

# Christ Presbyterian Church

## Foundations Class

### Lesson 9

*"I believe in One Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints"*

#### Ecclesiology, Part I

The purity, government and discipline of the visible Church are matters which have in most evangelical circles generally come to be regarded as divisive and injurious questions, and any attempt to revive interest in them is regarded as a threat to evangelical cooperation and unity.... This modern attitude is also to a considerable extent the outcome of indifference to the whole doctrine of the visible Church....

We need another Reformation, a movement which will go to the root of the mischief and bring back the visible church to the pattern of God's word in her government, ordinances and ministry.

Ian Murray, Preface to *The Church of Christ*, by J. Bannerman

Introduction: Notice that the statements about the church follow the statements of Christ and the Holy Spirit. The church is understood as a continuation of Christ's redemptive ministry on earth through the work of the Holy Spirit (c.f., Acts 1:1).

#### **I. What is "the Church"?**

"ekklesia" (literally, "assembly") has a range of meanings in the New Testament, though they are all interrelated.

A. A "local" church ("the church that meets in Lydia's house.")

B. A regional/city-wide church or presbytery ("the church in Ephesus")

C. The church throughout all ages (all the saints in Christ)

## II. What does "One Holy Catholic" mean?

Traditional distinction (beginning with Augustine):

*Westminster Confession of Faith 25:1-2:*

P1 The catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all.

P2 The visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.

Note that this does not suggest an invisible faith, a personal Christianity. This assumes that Christians will publicly profess the name of Christ and be joined to visible "assembly." The Church is "invisible" only in the sense that we cannot see all places and all times at once, and that we cannot see the heart of a person.

## III. The Church As An Essential Element of the Gospel

1. Christ is essential to the Gospel
2. Christ's three offices whereby He accomplished our salvation are essential to the Gospel
3. Christ's Church is essential to participating in Ch present age.

### 1. Christ Is Essential To The Gospel As Our Only Redeemer

**Acts 4:11-12**, This Jesus... There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved

John 14:6, I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father, but by me.

**John 6:35**, I am the bread of life he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst

**John 8:12**, I am the light of the world, he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

**John 11:25-26**, I am the resurrection and life he who believes in me though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.

## **2. Christ's Three Offices whereby He accomplished our salvation are essential to Christ's work as our Redeemer**

**A. Christ our Prophet:** *God in Christ speaks to us concerning His will for our salvation and for the sake of His Glory.*

**John 1:14**, And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

**Acts 3:20ff**, In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer...that he may send the Messiah, *appointed* for you... Moses said, "the Lord your God will raise up for you from your own people a prophet like me. You must listen to whatever he tells you. And it will be that everyone who does not listen to that prophet will be utterly rooted out of the people... (see Dt. 18:15ff)

**Heb. 1:1**, Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son...He is the reflection of God's glory...

**B. Christ our Priest:** *God in Christ enables to have fellowship (communion) with Him through the atonement of our sins*

**Hebrews 1:3**, ... when he made purification for sins...

**Hebrews 4:14, 5:5**, Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God... So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was *appointed* by the one who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you.

## **C. Christ our King: *God in Christ governs us for his glory and our protection***

**Luke 1:32ff.** the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there will be no end...

**Luke 19:38,** Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!

**Heb. 1:3,** ... He sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high...

**Heb. 5:10,** having been designated by God a high priest *according to the order of Melchizedek*.... (Heb. 7:1) This *king* Melchizedek of Salem, priest of the Most High God... his name first of all means king of righteousness...

## **3. Christ's Visible Church Is Essential To The Continuation Of Christ's Mediatorial Offices As Our Only Redeemer in the Present Age**

### **Three Elements (Marks) of the Church: *Christ's Three Offices in the "last days"***

**Matthew 28 18ff,** All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. As you go, 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 that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

*I am with you always to the end of the age.*

1. As our Prophet: *teach them* (by the preaching of God's word)
2. As our Priest: *baptize them in the name of the F.S.HS,* (baptism represents an entrance into the fellowship (communion) of said community , here the community of the Triune God.)
3. As our King: *to obey* (presupposing discipline by the government provided by God)

Question: How does Christ mediate his three redemptive roles for us today?

Answer: By the continued ministry of the Holy Spirit, Christ's accomplished work as our prophet, priest and king is applied to us today.

Question: How does the Holy Spirit apply Christ's accomplished work as prophet, priest and king.

Answer: By the church, given by Christ, built upon the foundation, and instituted by the Holy Spirit through the ministry of the apostles.

### **A. The Prophetic Role of the Church : *Apostolic Preaching***

**Romans 10:14ff**, But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?

**Titus 1:5, 9**, I left you behind in Crete for this reason so that you should put in order what remained to be done by appointing elders in every town... He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it.

### **B. The Priestly Role of the Church: Renewal of New Covenant Fellowship with God**

**1 Cor. 10:16ff**, The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a *sharing* in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a *sharing* in the body of Christ...You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons... **11:18**For to begin with when you come together as a church... **11:26**, For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you preach the lord's death until he comes.

### **C. The Governmental Role of the Church:**

**1 Peter 5:2ff**, Shepherd the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising oversight... and when the chief shepherd appears.

**Acts 20:28** Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. 29 I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Some even from your own group will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them. 31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to warn everyone with tears.

## **V. Conclusion: The Church Is An Essential Element Of The Gospel:**

### **A. By Positive Institution:**

*Matthew 16:18-19*

Note that Christ's Messianic authority is to be exercised (mediated) through the foundation laid by the apostles. The "binding and loosing" that is taking place on "earth" is recognized and sanctioned in heaven. The "church" being spoken of is said to be "on earth" and therefore the visible "kingdom of God." This passage, therefore, asserts that Christ and Christ alone is both the founder and administrator of the church. His administration is to be exercised through the foundation given to the church by the apostles.

**Eph. 2:19-20**, So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, *built* upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.

### **B. By Statement:**

**1 Timothy 3:15**, *the household of God... the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.*

**Eph. 1:22**, And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head of *all things* for the church, *which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

### **C. By Inference from various commands in Scripture regarding Christian discipleship.**

Example # 1: The responsibilities regarding church government:

Acts 20:28 Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. 29 I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Some even from your own group will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them. 31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to warn everyone with tears.

**1 Peter 5:1-3**, I exhort the elders among you to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it...

**Heb. 13:17** Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with sighing-- for that would be harmful to you.

**1Tim. 5:17** Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching;

How could the church officers (I.e. Elders) practically be faithful to the above commands unless there is some definable "flock... under their charge?" How could the "flock of God" practically be faithful to "obey leaders" unless certain "leaders" are recognized as such.

Example # 2: The Administration of the Lord's Supper (Communion)

**1 Cor 5:3-5**, *...though absent in body, I am present in spirit and as if present I have already pronounced judgment in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. When you are assembled and my spirit is present with the authority of our Lord Jesus , you are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.* (Compare wording to Mt. 16:18-19 and Mt 18:18-20)

What is excommunication? It is the church barring someone from the table. How can the church have power to bar from the Table, if it does not have power to admit to the Table? If we come to the Supper solely by our own volition, then how can we be removed by any other means? Admission to and exclusion from the Supper are by the same means; either our own individual volition or the volition of the church. Then, look at 1 Cor.5. Paul does not say the man is to remove himself, but that the church is to remove him. How can the church have the duty to remove from its membership if it does not have the duty or admission? Therefore, the church as organized under a definable government is essential to the practice of the Lord's supper. ( A Personal Correspondence used by permission of author, T. David Gordon)

Example #3: The Responsibility to "assemble" on the first day of the week

**Acts 20:7** On the first day of the week, when we met to break bread...

**Heb.10:19ff**, Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great priest of the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith... Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some...

God's people in all ages under various covenants (administrations) have always been commanded to assemble for the sake of covenant renewal whereby various ceremonies suitable to the various covenants were administered. It is therefore no surprise that God's people under the new covenant continue to meet together albeit under the new ceremonies which presently administer the new covenant "until the Lord returns." As the above scriptures exemplify, such "assembling" is essential to Christian discipleship and so the various "marks" of the church that facilitate said worship.

Example # 4: The Communion of the Saints... The responsibilities of the flock one to another. Mutual love and service; acts of charity; etc.

Jn. 13:34 I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

Rom. 12:10 love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor.

Rom. 12:16 Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are.

Gal. 5:13 For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another.

Eph. 4:1 I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Col. 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

Heb. 10:24 And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Jas. 5:16 Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.

1Pet. 5:5 In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

**WCF # 26.2,** *Saints by profession are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification; as also in relieving each other in outward things, according to their several abilities and necessities. Which communion, as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who, in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.*

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