

Doctrine of the Church

The New Testament Greek term for “church” is *ekklesia*, which means an assembly of believers, called out by God (1Pet. 2:9-10). The Bible speaks of the church in two distinct ways: the universal church and the local church, with the majority of references to local churches. Grudem simply defines the church as, “the community of all true believers for all time.” The church consists of the people of God existing under the headship of Christ to serve the kingdom’s purposes by the power of the Spirit for the glory of God.

The New Testament includes many different images for the church. The church consists of a chosen people (Eph. 1:4), the people of God (1Pet 2:9), which are a royal priesthood of believers (1Pet 2:9), who are dedicated to serving the High Priest, the King of Kings. The church is frequently referred to as the body (*soma*) of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-27) expressing unity. Christ is the foundation of the church, the cornerstone (1Pet.2:7), upon which the church rests as spiritual stones to form a spiritual building (1Pet 2:5). The church is the place of God’s dwelling, the holy temple of the Lord (Eph. 2:21), not a physical building made of bricks and mortar, but a spiritual temple composed of regenerate believers, individual dwellings of the Spirit of God (1Cor. 3:16).

Three marks of a true church are: 1) regenerate church membership. The image of the church as the people of God assumes these are people who belong to God. The church shares “one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph 4:5-6). 2) The Gospel must be rightly preached. There can be no people of God, body of Christ, or building of God apart from the teaching of the Gospel. A right understanding about God, as revealed through his word (2Tim. 3:16), is

the only true foundation for the church. 3) The church ordinances must be rightly administered. Jesus has given two visible signs of his presence to the Church, baptism and the Lord's Supper, neither of which is a means of conveying grace. Christ ordained these two practices both by example and command. Baptism is a mark of repentance and a sign of faith (Acts 2:38). Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist and also commanded that we make disciples and baptize in all nations (Matt.3:15-16; 28:19; Mark 1:9; Luke 3:21; John 1:29-34). Baptism is the initiatory rite into the Christian faith that is a sign of the saving work of Christ by the Spirit and the faith of the believer. Jesus also established the Lord's Supper and commanded his disciples to, "do this in remembrance of me" (Matt. 26:17-30; 1Cor. 11:17-33). The Lord's Supper is a continuing confession to Christ's saving work, forming a Christian way of life, and promoting unity within the church (1Cor.10:17). When the church rightly practices believer's baptism and the Lord's Supper it obeys the teaching and example of Christ.

The mission and purpose of the local church's life and actions is to accomplish God's mission to the glory of God. This mission is accomplished through several church ministries. First, is the worship of God through preaching and explaining God's word (2Tim. 4:2), singing hymns, psalms, and praises to God (Eph. 5:19-20), and offering up corporate prayer that exalts God and edifies the church (Matt. 6:7-15; James 5:6). Second, is the edification of the church, by promoting and fostering the individual's worship of God (Rom. 12:1-2), encouraging individual Christians in their faith (Col. 3:16), building each other up in love (Eph. 4:15-16), promoting holiness and purity through church discipline (Matt. 18:15-17) and by sharing life together (1John 1:5-7; 2:9; 3:10, 14; 4:7-8, 11-12, 19-21) . Third, is the evangelization of the world by taking the

Gospel of Christ to the nations (Matt. 28:19-20). The overarching mission and purpose of the church is to seek to glorify God in all things (1Cor. 10:31).

We affirm congregational polity. Christ is the Head of the church and we are the members of his body (1 Cor. 12); as the Head he directs his church and as the members we serve each other through the exercise of our spiritual gifts. The fundamental responsibility under God for the maintenance of the public worship belongs to the congregation. The congregation has the final authority and the obligation to ensure the continuance of a faithful gospel witness among themselves. The church is established with a simple order of leadership entailing only two specific offices, elder and deacon (1Tim 3; 5, Titus 1). Spiritual leadership is the responsibility of the elders. Their qualifications are found in 1Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9 which restricts this office to men. They are responsible to protect the church from doctrinal error and to serve the church as shepherds, caring for the Good Shepherd's flock (Acts 20:17, 28). We affirm a plurality of leadership but also recognize there is a leader among leaders (pastor). Deacons do the practical work "service" of leadership under the authority of the elders. They take care of the physical needs of the congregation and strive for the unity of the body (Acts 6:1). Women can serve as deacons (Rom. 16; 1Tim. 3:8-11). The congregation's role in leadership is to maintain holiness and congregational purity (Matt. 18), identify and confirm leaders (Acts 6), affirm important decisions (Acts 15), follow and care for their leaders (1 Thess. 5; Heb.13) and most importantly to trust in God.