

## Purpose of Our Study

Our goal in these notes is to provide an outline of the doctrine of the church, also known as “ecclesiology.”

## The Universal Church

The church is the Body of Christ, of which Christ is the Head,<sup>1</sup> and is an organism composed of genuine believers in Jesus Christ, the total number of Spirit-baptized believers of this age, i.e. between Pentecost<sup>2</sup> and the Rapture of the Church.<sup>3</sup> The Church is distinct from Israel.<sup>4</sup> All who are united to Christ are members of the church, which is His bride,<sup>5</sup> whether Jews or Gentiles,<sup>6</sup> regardless of membership in any local church.<sup>7</sup>

## The Local Organized Church

A local church is the visible expression of the body of Christ in a particular time and place,<sup>8</sup> an organized body of baptized believers<sup>9</sup> sharing a common faith,<sup>10</sup> observing the two ordinances of baptism and communion,<sup>11</sup> meeting at regular and stated times for worship,<sup>12</sup> preaching and teaching,<sup>13</sup> fellowship, prayer,<sup>14</sup> and mutual edification, exhortation, and encouragement,<sup>15</sup> carrying out the Great Commission,<sup>16</sup> and whose offices are pastor<sup>17</sup> (also known as an elder<sup>18</sup> or bishop<sup>19</sup>) and deacon.<sup>20</sup> The local church is an autonomous body solely responsible to preserve its internal unity and love,<sup>21</sup> maintain pure doctrine and practice,<sup>22</sup> elect its own officers and messengers,<sup>23</sup> settle its own internal affairs,<sup>24</sup> and determine the extent of its cooperation with other churches.<sup>25</sup> The local church is God’s ordained instrument for His work and witness in this age.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Eph. 1:20-23; 5:23; Col. 1:18, 24

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 16:16-18; cp. Acts 1:5, 2:3-4, and 11:15

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 2:11-22; 1 Thess. 4:16-17

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. 10:32

<sup>5</sup> Eph. 5:23-32; Rev. 19:7-9

<sup>6</sup> Rom. 1:16; 10:12; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11

<sup>7</sup> Believers should join a local assembly. Saints that have gone to be with the Lord are part of the universal church but not part of any local church, for instance.

<sup>8</sup> Acts 13:1; Rom. 16:1, 5; 1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; Phlm. 2

<sup>9</sup> Acts 28:19; Acts 2:41, 47. It is not Biblical to have “half-members” or unregenerate members.

<sup>10</sup> Acts 2:42; 2 Thess. 3:6; Jude 3

<sup>11</sup> Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 11:17-34

<sup>12</sup> Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Heb. 10:25

<sup>13</sup> Acts 11:26; 2 Tim. 4:1-2

<sup>14</sup> Acts 2:42-47

<sup>15</sup> 1 Cor. 14:12; Col. 3:15-16; Heb. 10:24-25

<sup>16</sup> Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-48; John 17:18; 20:21; Acts 1:8; 14:21; 2 Cor. 5:18-20

<sup>17</sup> Acts 20:17, 28; Eph. 4:11; Php. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1

<sup>18</sup> Acts 14:23

<sup>19</sup> 1 Tim. 3:1-2; Titus 1:7

<sup>20</sup> Acts 6:1-6; Php. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8-13

<sup>21</sup> Rom. 12:5; Rom. 12:16; 1 Cor. 1:10; 2 Cor. 13:11; Eph. 4:3, 25; Php. 4:2; Col. 3:14; 1 Peter 1:22

<sup>22</sup> 1 Tim. 3:15; Jude 3; Rev. 2-3

<sup>23</sup> Acts 11:22; 13:2-3; 15:3-4, 22; 1 Cor. 16:3; 2 Cor. 8:19

<sup>24</sup> Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:4-5, 12; 6:1-5; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14

<sup>25</sup> Acts 15:2-32; 2 Cor. 8:19

<sup>26</sup> 1 Tim. 3:15

## Relationship of the Church to the Kingdom.

The Church is distinct from both the universal<sup>27</sup> and mediatorial<sup>28</sup> aspects of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is the political, spiritual, ecclesiastical, economic, physical and ethical arrangement that God established over Israel at Sinai, that went into declension during the latter part of Old Testament history, that was offered to the nation of Israel by the Lord Jesus Christ at His first advent,<sup>29</sup> that was deferred after being rejected by Israel,<sup>30</sup> and that will be yet established in the millennial age with the Lord Jesus Christ ruling over it.<sup>31</sup> Because the church enjoys many benefits that will be more widely evident during the future kingdom,<sup>32</sup> the terms *kingdom* and *church* are often used interchangeably in informal usage. It is more accurate, however, to say that Church saints are citizens of,<sup>33</sup> and will be co-rulers in,<sup>34</sup> the future millennial kingdom. As such, certain New Testament texts refer to the offered kingdom and requirements for entrance into it<sup>35</sup> without specifying that the kingdom will go into eclipse during the present Church age. The requirements for entering the Church are the same as for entrance into the kingdom (in short, regeneration). Other texts specify the present believer's relationship to the kingdom and the proper ethic in light of the kingdom's certain eschatological arrival.<sup>36</sup> Yet other texts teach us that we are still awaiting the arrival of the kingdom; these texts are definitive in teaching that the kingdom has not yet come.<sup>37</sup> It is in abeyance as long as the king is absent.<sup>38</sup>

## Relationship of the Church to the State

The Church is also distinct from the government. Each has its realm of operation; this is the so-called "separation of church and state."<sup>39</sup> The government is responsible before God to restrain sin and effect an orderly society.<sup>40</sup> It is not to dictate particular religious beliefs or matters of conscience. This is the right and privilege of the individual and his association with the church of his choosing. The Church is to be subject to the authority of the government, when that authority is properly exercised.<sup>41</sup>

## Summary

We believe the Baptist distinctives of biblical authority, autonomy of the local church, the priesthood of the believer, the two ordinances of baptism and communion, individual soul liberty, a saved church membership, two offices of pastor and deacon, and the separation of church and state.<sup>42</sup>

MAP

---

<sup>27</sup> Ps. 103:19

<sup>28</sup> Matt. 6:10

<sup>29</sup> Matt. 4:17

<sup>30</sup> Matt. 21:43; 23:37-39

<sup>31</sup> Matt. 25:31; Rev. 20:1-7

<sup>32</sup> Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:8-13. Note that Christians partake in a pre-fulfillment installment of blessings similar but not identical to those of the future kingdom age.

<sup>33</sup> Matt. 13:38 ("sons of the kingdom"); cf. Php. 3:20 where believers are citizens of heaven, yet not in heaven, so believers are citizens of the kingdom, yet not in the kingdom *per se*.

<sup>34</sup> Rev. 20:4a; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:27, 3:21; 1 Cor. 6:3

<sup>35</sup> John 3:3, 5; this is analogous to Matt. 5:20.

<sup>36</sup> Acts 8:12, 19:8, 20:25, 28:23, 31; Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 4:20, 15:24; Col. 1:13, 4:11; 1

Thess. 2:12; Heb. 12:28

<sup>37</sup> Acts 1:6, 14:22; 1 Cor. 6:9-10, 15:50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; 2 Thess. 1:5; 2 Tim. 4:1, 4:18;

James 2:5; 2 Peter 1:11; Rev. 12:10

<sup>38</sup> Matt. 23:39

<sup>39</sup> Matt. 22:21

<sup>40</sup> Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:14

<sup>41</sup> Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-15; Acts 5:29

<sup>42</sup> 2 Tim. 3:16-17, Matt. 18:17, 1 Peter 2:9, Acts 2:41-42, Acts 5:29, Acts 2:47, 1 Tim. 3:1-13, Matt. 22:21