

The Doctrine of the Church

The doctrine of the Church, like all the other great doctrines of the Bible, is set forth in Scripture with a clearness and fullness befitting its importance.

The Church is both an organism and an organization. As an organism it consists of one body of believers with Jesus Christ as the Head and the members of the body functioning as the Head may direct. We have only to think of the relationship of the mind to the rest of the body, and we have a clear concept of the relationship between Christ and the members of His body, the Church. As an organization, the Church is a body of people organized for effectual service and the common welfare. Through divine directions, it has its officials and rules of order, that members may be of mutual service to one another, may be fortified against the evils of this world, and may unite their powers in the work of winning the lost.

The ordinances serve as a help in keeping the Church in proper working condition, both as individuals and as a collective body. They were conceived in divine wisdom, instituted by divine authority, and we praise the Lord for the privilege of keeping them as He commanded us to do.

All praise and glory to God for instituting the Christian Church. May we cherish it, and spend our lives in promoting its interests and in glorifying its Head.

The Christian Church

The word Church (*ekklesia*) is derived from two Greek words meaning “to call out from.” It has been defined as a body of believers who have been called out from the world, and who are under the dominion and authority of Jesus Christ.

The *visible Church* is the Church on earth, as man sees it.

The *Church militant* is the body of Christ maintaining the standard of righteousness, and waging an aggressive warfare against sin and unrighteousness.

The *Church of Christ* is the body of true believers in the present dispensation.

The innumerable body of overcomers whose faith in Jesus Christ enables them to live the overcoming life here and to share in the complete triumphs of righteousness in the end is known as the *Church triumphant*.

In another sense we speak of the Church as an *assembly of believers*.

The Church in Figure

There are three very suggestive figures of the Church used in the Bible: (1) the body of Christ, (2) the temple or building, (3) the Bride of Christ.

As the body of Christ, He is represented as the Head (Colossians 1:18) and we as members of the body (1 Corinthians 12).

For an accurate description of the temple in building, read Ephesians 2:20-22; 4:11-16. A most beautiful figure is held out in Scripture representing the Church as the prospective Bride of Christ, awaiting His coming. The Holy Spirit is at work in this dispensation choosing this Bride. As a picture of the Church in the waiting attitude, see Matthew 25:1-11. All things having been completed, the Lord will come for His Bride, an indissoluble union between Christ and the Church (as between a bride and groom) will take place, “*and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*” Read also Ephesians 5:22-33 and Revelation 21:9.

The Purpose of the Church

God the Author. That God is the Author of Church organization is evident. He supplies the overseers and officers of the Church (Ephesians 4:11-16), gives directions for its government (Matthew 18:15-17; Acts 20:28), and Christ is frequently referred to The Lord will come for His Bride, an indissoluble union between Christ and the Church will take place as “head,” “door,” “foundation,” etc., of the Church. Church organization is a very prominent feature in the work of both Christ and His disciples.

Purpose of Organization. This is forcibly set forth in Paul’s instructions to the Ephesians:

“And he gave some, apostles; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers: for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11, 13).

Notice the four reasons given: (1) “perfecting of saints” (2) “work of the ministry,” (3) “edifying of the body,” (4) “unity” of the entire body.

The history of the Christian Church has proved the wisdom of organization. Churches discrediting it are, as a rule, short-lived. Organization is not only a power in holding members but also a means of uniting forces and winning other souls for God. Had the spirit of Luke 9:23, as exemplified in Acts 2:41, 42; 15:6-32 been put into universal practice since the days of Christ, there would today be but one organization in one body of loyal members of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Gospel Requirements for Admission

The popular idea of church membership is to receive all who want to unite with the Church; but the Bible holds to a different standard. Following are the Bible conditions for membership:

Faith. In response to the question, “What doth hinder me to be baptized?” Philip replied, “If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest” (Acts 8:37, 38). When the jailer asked, “What must I do to be saved?” he received the reply, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 16:30, 31). Upon evidence of this faith he was baptized. Since faith is essential to salvation (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6), it should also be made a test of membership in the visible Church.

Repentance. John the Baptist called for “fruits meet for repentance” as a requisite for baptizing the multitudes of people before him. Matthew 3:7, 8. Peter’s admonition, “Repent, and be baptized” (Acts 2:38), is in harmony with John’s attitude. Receive into Church any one who is willing to come, and the chances are that you have a Simon the sorcerer, an Ananias, or some other unconverted member. Receive him upon evidence of repentance and you receive one whose sins have been remitted. Luke 24:47.

Conversion. True repentance results in conversion. Peter understood this when he said, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19). Conversion is essential to

salvation, and should be held essential to church membership. To receive unconverted people into the Church is an injustice to the applicant, for the influence of such a procedure is to blind the applicant with false hopes; an injustice to the Church, because it plants more of the leaven of wickedness into it.

Obedience. You may ask, “How can a person not yet in the Church manifest obedience?” He can do as they did on the day of Pentecost: “Gladly” receive “his word” (Acts 2:41). The convert who comes dictating terms to the Church is a convert only in name. While the keeping of ordinances is reserved until the convert is taken into fellowship, there are many other commandments which, if the conversion is genuine, will be obeyed from the time the convert is enlightened. The Church has a right to expect a submissive attitude on the part of every convert.

~Daniel Kauffman