s Supper). The external dimension of the sacrament signifies an internal reality that comes from Christ Jesus.

1- The sacraments were given to us by God, so we should not alter them in any way.

2- We should keep the Biblical words of institution in the celebration of the sacrament.

3- The symbols God gave must be kept to help people see the connection between the sign and the Biblical reality signified.

a- For example, we should not substitute white wine, as one church did so it would be easier to clean the carpet when someone spills the wine; the great amount of blood Jesus shed for us was not white!

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. [12]For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring.” (Genesis 17:11-12)
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Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2) Protestant Christians typically celebrate two Sacraments, the only two Jesus commanded.

d) The external dimension of the sacrament signifies an internal reality that comes from Christ Jesus.

3- The symbols God gave must be kept to help people see the connection between the sign and the Biblical reality signified.

a- We should <u>not</u> do as one church did and change the red wine to white wine, because the custodian complained that when people spilled the red wine, it was hard to get the stain out of the carpet. <u>Jesus did not bleed white blood</u>!

+ Reflect and Discuss: How should such a problem be resolved?

+ Possible solutions maintaining Biblical integrity: _____ (One would be to change the floor covering to a surface that cleans easily.)

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

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Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2) Protestant Christians typically celebrate two Sacraments, the only two Jesus commanded.

d) The external dimension of the sacrament signifies an internal reality that comes from Christ Jesus.

3- The symbols God gave must be kept to help people see the connection between the sign and the Biblical reality signified.

c- What should be done in this case? Some people struggle with alcoholism, and even the smell of the wine can give them a strong desire to drink too much alcohol again.

+ Reflect and Discuss: How should such a problem be resolved?

+ Possible solutions maintaining Biblical integrity: (Some congregations offer **red** grape juice in a specially designated part of the tray alongside the **red** wine glasses.)

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. 12For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring.” (Genesis 17:11-12)
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Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2) Protestant Christians typically celebrate two Sacraments, the only two Jesus commanded.

e) The internal reality that is pointed to by the external signs has several elements:

1- Membership in the covenant of grace (Genesis 17:11)

2- The righteousness of faith (Romans 4:11)

3- The forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:28)

4- Faith and repentance (Mark 1:4; 16:16)

5- Communion with Christ in his death and resurrection (Romans 6:3; Colossians 2:11-12)

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. 12For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring.” (Genesis 17:11-12)
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Meaning and Practical Benefits

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f) The essence of each sacrament is seen theologically in the union of the sign and the reality signified. In what way this union occurs is viewed differently by theologians and the churches they represent and influence.

1- As we consider each of the sacraments, we will look at some of the main theological differences that have emerged over the centuries and the rationale for the position here held.

2- As throughout this study of Essential Christianity, where differences among true Christians exist as to a Biblically permissible interpretation of God’s Word on such subjects as the sacraments, I find that continued discussion often leads to concurrence for the most part with an agreement to keep talking. This is not to minimize important doctrinal distinctives but to see them in the Biblical perspective. On some matters, we can agree to disagree, but to continue the conversation.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.” (Romans 14:19)
- “May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, 6so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” (Romans 15:5-7)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2) Protestant Christians celebrate two Sacraments, the only two Jesus commanded.

f) The essence of each sacrament is seen theologically in the union of the sign and the reality signified. In what way this union occurs is viewed differently by theologians and the churches they represent and influence.

3- Thus, as we continue the discussion, where differences continue among those segments (e.g., denominations) of the global church, that are faithful to God’s Word, where true believers in Christ agree on what is necessary for salvation (e.g., on John 3:16 and Romans 10:9), those differences can be seen as disputable matters (in an application of the basic principle Paul uses in Romans 14:1ff.) where, speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), the different interpretation of Bible texts informs and enriches rather than divides. (Cf. Romans 14:19; 15:5-6)

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- "And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them." (Romans 4:11)
- "Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed." (1 Corinthians 5:7)
- For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. [2]They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. [3]They all ate the same spiritual food [4]and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ." (1 Corinthians 10:1-4)
- "In him [Christ] you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, [12]having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead." (Colossians 2:11-12)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2) Protestant Christians typically celebrate two Sacraments, the only two Jesus commanded.

g) Protestant Christians believe that the sacraments are not absolutely necessary for salvation, but that they are necessary, because they are divinely commanded by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Therefore, since they have been instituted by the Lord's command, to willfully neglect their use is spiritually dangerous, as is all disobedience of God's Word and will. The spiritual danger includes a weakening of the disobedient person's soul and the lessening of his or her accomplishing the work the Lord has called him or her to do for the extension and nurture of his kingdom.

h) As we'll see, when we study the two sacraments in depth, the New Testament sacraments the Lord established are based on their Old Testament counterparts. There is no significant difference between the two sets of sacraments. (See the texts at the left.) In each case, the Old Testament forerunner points forward to Christ, while the New Testament sacraments both point back to Christ and the efficacy of his completed and all-sufficient sacrifice of redemption.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

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Meaning and Practical Benefits

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i) Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches celebrate seven sacraments

1- R.C.: Baptism, Eucharist (the Lord's Supper), confirmation, penance, orders, matrimony, and extreme unction.

2- E.O.: Baptism, Chrismation (confirmation, immediately following baptism, priest anointing the newly baptized Christian with "Holy Chrism," i.e., oil blessed by the bishop), The Eucharist (also immediately after baptism, the beginning of the new life nourished by the Eucharist), confession, holy unction (anointing of the sick), ordination, marriage.

j) Protestant churches typically observe just two sacraments in both the Old Testament (OT) and the New Testament (NT). The signs and seals of membership in the OT covenant were circumcision and the Passover meal, which were replaced by baptism and the Lord's Supper in the new covenant in the NT.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

"When Moses had proclaimed every commandment of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll and all the people. [20]He said, 'This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep.' [21]In the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies. [22]In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.
[23]It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. [24]For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. [25]Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. [26]Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. [27]Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, [28]so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him." (Hebrews 9:19-28)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2) Protestant Christians typically celebrate two Sacraments, the only two Jesus commanded.

j) Protestant churches typically observe just two sacraments in both the OT and the NT.

1- The two OT sacraments were bloody and linked with the sacrificial system that pointed ahead to Jesus Christ.

a- Circumcision, though practiced among Gentile nations as a health measure, was given significance in Israel as a sacrament of God's covenant of grace with Abraham, symbolizing the cutting away of sin.

b- Passover was instituted by God at the time of the Exodus with Moses. This sacrament symbolized and became a type of deliverance of God's people from the bondage of evil.

2- The two NT sacraments are unbloody, since Christ's perfect and all-sufficient sacrifice on the cross, no more shedding of blood is needed for the redemption of sins. We now consider the two NT sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper in detail.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19]Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20]and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)
- “Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? [4]We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.
[5]If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.” (Romans 6:3-5)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2- The two NT sacraments are unbloody, since Christ’s perfect and all-sufficient sacrifice on the cross, no more shedding of blood is needed for the redemption of sins.

a- Baptism

1] Christ commanded and thus instituted baptism after his resurrection, after he completed his atoning work, thus with his full and complete mediatorial authority and power. (Matthew 28:18)

a] He said baptism was to be done in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

b] Baptism is in, not into, as Lenski explains is the meaning in the Koine (common) Greek in which the NT was written.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20]and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20)
- “Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? [4]We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.
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Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2- The two NT sacraments are unbloody, since Christ’s perfect and all-sufficient sacrifice on the cross, no more shedding of blood is needed for the redemption of sins.

a- Baptism

1] Christ commanded and thus instituted baptism after his resurrection, after he completed his atoning work, thus with his full and complete mediatorial authority and power.

c] Baptism indicates that all who receive this sacrament have entered into a new relationship with God and now belong to him.

2] Before discussing the mode of baptism, we must consider what it is that baptism symbolizes.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols.” (Ezekiel 36:25)
- “Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’” (Acts 2:38)
- “‘And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.’” (Acts 22:16)
- “And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Corinthians 6:11)
- “he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,“ (Titus 3:5)
- “and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,” (1 Peter 3:21)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2- The two NT sacraments are unbloody, since Christ’s perfect and all-sufficient sacrifice on the cross, no more shedding of blood is needed for the redemption of sins.

a- Baptism

2] Before discussing the mode of baptism, we must consider what it is that baptism symbolizes.

+ When we examine the texts, we see that the essence of baptism, i.e., what it symbolizes is rebirth and purification. The only way we can belong to God, who is not only holy, but holy, holy, holy, is to be purified of all that separates us from him, from what contaminates us, our sin.

+ As Jesus explained to Nicodemus, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.” (John 3:5)

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “To purify them, do this: Sprinkle the water of cleansing on them; then have them shave their whole bodies and wash their clothes, and so purify themselves.” (Numbers 8:7)
- “[13]Whoever touches the dead body of anyone and fails to purify himself defiles the LORD's tabernacle. That person must be cut off from Israel. Because the water of cleansing has not been sprinkled on him, he is unclean; his uncleanness remains on him.…[18]Then a man who is ceremonially clean is to take some hyssop, dip it in the water and sprinkle the tent and all the furnishings and the people who were there. He must also sprinkle anyone who has touched a human bone or a grave or someone who has been killed or someone who has died a natural death. [19]The man who is clean is to sprinkle the unclean person on the third and seventh days, and on the seventh day he is to purify him. The person being cleansed must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and that evening he will be clean. [20]But if a person who is unclean does not purify himself, he must be cut off from the community, because he has defiled the sanctuary of the LORD. The water of cleansing has not been sprinkled on him, and he is unclean.” (Numbers 19:13,18-20)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-a- Baptism

3] The NT does not specify, much less prescribe, any mode of baptism as being required.

a] The Greek verb, Βαπτίζω (baptize), refers to all applications of water, including dipping, immersing, washing, sprinkling, cleansing.

b] Rites for cleansing, purification, by sprinkling were prescribed for God’s people in the Old Testament. In addition to the texts at the left, recall the Ezekiel 36:25 text previously cited.

c] Throughout its history, from the earliest times, the church has customarily practiced all three main modes of baptizing: sprinkling, pouring, and total immersion.

d] Thus, while Baptist Christians do no wrong by practicing immersion, they cannot fault other believers for using other modes.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols.” (Ezekiel 36:25)
- “‘And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.’” (Acts 22:16)
- “And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Corinthians 6:11)
- “he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,“ (Titus 3:5)
- “let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.” (Hebrews 10:22)
- “and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,” (1 Peter 3:21)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-a- Baptism

3] The NT does not specify or prescribe any mode of baptism as being required.

e] Immersion does carry with it the beautiful motif of life, death, and resurrection alluded to in the Romans 6:3-5 passage. Luther and Calvin both preferred immersion.

+ Note that immersion does not prohibit infant baptism. Eastern Orthodox churches practice infant baptism by immersion. The priest holds the baby’s nose and quickly lowers the baby into and out of the water.

f] Since Scripture specifies that the water is a symbol, and it is a symbol of rebirth, cleansing, purification, the mode, as Berkhof rightly concludes, “is immaterial, as long as the fundamental idea of purification finds expression in the rite. Jesus did not prescribe a particular mode…, [nor does the Bible].” (316)

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols.” (Ezekiel 36:25)
- “Jesus replied, ‘You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.’
[8]‘No,’ said Peter, ‘you shall never wash my feet.’
Jesus answered, ‘Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.’
[9]‘Then, Lord,’ Simon Peter replied, ‘not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!’
[10]Jesus answered, ‘A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.’ [11]For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.” (John 13:7-11)
- “and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,” (1 Peter 3:21)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-a- Baptism

3] The NT does not specify or prescribe any mode of baptism as being required.

g] The water symbolizes cleansing and rebirth, the new life in Christ regardless of the quantity used.

+ The rationale of a small amount sufficing to include the whole is also seen in Jesus’ explanation for washing only the disciples’ feet, as he responded to Peter in John 13:10.

+ That principle is also seen in Jesus’ death being sufficient to pay for the sins of everyone in the world and to redeem his creation.

+ One reason for the Bible’s silence on the mode of baptism is likely seen in the circumstances throughout church history where only a small amount of clean water has been available for one or more baptisms.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” (Mark 16:16)
- “Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. [39]The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.’
[40]With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, ‘Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.’ [41]Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.” (Acts 2:38-41)
- “and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,” (1 Peter 3:21)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-a- Baptism

4] Who may administrate the sacrament of baptism?

a] Since most Protestants believe that the sacraments should be administered with the proclamation of the Word of God and in a public gathering of believers in Christ, therefore they hold that baptism should be administered by a duly accredited minister and always in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

b] Roman Catholics, believing that baptism is necessary for salvation, except in rare instances, do allow for others to administer baptism, but only in the name of the triune God.

5] Who may receive baptism?

a] As we see in Acts 2:39 and elsewhere in the Bible, baptism is intended for believing adults and for their children.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20]and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20)
- “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” (Mark 16:16)
- “Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. [39]The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.’ [40]With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, ‘Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.’ [41]Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.” (Acts 2:38-41)

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Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-a- Baptism

5] Who may receive baptism?

a] As we see in Acts 2:39 and elsewhere in the Bible, baptism is intended for believing adults and for their children.

1} When Jesus gave the Great Commission, it was to adults to enable them to receive their mission assignment and to have the essentials of what to do.

2} As we see in the Biblical texts, a profession of faith, including repentance, precedes baptism for adults.

3} The sincerity of that faith is the responsibility of the believer; the church is not required to do extensive examination of the genuineness of a confession of faith. However, in matters of church discipline, as we’ve seen above, the church has the responsibility to act accordingly.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20]and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20)
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Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-a- Baptism

5] Who may receive baptism?

a] As we see in Acts 2:39 and elsewhere in the Bible, baptism is intended for believing adults and for their children.

4} Baptists argue that there are 12 examples of baptisms in the NT, all of which involve adults and a prior profession of faith.

R. C. Sproul finds that three of the 12 mention household baptism, so we have nine examples in the NT that are clearly referring only to adults. The dispute is about the other three, which is 25% of the recorded instances of baptism in the NT, and they include the term household (So and So and his household were baptized).

Pertaining to the nine NT adult baptisms, Sproul offers an insightful observation.

R. C. Sproul on Adult Profession of Faith Prior to Baptism

Pertaining to the nine NT adult baptisms, Sproul offers an insightful observation.

"But there is another dimension here that is very significant, and you almost never hear this one mentioned, and it's critical: Everyone of those examples that we can find in the New Testament of adults being baptized, who first are required to make a profession of faith and to repent, whatever we can tell about their status prior to their baptism, in the places where we can tell, every single one of them, the person is a pagan convert, a Gentile coming to the faith as a first generation believer. Now if the Baptist could show that one of those adults had been in the family of Christians when that person was an infant and is only now being baptized, then you have a case. Otherwise, all you're arguing for is what everybody already agrees on, namely that in the case of adults you have to repent and believe before you can receive the sign." [EDS comment: Notice in Acts 16:29-34, the Philippian jailer asks, "…what must I do to be saved?" Paul and Silas reply, "'Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved—you and your household.' Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house….then immediately he and all his family were baptized." Nothing is said about a preceding repentance.]

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

"'I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. 8The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.'

9Then God said to Abraham, 'As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. 10This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. 11You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. 12For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring. 13Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. 14Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.'" (Genesis 17:7-14)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-a- Baptism

5] Who may receive baptism?

b] Though no Bible verse overtly says to baptize infants, the authorization, indeed the command, for doing so is clearly presented in God's Word, but it was clearer to the early church that was connected so closely with the Old Testament, so we have to examine the Scriptures theologically in order to see the Biblical basis for God's command to include infants and other children.

1} Understanding God's covenant of grace with Abraham is the strongest Biblical basis for baptizing infants.

2} As Biblical scholars explain, the covenant is one of the major motifs that occurs throughout the Bible and that provides the basis for understanding the message of God's Word.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

"'I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. 8The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.'

9Then God said to Abraham, 'As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. 10This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. 11You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. 12For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring. 13Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. 14Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.'" (Genesis 17:7-14; see also Romans 4:11.)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-a- Baptism

5] Who may receive baptism?

b] We see the Biblical basis for baptizing infants beginning with God's covenant with Abraham.

3} Notice that this covenant is to be an everlasting covenant, as Jesus indicated in Matthew 5:17-18. However, the covenant promise in verse 8, pertaining to God's gift of Canaan, was given a condition of obedience (1 Kings 9:1-9 *et al*.), which Israel failed to keep, so they lost the land.

4} But the rest of this covenant promise remains everlasting and still intact. Nowhere in the Bible has God removed the promise that children could receive the sign and seal of the covenant.

5} That sign in the covenant with Abraham was circumcision, and God commanded it to be done when the baby was *eight days old*.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- 9Then God said to Abraham, ‘As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. 10This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. 11You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. 12For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised,’” (Genesis 17:7,9-12)
- “At a lodging place on the way, the LORD met [Moses] and was about to kill him. 25But Zipporah took a flint knife, cut off her son's foreskin and touched [Moses'] feet with it. ‘Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me,’ she said. 26So the LORD let him alone. (At that time she said ‘bridegroom of blood,’ referring to circumcision.)” (Exodus 4:24-26)
- “31‘The time is coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.
32It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,’ declares the LORD.” (Jeremiah 31:31-32)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-a- Baptism

5] Who may receive baptism?

b] We see the Biblical basis for baptizing infants beginning with God’s covenant with Abraham.

6} The incident that occurred when Moses was returning to Egypt from Midian (in Exodus 4), shows how seriously God views the disobedience of his command pertaining to circumcision and the disobedience of the leaders of his people. Moses was the leader of his people, and the one through whom God planned to work mighty acts in front of Pharaoh, and he was living in disobedience to God in failing to circumcise his son!

7} Later in the OT, God revealed through the prophet Jeremiah that the time was coming when he would make a new covenant with his people.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- "'I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.…[10]This is my covenant with you and your descendants…, the covenant you are to keep:…[11]…circumcision will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. [12]For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised,'" (Genesis 17:7- 12)
- "At a lodging place on the way, the LORD met [Moses] and was about to kill him. [25]But Zipporah took a flint knife, cut off her son's foreskin and touched [Moses'] feet with it. 'Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me,' she said. [26]So the LORD let him alone. (At that time she said 'bridegroom of blood,' referring to circumcision.)" (Exodus 4:24-26)
- "[31]'The time is coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.
[32]It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,' declares the LORD." (Jeremiah 31:31-32)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-a- Baptism

5] Who may receive baptism?

b] We see the Biblical basis for baptizing infants beginning with God's covenant with Abraham.

7} As discussed above, later in the OT, God revealed through the prophet Jeremiah that the time is coming when he would make ***a new covenant*** with his people. Remember, the word in the LXX, Jeremiah 31:31, καινός (*kainos*), means new in nature or quality (somewhat like renewed, ***having continuity but with a new dimension*** [which is why it would "not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers"]), not new in time or origin (not brand new) which is designated by another Greek word also translated new, νέος (*neos*). Recall that the covenant is an essential unity, for it is "an everlasting covenant." (Genesis 17:7)

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say ‘and to seeds,’ meaning many people, but ‘and to your seed,’ meaning one person, who is Christ.” (Galatians 3:16)
- “In the same way, after supper he [Jesus] took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new [καινός (*kainos*)] covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.’” (1 Corinthians 11:25)
- “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, [27]for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. [28]There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. [29]If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (Galatians 3:26-29)
- “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, [10]and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. [11]In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, [12]having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.” (Colossians 2:9-12)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-a- Baptism

5] Who may receive baptism?

b] We see the Biblical basis for baptizing infants beginning with God’s covenant with Abraham.

8} Jesus established the new (καινός [*kainos*]) covenant. The apostle Paul explained to the Galatians that since all who are in Christ are Abraham’s seed and members of this new (but not brand new) covenant, that is the “everlasting covenant” but new in its essence, all in Christ are thus heirs of the covenant promise to Abraham.

However, with God changing both sacraments, and with the other modifications he made, it truly was “not…like the covenant I made with their forefathers.” (Jeremiah 31:32)

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, [27]for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ… [29]If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:26-29)
- "…[10]and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. [11]In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature,…with the circumcision done by Christ, [12]having been buried with him in baptism…." (Colossians 2:9-12)
- "Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. [3]For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—" (Philippians 3:2-3)
- "…go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them…[20]and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you…." (Matthew 28:19-20)
- "…the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs [the high priests of the old covenant] as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises." (Hebrews 8:6)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-a- Baptism

5] Who may receive baptism?

b] We see the Biblical basis for baptizing infants beginning with God's covenant with Abraham.

9} Paul further reveals in his letter to the Colossians that baptism now replaces circumcision. (2:11-12)

10} In fact, in the new covenant it is wrong to be circumcised for religious reasons. (E.g., Philippians 3:2-3)

11} R. C. Sproul and other theologians point out that the NT, in particular the Book of Hebrews, emphasizes that new covenant is more not less inclusive than the old covenant. How, then, can the church prohibit infant children from receiving the sign and seal of the covenant, taking away from them the sign and seal that they have been receiving for thousands of years, thus making the new covenant more exclusive?!

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, [27]for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. [28]There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. [29]If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (Galatians 3:26-29)
- “In him [Christ] you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, [12]having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.” (Colossians 2:11-12)
- “Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. [39]The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.’” (Acts 2:38-39)
- “For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.” (1 Corinthians 7:14)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-a- Baptism

5] Who may receive baptism?

b] We see the Biblical basis for baptizing infants beginning with God’s covenant with Abraham.

12} Since God commanded that infants be given the privilege of bearing the sign of the covenant, and nowhere has God withdrawn this privilege, they now receive that privilege in baptism.

As Berkhof well explains, the “exclusion of children would require an unequivocal statement to that effect, but quite the contrary is found, Acts 2:39; Matt. 19:14; 1 Cor. 7:14.” (320) **Since Peter does not specify an age restriction, on what authority can we?** (Acts 2:39)

13} Furthermore, there is no explicit NT command or example in support of Baptists and others who require profession of faith prior to baptizing children.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

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14} We see in the NT other reasons confirming it is God’s will that infants be baptized. As Berkhof says, “The language of the New Testament is perfectly consistent with a continuation of the former state…Whole households were repeatedly baptized, and this is represented as something perfectly normal.” (321) Noted Swiss NT Bible scholar and theologian, Oscar Cullmann, maintains that the Greek word, οἶκος (*oikos,* meaning house, dwelling, home, habitation, household, family) not only can but must be understood as specifically referring to children, especially considering the size of first century Near East families.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “Carefully follow the terms of this covenant, so that you may prosper in everything you do. [10]All of you are standing today in the presence of the LORD your God--your leaders and chief men, your elders and officials, and all the other men of Israel, [11]together with your children and your wives, and the aliens living in your camps who chop your wood and carry your water. [12]You are standing here in order to enter into a covenant with the LORD your God, a covenant the LORD is making with you this day and sealing with an oath, [13]to confirm you this day as his people, that he may be your God as he promised you and as he swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” (Deuteronomy 29:9-13)
- “There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read to the whole assembly of Israel, including the women and children, and the aliens who lived among them.” (Joshua 8:35)
- “All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the LORD.” (2 Chronicles 20:13)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

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15} Furthermore, we also see that children were always present whenever the covenant was renewed. The Scriptures in the left column are only a few of the ones that can be cited.

16} Since infants receiving the sign and seal of the covenant is so clearly commanded throughout the whole OT, the burden of proof as to why infants in the covenant cannot receive the NT sign and seal of covenant membership is on those who withhold this privilege, and this matter is huge in the light of its importance to God. The silence of any NT mention of God taking away this privilege is deafening.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

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16} God nowhere in the OT or NT rescinds the command to give the covenant sign to infants. Sensing the need to offer something, churches that do not baptize infants typically offer some type of dedication. R. C. Sproul insightfully points out a significant theological problem with dedication: they give the children an OT sign where there is no NT provision for such a practice. Also, recall that dedication only occurs once in the OT and that not by any command from God; thus, it cannot hermeneutically be considered normative. Further, dedication is theologically very different from baptism.

Ecclesiology: Historical Argument for Infant Baptism

Those who argue against infant baptism like to point out that we don't read of infants being baptized until well into the second century A. D. However, a closer look shows that history is very supportive of the practice of infant baptism by the early church. For example, one of their leaders, the North African lawyer, Tertullian, called the "father of Latin theology," who questioned the practice, admitted it was universal throughout the church, not just in North Africa. Origen, an outstanding scholar of the Scriptures, writer, and preacher, who was martyred for the faith, said the tradition came from the apostles and is the custom of the church. With the early church literature clearly mentioning the controversies that existed at the time, such as heavy persecution and the fight against the influence of pagan theology, the silence of any controversy concerning giving the covenant sign to infants argues for rather than against the practice.

Theologian, R. C. Sproul adds a further point. "How likely is it given the abundance of written material that does survive from apostolic times to middle of the second century, that focuses on every serious controversy and theological debate in that hundred year period, isn't it strange that there is not a word of debate about infant baptism? The historical record seems to suggest that this thing spread to be the universal practice of the church and nobody said a peep about it. I think the reason for that is obvious. That at that time the New Testament Christian community was much more in tune with the historic continuity of the covenants. And that nobody even ever questioned the business of including the babies with the covenant sign. I think the argument from history is also in favor of infant baptism and not against it."

In his comment on Acts 2:38-39, R. C. H. Lenski states, "'Your children' allows no restriction as to age. How the Holy Spirit enters their hearts by baptism is his concern only, ours is to administer that baptism, in no wise doubting, otherwise we could not answer to God." (110)

Ecclesiology: Significant Differences between Baptism and Dedication

Infant Baptism

1. Based on covenant commands of God and is required in his Word.
2. Covenant commands continually recur in Bible.
3. Focus is on what God is doing in the life of the child.
4. Baptism a means of grace.
5. God's declaration that the child belongs to him and is affirmed as a member of his covenant and the body of Christ with all the accompanying blessings assured. Consider the implications.
6. Child shares in one of the two sacraments instituted by our Lord (and both in some church denominations).
7. Practice is well-grounded in God's Word.
8. Result: 1st class citizenship in God's kingdom.

Infant Dedication

1. No command of God and is optional for parents.
2. No Biblical basis: occurs only once in OT, where Hannah dedicates Samuel to the Lord's work in the tabernacle (1 Samuel 1:21ff.), which was voluntary and not by any command of God, thus not normative for others.
3. Focus is on what parents are committing to do in the life of the child.
4. Dedication not a means of grace.
5. No God-declared authoritative statement that the child belongs to him, or affirmation of being a member of his covenant, or assurance of his continued blessings. Consider the implications!
6. Child is deprived from sharing in even one of the two sacraments instituted by the Lord.
7. Commits a serious theological error: gives the child an OT sign where there is no NT provision for such a practice. Hermeneutical principles prohibit making Scriptural occurrences normative that take place only once and without a command to do so.
8. Result: lower class citizenship and inferior status, in God's kingdom.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new [καινός (*kainos*)] covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.’” (1 Corinthians 11:25)
- “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, [27]for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. [28]There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. [29]If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (Galatians 3:26-29)
- “When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, [14]saying, ‘I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.’ [15]And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.
[16]Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. [17]Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath.” (Hebrews 6:13-17)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-a- Baptism

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17} The writer to the Hebrews explains that this new covenant is unchangeable. (6:13-17)

18} One question I’ve often received from women and girls, is what about women and girls in the OT? Were they included in the covenant? The answer is yes they always were; however, in the culture of the Near East at that time, women and girls were included by their relationship with their husband/father head of the clan. In that patriarchal society, the women and girls participated in the benefits of the male head of the clan, which among God’s people included covenant membership.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

"To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. 13And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. 14For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.
15But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. 16How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?
17Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches."
(1 Corinthians 7:12-17)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

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19} To rightly interpret this text, view it in the light of the covenant. Also, remember what holy means and that it's the root of the word sanctification. (For more on both words, see the sections above: holy in Theology and sanctification in Soteriology.) Essentially, holy means set apart, uncommon, clean; sanctification is development in Christ-likeness that further equips God's covenant people to serve and please God and accomplish his purposes for them ever more effectively. A child needs at least one believing parent to be and develop in the covenant. Sproul explains more.

Ecclesiology: R. C. Sproul on the Implications of 1 Corinthians 7:12-17, and especially 7:14, for Baptizing Children

Now one thing is significant that's often overlooked here, and that is what seems to be communicated here, that is the same as the Old Testament, is that when the head of the family enters into a covenant, his entire family receives the benefit of that. So that covenant principle is reaffirmed in the household baptisms. Now that's very significant, particularly where we do have passages in the New Testament that do specifically refer to infants and their status in the covenant. And I'm thinking of 1 Corinthians where the apostle teaches (and as far as I'm concerned this is one of the most poignant reasons for infant baptism there is, and it's one you hardly ever hear talked about) where Paul says the unbelieving wife is sanctified by her believing husband, and the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife. [EDS Note: This text refers to marriages in which one of the partners has become a Christian since the wedding; it is not contradicting God's will elsewhere stated in his Word that Christians should not marry non-Christians. See the discussion above, especially pertaining to 1 Corinthians 7:39; 2 Corinthians 6:14; Nehemiah 10:30; and Deuteronomy 7:3-4,6.]

Now that throws a lot of people for a loop, because we normally use the term sanctified to refer to that which follows justification. It presupposes being in a state of grace or in a state of salvation…Now the message of the New Testament is clear, that salvation depends on faith. The important part of that text in 1 Corinthians is not about the unbelieving wife and the unbelieving husband but the rest of it. Why does Paul say that the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife, for what reason? Else would their children be unclean. But says the apostle now are they holy. Now you have three words in this text that are very significant and pregnant with meaning: sanctified, unclean, and holy. Now I ask you this: what would those terms mean to a first century Jew?

Ecclesiology: R. C. Sproul on the Implications of 1 Corinthians 7:12-17, and especially 7:14, for Baptizing Children

What does it mean to be sanctified? In our doctrinal language, we use the word sanctification to refer to the process of our being conformed to Christ after we are justified. But the primary meaning of sanctification in the Bible is to be set apart, to be consecrated, to be placed in a sacred, favorable position. Just as Israel was set apart from the nations, and the families of Jewish people were sanctified, that is they were set apart, and those who were not in that group of sanctified people, which was the covenant community, what were they called in the Old Testament? They were not the set apart ones. Here we have Paul using this word that specifically refers, not just to children in general, but to infants, and he says of this that infants are now, if there's just one believer, for the sake of the infants lest they not be considered unclean, because the infant is holy. There is a certain sense in which the unbelieving spouse is considered sanctified, not for the sake of the believing husband or the believing wife, but specifically for the sake of the infant. That the infant may not be considered unclean, and that the infant may be considered holy. What I submit to you is that that is covenant language par excellence. What I hear Paul saying there, and I could be wrong, but what I hear him saying in the light of the language of the Bible is that infants clearly belong in the new covenant, because the validity of the sacrament rests upon the integrity of the one who's sign it is, namely God….

The point I want to make is this: if two pagans come to this church and say baptize our babies, we're not allowed to do that. At least one of them, following 1 Corinthians, must make a profession of faith. Now suppose it's a bogus profession of faith. We can't read the heart. But if that person is a member of the church, makes a profession of faith, is a member in good standing living in accord with God's Word, and brings [his or her] child for baptism, we baptize [him or her].

Ecclesiology: R. C. Sproul on the Implications of 1 Corinthians 7:12-17, and especially 7:14, for Baptizing Children

Let's not lose sight of the critical point here: the covenant community status of the children of at least one believer. I don't think there is any doubt about that in the New Testament, that our children have covenant privilege. Now the whole question then becomes, if they are included in the covenant, why in the world would you not give them the sign of the covenant? The whole reason the sign of the covenant was given to infants in the Old Testament was because that was the sign that they were included in the covenant, and if God is going to stop including infants in the covenant community, you would think that that silence would suddenly become a screaming change.

We know that the Old Testament laws that have been abrogated, are abrogated by specific new teaching in the New Testament. To me the biggest problem the Baptist has is the silence of the New Testament. They want to argue that a principle that God initiates and institutes throughout the whole of Old Testament redemptive history suddenly is set apart in the New Testament, set aside and without a word. It's repealed and nothing is said about it. I submit to you that 1 Corinthians assumes the continuity of inclusion of infants. [EDS Note: This continuity is clearly indicated in such texts as Luke 22:20 (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:25; Jeremiah 31:31-35, [38:31 LXX]), by the original Greek word, καινός (*kainos*), which means new in nature or in quality, i.e., renewed; Jesus does not use the other main word for new, νέος (*neos*), which means new in time or in origin, i.e., brand new. In 22:20, Jesus' says, "This cup is the new (*kainos*) covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you," clearly linking his new covenant with the covenant with Abraham, which commanded that infants receive the covenant sign. (Genesis 17:12)]

Ecclesiology: R. C. Sproul's Comments on Baptism and Salvation

Baptism signifies cleansing from sin; the washing away of sin. Baptism signifies the things associated with the washing away of sin. It is a sign of my forgiveness. It's a sign of my justification, and it's a sign of my total cleansing, so it's a sign of my sanctification; it's a sign of glorification, in other words, everything that is involved in the process and the complete work of salvation is indicated by baptism; it's a sign of my salvation.

What about faith? Baptism is a sign of faith; whose faith? Historically, virtually every church believes that baptism is a sign of faith and of the participant's faith. One of the chief reasons why the Baptist church won't baptize infants is because they believe that baptism is a sign of faith and they say you shouldn't give the sign of faith until there is faith or at least a profession of faith. How can you give the sign of faith to somebody who is incapable of faith?

Other churches that practice infant baptism argue that the sign, and that to which the sign points, do not have to be present at one and the same time. In the case of Abraham, Abraham has faith and then has circumcision, which is a sign of his faith (among other things). Isaac gets circumcision and then later faith. So that which the sign signifies is not tied inseparably to the moment of the sign.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols.” (Ezekiel 36:25)
- “‘And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.’” (Acts 22:16)
- “And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Corinthians 6:11)
- “he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,“ (Titus 3:5)
- “let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.” (Hebrews 10:22)
- “and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,” (1 Peter 3:21)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-a- Baptism

6] What is the relationship between baptism and regeneration? The answer deals with how Scripture is interpreted concerning the connection between baptism and regeneration and renewal.

Passages such as Titus 3:5 indicate that through baptism the Lord working through the Holy Spirit regenerates and renovates us. But the question next arises, how and when does this rebirth and renewal occur? Here is where true believers differ, due to Scripture not specifying how and when and thus also to the profound mystery involved. Two main views prevail.

a] Some hold to an understanding called presumptive regeneration, which assumes that infants, and all others receiving baptism, are regenerated and should be considered as such unless they evidence in their lives that they are not regenerated.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “What does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’ [Genesis 15:6]…[10]Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! [11]And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. [12]And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.” (Romans 4:3, 10-12)
- “When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him.” (Genesis 21:4)
- “he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,“ (Titus 3:5)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-a- Baptism

6] What is the relationship between baptism and regeneration? The answer deals with how Scripture is interpreted concerning the connection between baptism and regeneration and renewal.

a] Some hold to an understanding called presumptive regeneration, which assumes that infants, and all others receiving baptism, are regenerated and should be considered as such unless they evidence in their lives that they are not regenerated.

b] Others maintain the practice of infant baptism on the basis of the manifold and comprehensive covenant promise of God, which includes the promise of regeneration. Then the question is when that saving faith occurs: before, during, or after baptism.

1} Abraham believed <u>before</u> receiving the covenant sign and seal.

2} Isaac believed <u>after</u> receiving the sign and seal of the covenant.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. 45The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. 46For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, ‘Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.’ 48So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.” (Acts 10:44-48)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-a- Baptism

6] What is the relationship between baptism and regeneration? The answer deals with how Scripture is interpreted concerning the connection between baptism and regeneration and renewal.

b] The question is when that faith occurs: before, during, or after baptism. Notice that in the book of Acts, the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit is revealed as coming <u>before</u>, <u>during</u>, *and* <u>after</u> the sacrament is administered.

1} Abraham believed <u>before</u> receiving the covenant sign and seal. Cf. the God-fearing Gentiles, who met in Cornelius’ house in Caesarea, who received the Holy Spirit <u>before</u> they were baptized. (Acts 10, especially 44-48)

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

"While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples [2]and asked them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?'

They answered, 'No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.'

[3]So Paul asked, 'Then what baptism did you receive?'

'John's baptism,' they replied.

[4]Paul said, 'John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.' [5]On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. [6]When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. [7]There were about twelve men in all." (Acts 19:1-7)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-a- Baptism

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1} Abraham believed <u>before</u> receiving the covenant sign and seal. Cf. the God-fearing Gentiles, who met in Cornelius' house in Caesarea, who received the Holy Spirit <u>before</u> they were baptized. (Acts 10:44-48)

2} The Spirit came <u>during</u> baptism at Ephesus. (Acts 19:1-7; note v. 6.)

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- "When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. [15]When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, [16]because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. [17]Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit." (Acts 8:14-17)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-a- Baptism

6] What is the relationship between baptism and regeneration? The answer deals with how Scripture is interpreted concerning the connection between baptism and regeneration and renewal.

b] The question is when that faith occurs: before, during, or after baptism. Notice that in the book of Acts, the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit is revealed as coming <u>before</u>, <u>during</u>, *and* <u>after</u> the sacrament is administered.

1} The God-fearing Gentiles, who met in Cornelius' house in Caesarea, received the Holy Spirit <u>before</u> baptism. (Acts 10:44ff.)

2} The Spirit came <u>during</u> baptism at Ephesus. (Acts 19:1-7)

3} The Holy Spirit came to believers in Samaria <u>after</u> they were baptized. (Acts 8:14-17) Cf. Isaac believing <u>after</u> receiving the sign and seal of the covenant.

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R. C. Sproul's Further Comments on Baptism and Salvation

Baptism is a sign of rebirth, regeneration.

Jesus: that which is born of the flesh (sarx; not soma, body) is flesh (not spirit/spiritual). When we are born we are alive physically (bios) but are dead spiritually. We are in a state of spiritual death.

The person who is of the flesh is by nature at enmity with God. He or she has a disinclination toward God. The pagan, the unbeliever, is never in a neutral state with respect to God. In his heart he is anti-God. He is a fugitive from God. He rejects God; he refuses to have God in his thinking; and his natural disposition is opposition toward the living God. Churches think about regeneration differently but all agree that the essential point is that God works internally on the soul of a person and changes the disposition of the human heart. Regeneration has always been seen as an antidote to original sin (the degree of our fallen, corrupt, nature that we inherit from Adam and Eve.)

Baptism symbolizes the new birth; it is a sign of spiritual resurrection [and of the physical resurrection to come], of spiritual renewal, of being brought from spiritual death to spiritual life. [EDS Note: Some denominations, e.g., Lutherans, interpret the Scripture, e.g., Titus 3:5, as indicating baptism is not only a symbol but an instrument through which the Holy Spirit provides regeneration.]

Baptism also signifies, is the outward sign of, the new covenant.

Baptism signifies cleansing from sin; the washing away of sin. Baptism signifies the things associated with the washing away of sin. It is a sign of my forgiveness. It's a sign of my justification, and it's a sign of my total cleansing, so it's a sign of my sanctification; it's a sign of glorification, in other words, everything that is involved in the process and the complete work of salvation is indicated by baptism; it's a sign of my salvation.

R. C. Sproul's Further Comments on Baptism and Salvation

[Sproul quote of church history professor, Dr. John] Gerstner: "In your justification, when you put your faith in Christ, truly trust him for your regeneration, in the sight of God all that Christ has and all that Christ is becomes yours." In this identification in the sight of God that takes place in our salvation, all that Christ is and all that Christ has becomes yours. When God looks at you, he sees the merit of Christ. My salvation rests not on my performance but on his.

We are redeemed not only by the death of Christ, but it is by the life of Christ by which he fulfills every jot and tittle of the law and wins the blessing that is promised to the people of the old covenant to anyone who keeps the Law. ***Jesus keeps the Law for me and receives the reward for me.***

He becomes an heir of God, ***but then in my adoption*** I become a joint heir, and we look to that day when the Father says to us, "Come my beloved children inherit the kingdom the Father has prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Why am I going to inherit a kingdom? The real heir to the Kingdom is Jesus. But ***now I am in Christ, and Christ is in me, and this is not just a symbol. There is an authentic identification here, and my identity with Christ is signified by baptism. My baptism says to the world I belong to Christ, and he belongs to me.*** [*Emphasis is mine* (*EDS*)] All that is his is mine, his merit, his inheritance, and so on. (This doesn't mean I become divine; we're talking here in terms of his Savior role.) The symbol here is burial and resurrection. We are buried with Christ in baptism. He has a baptism with which we can't be baptized, but my baptism signifies my identity with him in his humiliation in his suffering in his affliction and in his Resurrection.

R. C. Sproul's Further Comments on Baptism and Salvation

Virtually all the churches historically that practice dipping and sprinkling took the position that the preferential mode of baptism is through immersion but that it is not required for it to be authentic. Even Calvin would say it is better to immerse than to sprinkle if you have the opportunity. The point is what it signifies: my baptism signifies my identity with the death and humiliation of Christ. The apostle Paul gives us these marvelous, marvelous, promises that we will participate in the glory that the Father has bestowed on Christ; we're going to go to heaven; we're going to be kings and priests; we're going to inherit the kingdom that the Father has prepared for his beloved, for his Son, God is going to include you in his exaltation of his Son. Those are the wonderful promises that the apostle makes to us, but every time he does it, he warns us that unless we are prepared and willing to participate in the humiliation of Christ and in the afflictions of Christ, his inheritance will not belong to us.

I hear complaints from people in the church all the time, "How can God allow Christians to suffer the way they do?" I hear preachers stand up and say, "We're not supposed to suffer as Christians." And I want to get up on a soap box and say, "Get out of here you false prophet! You're speaking with a forked tongue. Not only are we allowed to suffer, it's our vocation as Christians. [Another rejection of the false so-called prosperity gospel. Recall our discussion in the Theology (Doctrine of God) section on the theodicy question.] Our Savior was a suffering Savior; a man of sorrows acquainted with grief who endured manifold affliction. How many times…does the New Testament tell you that your baptism identifies you with that; you participate with that if need be for a season. Peter tells us, "Think it not strange when afflictions come into your life."

R. C. Sproul's Further Comments on Baptism and Salvation

The thing that is strange is when we are enjoying relative freedom from afflictions in this world. The time where afflictions are over, and the time of exaltation, is when we pass the veil. Don't weep for me at my funeral. Jesus said, "Don't weep for me but for yourselves and for your children." Right now I'm identified with affliction.

Here's the hard part. If I have to suffer in this world for righteousness; if somebody slanders me because of my stance for the Gospel, or somebody hurts me because I'm a Christian, that's one kind of pain; that's one kind of suffering. To wake up at night with a bleeding ulcer, is a different kind of suffering, because when you're suffering in the direct visible warfare with the pagan forces that are against you, it's easier to bear it when you know you're bearing it for the Gospel's sake. When you wake up with excruciating pain and they rush you to the emergency room of the hospital, how in the world does that relate to the Kingdom of God? What's the difference? Whether I'm assaulted by a human being's animosity to the things of God or if I'm afflicted by the forces of sin and darkness through bodily disease (don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that God has nothing to do with suffering) it may be the Lord himself who sends this affliction of suffering into my life [EDS: or allows it to occur], but that affliction, that disease, is part of the fallen world; it's part of the kingdom of this world, and to bear that affliction is the same testimony to the redemption that is ours in Christ as to bear the affliction of the persecutions of the emperor Nero. Do you see what I'm saying? Our spiritual response to disease should be no different than our spiritual response to persecution.

…in the history of redemption Christ, who performs the perfect sacrifice once and for all, nevertheless calls his church to bear witness to his suffering until he returns, and there is still a measure of suffering that in the history of redemption must take place….

R. C. Sproul's Further Comments on Baptism and Salvation

…God uses nonverbal things to reinforce and emphasize the verbal promises he makes. How easy it is to go through the outward sign and miss the significance either due to lack of understanding or a lack in one's heart. ***We not only have to understand what the sign means but to then embrace its significance with our heart if we are to please God.*** (Baptism, Part 1, Tape 6) [*Emphasis mine* (*EDS*)]

[EDS observation: Consider the implications of this important theological reality for our own maturing as Christ's disciples and for our parenting and teaching in other contexts. Recall here the insights from the finest of human learning research on the three domains of mental processing and acting on input from outside ourselves: cognition, emotion, and action, where all three are interconnected and affect development and decision-making. For further information on this subject, see the Christian Education page of my Website at www.fromacorntooak12.com.]

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. [2]Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. [3]Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. [4]There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—[5]one Lord, one faith, one baptism; [6]one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” (Ephesians 4:1-6)
- “And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Corinthians 6:11)
- “he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,“ (Titus 3:5)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-a- Baptism

7] What do we say to people who were baptized as infants, who want to be rebaptized as adults?

a] Ephesians 4:5 indicates there is now one baptism that unites all in Christ Jesus. (See also John 3:5-6; Romans 6:3-4; Acts 19:4-6) All have been baptized into Christ, not into one or more church leaders, e.g., Paul (1 Corinthians 1:13).

b] The Greek aorist (past) tense of key verbs in texts pertaining to baptism (e.g., 1 Corinthians 6:11 and Titus 3:5) inclines me to think that another application of “one baptism” in Ephesians 4:5 can mean it is not intended to be repeated. Once is sufficient.

c] The same aorist tense of related verbs in 1 Corinthians 6:11, made holy and justified, which don’t need to be repeated, along with washed, suggest the same about baptism.

R. C. Sproul Explains Further Why No Rebaptism

Many Protestants…say, “Well if baptism doesn’t automatically convey the grace, why do it? What’s the big deal? The big deal is the promise of God, whose promise for all who believe all these marvelous blessings is signified by a sign that our Lord instituted and commanded to be taken to all nations. I know…that I am saved and when Satan comes to assault me I can look at the Devil and say, “I am baptized.” That is, I can show him the sign of the promise of God. When I say that, what I am saying is this, “I trust in this promise, Satan, and it’s God’s promise, and if it’s God’s promise, though my faith is fallible, my faith is fragile, the promise of God cannot be broken.” And so I hold on to the pledge of that promise that is mine in baptism. This is the point the church hasn’t gotten.

People come to me all the time and say, “I was baptized as an infant, and all these things were symbolized to me, I was unaware of it, I didn’t know anything about it, and now I’ve come to faith, and would you baptize me now when it means something to me?” And I say, “Not on your life!” “Why?” “I don’t want to commit blasphemy!” “What?!” “Look, I know that nobody ever came up to me thinking it this way. But I say, here’s what you’re doing: when you were baptized the first time, you received an outward sign of the promise of God for all of these things. And now that you’ve come to faith, did God keep his promise? Are you now born again?” “Yes.” “Are you now a member of the new covenant?” “Yes.” “Do you now enjoy in the sight of God a personal identification with Jesus Christ?” “Yes.” “Do you now participate in the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus Christ?” “Yes.” And we go through all these things. Then I say, “What part of that promise has God failed to keep?” “Well, no part.” “OK, so then 25 years ago, when it meant nothing to you, you were given the sign of a promise of God. Now God in time and space fulfills every aspect of that promise to you, and you want me to say to God, ‘Run by me that again?! I’m not sure you meant it?!’” “No.” Do you hear what I’m saying? Nobody intends that when they ask to be rebaptized; they’re looking for a spiritual experience. I understand that. And I explain that to them. But I want you to understand why I will not do it. I rather want to take this opportunity for you to understand how blessed you are that that sign that you had outwardly has now been realized inwardly and now you are living proof of the trustworthiness of the promises of God.”

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- Even the baptism of John had a causative effect. “(All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. [30]But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.)” (Luke 7:29-30)
- “he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,“ (Titus 3:5)
- “let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.” (Hebrews 10:22)
- “and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,” (1 Peter 3:21)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-a- Baptism

8] Passages such as Titus 3:5 indicate that through baptism the Lord working through the Holy Spirit regenerates and renovates us. But the question next arises, how and when does this rebirth and renewal occur?

a] Here is where true believers differ as to the interpretation of the Bible’s related texts. We can say what follows.

b] From our study of the texts in the left column, and the other preceding passages, baptism is much more than just a symbol, and the regeneration that it symbolizes does not occur automatically; the Holy Spirit is the main agent, and we saw in the Bible passages, he comes before, during, and after baptism. (Cf. Acts 10:44; 19:1-7; 8:14-17.)

c] The Holy Spirit makes baptism and all it signifies a very powerful means of grace.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the LORD.
[9]‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.
[10]As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,
[11]so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.’” (Isaiah 55:8-11)
- “he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,“ (Titus 3:5)
- “and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,” (1 Peter 3:21)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-a- Baptism

8] Passages such as Titus 3:5 indicate that through baptism the Lord working through the Holy Spirit regenerates and renovates us. But the question next arises, how and when does this rebirth and renewal occur?

d] While there is much we can learn and know from God’s Word about baptism, as we’ve seen in this study, much about this marvelous sacrament remains a mystery, which makes perfect sense, for the limited cannot comprehend the unlimited; neither can the finite comprehend the infinite. (Cf. Isaiah 55:8-9)

e] As with other “disputable matters” (cf. Romans 14), we need to “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15) with, and learn from, other true believers in and followers of Christ, continuing to discuss the Scriptures, pray together, and graciously accept one another and the practice of their long-standing tradition.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.” (1 Corinthians 5:7)
- For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. 2They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. 3They all ate the same spiritual food 4and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.” (1 Corinthians 10:1-4)
- “The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24and when he had given thanks [< εὐχαριστέω (*eucharisteō*)], he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ 25In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new [< καινός (*kainos*)] covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ 26For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.” (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-b- As baptism replaces circumcision in the new covenant, so also the Lord’s Supper replaces the Passover feast. The Lord’s Supper in other ancient Christian traditions is also called the Eucharist, the Lord’s Table, the Breaking of Bread, and Holy Communion.

The following statement in the Eastern Orthodox tradition explains well the connection between Passover and the Lord’s Supper. “The Christian eucharist is a meal specifically connected with the Passover meal of the Old Testament. At the end of his life Christ, the Jewish Messiah, ate the Passover meal with his disciples. Originally a ritual supper in commemoration of the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, the Passover meal was transformed by Christ into an act done in remembrance of him: of His life, death and resurrection as the new and eternal Passover Lamb who frees men from the slavery of evil, ignorance and death and transfers them into the everlasting life of the Kingdom of God.” (https://oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/worship/the-sacraments/holy-eucharist [Accessed May 20, 2019])

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “After taking the cup, he gave thanks [< εὐχαριστέω (*eucharisteō*)] and said, ‘Take this and divide it among you. 18For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.’ 19And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ 20In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new [< καινός (*kainos*)] covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.’” (Luke 22:17-20)
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- “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion [κοινωνία (*koinonia*)] of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion [*koinōnia*] of the body of Christ? 17For we *being* many are one bread, *and* one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.” (1 Corinthians 10:16-17 KJV)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-b- The Lord’s Supper in other ancient Christian traditions is also called the Eucharist, the Lord’s Table, the Breaking of Bread, and Holy Communion.

1] The term Eucharist, means thanksgiving; it comes from the Greek verb εὐχαριστέω (*eucharisteō*), to be thankful, give thanks, the word Jesus used in the institution of the Eucharist. (E.g., Matthew 26:26-27; Luke 22:17,19; 1 Corinthians 11:24)

2] The term Communion comes from Greek, κοινωνία (*koinonia*), fellowship, communion, sharing, of which Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians 10:16.

3] Throughout church history, the celebration of the Lord’s Supper has been central to congregational worship, likely done weekly, as it still is with many churches. Some, e.g., Roman Catholic, churches celebrate the Lord’s Supper daily. Everyday somewhere in the world, Christians celebrate the Eucharist and all that it means and experience all its benefits.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “After taking the cup, he gave thanks [< εὐχαριστέω (*eucharisteō*)] and said, ‘Take this and divide it among you. 18For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.’ 19And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ 20In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new [< καινός (*kainos*)] covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.’” (Luke 22:17-20)
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- “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion [κοινωνία (*koinonia*)] of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion [*koinōnia*] of the body of Christ? 17For we *being* many are one bread, *and* one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.” (1 Corinthians 10:16-17 KJV)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-b- The Lord’s Supper in other ancient Christian traditions is also called the Eucharist and Holy Communion.

4] The sacraments are signs and seals of Biblical realities. (Cf. Romans 4:11) What are they in the Lord’s Supper?

a] What is <u>signified</u> by the Lord’s Supper? Berkhof lists four that are largely seen in the passages to the left.

1} It symbolically represents the Lord’s death.

2} It symbolizes the believer’s participation in the crucified Christ.

3} It represents the effect of this spiritual eating and drinking as giving life, strength, and joy to the soul.

4} It is a symbol of the union of believers with one another as members of the mystical body of Jesus Christ. (324-325)

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “Then God said to Abraham, ‘As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. [10]This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. [11]You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.’” (Genesis 17:9–11)
- “And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them.” (Romans 4:11)
- “The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, [24]and when he had given thanks [< εὐχαριστέω (*eucharisteō*)], he broke it and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ [25]In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new [< καινός (*kainos*)] covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ [26]For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.’” (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-b- The Lord’s Supper in other ancient Christian traditions is also called Holy Communion.

4] The sacraments are signs and seals of our membership in the covenant. (Cf. Genesis 17:11; Romans 4:11)

b] What is sealed by the Lord’s Supper? Berkhof explains, “These two aspects of the sacrament [signs and seals] are closely related. The sacrament as a sign or with all that it signifies constitutes a seal. The seal is attached to the thing signified and is a pledge of its realization.” (325) He lists four seals.

1} It seals to the participant the great love of Christ revealed in His self-surrender to a bitter and shameful death as a ransom payment for our sins.

2} It gives the believing partaker of the sacrament the assurance that all the promises of the covenant and all the riches of the gospel offer are his or hers.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “After taking the cup, he gave thanks [< εὐχαριστέω (*eucharisteō*)] and said, ‘Take this and divide it among you. 18For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.’ 19And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ 20In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new [< καινός (*kainos*)] covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.’” (Luke 22:17-20)
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Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-b- The Lord’s Supper in other ancient Christian traditions is also called the Eucharist and Holy Communion.

4] The sacraments are signs and seals of Biblical realities. (Cf. Romans 4:11) What are they in the Lord’s Supper?

b] What is <u>sealed</u> by the Lord’s Supper? Berkhof sees four seals.

3} It even assures the believing participant that the blessings of salvation are his or hers in actual possession.

4} It is a badge of profession on the part of those who partake of the sacrament in faith. They profess their faith in Christ as their Saviour, and their allegiance to Him as their King, and solemnly pledge a life of obedience to His divine commandments. (325)

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- "After taking the cup, he gave thanks [< εὐχαριστέω (*eucharisteō*)] and said, 'Take this and divide it among you. [18]For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.' [19]And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.' [20]In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new [< καινός (*kainos*)] covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.'" (Luke 22:17-20)
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Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-b- The Lord's Supper in other ancient Christian traditions is also called the Eucharist and Holy Communion.

5] The celebration of the Lord's Supper engages all five of our senses: taste, touch, smell, sight, and hearing.

6] The sacrament draws our attention to three main aspects of its meaning: past, present, and future.

a] Holy Communion points to the past.

1} Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me."

a} The acme of Jesus' mission to be a propitiation (op *cit.*), redeeming human beings and his Creation, was done in history and linked with the old covenant, here Passover, all pointing to the cross.

1> Too much of the church today has lost this crucial understanding of the seriousness of human sin in God's sight.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “After taking the cup, he gave thanks [< εὐχαριστέω (*eucharisteō*)] and said, ‘Take this and divide it among you. [18]For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.’ [19]And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ [20]In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new [< καινός (*kainos*)] covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.’” (Luke 22:17-20)
- “The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, [24]and when he had given thanks [< εὐχαριστέω (*eucharisteō*)], he broke it and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ [25]In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new [< καινός (*kainos*)] covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ [26]For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.’” (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)
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Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-b- The Lord’s Supper in other ancient Christian traditions is also called the Eucharist and Holy Communion.

6] The sacrament draws our attention to three main aspects of its meaning: past, present, and future.

a] Holy Communion points to the past.

1} Jesus: “in remembrance of me.”

a} We must remember the acme of Jesus’ mission to be a propitiation, removing God’s righteous wrath against our sin. Remember also, to understand God’s wrath against human sin, review his characteristics, especially his being holy, holy, holy.

2> Remembering with at least a wince what Jesus did for us to satisfy God’s wrath due to us, causes great thanksgiving, Eucharist, to burst forth from the depths of our soul.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, [2]through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. [3]Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; [4]perseverance, character; and character, hope. [5]And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.
[6]You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. [7]Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. [8]But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
[9]Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! [10]For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! [11]Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation." (Romans 5:1-11)

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1} Jesus: "in remembrance of me."

a} Remember also, to understand God's wrath against human sin, review his characteristics, especially his being holy, holy, holy.

3> Ironically, the church today in wanting to ignore God's righteous wrath and focus only on love, by failing to keep God's wrath against sin in the picture, we don't see many benefits of his love for which we long so greatly, especially the huge meaning of the Father's and the Son's love for us in Jesus' passion!

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

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4> Ironically, by failing to keep God's wrath against sin in the picture, we miss many benefits of his love, especially the huge meaning of the Father's and the Son's love for us in Jesus' passion! Consider the implications: e.g., how much God values you and relationship with you. **Discuss:** What others?

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “After taking the cup, he gave thanks [< εὐχαριστέω (*eucharisteō*)] and said, ‘Take this and divide it among you. 18For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.’ 19And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ 20In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new [< καινός (*kainos*)] covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.’” (Luke 22:17-20)
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1} Jesus said, “Do this in remembrance of me.”

a} The acme of Jesus’ mission to be a propitiation, redeeming human beings and his Creation, was done in history and linked with the old covenant, here Passover, all pointing to the cross.

b} Jesus ratified the covenant God made with Abraham and at the same time renewed (*kainos*) it in his body and blood.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

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1} Jesus said, “Do this in remembrance of me.”

c} We also remember that Jesus’ passion had both an emotional as well as a physical dimension, and it began with emotional anguish at the beginning of the Supper (profound anguish that continued into the Garden of Gethsemane after the meal). His great concern, translated, “I have eagerly desired (to eat this Passover with you…”) is literally “with desire I desired.” Lenski explains that this is a figure of speech to emphasize intensity.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

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d} Jesus’ great emotion, translated, “I have eagerly desired (to eat this Passover with you…”) is literally “with desire I desired.” Lenski explains that this is a figure of speech to emphasize intensity: it’s “regarded as a Hebraism (infinitive absolute) although the Greek, too, uses the cognate noun or participle for intensifying the verb (R. 531): ‘with great desire.’” (1041)

e} “With you,” is theologically very significant.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

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1} Jesus said, “Do this in remembrance of me.”

e} “With you,” is theologically very significant.

1> He refers here to his human emotional need to be with his closest friends, especially during a traumatic time, another indication of his humanity. As we studied in the Christology section and others, Jesus had to be 100% human as well as 100% divine. Here is more poignant and gripping evidence of Jesus’ being human as well as divine.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

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1} Jesus said, “Do this in remembrance of me.”

e} “With you,” is theologically very significant.

2> “With you” refers to the unique NT fellowship, communion [*koinōnia*], a clear reference to the bond we have with the Lord and with his church, especially in celebrating together this sacrament, called also by this term.

3> In addition to its fostering our sense of oneness with the Lord and each other, consider the implications for pastoral care.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- **“**The LORD had said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.
[2]‘I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.
[3]I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’” (Genesis 12:1-3)
- “But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace.” (Psalm 37:11)
- “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.” (Matthew 5:5)
- “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. [29]If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (Galatians 3:28-29)
- “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.” (Revelation 7:9)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

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2} Jesus’ renewed the old covenant that had its nationalistic emphasis with the new (*kainos*) covenant, consistent with God’s expanding revelation through all the Bible that his objective always was to include all nations. (Genesis 12:3; Psalm 37:11 broadened by Matthew 5:5; Galatians 3:28-29; Revelation 7:9; notice also Deuteronomy 5:16 [“in the land the LORD your God is giving you” broadened by Ephesians 6:3 to [“on the earth”]).

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. 15And he said to them, ‘I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. 16For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.’ 17After taking the cup, he gave thanks [< εὐχαριστέω (*eucharisteō*)] and said, ‘Take this and divide it among you. 18For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.’ 19And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ 20In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new [< καινός (*kainos*)] covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.’” (Luke 22:14-20)
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- “Then the angel said to me, ‘Write: “Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!”’ And he added, ‘These are the true words of God.’” (Revelation 19:9)

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b] Holy Communion points to the <u>future</u>.

1} Jesus’ statement that he “will not eat [the Passover] again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God,” refers to his doing so in the future, when the kingdom of God, which is here in part (Luke 17:21), comes in its fullest, when Christ brings all things to completion in the great Messianic “wedding supper of the Lamb!” (Revelation 19:9)

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

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2} We see in God’s Word that when we celebrate the Lord’s Supper we are publicly witnessing in word and in deed to the wonderful Gospel message of Jesus’ death “until he comes,” thus also to his Second Coming. (1 Corinthians 11:26).

3} As Sproul puts it, “so every time we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, we don’t just think about the past, but we remember that there’s a future for the people of God and that we are having a foretaste at the Lord’s Table of that ultimate fellowship that we’ll have with him in heaven.”

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

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b] Holy Communion points to the future.

4} Calvin Theological Seminary professor, Ronald Feenstra, describes how dialogue with Roman Catholics has taught him “to appreciate the sacramental meal as a foretaste of the future.

“The Christian journey of life has a goal: new life in Christ lived in community with all of God’s people in the presence of the triune God. When he instituted the sacramental meal, Jesus suggested that it anticipates the coming fulfillment of the kingdom of God (Matt. 26.29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:16,18).

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for? The Lord's Supper also Points to the Future

Continued from previous slide:

"The Catechism of the Catholic Church highlights this dimension in a quotation from Vatican II: 'In the earthly liturgy we share in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the Holy City of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God' (CCC 1090). Moreover, the Eucharist unites us with 'the heavenly banquet, when all the elect will be seated at the table of the kingdom' (CCC 1344, 1326). In a key passage, the Catechism says, 'The whole community thus joins in the unending praise that the Church in heaven, the angels and all the saints, sing to the thrice-holy God' (CCC 1352). According to the Catechism, 'The Eucharist is celebrated in communion with the whole Church in heaven and on earth, the living and the dead' (CCC 1354). In this way, the Catechism notes that the Eucharist is not only 'the memorial of the Passover of the Lord Jesus' but also 'an anticipation of the heavenly glory' (CCC 1402).

"Viewing the sacramental meal as a foretaste in which the church on earth joins in praise with the church in heaven provides helpful insights into difficult questions about how Christ is present at the meal. The traditional opening of the liturgy for the Christian meal gives a hint. The worship leader says, 'Lift up your hearts,' to which the people respond, 'We lift them up to the Lord.' Dialogue with Roman Catholics helped me see the invitation to lift our hearts as an indication that in this meal we are spiritually lifted up to be with Christ. The church that meets on the corner of First and Elm Streets is spiritually transported to be with the ascended Lord. When we enter his presence, we join believers who have already died and are already present with him. There, surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses (Heb.12:1), we commune with one another and with the Lord. In this event, then, the meal is a foretaste of the final banquet of the Lamb (Rev. 19:6-9)." (*Forum*, Fall 2017, pp. 8-9.)

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for? The Lord's Supper also Points to the Future

Continued from previous slide:

As seen above (*op cit.* Christology), this concept of the church militant communing with the church triumphant is also graphically portrayed in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, where the sanctuary of the church on earth in which the believers celebrate the sacrament is under a dome, referring to heaven. At the center of the dome, looking down on and watching over the faithful yet here on earth, is an icon of the Lord Jesus Christ, called Pantokrator (> Greek meaning Ruler of All; Psalm 33:13-15, Revelation 1:8), with his fingers positioned in a symbol indicating he is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity.

Feenstra continues, "The sacramental meal is often called 'Communion,' emphasizing both the communion we share with one another in the meal and the communion we have with the ascended Lord. The church present can also sense communing with those loved ones, family and friends in Christ, who are already with the Lord, as Samuel J. Stone and Samuel S. Wesley have stirringly portrayed in their magnificent 19th century hymn, "The Church's One Foundation," Jesus Christ her Lord, especially in the fourth verse where we sing with moistened eyes, "Yet she on earth hath union with God the Three in One, and mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won…."

Both dimensions of communion anticipate the final goal of life, when we are united fully with the triune God and with one another in the new heaven and new earth. So in a world in which people are often alienated from one another and alone, the sacramental meal provides fellowship for today and a taste of the life to come." (*Forum*, Fall 2017, pp. 8-9.)

Here we see what great blessings occur from fellowship with the church catholic (universal). While we still differ on some doctrines, we can continue to love, learn from, mature in Christ with, and encourage one another as we read and talk with other Christians from different historic church traditions through the ages.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

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4.d.2)j)2-b- The Lord’s Supper in other ancient Christian traditions is also called the Eucharist and Holy Communion.

6] The sacrament draws our attention to three main aspects of its meaning.

c] Holy Communion points to the present. Feenstra says, it’s “spiritual food for the spiritual journey…like manna in the wilderness, God provides spiritual sustenance in the form of a sacramental meal—a meal that serves as a means of grace to sustain us along the spiritual journey from slavery to sin to new life in Christ.” (*Forum*, Fall 2017, p. 8)

There is not much debate in the church about the meaning of the Lord’s Supper for the past and the future, but considerable debate continues about the meaning of the Lord’s Supper in the present, both pertaining to the meaning of certain Bible texts and to the manner of celebrating Communion.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “After taking the cup, he gave thanks [< εὐχαριστέω (*eucharisteō*)] and said, ‘Take this and divide it among you. 18For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.’ 19And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ 20In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new [< καινός (*kainos*)] covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.’” (Luke 22:17-20)
- “The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24and when he had given thanks [< εὐχαριστέω (*eucharisteō*)], he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ 25In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new [< καινός (*kainos*)] covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ 26For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.” (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)
- “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion [κοινωνία (*koinonia*)] of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion [*koinōnia*] of the body of Christ? 17For we *being* many are one bread, *and* one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.” (1 Corinthians 10:16-17 KJV)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-b- The Lord’s Supper in other ancient Christian traditions is also called the Eucharist and Holy Communion.

6] The sacrament draws our attention to three main aspects of its meaning.

c] Holy Communion points to the present. Debate exists about the meaning and the manner of celebrating Communion.

1} The meaning of how Christ is present in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper is explained by four main theological traditions with different interpretations.

a} The first two traditions, the Roman Catholic (and Eastern Orthodox) and the Lutheran, interpret Jesus’ use of “is” literally, when he said, “This is my body” and “This cup is the new covenant in my blood.” The literal view was taken by most Christians until the Reformation and remains the view of most today.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “After taking the cup, he gave thanks [< εὐχαριστέω (*eucharisteō*)] and said, ‘Take this and divide it among you. 18For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.’ 19And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ 20In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new [< καινός (*kainos*)] covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.’” (Luke 22:17-20)
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Meaning and Practical Benefits

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6] The sacrament draws our attention to three main aspects of its meaning.

c] Holy Communion points to the present. Considerable debate continues pertaining to the meaning and to the manner of celebrating Communion.

1} The meaning of how Christ is present in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper is explained by four main theological traditions with different interpretations.

b} The third and fourth traditions, the Zwinglian and the Reformed, interpret Jesus’ use of “is” figuratively. They say Jesus here uses “is” as a metaphor, which is not unusual, since he as a master teacher often used figurative language.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “After taking the cup, he gave thanks [< εὐχαριστέω (*eucharisteō*)] and said, ‘Take this and divide it among you. 18For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.’ 19And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ 20In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new [< καινός (*kainos*)] covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.’” (Luke 22:17-20)
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Meaning and Practical Benefits

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6] The sacrament draws our attention to three main aspects of its meaning.

c] Holy Communion points to the <u>present</u>. Considerable debate continues about the meaning of the Lord’s Supper in the present, both pertaining to the <u>meaning</u> of certain Bible texts and to the <u>manner</u> of celebrating Communion.

1} The <u>meaning</u> of what is done in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper centers on the question of if and how Jesus is really present. The crux of the matter is what did Jesus mean by one word, “is,” when he said, “This is my body” and “This cup is the new covenant in my blood.” Four main interpretations answer if and how Jesus is really present. R. C. Sproul explains them well in the main PPT.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion [κοινωνία (*koinōnia*)] of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion [*koinōnia*] of the body of Christ? [17]For we *being* many are one bread, *and* one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.” (1 Corinthians 10:16-17 KJV)
- “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.” (1 Corinthians 11:26)
- “Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. [28]A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. [29]For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. [30]That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. [31]But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. [32]When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world. [33]So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other. [34]If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment.” (1 Corinthians 11:27-34)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

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6] The sacrament draws our attention to three main aspects of its meaning.

c] Holy Communion points to the present. Considerable debate continues about the <u>meaning</u> of the Lord’s Supper in the present, both pertaining to the meaning of certain Bible texts and to the <u>manner</u> of celebrating Communion.

2} From the beginning in the early church, some in the church have celebrated in an unworthy <u>manner</u>. Thus, Paul admonished them and stipulated procedures the church should follow in its celebration of the sacrament.

a} Each “ought to examine himself.” (1 Corinthians 11:28)

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion [κοινωνία (*koinōnia*)] of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion [*koinōnia*] of the body of Christ? [17]For we *being* many are one bread, *and* one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.” (1 Corinthians 10:16-17 KJV)
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Meaning and Practical Benefits

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c] Holy Communion points to the present. Debate continues about the manner of celebrating Communion.

2} Paul stipulated procedures the church should follow in its celebration of the sacrament.

a} Each “ought to examine himself.” (1 Corinthians 11:28) This requirement is addressed to and for adults.

1> Some churches admit children to the Lord’s Table. Some, the Eastern Orthodox, admit baptized infants. The Western church did also until the Middle Ages. For more see the large PPT.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion [κοινωνία (*koinōnia*)] of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion [*koinōnia*] of the body of Christ? [17]For we *being* many are one bread, *and* one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.” (1 Corinthians 10:16-17 KJV)
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c] Holy Communion points to the present.

2} Paul stipulated procedures the church should follow in its celebration of the sacrament.

a} Each “ought to examine himself.” (1 Corinthians 11:28) This requirement is addressed to and for adults.

2> Paul does not mean that children should not be admitted to the Lord’s Table. But it does mean that when they reach the age of conscience, they, too, must learn to examine themselves before partaking of the elements.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

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2} Paul stipulated procedures the church should follow in its celebration of the sacrament.

a} Each “ought to examine himself.” (1 Corinthians 11:28) This requirement is addressed to and for adults.

b} Wait for each other before beginning to eat. (21,33)

c} Care for those who have nothing. (22)

d} We should judge ourselves, individually and collectively, exercise church discipline, to avoid being condemned with the world. (31-34)

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “After taking the cup, he gave thanks [< εὐχαριστέω (*eucharisteō*)] and said, ‘Take this and divide it among you. 18For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.’ 19And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ 20In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new [< καινός (*kainos*)] covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.’” (Luke 22:17-20)
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Meaning and Practical Benefits

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6] The sacrament draws our attention to three main aspects of its meaning.

c] Holy Communion points to the present.

3} As in all Christian worship, when we participate in the Lord’s Supper, we renew our covenant commitments.

7] How is the Lord’s Supper effective as a means of grace?

a] As stated earlier, the sacrament engages all five of our human senses. The Lord has chosen a marvelous educational means of helping us understand and remember his Word and its meaning. But the sacrament is much more.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “And when your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' [27]then tell them, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.’ Then the people bowed down and worshiped.” (Exodus 12:26-27)
- “Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. [28]A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. [29]For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. [30]That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. [31]But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. [32]When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world. [33]So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other. [34]If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment.” (1 Corinthians 11:27-34)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-b- The Lord’s Supper in other ancient Christian traditions is also called the Eucharist and Holy Communion.

8] In the light of the foregoing, then, whom should be admitted to the Lord’s Table? As indicated in the preceding discussion, some debate is ongoing, especially in the West about the admission of children to participate in the Lord’s Supper. Nevertheless, a close study of God’s Word supports the following answer.

a] The Supper is for all who are in good and regular standing in their membership in a local church that faithfully proclaims God’s Word. All believers should repent of their sins and recommit to obeying God’s will.

b] As explained above, and with the Eastern Church for all its history and the Western Church for over half its existence, children of adult members in good and regular standing should be able to partake.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. [16]But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' [17]If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector." (Matthew 18:15-17)
- "Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. [28]A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. [29]For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. [30]That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. [31]But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. [32]When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world." (1 Corinthians 11:23-32)
- "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. [4]When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, [5]hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord." (1 Corinthians 5:1,4-5)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-b- The Lord's Supper in other ancient Christian traditions is also called the Eucharist and Holy Communion.

8] In the light of the foregoing, then, who should be admitted to the Lord's Supper? As indicated in the preceding discussion, some debate is ongoing, especially in the West about the admission of children to participate in the Lord's Supper. Nevertheless, a close study of God's Word supports the following answer.

c] Good and regular standing means, as Berkhof says, though not using that term, "even true believers are entitled to participation in it only when their conduct is not in flagrant opposition to their profession…. And professing Christians cannot be admitted, if they consciously and persistently depart from the truth or lead offensive lives." (329) By "offensive lives" is meant habitual sinning in disobedience to God's Word. Church discipline is necessary.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

The Doctrine of the Church

- “Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. 28A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. 29For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. 30That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. 31But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. 32When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world…34If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment.” (1 Corinthians 11:27-34)
- “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. 2And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? 3Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. 4When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, 5hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 5:1-5)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

4.d.2)j)2-b- The Lord’s Supper in other ancient Christian traditions is also called the Eucharist and Holy Communion.

8] In the light of the foregoing, then, who should partake of the Lord’s Supper? As indicated in the preceding discussion, some debate is ongoing, especially in the West about the admission of children to the Lord’s Table. Nevertheless, a close study of God’s Word supports the following answer.

d] Of course, unbelievers should not be admitted to the Lord’s Table. This “fencing of the Table,” forbidding participation in the sacrament, is not only to prohibit them from dishonoring the Lord and his church but to keep the unbeliever from one more sin for which he or she will have to face judgment. (1 Corinthians 5:5; 11:29-31) Church discipline needs to be improved for the sake of the sinner, for the integrity of the church’s witness, and to honor God.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

What is the church? Why should I attend?

Ecclesiology: *What is the church? Why should I attend?*

The church is the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12, 27); he is its head (Ephesians 5:23). Jesus said even "the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (Matthew 15:28). It is nothing like any other organization.

The church first appears in the Old Testament in God's implementing his covenant with Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 17; Galatians 3:26-29), and throughout the New Testament its mission is described and commanded. Further, the church is the people of Christ, not a building, and many of the people use the Internet for the purpose of trying to accomplish the mission Christ gave his church; yet, the Internet is a means the church can use to serve the Lord, but it is not a replacement or a substitute for his body. Thus, the church will always exist, and it is always needed, even by people who don't feel such a need.

God's Word clearly states that we should worship him regularly. Jesus himself did and provided such an example for us to follow. In Luke 4:16 we read that Jesus on the Sabbath day "went into the synagogue, *as was his custom*." (Italics mine) Even Jesus worshiped regularly. In his human nature he obeyed his parents (Luke 2:52), and he "grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." (Luke 2:52) In Hebrews 10:25 the writer exhorts his readers, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." That "meeting together" involved worship and the special fellowship God's people have with each other called *koinōnia*, a great blessing, including encouragement.

Ecclesiology: *What is the church? Why should I attend?*

Regular attendance at church worship gives us a disciplined means of praising God. We can and should ask the person who says he or she "would rather worship God in my garden [or in the woods or on the beach as is also said]," "But do you? Even if your premise were correct (that God would be just as pleased to have his children worship him individually instead of corporately, which premise cannot be defended from the Bible, his Word), do you in fact worship him on Sunday mornings (the day Christians all over the world from the first century have witnessed to the Lord's Resurrection by their corporate worship) or any other time each Sunday?"

Through corporate worship we human beings, who are weak and constantly tempted to become distracted by and involved in other matters than worship, have a strong and healthy discipline to join with our brothers and sisters in Christ and praise and worship in other ways the owner and ruler of the universe who has performed the most wonderful demonstration of love for us ever!

Ecclesiology: *What is the church? Why should I attend?*

Blessings in the Call to Worship

In historic Christian worship services, the pastor begins by reading a passage from God's Word such as Psalm 95:6-7, "Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care." How do you feel when you receive an invitation to the home of someone you respect and who is very important in your community? What an unparalleled privilege and pleasure we receive from such an invitation! How much more, how much exceedingly more, when we sense that the God of the cosmos, the whole universe, has invited us to come into his house and meet with him in his very presence!

Blessings in the Prayer of Confession and the Immediately following Assurance of Pardon

Once there, in the presence of God who is Most Holy, intuitively I sense my great need to be relieved of the weight of my sin, including its effects, including my guilt. We know why this feeling arises from our preceding study of theology, the Biblical doctrine of God—that it is necessary for sinful people to be cleansed in order to come into the presence of God who is Most Holy. And God provides that relief immediately in two ways. It occurs when I confess my sins, including fears and failures, to him in the prayer of confession, and then it occurs most wonderfully when I hear the blessed words in the assurance of pardon that next follows, also typically from God's Word in a passage such as Psalm 103:8-13, "The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him…."

Ecclesiology: *What is the church? Why should I attend?*

What relief! The burden is gone!

When this feeling of guilt is not relieved by God, humans try to relieve it in other ways. Some of those ways are short-lived and counterproductive to their mental and physical health and other well being. All the ways of trying to relieve guilt other than by God are ultimately ineffective.

Another passage that is often used in the assurance of pardon is 1 John 1:6-9, “If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

Notice how practical and helpful is this worship! It frees us from guilt, shame, and intense feelings of inadequacy and strengthens us for engaging life! It provides the basis for mental, including emotional, health.

The music of the church facilitates and reinforces the message of God’s gracious love. The instruments and voices help me express my joy in the Good News of what Jesus did, continues to do, and forever will do. The music also enables me to express my eternal gratitude to the triune God for all I value, cherish, count as good, and enjoy.

Ecclesiology: *What is the church? Why should I attend?*

These blessings do not occur out in the woods. Even if those who go into a forest seeking to worship God (would that be the only true God who reveals himself in the Bible?) took their Bible and knew where to look for these passages above and the many other related texts, they would miss the profound significance of hearing God's forgiveness being authoritatively and lovingly proclaimed by a fellow human being whom he has called and ordained to be one of his spokespersons. The wind rustling the leaves can't even come close to the breath of a faithful pastor through whom God is speaking in ways that calm our deepest concerns.

The Holy Spirit uses our consciences to convict us of our sins. (John 16:8; Romans 2:15) We feel guilt. Yet, we are relieved of our sin and guilt. How do we overcome our sin and guilt and experience forgiveness, from God and from those we've offended? Those blessings come in God's corporate worship services and in the special Spirit-infused *koinōnia* of the church—not out in the trees. Even when we are in wonderful quiet (for us) of nature, and even when we remember in our solitude the promises of God for forgiveness, we can't come close to the balm of the assurance and experience of forgiveness and relief from our guilt as we can when we hear in the worship services those precious words of forgiveness as proclaimed by the ordained and authorized representative of God through whom God is speaking to assure us of our pardon. Similarly, though on a different plane, we are comforted by the forgiveness extended to us of other humans who know and view us as we are: flawed but renewed in Christ Jesus.

In some parts of the world the church meets in congregations that do not have an ordained pastor. They still receive these blessings when their church leader, who is a committed believer in and follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, reads those words and others from the Bible, the Word of God, at this point in a corporate Christian worship service.

Ecclesiology: *What is the church? Why should I attend?*

Blessings in the Proclamation of the Word of God

In corporate worship we meet the triune God, and he reveals himself in and through the clear and faithful proclamation, explanation, and application of his Word to our lives and in the sacraments. In these ways and in the congregational prayers, we sense the mystery and awe of God, we're drawn to him in and through the presence of Christ Jesus, and we're further equipped by the Holy Spirit for living life abundantly and effectively in Christ in the service to which he is calling us.

We learn who God is, what he is like, and his plans for us, our role as he works in and through us as he accomplishes the redemption and restoration of his creation. We discern the difference between God and his creation, a distinction which is often blurred and misunderstood by people who only want to worship God in the woods or somewhere else in nature. We rejoice in God and in his creation without confusing them. Many churches hold at least one or more of their worship services outdoors in the summer, thus giving worshipers an experience of meeting God in a natural milieu but with the clear distinction of each, which enables us to worship the Creator and more fully appreciate and respect but not worship what he created.

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When we attend church worship services we're blessed individually as well as corporately. We're edified, encouraged, and strengthened in our faith by attending worship. In particular, we're further informed, inspired, and equipped in our high and holy calling and mission to witness for Jesus Christ more effectively and to serve him in other ways as well.

By attending corporate public worship services regularly, we are taught God's Word. If I were to only go out in a garden, woods, or beach and worship by myself, I'd not cover the whole counsel of God; I'd just focus on the things that most interested me or that I thought were important. In so doing I would be ignorant of vital needed information and fail to mature and become equipped for functioning most effectively in my calling from God in the place he has for me in his plan for redeeming his creation. In my observation, and in the testimony of the historic Christian church, this typically occurs with all who try to "go it alone."

In a sermon based on a text from the Bible, which is an explanation of that text, God speaks to us; we don't get that "out in the woods." We hear what we need to hear from an authority credentialed by respected educational institutions, and an official ecclesiastical organization, in the historic Christian tradition, who, led by God, has prepared a thoughtful presentation explaining God's Word and applying it to matters we address and need to address today in order to serve most effectively in the holy calling God has given us, and to experience the most joy in so doing.

Ecclesiology: *What is the church? Why should I attend?*

We increase in our understanding: we grow in our ability to make sense out of life. We find answers to the great questions of life and eternity. And we're encouraged to ask the tough questions of life and to find their answers in and consistent with God's Word, our ultimate guide, trustworthy standard, and highest authority. Because Jesus has set us free from the bondage of sin, we seek the truth, and the church helps us apply it accurately to the issues of life we encounter.

One way I've seen this understanding occur many times, in both my own life and in the life of others in the church, is in the answer to one of the most often asked questions: "Why does God allow evildoers to prosper while at the same time so many righteous people struggle?" The answer to that question is found in the Bible and in the helpful commentary that is given by pastors who have studied and prepared carefully to explicate those texts in sermons in the church's corporate worship and in church education classes. See for example Psalm 73:1-17 (cf. v. 17).

As much as I've studied God's Word, have degrees in theological education, and have taught and preached God's Word, I never cease to be amazed at how much I still have to learn! As I attend worship and hear an exposition of a Scripture passage, even one I've read and taught many times, I rejoice in learning more, not only about the meaning of the text but also its application in many new ways! Even though I hear some words that I've heard most of my life from the Bible and from sermons, I'm blessed as I hear them again in worship. I receive new insights and new applications for this time in my life that inform me regarding matters I'm engaging now that I never before dreamed I'd be encountering. Frequently fellow believers and I hear a Bible text and its explanation that provides us with an insight to share in an upcoming conversation that very week or soon after that we never anticipated, but that God knew was coming. What a joy it is to communicate what we've learned with others, which is part of what God is calling us to do.

Ecclesiology: *What is the church? Why should I attend?*

Believers receive vital instruction helpful for their physical and spiritual health. Over time in a church faithful to the Bible, we receive "the whole counsel of God." This occurrence is especially true in churches that follow the lectionary, a prescribed series of Scripture texts for each Sunday over a three-year cycle, on which the sermons are based; thus the worshipers hear a balance in the messages that cover the main themes of God's Word rather than over-repeating the favorite emphases (sometimes called "hobbyhorses") of the pastor. In a congregation that proclaims the Bible as God's Word, infallible and inerrant, we learn the full counsel of God, what we believe as Christians. In worship we are edified, but we also have many other opportunities to learn, for there are subjects in the Bible that, together with the explanation of what they mean and how they are applied, require more time than the 20 minutes, or even in some places an hour, a sermon is typically allotted.

Our society, which doesn't hold to a Biblical standard, is finding it more and more difficult to define what is right and what is wrong, especially in moral and spiritual matters. People who try to "go it alone" are buffeted by Satan and his legions of demonic followers. (Cf. 1 Corinthians 5:5.) We need the help of fellow believers in and followers of Christ to stay on the right path. As members of a church we learn what is right and wrong and how to explain this distinction with conviction and with courage that comes from God directly in our hearts and minds and through fellow members.

Ecclesiology: *What is the church? Why should I attend?*

We learn to be discerning and to speak the truth in love. For example, we distinguish homosexuality (Romans 1:18-27) from the gift of singleness (Matthew 19:11-12), yet following the command of Christ Jesus, we show love to all people, even our enemies (Matthew 5:44). The apostle Paul defines this love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, which includes being patient, kind, not envious or rude; it does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. We thus don't commit the naturalistic fallacy (saying that since something exists, it ought to exist) and confuse love with condoning behavior God condemns. At the same time love characterizes our approach to and our actions concerning homosexuals; we oppose homosexuality, because God opposes it, and social science research shows why: the homosexual lifestyle is very unhealthy, dangerous, and unholy. There is a disconnect between loving people as Christ has commanded and advocating for a lifestyle that will harm them. How can a person truly love someone and affirm, much less encourage, that one's choice to engage a lifestyle that is unhealthy, dangerous, and unholy? That is why Scripture tells us in many places that if we see a brother or sister going down the wrong path, we must speak up, albeit in love. (Leviticus 19:17b; Luke 17:3; Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20)

For further information and documentation of these realities, see my book, *What Is God's Will Concerning Homosexuality? Help for Church Leaders and Others to Speak the Truth in Love*. This book is available for free, and shareable, on the Current Issues page of my Website at www.fromacorntooak12.com.

By attending worship and other learning opportunities with the church, we are reminded of Biblical teachings we've forgotten, but which we need to remember and act on, in order to obey and to serve God most effectively, and to experience in abundance joy and fulfillment in life. (Cf. John 10:10) We remember and are blessed by the characteristics of God himself. (Cf. 2 Peter 1:12-15 for the importance of being reminded.)

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Believers are inspired as their focus is lifted to God, relieved from their burdens by doing so, and receive guidance for coping with, dealing with, and overcoming the challenges of life. When we encounter problems, especially big ones, we tend to get tunnel vision and focus inward, concentrating on the thorn in the flesh that is causing so much discomfort. In so doing we lose the broad view, including the eternal perspective, that puts things in their proper proportion and order. Losing the broad perspective leaves God, our greatest help and hope, out of the picture. We need to remember that God is not only in the picture; he's holding the picture!

Fellow believers in and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ help us to keep that perspective. In meeting with them, they remind us of these realities, and comfort us in other ways, during the difficult times we encounter and at other times as well.

We're healed of the great hurts of life, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. The healing is always from God, sometimes directly and often indirectly through others in the church. We receive sound advice for dealing with the challenges of life, from small to large, both in sermons and in more focused counseling on other occasions as needed. Such a resource is vitally important, indeed crucial. So many individuals, books, videos, Websites, and other sources are leading multitudes of people astray by offering counsel that is spiritually bankrupt, even demonically inspired, and contrary to God's Word. Watch out for them!

Ecclesiology: *What is the church? Why should I attend?*

When we regularly attend corporate Christian worship, our minds expand to include the broader perspective in which we live, our historical roots and the future in the context of eternity, and that perspective blesses us and many others. Many people are "trying to find themselves," and they are only looking within. No wonder they lack a sense of meaning and value. First of all, the fallen human heart is "deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9) Looking within fails to provide a viable and sustainable source of help in "finding oneself."

Part of the reason for this reality is that we are not "an island to ourselves." We are connected with, partially shaped by and partially influencing, other people historically, in the present, and in the future.

When we have significant problems, we tend to narrow our focus on that issue and lose sight of the context in which we are living. When we broaden our perspective and see a particular problem we're encountering in the light of eternity, including the past as well as the future, all under the control of God who is sovereign and who loves us and is committed to his covenant people, we are freed from the tyranny and bondage of the present predicament. We see that this angst of the moment has not always been so and will not last forever. In God's worship our minds and hearts are lifted (*sursum corda*) and we receive his help in our every need.

Furthermore, until we find our identity in our relationship with the triune God, we will experience a constant and highly unsatisfying emptiness and meaninglessness in life. (Ecclesiastes 1:14) Thus, we see many people trying to escape and, sadly, using means counterproductive to their own and others' well-being, such as alcohol, drugs, aberrant sex, gambling, excessive entertainment, and self-harm in addition to many other ways of avoiding reality. On the contrary, as we worship God, we draw near to him and sense the meaning, purpose for living, and joy in further awareness of our place in his world in the high and holy calling he has given us in his plan for redeeming his creation. (Ecclesiastes 2:26; Psalm 68; Matthew 28:16-20) We also see and receive his help to fulfill that calling!

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This broadening of perspective is not only with regard to matters on this earth, but it also has a cosmic dimension. In our participation in corporate worship and other aspects of the life and work of a true church of Jesus Christ, in a congregation which holds to the Bible as the trustworthy Word of God and our highest authority, where Christ is proclaimed, honored, and glorified, we are equipped and strengthened for engaging in, and winning, the spiritual warfare which lies behind all the evil and hardship that is going on in the world. We have the protection and support of God and his people in his covenant community, through whom he is working to redeem his creation. (Ephesians 6:10-20)

Everyone is affected by this cosmic battle, but multitudes, including too many in the church, are blissfully (until something bad occurs) unaware of what is going on. They tend to be the ones who shout the loudest, "Where's God in all this?!" when something goes terribly wrong, and they find themselves impacted by and struggling with the serious problems including evil that the enemy, Satan, the demons, and their followers through whom they work, perpetrate.

But, thanks be to God that he is sovereign, and he loves us. He is working in and through his church to accomplish his redemptive purposes. He has promised that he will build his church and that the gates of hell will not overcome it. (Matthew 16:18) One of the ways he is building and strengthening his church is as we regularly meet together for edification and encouragement and guidance. (Hebrews 10:23-25) By regularly meeting with God in his worship and participating in other work, as he's calling his covenant people to do, we become ever more aware of and receive his protection and ongoing support. (Matthew 10:19-20; 18:20; 28:20) God, working through his people, guides, strengthens, and emboldens us to make the tough choices and do what pleases him throughout our lives and especially during challenging times.

Ecclesiology: *What is the church? Why should I attend?*

Without the guidance and support that God provides through his people, one becomes vulnerable to the temptations, misdirection, and evil of the enemy. As more and more people drift away from their moorings in God's covenant community, the church, they make choices and engage in activities that not only displease God but are counterproductive to their own well-being and the well-being of our society.

Consult the social science literature to see the correlation between the decline in church attendance and the increase in social evils such as abortion, divorce, cohabitation, adultery, substance abuse, suicide, and a host of other maladies. The converse is also true, i.e., the reduction of such societal problems where the church is strong and engaged in bringing the light of God's Word in their society. Government officials recognize this reality, not only in the United States but elsewhere in the world as well.

In fact, the church is the primary source in society for keeping the definition of these problems as being bad not good. There are many, in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, who want to redefine these issues, calling "evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter." (Isaiah 5:20) The church by teaching the truth in God's Word, preserves human dignity and the awareness that one is made in and carries with him or herself the image of God, which means that he or she can be viewed as such by him or herself as well as by others. Such awareness motivates the thinking about the issues of the day to be more in accord with God's will.

Ecclesiology: *What is the church? Why should I attend?*

Blessings through the Prayers of God's Righteous People

The Bible says that "the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." (1 Peter 3:12) Indeed, through the prophet Isaiah we hear God saying, "your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear." (59:2) "The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective." (James 5:16 NRSV) For these reasons I've often said that I'd rather have one righteous quadriplegic in Christ, who can only lay in bed and move just his or her eyelids, praying for me than a million pagans. And in God's corporate worship we have many righteous people praying for us. How are they righteous? They are credited with Christ's righteousness on account of their faith in him (Galatians 3:26-29; Romans 4) and are trying to live out that faith in their daily lives in gratitude to him.

Thus, we are prayed for in the corporate worship of the church, and in so doing, we join those prayers for ourselves as well as for others. We learn to pray.

By attending church worship and other activities, we come know other believers and the pastor(s) who then care for us. If we or our family have needs, we can ask these people in the church, and they will pray for us and help us in other ways. Some churches also have email prayer lines that are daily updated. We can come to the pastor's office to meet with him or her for counsel and/or for prayer. The pastor will also come to our home and meet with and pray for us and our family.

Ecclesiology: *What is the church? Why should I attend?*

Through the prayers led at corporate church worship, we broaden our awareness of the needs of others throughout the world, locally, nationally, and internationally, and we pray for their needs. We learn of the power of the prayers of those whom God declares righteous by their faith in Christ. We see exciting results of such prayer.

The children of Christ's followers who attend corporate public church worship services regularly, especially with both parents, tend to avoid many serious and negative practices. Some of these benefits include significantly less tendency to become involved in premarital sex, illicit drug use, dropping out of school, and suicide. They also tend to select as marriage partners fellow believers in and followers of Jesus Christ, which results in a much more successful marriage than is experienced in the population as a whole, e.g., a significantly reduced divorce rate, as a result of obeying God's will to only marry a fellow believer in Christ. (2 Corinthians 6:14-18; 1 Corinthians 7:39; Malachi 2:11; Ezra 9:1-2 and 3-10:44; Nehemiah 10:30; Exodus 34:16; Genesis 26:34-35; 27:42-28:1ff.; Deuteronomy 7:3-6; James 2:26)

To see more benefits, see the document, "Empirical Benefits of Church Worship," on the Christian Worship page of my Website. It may be accessed at this URL: http://www.fromacorntooak12.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Empirical-Benefits-of-Church-Worship.pdf. See also the supporting documents on the Marriage page at http://www.fromacorntooak12.com/marriage/.

Ecclesiology: *What is the church? Why should I attend?*

Blessings in the Benediction

The benediction, also coming to be called the Sending, is the last part of the service during which we are reminded that God sends us back into the world to continue growing in Christ and to partner with God in his redemptive work in his creation. In the benediction (from the Latin meaning good words) we hear the pastor proclaim words from the Bible in which God promises to go with us, equipping us with all we need to serve him effectively and to facilitate the accomplishment of his redemptive purposes, which is why he has called us to be holy (that is separate and uncommon) to him. These words are very supportive, encouraging, and strengthening.

Consider the meaning of these passages from the Bible that are often used in the benediction, and consider how you feel after reading and hearing them. "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace." (Numbers 6:24-26 NRSV) "To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen." (Jude 1:24-25) "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." (2 Corinthians 13:14) "May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." (Hebrews 13:20-21)

Singing a benedictory song, such as a psalm put to music, lifts our spirits and gives us peace and joy that meets our deepest needs as does no other activity, especially as we do so standing next to other brothers and sisters in the Lord. An example of one such composition is "Psalm 84: How Lovely, Lord, How Lovely." See the arrangement by Arlo D. Duba and Hal H. Hopson in *Sing! A New Creation* (Grand Rapids: Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, CRC Publications, 2001), p. 184.

Ecclesiology: *What is the church? Why should I attend?*

Blessings after the Benediction

Having worshiped, we leave further equipped mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically strengthened to serve God in the high and holy calling he has given us to be his witnesses. Of course, before we even leave the church building we've begun to witness to him. Corporate worship, in addition to individual worship, is one special way to witness to Christ's Resurrection, especially when it occurs on Sunday, Resurrection Day. As the world travels by the church's building and sees a parking lot full of cars, observers conclude that a significant number of people are taking the triune God, including his only begotten, risen, and reigning Son, seriously.

Regarding edification, we have to remember who the church is and who attends the worship services. To begin with, all humans are sinners and fall short of the glory of God. (1 Kings 8:46; Romans 3:23) We all need to grow more Christ-like. The members of any congregation are in various stages of sanctification, the ongoing growth in Christ-likeness that occurs throughout the life of one who is a believer in and follower of the Lord Jesus.

Thus, some will be more mature (cf. Ephesians 4:13) than others at any given point in time. Then there will be some in attendance who are not committed to Christ. All of us need to hear God's Word in order to improve *in God's sight*. In my own sight I may not need to improve, but my standard is not the same as God's standard, or even another person's perspective who can readily see where I need to do some improving.

I wish more people would point out those areas on which I need to do some work. Most people are afraid to say anything, because they want to be liked, and past experience has shown them that such speaking up isn't well received. But it should be, especially in the church. In fact, that corrective feedback is commanded in Scripture. For just a few examples, consider these: "Rebuke your brother frankly so you will not share in his guilt." (Leviticus 19:17b) Jesus said, "So watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him." (Luke 17:3) Paul wrote, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted." (Galatians 6:1) Observe that these are sins that are being referred to in these texts. God is not saying we should be walking around nit-picking and calling people on matters that involve only a difference of opinion.

Ecclesiology: *What is the church? Why should I attend?*

In a guest editorial, a Christian psychologist explained our need to forgive. "Why forgive? For two reasons: One, you will actually end up feeling better because holding anger and unforgiveness against someone else actually eats at your body and soul, not theirs. Two, a mutual friend says His Father who resides in heaven will forgive you your sins as you forgive those who have sinned against you. [Matthew 6:14] His forgiveness is worth it!" (*Reporter-Herald*, May 8, 2022, p. 4A) Further, we all need forgiveness. It's easier to forgive when we remember we also need to be forgiven.

The key, as God also said, this time through the apostle Paul, is to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), which love he defined as being patient, kind, and acting not in a way that is boastful, arrogant, or rude. (1 Corinthians 13:4-5) The truth is, we need one another, especially as God works through us to help each other to mature in Christ-likeness in God's calling for us to be holy to him for the accomplishment of his purposes through us. As one Lutheran pastor well put it, "We won't attract people to Christ if we're living our lives in the gutter."

You've heard the partial-truth, "God accepts you as you are." The matter depends on our relationship with Christ Jesus. If we've been credited with Christ's righteousness, we are acceptable to God in an eternal relationship with him, who requires those in his presence to be righteous, but even then, he wants us to improve in our actions. In Christ we are OK ontologically, but morally and ethically in this phase of life here on earth we always need to do better, to be more like Christ in our actions and in the accomplishment of God's purposes, his work in and through us. (Cf. Ephesians 2:10)

Further, the key message of the Bible is that outside of Christ we are not acceptable to God. To correct that often-heard partially true assertion, we need to add some more words for all of us—those in as well as those outside of Christ. As a minister/evangelist friend of mine accurately responds to that partial-truth for those in Christ, "Yes, God accepts you as you are, but he loves you enough to not leave you that way!" In order to find how to not remain that way, and how to become mature in Christ (Ephesians 4:11-16), we need to hear his Word from those who live in and walk with Christ and who've studied and applied the Word in their lives. This Ephesians 4:11-16 text is one of the Biblical bases for the very important Christian education ministries in the church.

Ecclesiology: *What is the church? Why should I attend?*

We find and develop deep friendships. Social science research confirms what we feel in our daily lives, namely that the need to belong is one of our greatest needs as human beings. That need is met most fully through friendships in Christ that grow to a much deeper and more meaningful level than those we have in society in general.

In the special Holy Spirit-led fellowship in Christ, that the New Testament calls *koinōnia*, we're encouraged by others and we encourage them. This encouragement occurs in many ways:

- By warm greetings that lift our spirit and convey acceptance and belonging.
- Through affirmations of work and characteristics that are right and good.
- By affirming our faith in our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ and the reasons for it, thus greatly facilitating perseverance.
- By giving and receiving advice based on God's wisdom as the Holy Spirit speaks through friends in Christ on matters of importance to us.
- By giving and receiving admonition. God helps us learn his will as he speaks directly to us in our own minds and hearts and as he speaks through others. If we have thoughts that differ from the Bible's interpretation by the historic Christian church, we must talk about them with a respected leader in a Bible-believing church, one who has the courage to tell us what we need to hear, not what we necessarily want to hear. Through receiving corrective feedback in the context of affirmation and love.

Ecclesiology: *What is the church? Why should I attend?*

God blesses us not only directly as individuals but indirectly, corporately, through other believers in the Body of Christ, the church. Involving others, he primarily and mostly works through the church to bless us. We know these gifts are from God, because he has told us so: "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows." (James 1:17)

The freedom from the bondage to sin that Jesus provides frees church members to care for one another. They are able to consider, and desire to help, others and not just focus on their own needs and desires. Caring Christians coming to know and love others who attend worship and other times of fellowship together, help them think rightly and work through times of doubt if they arise and to overcome the difficulties encountered in daily life. As a result, the church makes a significant difference in the community of which it is a part in countless and far reaching ways. We need the regular reminders of what is right and what is wrong, as the Bible, God's Word, is truthfully proclaimed, explained, and applied to our daily lives. Moreover, we rejoice in seeing that we're not the only ones who believe that way; many others throughout the whole world, all in Christ Jesus, do too!

The members and leaders of the church lovingly listen to us in ways we do not find in the world that doesn't care about, and has little time, for us. They not only do this for us when we meet together at church. When we have questions and/or problems at home, at work, in school, in our neighborhood, we can find help in the body of Christ, the church; we ask God for help in this context and we receive that help. We find the wisdom to answer the most important questions in life and eternity and usually without cost (always without cost unless a problem requires the extra help of a trained professional such as a Christian physician, psychologist, or other worker). When such highly specialized help is needed, we have the assurance the church will guide us to one who is trustworthy, competent, and caring; ***never*** rely on the Internet in such circumstances.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

Though the church sometimes has members and attendees who are spiritual infants in elementary stages of sanctification, not yet mature in Christ (Ephesians 4:11-24), and not treating all others of every race in a loving Christlike manner, it is clear in this passage and throughout the whole Bible, that such behavior does not please God and is not in accord with his will.

Further, Jesus Christ, whom we worship with the other two Members of our triune God, with whom we identify, and proclaim, is not an Anglo-Saxon. He is not "a white guy;" he is (and will forever be in his already resurrected fully human body) a Person of color.

- *Thus, the church can never rightly be accused of "systemic racism" or of being inherently racist. Clearly, God has called the church to lovingly reach out to all people and invite them into his kingdom.*

That reality is also true individually as well as corporately. I know and have worked with many Christians of every color who are not at all racist. Christian missionaries of every color are called by God to live in lands as far as half the world away from where they were born and raised and where their parents, other family members, and beloved friends continue to live. If they were racists, what would explain their leaving these loved ones to live with another race? It certainly is not for money. Believe them when they explain they are responding to their call, which is part of the great commission of the Lord to "go and make disciples of all nations." (Matthew 28:19)

Ecclesiology: *What is the church? Why should I attend?*

We sense we're loved and accepted as we are and are not made to feel we have to be someone we are not. This is not to say we shouldn't always be trying to be more Christ-like, which all of us need to do. When we're most honest with ourselves, we recognize we all have changes we need to make. But Jesus is the only one we all are trying to be like; we never sense someone maturing in Christ is trying to remake us according to his or her preconceived notions.

We grow in our love for all people as they grow closer to God who loves all people and who wills that his Kingdom will comprise those "from every nation, tribe, people and language." (Revelation 7:9) We learn to value fellow believers from other parts of the world and what they bring into God's kingdom that enriches our lives. As people mature in Christ, any racial concerns are diminished and extinguished. (Ephesians 4:12-18)

We learn of and have opportunities where we can serve God with brothers and sisters in Christ both in the church and in the community in which we live and work. In so doing we sense we are connected with and pleasing God and helping to accomplish his redemptive purposes for his creation. In such opportunities for service we experience joyful fellowship at a deep and profoundly meaningful level that is uniquely enriching, including as a witness for Christ partially fulfilling his calling for us.

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Marriages are strengthened and maintained, especially for those who were married in the church. For those who were married with a traditional liturgy, they took their vows "before God and these witnesses." A considerable percentage of the witnesses were members of that church with whom the couple is still in a relationship, and the couple is accountable to them if they don't live up to those vows. They are especially accountable to God. For those couples who now are part of another church, their present congregation serves to help them stay on the right path. (See for example, Leviticus 19:17b; Luke 17:3; Galatians 6:1; Ephesians 4:15; James 5:19-20.) All these benefits are even more strongly and easily experienced by couples who are members of the church, for the members find it much easier to relate to those who are fellow members, in the same way that family members can speak more easily and helpfully to members of their family than they can do with those who are not family.

The whole family is strengthened and blessed in countless ways, each member individually, and the whole family together corporately. Each person experiences the work of the Holy Spirit in his or her mind and heart directly during worship and in other activities, as well as indirectly through brothers and sisters in Christ in the life and work of the church, for example in conversations while working together on a service project, at choir or praise team practice, or in Bible study and Sunday school classes. When children hear other adults voicing and living the same values as their parents, they and their parents are all strengthened and encouraged. Even in nursery little children experience the special love and caring of Holy Spirit-inspired believers in and followers of Jesus Christ. That special milieu facilitates the development of an "at home" feeling for which the children will long when they are away from it as adults.

As Paul indicates in the first part of the Philippians 4 passage, sometimes conflicts occur in the church, but they usually are, and always can be, short lived. Further, when a conflict due to our human sin and immaturity occurs in the church, we have help on the vertical plane from God and on the horizontal plane from many others who will help us resolve the matter. Again, such human resources are more forthcoming with membership, as analogous in family relationships contrasted with visitors in a family context.

See the accompanying essay, "What is the Church? Why should I become a Member?" on my Website at https://fromacorntooak12.com/what-is-the-church/.

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We have opportunities to prepare to serve and to then serve. We read in Ephesians 4:11-16 that God has given spiritual gifts to the believers in and followers of Christ Jesus so that they will be able to help people mature and become more Christ-like. We don't usually find these people out in the woods on Sunday morning, and even if we did it would not be enough for the education we need. Conversely, all of us who are believers in and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, our only Savior, are important parts of the body of Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:12-27) We've been given gifts to use to help build up the body of Christ, to help brothers and sisters in the Lord, to bless them and facilitate the accomplishment of his purposes. We can't bless them as much as possible if we're not with them.

As we engage in the worship of the triune God in the company and ongoing fellowship with his covenant people, we mature in Christ-likeness and in God's service. We seek to prepare ourselves and help others to prepare "so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming." (Ephesians 4:12-14) Here again is a key Biblical basis for the vital teaching ministry the church offers.

Preparation for the end of life here on earth should be mentioned as one of the first reasons to attend church regularly, but I put it at the end since many if not most people may not read farther if this were one of the first points. Sadly, those who ignore preparation for eternity are the least prepared and find the end of this phase of life most difficult when it comes instead of experiencing the joy Jesus has provided. To do well in the challenges facing all of us in our final days in this world requires a life-long walk with the Lord, maturing in Christ via the time honored means of God's grace, which include hearing the proclamation of his Word and receiving the sacraments in his sanctuary where he meets with his people and dialogues with us, drawing us closer to him and to our church family, whose support is huge when our death, and the death of our loved ones, draws near and comes. To be the strongest and best prepared, we need to meet with God in his sanctuary regularly, ideally at least weekly, throughout our whole lives.

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As a long-time pastor, I've observed the very significant difference in countless people who've faced their death and the death of loved ones. Those who have given little thought to matters pertaining to God and his weekly worship throughout their lives have a much harder time coping in these situations. On the contrary, those who've nurtured their faith in Christ, and the faith in Christ of their loved ones, do grieve, including weeping, (John 11:35) but "not as those who have no hope." (1 Thessalonians 4:13)

I've experienced the death of both of my parents, who were wonderful and whom I loved dearly. I have also experienced the death of my precious wife of 48 ½ years. The death of a spouse is much, much harder. As Jesus explained, "at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh…So they are no longer two, but one." (Matthew 19:4-5) That Biblical one flesh marital bond is such a deep and profound oneness, that when separation occurs, especially where abundant love exists, enormous sadness emerges.

However, God gives us all we need to help us cope with and overcome this greatest of all challenges. In a brief video, entitled "Managing Grief: Thanking God in and for Everything," and an accompanying essay, "Preparing for Living again as an Unmarried Person," I have explained how God has greatly helped me, and in countless ways each day continues to help me, function well in this temporary time between now and when I am reunited with my precious Carol in his eternal service and presence! Those resources can be accessed on my Website at http://www.fromacorntooak12.com/marriage/. As with everything else on my Website, they can be accessed for free and forwarded to anyone who may find them helpful.

Nevertheless, in Christ we can say with the apostle Paul,

"Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." (1 Corinthians 15:54-58)

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The encouragement we hear each time we attend the meetings of the body of Christ, the church, enables us to stand firm indeed! And when our time comes to face the end of life on this earth, we can do so without fear and even look forward with joy to what is coming in and with Christ Jesus, with our loved ones in him, and with all his other people throughout the ages!

In this section, we have seen many reasons why to attend church. God blesses us uniquely in countless ways in his church, the body of Christ, especially in services of God's worship, and in other ways in the life and work of the church, the people of God, blessings that are not obtained anywhere else outside the church.

For further information on this subject, see the preceding section of this study on *Essential Christianity*. See also my accompanying essay, "What is the church? Why should I attend?" which is on the Christian Theology page of my Website, in the section "What is the church, and how is God using it? (Ecclesiology)," which can be accessed at https://fromacorntooak12.com/what-is-the-church/.

But there's more! Much more!! Many additional blessings are experienced uniquely when one *joins* a local congregation of Christians. We look next at what God offers you when you become a member of his church.

The church in the Bible always refers to people, never to a building.

Ecclesiology: What or who is the church, and what is it for?

What is the church? Why should I become a member?

Ecclesiology: *What is the church? Why should I join?*

The following are reasons for church membership drawn from the wisdom of the historic church through the ages. In addition, I've included findings of social science research, e.g., informing us of basic human needs that are met most fully by membership in the church, which the New Testament reveals and explains is the body of Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:27; Romans 12:5; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:12; Colossians 1:18,24. See also above.)

The unconnected private life is neither personally fulfilling nor God's plan for us. Especially in Western society, which is highly imbued with individualism, even to the extent of narcissism, exceptions to the contrary notwithstanding, most people are inclined to think primarily in terms of themselves. Even for those who have come to faith in Christ Jesus, many think that being saved, and thus qualified for heaven, is all they need. However, that view runs counter to what we read throughout the Bible; there we see that salvation is always for service for God. As one Christian leader said long ago, if qualifying for heaven were all that were needed, a believer would be immediately transported to heaven; the fact that he or she is still here is an indication that God has more in mind for us. We are saved to serve. And when we do serve, for example by calling on a church member in the hospital, it is a lot easier for us, is much less awkward, and means much more to the other person if we can introduce ourselves as a fellow member of the church.

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God has called us to be his people, holy (uncommon and set apart) to him for the accomplishment of his purposes through us, and he has established his covenant with us. As we read throughout the Bible, the church is the primary means God is employing in the redeeming of his creation. The covenant, a major motif or theme throughout the whole Bible, explains key theological concepts in God's Word.

The covenant is not a contract or an agreement where both partners are equal; it is not a democratic idea. As with Abraham, through whom God established the present covenant (Genesis 17, Romans 4, Galatians 3), which was renewed in and by Jesus Christ, we come into this relationship on God's terms. (See the discussion earlier in our consideration of the nature and work of the church for further information on the covenant.) The covenant is a relationship with God which involves a historical continuity, commitment, and membership based on faith and obedience. Regarding the latter, obedience brings blessings; even disobedience can result in forgiveness, healing, and restoration through corrective feedback and, when necessary, discipline. The visible manifestation of the covenant is the church.

Membership is required for these blessings to occur, both for the individual and for the church. For any meaningful membership, the church must have a standard to which all who are part of the fellowship agree in order for the congregation to have an identity. Can you imagine the Lions club, Michigan State University, or the U. S. Marines having no membership requirements or an enrollment list? Every country has a membership requirement for citizenship and the attendant benefits thereof. People place a higher value on an organization, and are more inclined to join it, if it has a high standard and requirements for membership.

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For any meaningful membership, the congregation must have a roll or a list of those who are part of the communion distinguished from those who are only attendees. Some people, including some congregations, think an open membership is possible and even most to be desired. In too many cases the reason for not wanting to join are self-serving. They intuitively know if they aren't members they won't be asked to do a lot; they want the benefits offered in a congregation but without accepting responsibility to help produce those benefits. Some think that just by attending they are members. If that were the case, leaders and many others may never know a given person or that he or she is a member. To have any significance, the corporate fellowship must know who are members and who are not.

Membership in the church family is analogous to the difference in benefits experienced by being a member of a regular family contrasted with being a visitor in the home of that family. The family is there for its members, not nearly as much for a visitor; there are limits to which the family will go to meet the needs of an acquaintance, but a family, especially a family in Christ, will do all it can to help any of the members of their family whenever he or she requires their succor.

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Church membership meets and satisfies humankind's deepest needs and longings, including the need to be loved and to belong. We sense keenly that we belong to God and to one another in the special fellowship in the Holy Spirit the Bible calls *koinōnia*. We also learn how to give and receive this love more effectively.

Both on the horizontal and on the vertical level we need to belong and engage with other people and with God, our Creator. Pertaining to human interaction, Cleveland Clinic M.D., Raul Seballos, writes, "not having face-to-face interaction with other adults can become a major health risk. Studies show that a lack of social contact can lead to higher blood pressure, heart disease, anxiety, depression, cognitive decline and even early death, regardless of previous underlying issues…Along with engaging socially, stimulating your mind can lower your risk of dementia. Plan for obligations and activities with others that fuel a sense of purpose…." While such general activities as volunteering and computer-based programs like Facebook or LinkedIn can help, think about the far greater benefits that come with membership in the church, the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27. See also above for additional text references.) that includes engaging in the Great Commission the Lord Jesus Christ gave to his people! (Matthew 28:18-20; Ephesians 4:11-32)

As members of the body of Christ, we have the most special relationship of all in our connection with God. *We experience and grow in our sense of what it means to belong to God*. We even catch a glimpse of what it means to belong to something, and especially Someone, so huge that it (creation) and he (God) are beyond containment!

In God's worship we learn that we are in the presence of God who is not only holy but holy, holy, holy, which is the Biblical way of saying, Most Holy (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8) and all love. (1 John 4:8) We come to worship to meet the one true God, who is triune: the Father; his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ; and the Holy Spirit, three distinct Persons who share one substance. Since God is redeeming his creation in and through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; since God has put all things under the feet of Christ (Psalm 8:6; 1 Corinthians 15:25-27; Ephesians 1:22; Hebrews 2:8); and since we come into the presence of God only in Christ, (John 14:6) we fix our eyes on Jesus in our worship. We learn to sense more of his presence in worship, to grow ever closer to him, and to serve him in the high and holy calling he is giving us. In worship, which is true to God's Word, we enter God's presence with Jesus and grow in our relationship with the risen and reigning Christ! And we are doing so with the church triumphant, our fellow faithful loved ones and others in Christ who are already with him! (Revelation 4-5)

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Part of what it means to be created in God's image (Genesis 1:26-28) is that we are social beings. We are created to be in fellowship with one another. We help one another by being in relationship with each other and in the ensuing interactions that take place. Left alone in isolation from others, especially fellow believers in Christ, we are vulnerable to the residue of sin in our nature and to the oppression of Satan and his demonic forces, which can have severe negative effects on us that are counterproductive not only to our mission to which God has called us, but also to the joy he wants us to have. (See, e.g., Galatians 5:22; Romans 15:13.) Alone, our minds play tricks on us, but those tricks are exposed, put in perspective, and overcome through relating to God's people through whom he works for our benefit. We need ongoing fellowship with the church, God's people in Christ, the body of Christ, through the Holy Spirit, in order to "be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18) and live life in Christ Jesus to the fullest (John 10:10), including accomplishing a more healthy and effective service for the Lord which is our calling, our vocation.

And our brothers and sisters in Christ need us. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, "I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." (1 Corinthians 2:2) Paul was emphasizing how important Christ is; without Christ we lose everything. ***We need to know Christ, that is, to have a relationship with him, not just know about him, which involves the sincere and ongoing desire and goal to please our Lord (2 Corinthians 5:9), obeying him, and making him known to others.*** This is who we are, our identity and our calling, our vocation. (Refer to our study of Soteriology.) Christ Jesus is our greatest blessing, and we are called to give this good news to others, beginning in our families. I have tried to do this every day of our lives together, and I want to continue to do so after God calls me home, beginning with my funeral. I've said verbally and in writing that I want the whole service to be and focus on Christ. Paul also urged the church in Ephesus (and of course all churches including us) "to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God." (3:19)

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Sense your belonging even more keenly and fully by volunteering for work that needs to be done. Do any kind of work in the church, no matter how menial because it is important, and do it well, knowing it is the Lord you are serving. (Cf. Colossians 3:23-25) Remember also what the Apostle Paul said in Romans 15:58, when he wrote "…stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." Of course, you can serve in some limited ways in the church without becoming a member, but the experience is much deeper and more meaningful, fulfilling, and extensive with the sense of belonging you have as a fellow member of the church. Accordingly, you are also obeying the Lord (Hebrews 10:25) and reaping the benefits of doing so.

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The Holy Spirit uses our consciences to convict us of our sins. (John 16:8; Romans 2:15) We feel guilt. Yet, we are relieved of our sin and guilt. How do we overcome our sin and guilt and experience forgiveness, from God and from those we've offended? Those blessings come in God's corporate worship services and in the special Spirit-infused *koinōnia*, fellowship, of the church—not out in the trees by ourselves. Even when we are in a wonderful quiet (for us) place in nature, and even when we remember in our solitude the promises of God for forgiveness, we can't come close to the balm of the assurance and experience of forgiveness and relief from our guilt as we can when we hear in the worship services those precious words of forgiveness as proclaimed by the ordained and authorized representative of God through whom God is speaking to assure us of our pardon. Similarly, though on a different plane, we are comforted by the forgiveness extended to us by other humans who know and view us as we are: flawed, but contrite with a sincere desire to not repeat the offense, and renewed in Christ Jesus.

This forgiveness is much more meaningful for those who are members of the church, who belong to each other as family, and who know and are committed to each other, rather than only being attendees who lack, or who cannot make, the commitment. The forgiveness is much more meaningful when those who know us, with our imperfections, still forgive and love us. We can experience God's love and forgiveness through those who know and still love us. An analogy is marriage, which metaphor God uses for his relationship with the church throughout the Bible. (E.g., Jeremiah 3:1-25, esp. v. 20; Ephesians 5:21-33, esp. v. 32) The Biblical one flesh marital bond, in which a man and a woman experience the deeply profound physical, psychological, and spiritual oneness in Christ, enables, facilitates, and fosters the ability and desire to actively care for the other, including to forgive, which is far more satisfying than is typically experienced in the commitment-less cohabitation that leaves so much to be desired.

In addition to God's Word, which reveals fornication to be a sin, careful social science research reveals why cohabitation harms those who do it. See the evidence from both Scripture and sound science in my essay, "Is Cohabitation an Option for God's People—Or for Anyone Else?" on the Marriage page of my Website. This essay can be accessed at https://fromacorntooak12.com/marriage/.

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Church membership ensures receiving the prayers and other support of God's people, whose prayers are powerful and effective. (James 5:16) Though a church will gladly pray for someone who is not a member, the needs of persons who are not part of the church may not become known by the whole church, or even a smaller number. Each local church has a system for caring for its members in need, e.g., praying for and bringing meals to those who are ill. Those who may have attended the church or even be attending on a regular basis, may have needs arise that no one in the church will discover, especially if it is a larger church. To receive the prayers and other support of God's people, prayer needs are usually listed in the church publications for members, especially in larger congregations.

One of the most significant differences between nonmembers, who just attend the worship services and other events and programs of a congregation, and those who are members, is commitment to the congregation, corporately and individually. Corporately, the level of support for the congregation's mission, vision, objectives and other values (see below) is much higher among members; *they have more of a vested interest in the church, for they recognize they are part of the body*. They know they are doing it (whatever that is) not only for others but also for themselves and most of all, for God.

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Individually, members sense and share a common bond in the commitment to one another over time, a lifetime, which is typically deeper than with those who attend but do not commit. The commitment is sometimes consciously but usually unconsciously appreciated and respected. Consciously, the question occasionally emerges, "What is there about us and what we stand for that John [or Mary] doesn't like? What is keeping him [or her] from committing to our fellowship?" Of course, then it is good to ask John or Mary those questions, but sadly many people are reluctant to do so for a variety of reasons. Moreover, those who cannot or will not commit to the congregation, as in other relationships, usually don't stay for "the long haul." Except for those attendees who are church shopping with the intention of finding a church home, the presence of people who want to attend but not join is typically not as steady as that of members. Sensing that attendees may not be around regularly or long, and not be as dependable, members and others tend to not invest in the relationship, resulting in a less satisfying and enjoyable friendship over time.

Commitment frequently motivates reciprocity. The converse is also true. Without commitment to a relationship, such people tend to move off, or farther and farther from the center on, one's already busy, demanding, and cluttered "radar screen."

Some exceptions to this practice exist but are exceptional, atypical, and rare. For example, a very involved and committed attendee of a church I served for many years answered my question of why he was so involved for so long but wasn't joining by informing me, "As much as I love this congregation and consider it my church home, I can't join while my 85-year-old mother is alive. She's a charter member of the Community United Methodist Church, and she'd die if I joined another church."

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Further, *since commitment is one of the bases of a lasting, rewarding, and fulfilling relationship, it enables members to walk together with a growing level of care that is much deeper than a more superficial acquaintance provides*. As members walk together through the life stages, they share common experiences and offer help in coping with and managing the challenges of life. For example, caregivers for spouses with chronic afflictions, offer understanding, compassion, time, encouragement and a host of other resources, including praying for one another. People need to feel cared for, and membership in the body of Christ meets that need more than in any other organization.

"I have your back" is a nice-sounding saying, but when the chips are down most people don't come through or follow through all the way. Except in the church. Because the church is not just a human institution; it is the body of Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:27. See also above for other text references.) Recall not just the pleasant words but the promises of God to his faithful people: "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Joshua 1:5. Cf. Deuteronomy 31:8; Joshua 1:5; Hebrews 13:5) Never forget what Jesus said, "…surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:20) Notice I said "faithful people." God has not promised to bless disobedience and rejection, which harms the people he loves. See, e.g., 2 Chronicles 15:2; Proverbs 3:3; Jeremiah 17:13.

Membership has many privileges, including *the availability of more staff time*. A person who is not a member will receive attention to his or her needs from staff members, but the staff member is obligated to meet the needs of the church members to whom he or she is called by God, directly and through the church, and who have hired him or her. For example, a member is entitled to a certain amount of counseling from a pastor. Because of this obligation, a staff member will be limited in what he or she can do for nonmembers. The staff members are glad to serve nonmembers but can only do so after having met the needs of the members whose requirements are their priority. By becoming a member, an attendee now has a right to more of the staff members' time.

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Many if not *most leadership positions are open only to members*, as they should be. In many cases the values of church members are different in significant ways from those of nonmembers, especially on some issues that are important to the church. That is often why the nonmember has made the decision not to join.

I observed an illustration of this principle on one occasion when I was meeting with the volunteer board of a singles organization in one of the churches I served. We were planning the next month's program, one of the events of which was a favorite called "Ethnic Dining," where the group would eat at a restaurant featuring the cuisine of a selected culture, e.g., Chinese, Italian, French. At this meeting, one of the members of the board, the only one who was not a member of the church, decided to challenge the church's policy that official programs of the church would not involve the consumption of alcoholic beverages. The other board members patiently explained the rationale of the policy, that the church cares for those struggling with alcoholism and wants to provide a safe environment wherein those with that struggle and who want to attend need not fear exposure to temptation and possibly losing their control over alcohol. The Biblical basis of the policy, the freedom we have in Jesus Christ to limit our freedom due to love and for the sake of another who is struggling (1 Corinthians 8-10), was also explained and applied to the matter under discussion. The nonmember would have none of it. She proceeded to press her point and took up 45 minutes of a board meeting, arguing that alcohol should be permitted at church-sponsored events, when the board had already made the decision not to do so and to comply with the church's policy years ago when it agreed to become a part of the church's program.

The other board members were at first pleased to try to help the nonmember understand and become sensitive to the needs of those who struggle with the difficult disease of alcoholism. However, when the nonmember demonstrated an unwillingness to cooperate with the church, its program, its values, and its understanding of the Lord's will, the board concluded such a situation was neither the wisest nor most productive use of its limited time. The nonmember, who was usually a pleasant person and a good worker in those matters to which she agreed, was allowed to serve out her term on the board. Providentially, there were no other occasions of opposition like this one. The church subsequently made the policy that only members would be permitted to hold positions of authority in the church.

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Not only I but many others have observed that there is a difference between members and non-members. The latter typically have values, theological or other opinions, personnel problems (with the staff or others in the church), or additional concerns that keep them from membership. When such people are permitted to serve on committees or teams, especially in any form of leadership, they frequently want to set a policy that is in opposition to one in place in the church or to set one that opposes the positions held by many if not most in the church, or to change a current policy or practice that has been established to meet human needs and to serve the Lord most effectively. This is <u>not</u> about unwillingness to make necessary changes; it <u>is</u> about doing God's will.

Further, the historic Christian church has always had a standard for determining membership. Adherence to the Bible as God's Word and ultimate authority has been the standard from the beginning. As the early church encountered problems in interpretation of the Scriptures regarding membership, they turned at first to the apostles who helped them define and operate the standard, as Paul did in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5. In this text we see clearly that the apostle firmly believed that to allow a person to continue to be a member of the church while conducting his life in opposition to the teachings of God's Word would be destructive not only to himself but also to the whole church, so Paul commanded the church to put the member who had sinned so extraordinarily, egregiously, and publicly outside the church with the goal of not only preserving the holiness of the church to which God called it (Leviticus 19:2; Ephesians 5:3; 1 Peter 1:13-16) but in love for the one being excommunicated so that he would come to his senses, change his ways, be readmitted, and function according to God's will. Without such action, the church and the individual would suffer, and God's redemptive purposes would not progress as well or please him. God will not be thwarted. He will accomplish his purposes; but if he were to allow gross disobedience without it being disciplined, people would suffer unnecessarily.

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After the apostles died and issues arose about specific key theological understandings and commitments, the church established standards in the creeds and confessions, such as the Apostles' Creed, which was likely not written by any of the apostles but was a summary of the cardinal teachings of the apostles in the New Testament writings. When further questions and heresies arose, the church explained their common belief in additional creedal standards, such as the Nicene Creed which specified who Jesus Christ is and what he will do, focusing on the presenting issues, which issues still exist today and will until Christ returns, which is why the church still uses these creeds in its worship and educational programs.

Subsequently, since the Reformation, many denominations have found it helpful, indeed necessary, to write confessional statements called standards of unity, including catechisms, that address not only historic but contemporary issues, the adherence to which results in congregations that agree on the most important matters in the Christian faith. That agreement fosters unity, peace, maturing in Christ, and joy in the church. Since these issues occur not only in the United States but all over the globe, such standards have been developed by the church worldwide.

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Church membership facilitates commitment and discipline, two key characteristics of maturity in Christ-likeness. Many people think they can worship God out in their garden, in the woods, or on a beach, just as well, if not better, than they can in a church service. Of course, it is not only possible but desirable to worship God alone in private; we should read the Bible and pray in solitude every day. (Psalm 63:6; Matthew 6:5,6) However, part of worship includes edification that encourages maturing in the sanctification process. And sanctification, as we saw previously in the Soteriology section, involves serving as part of a body, the body of Christ, where each part is important in the use of one's gifts given by the Lord. (1 Corinthians 12)

Sanctification, maturing in Christ-likeness, involves reaching our potential in our calling from the Lord to serve him. The church facilitates that development in many ways, including providing corporate educational ministries (many churches also providing parochial and private schools) and individually encouraging, advising, and, when needed, gently and lovingly admonishing us to modify an aspect of our behavior, making a change or changes in accord with God's will as we read in the Bible. (Ephesians 4:15; 2 Timothy 3:16-17) Members receive this caring for the person's own good (1 Corinthians 5:5) and because God has given the church the responsibility to do so. The church's reputation in the community, its helpfulness for others, and its witness for Christ is at stake. Attendees' behaviors do not impact the church and its witness as much as that of members.

However, if attendees do misbehave significantly, especially in ways that become public knowledge, they also should receive admonition out of love in a caring manner. (See, e. g., Leviticus 19:17b, Luke 17:3; Galatians 6:1)

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In our interactions with others in the church we experience a refreshing Christ-like humility that we typically don't see in the world. This statement is not to say there are no nice non-Christian people in the world. As God the Father out of his great love and grace, grants blessings to the righteous and the unrighteous, (Matthew 5:45) some unbelievers can have an extra measure of grace that results in their being pleasant people—nice enough to be considered fine from our horizontal perspective, a norm reference—but not meeting God's criterion for an eternal relationship with him in his holy, holy, holy, albeit all-loving and most gracious, presence. Since all humans have a sinful nature and have sinned, we are unable to enter God's presence, and the only way he has provided for us to be fit for being with him is to be cleansed by being credited with Christ's righteousness by faith. Also, exceptions to the contrary notwithstanding, God's redeemed people growing in their relationship with God in sanctification, maturing in Christ-likeness, stand out and are wonderful to live with in the church's unique Spirit-infused *koinōnia*, fellowship.

Thus, in the world we see arrogance, pride, manipulation, power playing, narcissism, one-upmanship, pecking orders, kowtowing, grudge-bearing, and other forms of selfishness. Similarly, and as a result, we experience in the church the peace that transcends understanding (Philippians 4:1-13, esp. v. 7), peace that Jesus gives, which, as he said, is not as the world gives. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." (John 14:27)

As Paul indicates in the first part of the Philippians 4 passage, sometimes conflicts occur in the church, but they usually are, and always can be, short-lived. Further, when a conflict due to our human sin and immaturity occurs in the church, we have help on the vertical plane from God and on the horizontal plane from many others who will help us resolve the matter. Again, *such human resources are more forthcoming with membership, as analogous in marriage and family relationships, contrasted with visitors in a family context*. *Commitment provides the dynamic that facilitates the effective communication required to resolve conflict*. In church relationships, when a conflict involves people who are not members, members will be reluctant to engage the nonmember(s), and especially be hesitant to initiate corrective feedback, due to the concern the nonmember will misunderstand, leave, and not return. In so doing, the nonmember and the congregation lose more than they gain, and the cause of Christ in that congregation receives a temporary and unnecessary setback.

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Marriages are strengthened and maintained, especially for those who were married in the church. For those who were married with a traditional liturgy, they took their vows "before God and these witnesses." A considerable percentage of the witnesses were members of that church with whom the couple is still in a relationship, and the couple is accountable to them if they don't live up to those vows. *They are especially accountable to God. For those couples who now are part of another church, their present congregation serves to help them stay on the right path*. (See for example, Leviticus 19:17b; Luke 17:3; Galatians 6:1; Ephesians 4:15; James 5:19-20.)

The children of a married couple are also blessed together with their mother and dad. Families are strengthened and blessed in countless ways, each family member individually, and the whole family together corporately. Each person experiences the work of the Holy Spirit in his or her mind and heart directly during worship and in other activities, as well as indirectly through brothers and sisters in Christ in the life and work of the church, for example in conversations while working together on a service project, at choir or music team practice, when being visited in the hospital, or in Bible study, youth groups, and Sunday school classes. *When children hear other adults voicing and living the same values as their parents, they and their parents are all strengthened and encouraged*. Even in nursery little children experience the special love and caring of Holy Spirit-inspired believers in and followers of Jesus Christ. *If it has been a regular part of their lives, that special milieu facilitates the development of an "at home" feeling for which they will long if they are away from it as adults*.

Ecclesiology: *What is the church? Why should I join?*

Church membership facilitates doing work decently and in good order (1 Corinthians 14:40) and most effectively and efficiently, such as in national and international mission work. Even the U. S. federal government has recognized this reality and has sought the help of church organizations to accomplish the meeting of human needs where governments cannot, e.g., by asking international mission agencies to move supplies into areas of other countries to feed those who are starving, whereas by using government channels the supplies have been siphoned off into the black market and/or into private use by government officials and their friends, stolen by rebel raiders, or left to rot on the loading docks, illustrating the differences in the behavior and effects of the regenerate vs. the unregenerate mind and heart.

Similar situations involving human sin that thwart government efficiency and effectiveness exist also in the United States. Thus, the federal government has decided to use church organizations as a means of helping people here in this country as well.

The many services provided by global and stateside missions cannot be done by an individual, and without the corporate church, the body of Christ, such organizations would not exist to facilitate such accomplishment. If a group of people gathered together only to worship with no commitment to a permanent membership, such mission work would not likely occur and not likely as effectively and over the desirable extended timeframe. Denominations bring together the vast resources of many churches, including the gifts the Lord has given to their members, effectively and efficiently coordinating the individual efforts. Interdenominational collaboration and cooperation empowered by the Holy Spirit accomplishes great outcomes.

Ecclesiology: *What is the church? Why should I join?*

Members have considerably more influence on the decision-making of the church. Sound cross-cultural research in the field of communication, the subfield of the diffusion of innovations, shows that people in a social system, including a church, trust and allow themselves to be persuaded by a person who is most like them, represents their values, and is well-grounded in their social system. I explain this research in detail and relate it to facilitating change in churches in my essay, "Defusing Fear of Innovations: Facilitating Change in the Church." Previous versions of this essay have been published in *With an Eye on the Future: Development and Mission in the 21st Century*, Duane H. Elmer and Lois McKinney (eds.), Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1996, pp. 223-229 and the international journal, *REC FOCUS*, Vol. 3, No. 3, September 2003, pp. 40-61. The most recent version of this essay is on the Church Leadership and Administration page of my Website at http://www.fromacorntooak12.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Defusing-Fear-of-Innovations-Facilitating-Change-in-the-Church.pdf.

The church cannot accomplish its mission and enabling objectives as effectively and efficiently with an amorphous gathering that comes and goes. The following quote from Leslie Newbigin's book, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, links God's calling of his people to membership in the local church.

[A]ll human thinking takes place within a "plausibility structure" which determines what beliefs are reasonable and what are not. The reigning plausibility structure can only be effectively challenged by people who are fully integrated inhabitants…. A Christian congregation is a community in which, through the constant remembering and rehearsing of the true story of human nature and destiny, an attitude of healthy skepticism can be sustained, a skepticism which enables one to take part in the life of society without being bemused and deluded by its own beliefs about itself. And, if the congregation is to function effectively as a community of truth, its manner of speaking the truth must not be aligned to the techniques of modern propaganda, but must have the modesty, the sobriety, and the realism which are proper to a disciple of Jesus." (Pp. 228-229)

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A key reason why Newbigin says that "The reigning plausibility structure can only be effectively challenged by people who are fully integrated inhabitants," is due to what social psychologists observe as the essential basis of relationships: basic trust. The members of a church, or any other organization, know that the challenges from within regarding a needed change, come from those of like mind, who share the most important values, and are committed to the institution's success and continuity. Moreover, in the church is the bond of love that holds the members together, while at the same time permitting the stretching needed to consider opposing viewpoints, all of which are put forth with the positive desire to accomplish the church's mission for the Lord.

Church membership links us with saints and experiences in the past. We enjoy precious memories with loved ones and others we knew who have gone before us, and we anticipate meeting and sharing eternity with the wonderful people God has redeemed, sanctified, and glorified.

We need Christ-like role models to visualize what becoming "mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13) looks like in the context of the culture in which we live, with its pressures, temptations, and challenges that we face. We need to see and, having seen, to be reminded regularly that it is possible, realistic, and most beneficial to obey Christ as he requires. (See, e.g., John 14:15-21; 15:1-17; Matthew 7:13-23) Christ-centered commitment is a key personality characteristic that bears fruit for the Lord in countless ways.

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We need to see this maturity over time, and that usually occurs most in members who are committed to the long haul through thick and thin, and which usually outlasts the uncommitted who only attend, often more occasionally than regularly. Members see this maturity easier. Many people are less reserved with other members than with nonmembers, who they don't know as well; they aren't sure that what they do will be acceptable in the judgment of the nonmember. Just as in a family: members know they'll be loved and accepted no matter what they do; they don't have that assurance from those outside their family.

Again, what I am saying about uncommitted attendees in contrast to the commitment of members, applies to those who are just attending after several years. I know it can take time, now as much as, if not more than, in years past, especially in certain locations, to find a church congregation that is a good fit. Nevertheless, if you are looking for a church home, for your sake, for the sake of the church, and especially to accomplish the Lord's purposes in and through you and the church, don't let too much time go by for the above reasons and those that follow.

One caveat: examine your presuppositions. Are you assuming that there is a perfect church? Remember that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (1 Kings 8:46; Romans 3:23) Therefore, there is no perfect church here on earth. Also keep in mind with regard to pastors and other church staff members, they come and go; none will be around forever. If you like just about all of the most important aspects of a particular congregation, but not the pastor or another staff member, that person will be moving on sooner or later. The converse is also true; if you like all the staff members, they will leave at some point, but as a member you'll have more influence on who takes their place.

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Our giving is more effective. Well planned by the authorized leaders of the church, it is targeted, purposeful, and joined with others it is more helpful, e.g., in meeting the needs of the poor. Members are typically more motivated to such giving over time than those who don't commit to membership and the congregation's attendant stewardship program. Members trust those who manage the money, who they've known for many years, and as volunteers, the overhead is virtually nonexistent, the money thus going to those for whom it was given.

The church is a very helpful resource for people new to the community, as well as others, who need a trustworthy professional. The Yellow Pages, other advertisements, and people appearing at your door are risky, since insufficient or no prior screening is done, and frequently lead to a scam. I prefer to contact the pastor of my church home, a minister who has been in the community a long time, and ask him or her who is a good plumber, electrician, physician, attorney, etc. The pastor talks with many people and over time hears who does good work and who is to be avoided. Frequently, the minister has hired these people him or herself and is a trustworthy resource for finding the professional who will do good work for you. Often such labor, business, and professional people are trusted members of the congregation, and I can help them in their livelihood as they help me. *As a member of the church, you have relationships, based on trust, which will provide many helpful contacts that will meet your needs, and whom you will be able to help in special ways as well*.

As I wrote in the companion article on reasons to attend church, preparation for the end of life here on earth should be mentioned as one of the first reasons, but I put it at the end, as here, since many if not most people may not read farther if this were one of the first points. Sadly, those who ignore preparation for eternity are the least prepared and find the end of this phase of life most difficult when it comes.

Ecclesiology: *What is the church? Why should I join?*

To do well in the challenges facing all of us in our final days in this world requires a life-long walk with the Lord, maturing in Christ via the time honored means of God's grace, which include hearing the proclamation of his Word and receiving the sacraments in his sanctuary where he meets with his people and dialogues with us, drawing us closer to him and to our church family, whose support is huge when our death, and the death of our loved ones, draws near and comes.

Regarding the sacraments, churches in the historic Christian tradition baptize children and adults in a worship service in the church. An essential part of the meaning of baptism is that the recipient becomes a member of God's covenant with Abraham renewed in Christ. Baptism is usually done in the church, during a worship service, signifying that the church has a responsibility to the one(s) being baptized, specifically to be the main indirect conduit of God's care for the needs of the baptized person(s), most importantly spiritual maturity in Christ. *Baptism is a sign and a seal of membership in the covenant, and the church is the visible manifestation of that covenant*. (Genesis 17:7, 10-12; Romans 4:11; Galatians 3:26-29; Colossians 2:9-12) For attendees of a congregation over time, it becomes *inconsistent with the meaning of baptism to reject membership*.

In many churches one can only partake of the Lord's Supper if he or she is a member, and a member in good standing, as defined by the Bible and that congregation. The congregation cannot be criticized for this stand; they should be affirmed, for they are taking seriously the Biblical warning in 1 Corinthians 11:27-34 to protect not only themselves but anyone who might wrongly partake in holy communion and thus "eat and drink judgment on himself." (v. 29)

Further, *when we are members of a church home, a congregation of brothers and sisters in Christ, we experience the monumental blessings of our commitment to one another as members, similar to the difference mentioned above in benefits experienced by being a member of a family rather than a visitor in the home of that family*. Members often refer to the others in their congregation as "my church family."

Ecclesiology: *What is the church? Why should I join?*

To be the strongest and best prepared, we need to meet with God in his sanctuary regularly, ideally at least weekly, throughout our whole lives. As I mentioned in the companion essay on why one should attend church meetings, especially corporate worship services, as a retired pastor I've observed the very significant difference in countless people who have faced their death and the death of loved ones: those who have given little thought to matters pertaining to God and his weekly worship throughout their lives have a much harder time coping in these situations. On the contrary, those who've nurtured their faith in Christ, and the faith in Christ of their loved ones, do grieve, including weeping, (John 11:35) but "not as those who have no hope." (1 Thessalonians 4:13) Those who are members of a church congregation have additional support and succor.

I have experienced the death of both of my parents, who were wonderful and whom I loved dearly; I grieved for both of them, and also for my wife's parents. I have also experienced the death of my precious wife of 48½ years. The death of a spouse is much, much harder. I have learned a lot in the years since my wonderful wife died in how to cope with this temporary, but still sometimes painful, period apart until we are reunited in glory with God in heaven where she is already! I have posted a brief video where I explain what I've learned that is most helpful, and I've also written what I have learned in order to help others who lose a spouse in an essay, both of which are on the Marriage page of my Website at https://fromacorntooak12.com/marriage/. The title of the video is "Managing Grief: Thanking God in and for Everything." The essay is titled, "Preparing for Living again as an Unmarried Person: Begin Now."

As Jesus explained, "at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh…So they are no longer two, but one." (Matthew 19:4-5) That Biblical one flesh marital bond is such a deep and profound oneness, that when separation occurs, especially where abundant love exists, enormous sadness emerges. Nevertheless, in Christ we can say with the apostle Paul,

"'Death has been swallowed up in victory.' 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." (1 Corinthians 15:54-58)

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God helps us stand firm in two main ways: (1) He works directly himself in our minds and hearts, a blessing both members and attendees in Christ experience. (2) He works in special ways *indirectly through brothers and sisters in Christ to whom we are mutually committed as members of the body of Christ, the church*.

As a final answer to the question with which this essay began, consider the following story. I've had this anecdote in my files a long time, but it no longer contains the name of the original author; I don't think I ever knew who that was. It is nevertheless an insightful illustration of a profound and relevant truth.

Someone wrote a letter to the editor of the local newspaper complaining about how he had been going to church each week for thirty-some years, and had heard about 3,000 sermons, but since he couldn't remember any of them, he figured he was wasting his time and the pastors were wasting their time. A considerable controversy erupted on the op/ed page for several weeks until someone penned a striking analogy.

I've been married for 30 years now. In that time my wife has cooked some 32,000 meals. But for the life of me, I cannot recall the entire menu for a single one of those meals. But I do know this: They all nourished me and gave me the strength I needed to do my work. If my wife had not given me these meals, I would be physically dead today. Likewise, if I had not gone to church for nourishment, I would be spiritually dead today!

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Very significantly, in both cases commitment is key. He and his wife made a life-long commitment to God and to each other. His wife gave him those meals as part of his commitment to her, her commitment to him, and the commitment of both to God. How many of those 32,000 meals do you think she would have been willing to prepare for him if he were a "fly-by-nighter," who only showed up periodically, unexpectedly, and without anything much for her? Likewise, he received life-giving spiritual nourishment due to his commitment to God and his church, and God's and the church's commitment to him. In fact, his wife, her meals, and all her other blessings to him were also from God, the giver of every good and perfect gift. (James 1:17)

All of these and many other blessings are available for church members—all church members—including those with special needs, such as those who are homebound. Mobile members, serving with those who have physical and other incapacities, are willing to meet in the homes of those who are unable to leave their residence but who have much to offer with their Holy Spirit-guided wisdom, knowledge, experience, and ability to communicate in such social gatherings and via the Internet.

Think now. Reflect on what a *huge* blessing it is for people of all ages who have significant disabilities but who with God working through them still contribute in important ways to the Lord's work in and through his church. Their lives here on earth are not over! Not at all! And their lives have great meaning, value, significance, and purpose. Until they draw their last breath, all church members are able to serve the Lord in magnificent ways. This reality includes a quadriplegic person, who is bedridden; he or she can still serve Christ Jesus and his church. He or she can do so in several of the preceding ways applicable, and always and especially in prayer. As we read and recall in God's Word, "The prayer of a righteous person is effective." (James 5:16, Greek). Many, and usually all, times pastors, elders, and others who have visited homebound church members come away from the visit thinking and saying, "I came to visit [Name] to be a blessing, and I came away being even more blessed by him [or her]."

Ecclesiology: *What is the church? Why should I attend?*

In this section we've been focusing on the teaching of God's Word regarding the church, those whom God has called to be holy to him and who constitute the body of Christ. Our calling is to serve God, and in the process we receive many blessings that equip us to serve him most effectively. In this segment we've seen that those who engage the process of membership in a local church congregation are especially well equipped and blessed in so doing, now and forever.

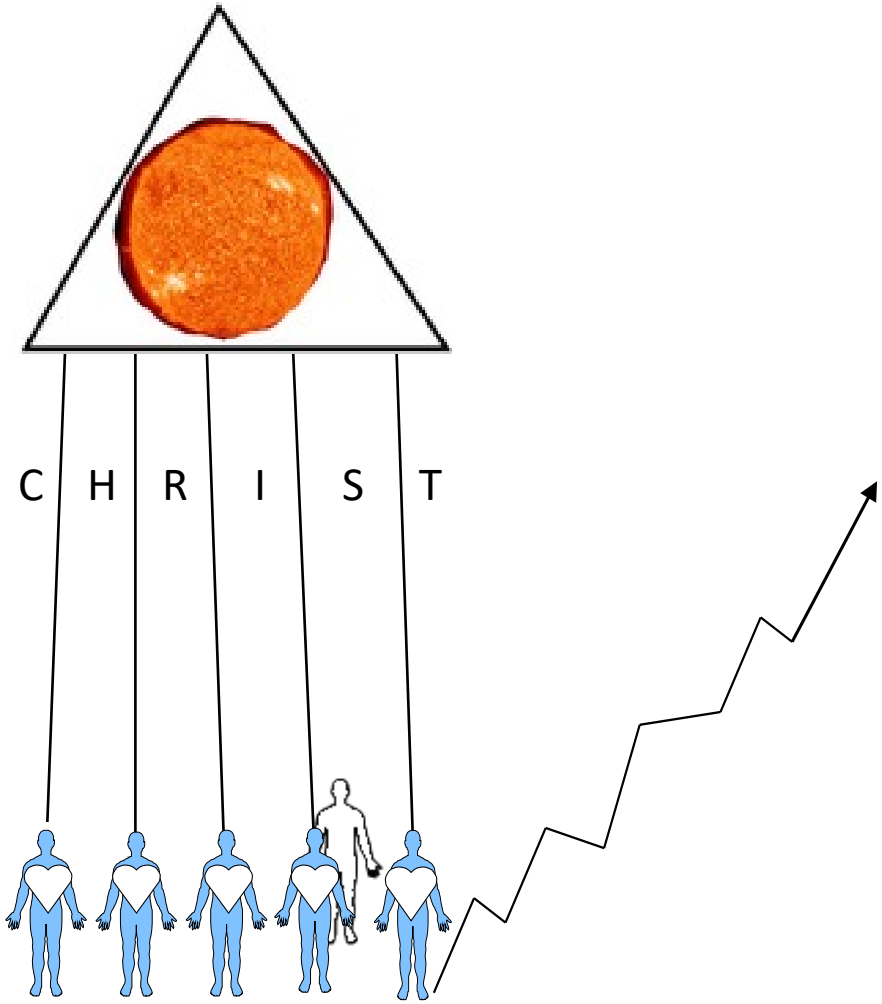
Many additional blessings are experienced uniquely when one joins, not only attends, a local congregation of Christians. For further information on this subject, see the preceding sections of this study on *Essential Christianity*. See also my accompanying essay, "What is the church? Why should I become a member?" which is on the Christian Theology page of my Website, in the section "What is the church, and how is God using it? (Ecclesiology)," which can be accessed at https://fromacorntooak12.com/what-is-the-church/.

The church in the Bible always refers to people who believe in and follow Jesus Christ, never to a building.

Ecclesiology: What are some of the practical implications and applications of this doctrine?

Question for Reflection and Discussion

What do you say to young adults who say, "Jesus, Yes; church No; I don't need the church?"



[If time: Start in groups of four, then debrief in the large group. If time is short: begin in dyads, then ask for volunteers to share with the whole group what they think.]

Resources

In order to facilitate course preparation, the slides in this overview of Biblical Ecclesiology have been selected from the Ecclesiology section in the original and unabridged version of the PowerPoint program (PPT), *Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology—With a Focus on Its Very Practical Dimensions, Including God's Answers to Our Great Questions of Life—for Now and Eternity*.

This abbreviated PPT is still larger than can be covered in an average one-class session, particularly in the West. Therefore, an accompanying further abridged PPT for a one-session class is available with highlighting of especially essential parts to help when time is very limited.

For further information about the subjects on the Ecclesiology slides in both this abbreviated PPT overview and the further abridged PPT, see the additional slides in the Ecclesiology section that are on the original and unabridged PPT, which is located on the Christian Theology page of the author's free and secure general Website. See also other informative articles on the Christian Theology page.

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