

XXV. The Church

A. Aspects of the church

1. The catholic (that is, universal) church, which is invisible, consists of all the elect who have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ its head. This church is his bride, his body, and the fullness of him who fills all in all.

2. The visible church, which is also catholic (that is, universal) under the gospel (that is, not confined to one nation, as it was before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world who profess the true religion, together with their children. It is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, outside of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.

1. Invisible

Consists of?

Eph. 5:27, John 6:39, Rev. 7:9-10

2. Visible

Consists of?

1 Cor. 12:12-13

“Their children.”

OT: Gen. 17:7, Ezekiel 16:20-21

NT: Acts 2:39, Acts 16:31, 1 Cor. 7:14, Rom 4:12, 2 Tim. 1:5

3. The fullness of Christ

Eph 1.22-23: *And he subjected everything under his feet and appointed him as head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.*

Is Christ incomplete? Does he need the church to fulfill something that is lacking in him?

4. The kingdom of Christ

The church as the kingdom of Christ in this world

Acts 2:30-33, Col 1:13

Gal 3:28-29

No ordinary possibility of salvation outside of the church

Acts 2:47

What are some extraordinary circumstances?

B. Responsibilities of the church

3. To this universal, visible church Christ has given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, to the end of the age. For this purpose he makes these means effectual by his own presence and Spirit, according to his promise.

1. God's gifts to the church

- God gives the church _____
1 Cor. 12:27-28
- God gives the church _____, _____, _____
Eph 4:11-13, Matt. 28:19-20
- Made effectual by _____
Isa. 59:21

2. The use of those gifts

- **Gathering**
- **Perfecting**
- **Timeline**

C. The visibility and marks of the church

4. This universal church has been sometimes more and sometimes less visible. Particular churches, which are members of this universal church, are more or less pure to the extent to which the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, the ordinances are administered, and public worship is performed more or less purely in them.

5. The purest churches on earth are subject to both mixture and error, and some have so degenerated that they have become no churches of Christ at all, but rather synagogues of Satan. Nevertheless, there shall always be a church on earth to worship God according to his will.

1. Error in the church (lowered visibility)

Rom. 11:3-5, Acts 2:47, Rev. 2-3

What makes the church less visible?

2. Marks of the church

Signs of a purer (more visible) church:

1 Cor. 5:6-7, Rev. 2-3

- Preaching of the gospel
- Administration of the sacraments (God's ordinances)
- Proper worship
- Church discipline (see WCF Ch. 30 & Belgic Confession Article 29)

Belgic Confession, Article 29:

The marks by which the true Church is known are these: If the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if it maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing sin.

At what point does a church cease to be a church and instead become a “synagogue of Satan?”

If you are in a church that is becoming “less pure,” at what point should you decide to leave?

3. Endurance of the church

“There shall always be a church on earth to worship God according to his will.”

Matt. 28:20

D. The head of the church

6. There is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor can the Pope of Rome be its head in any sense.

Col. 1:18, Eph. 1:22-23, Matt. 23:8-9

OPC Form of Government Ch. III.3:

All church power is only ministerial and declarative, for the Holy Scriptures are the only infallible rule of faith and practice. No church judicatory may presume to bind the conscience by making laws on the basis of its own authority; all its decisions should be founded upon the Word of God.

RCC Vatican II (1964):

“...the Roman Pontiff, by virtue of his office as Vicar of Christ, namely, and as pastor of the entire Church, has full, supreme and universal power over the whole church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered.”

1. Difference from the original

Original version ended paragraph 6 with this:

“: but is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself, in the Church, against Christ and all that is called God.”