
Part 2 | Christ's Church

- Last session: *The Beginning of the Church* – we considered the contribution to *ecclesiology* in the ancient period, the reformation period, and the modern period.

Major Areas of Difference Among Evangelicals

- Denials of the Universal Church
 - The universal church is Scripturally called *the body of Christ* (Col. 1:18).
 - A significant number of Christians do not believe in a universal church as distinct from local churches. Rather, they believe that the body of Christ is the sum of all the local churches.
 - For some of these, no one is a member of the body of Christ who is not a member of the local church. (This is not a universal view among those who reject the universal church.)
 - Evidence for the “universal church” in the Scriptures- (a partial list from the book)
 - Matthew 16:18 – Christ promised to build His church, which was not in existence at the time He spoke. No particular local church was in view. It was a church to which He promised perpetuity, thus could not be a local church.
 - 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 – Paul identifies *Christ* as *one body*. All who are baptized in the Spirit are part of this body. Since all believers have the Spirit, local church membership is not a criteria to being part of the body.
 - Ephesians 1:22-23 – the church is identified as under the head of the body, which is Christ. Christ is called *the fullness of him that filleth all in all*, which would seem to be a universal rather than local application.
 - Ephesians 2:11-17 – If the body is interpreted to mean the local church, it would follow that each local church must have in it both Jews and Gentiles.
 - Ephesians 5:23-27 – If Christ’s purpose is to provide himself a spotless and holy church, to which local church does this apply?
- Views of the Beginning of the Church
 - The Roman Catholic View –
 - The Roman Catholic Church regards itself as the continuation of Israel.
 - The Roman Catholic Church has denounced all who deny that the body of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church are the same.
 - The Reformers View –
 - The Reformers largely left the doctrine of the church alone. Their concern was the doctrine of salvation.
 - The Reformers did recognize a body of believers outside the Roman church, yet placed great stress on the visible organization of the church.
 - For the Reformers, the church had its roots in Judaism and was made up of believers of all ages. The church was the inheritor of Israel’s promises.
 - It could be said that the Reformers taught that the church began with Adam.
 - The Covenant Theology View –
 - Covenant Theology may be defined as that system of theology which is based on the theological covenants of works and grace, with a minimizing of the biblical covenants, and has as the primary purpose of God the redemption of mankind.
 - Covenant Theologians do not distinguish between God’s program with Israel and His program with the church.
 - Covenant Theology sees the church of the Old Testament and the Church of the New Testament as essentially the same, though coming to a new level of maturity with the Spirit’s ministry beginning at Pentecost.
 - The Landmarkist View – There are certain groups that insist the church began with Christ, with John the Baptist as the forerunner.

- The Dispensational View –
 - Some forms of dispensational theology see two churches (or *assemblies* of the church), a Jewish assembly that began in Acts 2 and a later Gentile assembly.
 - There is disagreement among dispensationalists as to precisely when the church began, some saying Acts 2, others Acts 9 or 13, and still others after Acts 28.
- The New Testament Qualifications –
 - The church did not exist at the time Christ spoke in Matthew 16:18.
 - The church must have Christ's death and resurrection for its existence. Christ gave Himself for the church (Eph. 5:25) and purchased it with His own blood (Acts 20:28) and is the resurrected head of the church (Col. 3:1-3).
 - The Holy Spirit formed the church by His baptizing work (1 Cor. 12:12-13) and so the church could not have begun prior to Acts 2.
 - Paul claims that the church was a mystery, not previously revealed. While this does not tell us precisely when the church began, it does mean it did not exist in the Old Testament.
- The Plurality of Elders
 - Some evangelical churches insist on a plurality of elders, others insist there is to be a single elder in the church, whether he/they are called elders, bishops, or pastors.
 - Though the term elder is consistently used in the plural in the New Testament, a plurality in the local church is not necessarily demanded, for these reasons-
 - In New Testament times, there were house churches rather than large public meeting places. Therefore, a single city would have many house churches and many elders.
 - There is a switch from the singular bishop to the plural deacons in 1 Timothy 3:1-2, 8. This lends support to a local church having a single elder with multiple deacons.
 - The "angel" or messenger in the seven churches of the Revelation (Rev. 2-3) seem to refer to the single elder of each of these churches.
- Deaconesses
 - Some evangelical churches have the office of deaconess (either as a separate office from Deacons, or by having both male and females in the deacon body).
 - There is little support for this in the New Testament. The two references to women as deacons (Rom. 16:1-2, 1 Tim. 3:11) can equally refer to an unofficial servant role and need not be taken in an official sense.
- The Mode of Believer's Baptism
 - Most protestant denominations honor sprinkling or immersion, with a preference to sprinkling.
 - A few evangelical denominations baptize by sprinkling (Presbyterian Church of America, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, etc.).
- The Lord's Table
 - The Roman Catholic view – *Transubstantiation* – the bread and wine are changed to the body and blood of Christ.
 - The Lutheran view – *Consubstantiation* – The elements do not change, but there is a *real presence of Christ* in the elements.
 - The Reformed view – *Spiritual presence* - There is a spiritual presence of Christ but no real presence of Christ in the elements.
 - The Zwinglian view – *Memorial* – there is no real nor spiritual presence in the elements, they are simply memorials. This is the most common view among evangelicals and the only view among fundamentalists.
- The Government of the Church
 - Four forms of church government:
 - The papal form of government – all authority rests in the Pope.
 - The episcopal form places authority in the bishops.
 - The Presbyterian form places authority in the *sessions* of *synods*.
 - The congregational form places authority with the congregation, and has the most biblical support.
 - In the New Testament, there was no authority outside the local assembly. Each was autonomous and self-supporting.

Next Session: Christ's Cross: its importance and necessity.