

Doctrine of the Church (Ecclesiology)

Lecture 1 — Mike Aylestock

God promised Israel a kingdom on this earth. Jesus came and offered Himself as King and was rejected by Israel. He returned to heaven but left a promise that He would return and the Kingdom would be established. It has been nearly 2000 years and still we wait for the earthly literal kingdom to be established by our King of Kings at His return. The KEY TO GOD'S WORK DURING THIS 2000 YEAR PERIOD IS THE "DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH". Without an accurate, Scriptural understanding of this doctrine one cannot hope to understand God's work on earth during the past 2000 years or in this present day.

I. THE CHURCH IN THE BIBLE

A. Nature of the Church

1. What The Church Is NOT

a. Family of God

The "family of God" is composed _____ of all the children of God whether in heaven _____ or on earth _____.

See: Ephesians 3:15

How does one become a member?

- Receive _____ Christ _____ — John 1:12
- Faith _____ in Christ _____ — Galatians 3:26

Therefore, we are BORN into God's family. This family never meets together, never functions as a family, is never seen together as a family.

It teaches us our Father-Child relationship with God:

- Intimacy _____ — Romans 8:14-17
- Chastening _____ — Hebrews 12:5-8

b. Kingdom of God

The "kingdom of God" is composed of all the saints of God from all ages.

See: Luke 13:28, 29

1) Definition — See opening paragraph of this doctrine.

2) Entrance

- Born _____ Again _____ — John 3
- Translated _____ — Colossians 1:13

3) Message

See: Mark 1:1-4a — John the Baptist marks the beginning of the gospel of Christ.

ECCLESIOLOGY

- I. The Church in the Bible
 - A. *Nature of the Church*
 - B. Origin of the Church
 - C. Mission of the Church
 - D. Membership of the Church
 - E. Offices of the Church
 - F. Ordinances of the Church
 - G. Meeting Day of the Church
 - H. Discipline of the Church
 - I. Government of the Church
 - J. Fellowship of the Church
 - K. Support of the Church
 - L. Perpetuity of the Church
- II. The Church in History
 - A. Our Distinguished History
 - B. Our Distinctive Marks
 - C. Our Dogmatic Stand

Matthew 3:2 — John the Baptist preached the kingdom of heaven.
Acts 19:4 — John the Baptist's message embraced the gospel of
grace, repentance and faith.

The *kingdom message* is the *gospel!*

The Kingdom message was a message of repentance and faith in Christ as the condition for entrance into the Kingdom. The Kingdom was rejected, the King was crucified, the mystery form of the Kingdom (church age — Matthew 13) continued in operation.

Who preached this message?

- John the Baptist — Matthew 3:1, 2
- Jesus Christ — Mk. 1:14,15; Mt. 4:17, 23; 9:35; Luke 4:43; Acts 1:3
- Apostles — Acts 8:12
- Paul — Acts 19:8; 20:24, 25; 28:23, 31

4) Principles — Outlined in Sermon on the Mount

See: Matthew 5:13-16

- Salt — Preserving from Decay
- Light — Enlightening

We are BORN into God's Kingdom. This Kingdom has never organized or functioned as a kingdom though it will one day. Presently it teaches us our King-Servant relationship with God.

THINK ABOUT THIS...

Neither the FAMILY OF GOD nor the KINGDOM OF GOD has ever assembled, organized, elected officers. Neither could be salt preserving nor light enlightening. Neither could fulfill the great commission nor maintain the doctrinal purity once delivered unto the saints.

Therefore, Jesus Christ established something which is visible, literal, distinctly defined, local, and organized. He called it "MY CHURCH"!

The FAMILY OF GOD, KINGDOM OF GOD, and the CHURCH OF GOD are each different.

- Family of God — teaches family relationships
- Kingdom of God — a future, literal, kingdom now in mystery form teaching King-Servant relationships
- Church of God — the working, functioning, active entity!

"The ... church is the executive institution or business body, within the Kingdom, charged with official duties and responsibilities for the spread of the Kingdom." — B. H. Carroll

"CHURCH" — THE RECRUITING AGENCY FOR THE KINGDOM!

2. What The Church Is

a. Terminology

| | |
|------------|------------------------------|
| “church” | — 77 times in the N.T. |
| “churches” | — 37 times in the N.T. |
| “assembly” | — <u>5 times in the N.T.</u> |
| TOTAL | — 119 times in the N.T. |

| Exceptions |
|---|
| James 2:2 — “assembly” = synagogue (sunagoge) |
| Heb. 12:23 — “assembly” = mass-meeting (paneguris) |
| Acts 19:37 — “church” = temple-robber (hiersulous) |

In each of the above (except 3, see box) the words “church”, “churches”, and “assembly” are the translation of the Greek word “*ecclesia*”. Therefore, the word *ecclesia* occurs 116 times in the New Testament. This is the word on which we want to concentrate. Consider who used the word.

The word *ecclesia* (translated *church*, *churches* or *assembly*) was used by:

| | |
|-------|--|
| Jesus | — 22 times in the N.T. (Matthew & Revelation 1-3, 22) |
| Luke | — 24 times in the N.T. (Acts) |
| Paul | — 64 times in the N.T. (various epistles) |
| James | — 1 time in the N.T. (James) |
| John | — <u>4 times in the N.T.</u> (III John & Revelation 1) |
| TOTAL | — 116 times in the N.T. |

NOTE: Exception — Acts 19:37 This is the only time in the Bible where *church* is used to translate a different Greek word. The word “church”, in this passage, is the translation of *hierosulous* which means — temple robber. Every other place in the Bible where the word *church* or *churches* appears it is the translation of *ecclesia*.

NOTE: The English word “church” is derived from the Greek word *kuriakon* which means — house belonging to a lord. Early usage of this word apparently applied to the meeting house — a building belonging to the Lord. King James translators chose this word to translate *ecclesia*.

Now, just what does *ecclesia* mean?

“*ecclesia*” — An assembly of people who have been called out and convened.

We don't GO to church — we ARE the church!

The word *ecclesia* occurs 116 times in the New Testament. Four of those occurrences are secular assemblies and have no direct bearing on the doctrine of Jesus’ church. However, their appearance does help us understand the common use of this word in Jesus’ day.

Common Usage in Jesus Day (4 uses of *ecclesia* as a secular assembly):

- ⇒ Assembly of silversmiths (Acts 19:32, 39)
- ⇒ Legal city assembly (Acts 19:41)
- ⇒ Assembly of Israel in the wilderness (Acts 7:38)

An “ecclesia” was an “assembly”. That carried two ideas:

- A Called-Out People
- A Convened People — assembled for a specific purpose.

Therefore:

- An “ecclesia” (assembly) is VISIBLE.
- An “ecclesia” (assemble) is LOCAL.

Three Uses of “Ecclesia” (or any noun):

- **Particular or Specific**
56 times in the N.T. — singular churches
36 times in the N.T. — plural churches
- **Abstract or Generic** — A singular noun referring to a collective group of all items the noun represents.
18 times in the N.T.

An abstraction has no meaning until it is materialized and localized into a specific, particular unit.

“Whenever the abstract or generic finds concrete expression ... it is always a particular assembly. ... in the application the generic always becomes particular.”

— Dr. Entzminger

“Nothing is real until it is local.”

— Gilbert Chesterton

- **Prospective**
1 time in the New Testament (Heb. 12:23 A yet-to-be-assembled group)

b. Jesus' Use of “Ecclesia”

Jesus used the word “ecclesia” 22 times in the New Testament.

- 1) Matthew 16:18 — 1 time

“I will build **MY** assembly!” Jesus was not referring to a specific assembly of Christians but to assemblies of Christians as a KIND of assembly distinct from any other kind of assembly the world had ever seen.

Why would He? See verses 13-16

What kind did He build?

- In Galatia — “churches” I Cor. 16:1
- In Judea — “churches” Galatians 1:22
- In Asia — “churches” I Cor. 16:19
- In Macedonia — “churches” II Cor. 8:1
- In Judea, Galilee, & Samaria —
“churches” Acts 9:31

- 2) Matthew 18:17 — 2 times
Jesus now speaks of a particular church.
Notice what it is like:

Professor Royal (taught A.T. Robertson at Louisville Seminary) was asked if the word ecclesia was ever a class of “unassembled or unassembling persons.” His reply — “I do not know of any such passage in classic Greek.”

JESUS DID NOT SAY HE WOULD BUILD TWO KINDS OF CHURCHES, ONE LOCAL AND VISIBLE AND THE OTHER UNIVERSAL AND INVISIBLE.

- Local — (*tell*) someone can find it, there is a definite place
 - Material and Visible — erring member is material & visible, likewise those who hear the charges
 - Organized Unit — with authority to discipline
 - Gathered People — verse 20
- 3) Revelation 1:11-3:22 — 18 times
- Seven assemblies in specific places 1:11
 - Each assembly is answerable to Him 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14
 - Holy Spirit speaks to each assembly 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22
 - The present work of God is the work of assemblies 1:19 with 2:1-3:22
- 4) Revelation 22:16 — 1 time
God sent His message to His people as they were assembled together in their assembly.

To Jesus an assembly (church) was a called out, assembled together, people. This assembly was local and visible. Jesus referred to such an assembly 22 times in the N.T.

Therefore ...

- **Jesus spoke of an “assembly” 22 times in the New Testament.**
- **He referred to specific assemblies 21 times.**
- **He spoke 1 time of His assembly as a kind of assembly distinct from all others.**

c. Illustrations

It is not reasonable to think that Paul took the very word used by Jesus (and in *Acts*) to refer to groups of Christians assembled together and gave to that word a new meaning. No, Paul speaks of the *same* church and illustrates it with the concepts of a body, a building and a wife. Paul used the word “ecclesia” 64 times in his New Testament epistles.

- 1) **Body** — The church is a coordinated, unified assembly doing as its Head commands — *just like a body*.

Romans 12:5, 6 — first mention of “body”. The context establishes LOCAL emphasis.

verse 3 — “among you”

verse 6-8 — A list of specific gifts which complement one another in a functional unit. What value to a universal body for someone in Europe to have one gift, another gift possessed by someone in Africa, etc.

I Corinthians 10:16, 17; 12:12-31

12:12-20 — Members form a complete, functional, organized, unified body.

12:21-24 — Every member is necessary.

- 12:25, 26 — Unity results when members care for, suffer with, and rejoice with one another.
- 12:27 — Assembly is “*the* body of Christ” in that area, not “*a part of* the body universal.

Ephesians 1:22, 23; 3:1-12; 4:1-16

- 1:22, 23 — Christ is the head. He is the authoritative, legislative element. The church is the body — a coordinated, organized work force doing the work of the Head. The church *completes* the Head. A head without a body is incomplete. The head directs. The body acts.
- 3:1-12 — It was a mystery that the Jew and Gentile would be joined together in one body (verse 6, 9a). If the body is universal and invisible then where is the fellowship? Where is the problem of a Jew joining the same body as a Gentile?
- 4:1-3 — The context is unity.
- 4:4-6 — God recognizes one kind of body.
- 4:11, 12 — Local church officers and functions.
- 4:13, 14 — Call for doctrinal unity which can only be realized in churches (where people follow the faith of their pastor—Hebrews 13:7, 17).
- 4:16 — Unity results in a compact, functional, organized body.

Colossians 1:18, 24; 2:17; 3:15

- 2) **Building** — The church is a coordinated, unified assembly built upon a sure foundation and inhabited by its owner — *just like a building*.
See: Ephesians 2:19-22
- 3) **Wife** — The church is a loving and submissive assembly — *just like a wife*.
See: Ephesians 5:23-27

Every assembly of saints is to Jesus Christ

- ✓ *what a body is to its head,*
- ✓ *what a building is to its foundation and owner, and*
- ✓ *what a wife is to her husband.*

Conversely, Jesus Christ is to each assembly

- ✓ *what the head is to its body,*
- ✓ *what a foundation is to a building, and*
- ✓ *what a husband is to his wife.*

3. What The Church Is CONFUSED To Be — Heretical Views

a. Heretical Views

- 1) Roman Catholic View
- 2) National View
- 3) Denominational View
- 4) Universal View

b. **History of Heretical Views**

1) **Church Fathers** — 2nd to 4th Century (100 to 399 A.D.)

Jesus prayer for unity was misconstrued to mean that all Christians were one church. This developed into the idea of a universal, visible church and paved the way for Catholicism.

In the earliest Christian literature, after the apostolic period, we may trace three tendencies toward degeneration, all proceeding from this common cause, developing along lines parallel at first, yet distinct, afterward converging, and at length constituting a logical, consistent whole. These are: the idea of a Holy Catholic Church, the ministry a priesthood, and sacramental grace.

Jesus prayed that His disciples might be one, and His apostles taught that the church is the temple of the Holy Ghost, and therefore both one and holy. Early in the second century, however, these ideas assumed a different form from that of the New Testament. The churches were conceived of as forming together one Church, not spiritual merely, but visible, extending throughout the world, and therefore Catholic (i.e., universal). Persecution doubtless had much to do with emphasizing in the minds of Christians their unity, but an exaggerated notion of the value of formal oneness came to prevail, until schism was reckoned the deadliest of sins a Christian could commit. The preservation of outward unity thus becoming the paramount consideration, it followed that whatever error a majority in the church might come to hold, the majority must accept it, rather than be guilty of this deadly sin of schism. This ideal of a Holy Catholic Church, outside of which was no salvation, unity with which was necessary to unity with Christ, prepared the way for all the corruptions that were introduced.

— Vedder, *Short History of the Baptists*, pp. 45, 46.

2) **Catholicism** — 5th Century (400 to 499 A.D.)

Predominant thinking saw the church as a universal, visible entity. Due to the nagging questions from the Donatists (Anabaptists) regarding the presence of wicked people in the visible church and their “salvation” Augustine conceived of two churches — one visible and, within it, one which is real. This concept was not fully developed at the time but did give Augustine an escape from the Donatists heat!

3) **Protestantism** — 16th Century (1500 to 1599 A.D.)

With the Protestants break from the visible church came the need to rethink what the real church was. The real church came to be, not in but outside the visible church. Thus Augustine's earlier concept now becomes developed into what we know of today as the universal, invisible church which is composed of all saints regardless of visible church affiliation.

These developments began with the early degeneration toward a combined church. Did early Baptists side with this trend? Listen to...

Schaff — “Thus the Apostolic Church appears as a free, independent, and complete organization.... In stead of receiving protection and support from the secular power, it suffers deadly hatred and persecution. Of union with the State, either in the way of hierarchical supremacy or of Erastian subordination, the first three centuries afford no trace.”

Wayland — “The Baptists have ever believed in the entire and absolute independence of the churches. By this we mean that every Church of Christ...is wholly independent of every other. The more steadfastly we hold to the independency of the churches and abjure everything in the form of a denominational corporation, the more truly shall we be united, and the greater will be our prosperity.”

Mosheim — “One president or bishop presided over each Church. During a great part of this century (second) all the churches continued to be, as at first, independent of each other. Each Church was a kind of small independent republic, governing itself by its own laws, enacted or at least sanctioned by the people.”

Coleman — “These churches, wherever formed, became separate and independent bodies, competent to appoint their officers and administer their own government without reference or subordination to any central authority or foreign power. No fact connected with the history of the primitive churches is more fully established or more generally conceded.”

Whately — Though there was one Lord, one Faith, and one Baptism for all of these, yet they were each a distinct independent community on earth, united by the common principles on which they were founded, by their mutual agreement, affection and respect.”

— Hiscox, *The New Directory for Baptist Churches*, pp. 156-158

Many churches in the first centuries were unwilling to accept the ideas that led to a universal, visible church and later a universal, invisible church. Yet many churches today accept those concepts without question.

Does it really make any difference?

c. Harm of Heretical Views

Just as the church (rightly understood) is the pillar and ground of the truth so a false doctrine of the church is the bedrock of many problems.

1) Doctrine of Salvation

Blending of ecclesiology and soteriology. Salvation is attained through church membership (baptism).

2) Doctrine of Church Unity

Church unity, a repeated theme in the New Testament epistles, is impossible without ecumenicalism.

3) Doctrine of the Church

Much New Testament doctrine regarding the practical function of the church is contained in the passages dealing with the church as a body, building, and wife. All that is lost if the church in these passages is a universal, invisible church.

4) Christian Responsibility

Why be concerned about membership and service in the local church if I am automatically a part of the *true* church? I will just serve God through some other organization. Every New Testament passage dealing with a person’s spiritual gifts (except 1 Peter 4) does so in the context of the church as a body. If the body is universal, then that is where I am to exercise my gifted service to God.