

## Lecture 1 – The Church: what is it?

1. Confusion: how define? How 'church' different from 'club' = folk with common interest (quilting, biking)? Necessary to join? How do that? Who has authority? Why? Can't church just leave me alone? What they good for?
  - a. As seek answers, we follow trends of times. Eg,
    - i. Reality based on what see, cf science. Observe:
      1. Many churches in community/peninsula, good people....
      2. Radio, internet: many good teachers from these churches....
        - a. Conclude: they all 'churches' – all have own 'services' = go there for your periodic 'service' (get your car 'serviced' = "weekly tune-up for your soul in 70 minutes" – though do again in PM → whatever for....
    - ii. Post-modernism/multi-culturalism, ie, scepticism re heritage of past, including concept of 'true church' or 'need to go to this church' → so old-school. Make up own truth/rules/standards; so go to 'service-provider' of your choice.
      1. So self-righteous to say we 'only' church, or only 'true' church
    - iii. Tap into typical North American formulation re church, ie, each a 'denomination' ∴ happy to speak of 'visible' & 'invisible' → here is influence of West Confession, Art 25
  - b. Result: think of any decent churches as bona fide 'church' – no judgmentalism. Ie, develop habits alien to previous generation:
    - i. Visit other churches... – near or far
    - ii. Withdrawal announcements have changed over years: "broken with the church" → "withdrawn from *this* church" – and voice hope for God's blessing on choice.
    - iii. Fencing Lord's Supper  
Common denominator to above: multitude of churches with varying strengths/weaknesses, all happily co-exist. Where go? Where you comfortable. Cf smorgasbord
  - c. Result: in practice adopt pluriform concept of church: all are equal....
    - i. Plato – dogs → "denominationalism" – banking
    - ii. All equal right of existence. So:
      1. retain your distinctives as long as you like, but don't bemoan if lose some distinctives. In fact, look over fence to see how others do things, eg, liturgy, worship style, and take on their habits....
      2. No urgency to call others to 'our' church (as long as they go to 'a' good church), let alone to remain CanRC.
  - d. ∴ Q: how find way forward?? What is 'church'? What are implications?
    - i. Options two-fold:
      1. Consider 'church' as human product, so use human categories to resolve Questions, eg, tradition, personal preferences, etc.
        - a. Then at whim of our preferences, cultural forces, etc.  
Conclusions today can differ tomorrow....
      2. See 'church' as God's work, and so consult His Word. This proper because 'church' built on 'Bible'. Church ≠ Mohammed....

- a. Note: not exclude history/tradition, but read history/tradition through glasses of Scripture.
    - ii. Latter approach distinctly what Lord requires. Ie, though we have responsibility wrt church, we not God's colleagues in building it so that we can help define what it is or what it should look like, etc.
      - 1. Dependent on God's instruction ∴ humility, *listen*, *believe*. Then act accordingly....
- 2. Scripture: Church is work of Triune God
  - a. Father: almighty Creator, governs all that happens in His world, cf providence, cf Ps 139:16
    - i. Subset of providence is election, cf Ephesians 1:3f.
    - ii. Give to Son: John 6:37,39; 17:2,6
  - b. Son:
    - i. To earth, to cross only for elect, cf Mt 1:21; John 17:2,6,9,24
      - 1. Shed blood to wash them clean
    - ii. Ascends – works on earth for elect, Ephesians 1:22 → preachers, faith, gathers
      - 1. Sends His Spirit to renew → Pentecost.
      - 2. Obtains His preachers, cf Acts 9:15. Then 13:2 → vs 48.
      - 3. Sends where He wills, cf Acts 16:6-10. Connect to John 6:37ff
  - c. Holy Spirit: changes hearts, cf John 3:3ff; Romans 10:14,17
    - i. Result: Philippi: Lydia (Acts 16:14f), jailer (Acts 16:34), Epaphroditus, Euodia & Syntyche (Philippians 2:25; 4:2)
      - 1. Note importance of history! Same Christ who triumphed long ago is actually working in subsequent years in this world, in own divine way → gathering His church. Happens *in process of time*.
- 3. ∴ church in Philippi? Depends on definition: church ≠ (individual/scattered/unconnected) believers; church = assembly of believers.
  - a. Cf terms in Acts:<sup>1</sup> the *brothers* (1:15 – Gk; 14:2; 15:1,22,36), ie, family together; the *disciples* (6:7; 9:26; 15:10; 20:30); *saints* = holy ones (9:13,32). Terms indicate *togetherness*, sense of community, bond. This clearer from next term:
  - b. “ecclesia”, cf 1 Thessalonians 1:1; Acts 19:32,39,41 → common word of day...
    - i. Yet origin deeper → OT: qahal: Deuteronomy 4:10; 5:22; 9:10 ≠ ‘people of God’, but ‘assembly/gathering of people of God’, ie, togetherness that comes out in physical act. Some people ‘home’ in tents....
    - ii. ∴ mailman has address in 1 Thessalonians 1:1; cf 5:27
  - c. This definition implies *change*, eg size, address, names, cf John 10:16 → *dynamics*, action. Cf 1 Peter 2:5: construction site: timbers, shingles, wiring, plumbing, insulation. ∴ ongoing preaching, tending, etc. Cf Ephesians 4:11-16: body needs to grow from infancy (no teeth, no fine motor skills, no facial hair) to adult → manly, responsible, mature.
    - i. In this life church never complete...,
      - 1. Recall: elect in given town not all live at same time, nor come to faith at same time.

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin Giles, *What on Earth is the Church?*, pg 80ff

2. More: always looks messy/broken → people of church sinful, cf Romans 7:14ff; 1 Thessalonians 4:1b. ∴ don't expect perfect church
- ii. Completion: Rev 14:1
  1. Term for completed thing used today while under construction, cf Ephesians 1:22; 5:23,25, etc. This how we talk, cf 'my house' – though carpenters still busy.
 

∴ don't define church from what see, no more than define house-under-construction from what see. *Believe* church.
- d. Back to Philippi: scattered individuals around town a church??
  - i. No! Church ≠ believing individuals; = *gathering* of believers, ie, those washed in Jesus' blood, renewed by Holy Spirit, who *accustomed* to meet together with Christ, ie, around Word. Cf Confessions of Redemption, eg, *Belgic Confession*, Art 27a: "congregation" & "assembly" → *gathered* flock
  - ii. Contrast Westminster, Art 25:
    - I. 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.
    - II. 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.
- e. Clear: *not* human organization! Very different animal from quilting club.
  - i. This contrasts so starkly with any club in town, whether spawned by grassroots locals or commanded by government. Divine work!
  - ii. ∴ even persecution can't destroy it, cf Mt 16:18; John 10:28; Rev 12:17 → 14:1
    1. cf Art 27bb.