

Biblical Theology by Dr. Chuck Baynard

Lesson 20 (HCLD 21) ¹

Preparation: Begin and end each study time with prayer. Pay particular attention to the background reading and pray over each passage asking God to reveal Himself to you.

Background Reading: Read all the Scripture verses in footnote # 1 & 2.

Vocabulary: Church, Visible/Militant church, Invisible/triumphant church

Question: What is the visible church and what are the privileges belonging to it?

Answer: The visible church is a society made up of all such as in all ages and places of the world who profess the true religion,[a] and of their children.[b] The visible church has the privilege of being under God's special care and government;[c] of being protected and preserved in all ages, notwithstanding the opposition of all enemies;[d] and of enjoying the communion of saints, the ordinary means of salvation,[e] and offers of grace by Christ to all the members of it in the ministry of the gospel, testifying, that whosoever believes in him shall be saved,[f] and excluding none that will come unto him.[g]²

¹ Q54: What do you believe concerning the "Holy Catholic Church"?

A54: That out of the whole human race,[a] from the beginning to the end of the world,[b] the Son of God,[c] by His Spirit and Word,[d] gathers, defends and preserves for Himself unto everlasting life a chosen communion [e] in the unity of the true faith;[f] and that I am and forever shall remain a living member of this communion.[g]

- a. Gen. 26:4
- b. John 10:10
- c. Eph. 1:10-13
- d. Rom. 1:16; 10:14-17; Isa. 59:21; Eph. 5:26
- e. Rom. 8:29-30; Matt. 16:18; Eph. 4:3-6
- f. Acts 2:46; Psa. 71:18; I Cor. 1:8-9; 11:26; John 10:28-30
- g. I John 2:19; 3:21; Gal. 3:28

Q55: What do you understand by the "communion of saints"?

A55: First, that believers, one and all, as members of the Lord Jesus Christ, are partakers with Him in all His treasures and gifts;[h] second, that each one must feel himself bound to use his gifts readily and cheerfully for the advantage and welfare of other members.[i]

- h. I John 1:3
- i. I Cor. 12:12-13, 21; 13:5-6; Phil. 2:4-6; Heb. 3:14

Q56: What do you believe concerning the "forgiveness of sins"?

A56: That God, for the sake of Christ's satisfaction,[j] will no more remember my sins, nor the sinful nature with which I have to struggle all my life long;[k] but graciously imputes to me the righteousness of Christ, that I may nevermore come into condemnation.[l]

- j. I John 2:2
- k. II Cor. 5:19, 21; Rom. 7:24-25; 8:1-4; Psa. 103:3, 10, 12; Jer. 31:34
- l. John. 3:18; Eph. 1:7; Rom. 4:7-8; 7:18

² a. I Cor. 1:2; 12:13; Rom. 15:9-12; Rev. 7:9; Psa. 2:8; 22:27-31; 45:17; Matt. 28:19-20; Isa. 59:21

- b. I Cor. 7:14; Acts 2:39; Rom. 11:16; Gen. 17:7
- c. Isa. 4:5-6; I Tim. 4:10
- d. Psa. 115:1-2, 9; Isa. 31:4-5; Zech. 12:2-4, 8-9
- e. Acts 2:39, 42

There is essentially only one difference between the visible and invisible church; the visible church may have as members those who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ. Whereas the invisible church consists only of the saints. Both transcend all man made or geographical boundaries, for there is but one church of God.

That this membership of the children of wrath exists is testified to by our Lord Himself in the parable of the "Sower" in Matthew 13. What exactly constitutes a "true" church and the professing of the "true religion" has caused much division in the visible body over the years. Some of the reasons for division while important to individual or groups of believers are invalid reasons to withhold fellowship and divide the church. Nonetheless, the best we can do as human beings in the governance of the visible church is flawed by the flesh of her earthly leaders and such division is going to be maintained and perhaps even increase.

While the parable of the Wheat and Tares would indicate we have not the means to separate the wheat from the tares without harming the wheat, it is this that man has sought to do in all the denominations that exist on the face of the earth. It is justified by passages that call for believers to separate themselves from such that hold false doctrine and teach the same. There is a delicate balance here and it is this mark of the true church and believer we should prayerfully consider. There have been many complete works given to this subject, so I will not rehash the whole issue, nor attempt to give a definitive definition here. Rather, I want to give some general guidelines that the reader may with prayer and spiritual discernment decide from whom they should withdraw fellowship. That such a point exists I believe is clear from Scripture. However I think we fail to exhibit the proper amount of tolerance for each other in the church, and the lines of battle are too often drawn within our own family circle.

We can see the extreme of not separating tearing the church apart today over the homosexual issue. I have read where supposed theologians said that the Bible was not definite on this as being sin and the church must be inclusive. Hogwash, and I will go so far as to say that any that can accept this are not of the church, but children of hell itself. This by example is an issue that should not even be discussed in the church courts. Scripture is clear that such is not of God and is more than passing error (Ephesians 5:1-3). Paul in this epistle continues that even foolish talking and jest is sin and we are to have no part of it (Eph. 5:7). Rather than fellowship we are to "reprove" such ungodly things as children of light (Eph. 5:11). I believe Ephesians 5:12 forbids the church ever considering the homosexual agenda, much less accepting the same. Under such gross error a believer has no choice but separate themselves from the church were such is accepted practice

Female elders is the next biggest issue separating the reformed church. Again without the attempt to prove or disprove the issue, there has plenty been written by others, I simply offer the solution that is acceptable to me. Only once in the Old Testament do we see a woman as head of God's people (Deborah). Nonetheless there was a time when God chose a woman. Some maintain God chose Deborah as punishment and shame to Israel rather than her being God's first choice. While indeed it may be a shame to the men that none of their rank was acceptable to be chosen, God did choose the woman. In the New Testament we see Paul speak of women and their service in the church. Most argue we can only prove he allowed women as deaconesses. Silence never answered an argument. The truth is we don't know the full extent of the role of women in the apostolic church. However from the whole of Scripture we can say that such calling of the female seems to have been the rare exception, and not the tradition of the church. Without the full

f. Psa. 147:19-20; Rom. 9:4; Eph. 4:11-12; Mark 16:15-16

g. John 6:37

knowledge of the circumstance under which God permitted Paul to write words that would seem to forbid women an office in the church, I personally choose to reserve the right to permit women under some circumstances the office of elder. There seems to be a bias in Scripture that renders either our understanding of Scripture wrong or God has contradicted Himself. God didn't do any such thing, and therefore the error is with our understanding. The point of all this is that of the two issues, one is crystal clear with not one word of Sacred Text to indicate otherwise. From such we must separate. The other, though weak at best, does leave room for some doubt about a complete forbidding of the practice. That man (female) will take advantage and move to an extreme when given any leeway is written in the journals of history from the beginning of time. Thus in denominations that allow women office, it seems it has always led to radical feminism and the upsetting of the natural order of things. This is the fault of the created, not God. Total depravity still reigns supreme among humankind.

Thus, of the big two I personally find one worthy of division (withholding of fellowship) and one that I think we should tolerate, though with much care and prayer. In my case I found a denomination that supports my view and where I feel God is present and the Holy Spirit working. Each of us must make such a decision. However I have not found the perfect church on earth, she doesn't exist here. To co-exist is the best we will find on earth in any given denomination. Is it of such a high aggravation to me that it hinders the true worship of God? If this is true, I need to find another place to call home within the body of Christ.

In this respect I find the need for several denominations, that we all might find this place within the reformed community where we are within the Biblical guidelines, and not trampling the clear teachings of Scripture. Nonetheless, the fellowship between denominations is not what it should be with many issues that in my opinion are not unbiblical causing the widest division, to the point churches are not in fellowship with one another even within the reformed family. I believe the words of the Lord ring all too true about harming the wheat by attempting to remove tares before the time of harvest. Some who appear to be so godly and of the family are not, and will populate hell on that great day to come (Mt. 7:21). This was true of the Old Testament, and New Testament, churches and continues today. The one perfect rule of judging among men was given by Christ in Matthew Seven also; "by their fruit you shall know them."

God is concerned with what is in the heart, not what proceeds from the tongue of man. Nowhere in Scripture can you find the methods set down in minute detail. The so called "Regulative Principle of Worship (RPW) aside. This rule simply stated says that if it is not explicitly set down in Scripture as being proper worship, it is strange fire on God's altar and to be avoided. I refuse to have my Christian liberty bound by silence. We are to worship God in truth and spirit. This is clear doctrine. The time, place, method, etc. are not as clear as most are want they should be. To attempt to read into Scripture and cause division in the Body of Christ is more sin than toleration, awaiting the Lord and the holy angels to make the separation on the sure day of judgment. Proverbs six and other places give us God's feeling toward such as would sow division without cause among the brethren. This is an area we should tread ever so gently, less we fall into a greater sin than those who hold what we consider doctrinally unsound. There are causes for division, of complete withdrawal of fellowship. However, we must temper judgment with charity, less we fall into the greater fault of pride.

Listen not to this nor any other commentator on the Holy Bible. Pick up that sacred book and read for yourself what it says. I have full confidence in God's promise that the Holy Spirit will lead you to all truth. This has been one of the biggest battles in my spiritual life. God's promise of leading all believers to all truth is firm. Yet, I find those that to the best of my human abilities appear

to be children of light differing on some issues. When the fruit within the life of the person is good, then I must believe that God's truth is perhaps larger than my conception of it, and perhaps both sides have an element of truth on their side. With the Bible as your anchor, in much prayer let the Holy Spirit place you in the church family where you belong. All children of light do belong in a local congregation (part of the visible church). The church was founded by Christ, not man, and to deny the necessity of belonging is the same as calling Jesus Christ a liar in my opinion. Among men the divisions and labeling of each other will continue until our Lord returns. That aside, God has a place for you in this visible body, seek it out. Meantime, love one another.

Suggested Sermon Outline

The Holy Catholic Church

What do you believe concerning the Holy Catholic Church?

I believe that from the beginning to the end of the world, and from among the whole human race, the Son of God, by His Spirit and His Word, gathers, protects, and preserves for Himself, in the unity of the true faith, a congregation chosen for eternal life. Moreover, I believe that I am and forever will remain a living member of it.

What do you understand by the Communion of the Saints?

First that believers one and all, as partakers of the Lord Christ, and all His treasures and gifts, shall share in one fellowship. Second, that each one ought to know that he is obliged to use his gifts freely and with joy for the benefit and welfare of other members.

What do you believe concerning the forgiveness Of Sins?

That, for the sake of Christ's reconciling work, God will no more remember my sins or the sinfulness with which I have to struggle all my life long; but that He graciously imparts to me the righteousness of Christ so that I may never come into condemnation.

I. Christ Gathers a People to Himself

A. The promise of a great world church was part of the revelation to Abraham. Sojourn in this land, and ***I will be with thee, and will bless thee***, for unto thee, and unto thy seed, ***I will give all these countries***, and I will perform ***the oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father***; And ***I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven***, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and ***in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed***; (Genesis 26:34)

B. The gathering of the promised people from among all nations is the work of Christ. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for ***thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation***; (Revelation 5:9)

C. Christ, not some organizational official, is the head of the church. And ***he is the head of the body, the church***: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all *things* he might have the preeminence. (Colossians 1:18)

D. The Bible is the means of God's administration in the church. As for me, this *is* my covenant with them, saith the LORD; ***My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth,*** nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever. (Isaiah 59:21)

E. The world is headed into the Holy Catholic Church. For so hath the Lord commanded us, *saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.* And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: ***and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.*** (Acts 13:47-48)

F. There is only one genuine church by definition. Endeavouring to keep ***the unity of the Spirit*** in the bond of peace. ***There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all,*** who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (Ephesians 4:3-6)

G. The Church is the product of Christ's work. Husbands, love your wives, even as ***Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;*** That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, ***That he might present it to himself a glorious church,*** not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be ***holy and without blemish.*** (Ephesians 5:25-27)

H. No one can prevent Christ from accomplishing His intention for the church. And I give unto them eternal life; and ***they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.*** (John 10:28)

II. The Gathered Are One Community

A. Christ made only one kind of believer and only one church. God *is* faithful, by whom ***ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus*** Christ our Lord. (1 Corinthians 1:9)

B. The great differences in believers and organizations still fit into a single church. Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And ***there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.*** And there are ***diversities of operations, but it is the same God*** which worketh all in all. ***But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.*** (1 Corinthians 12:4-7)

C. As there is only one way of salvation there is only one church. For ***as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body;*** so also *is* Christ. For by one Spirit are ***we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles,*** whether we *be* bound or free; ***and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.*** (1 Corinthians 12:12-13)

III. The Church Is the Community of Forgiveness

A. Through the work of Christ, people come back to a right relationship with God and then help others to return. To wit, that ***God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself,*** not imputing their trespasses unto them; ***and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.*** (2 Corinthians 5:19)

B. People actually can be right with God. For *he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.* (2 Corinthians 5:21)

C. God does not continually drag up the past to make us endure again what was wrong. And *they shall teach no more every man his neighbour,* and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: *for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them,* saith the LORD: *for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.* (Jeremiah 31:34)

D. The church of God is the community of new hope. *There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus,* who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For *the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.* (Romans 8:1-2)

E. The gospel summarizes polity and purpose. For *God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned:* but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (John 3.17-18)

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Lord's Day 021
Questions 54, 55, 56
Dr. Edwin P. Elliott, Jr.