

Doctrine 7: The Church

7. The Church Part 1 of 3

Doctrine (truth)

- We believe that the true church comprises all who have been justified by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone.

Church → made up of

→ Made right with God

Ephesians 2

Devotion (relationship)

- They are united by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ, of which He is the Head.

Fellowship w/ all believers

earthly expression

Duty (action)

Authority & glory

Pursue

We now come to our statement that focuses on the church. And we're going to look at three pages of this, but two main parts: one is the true Church and the other is the local church.

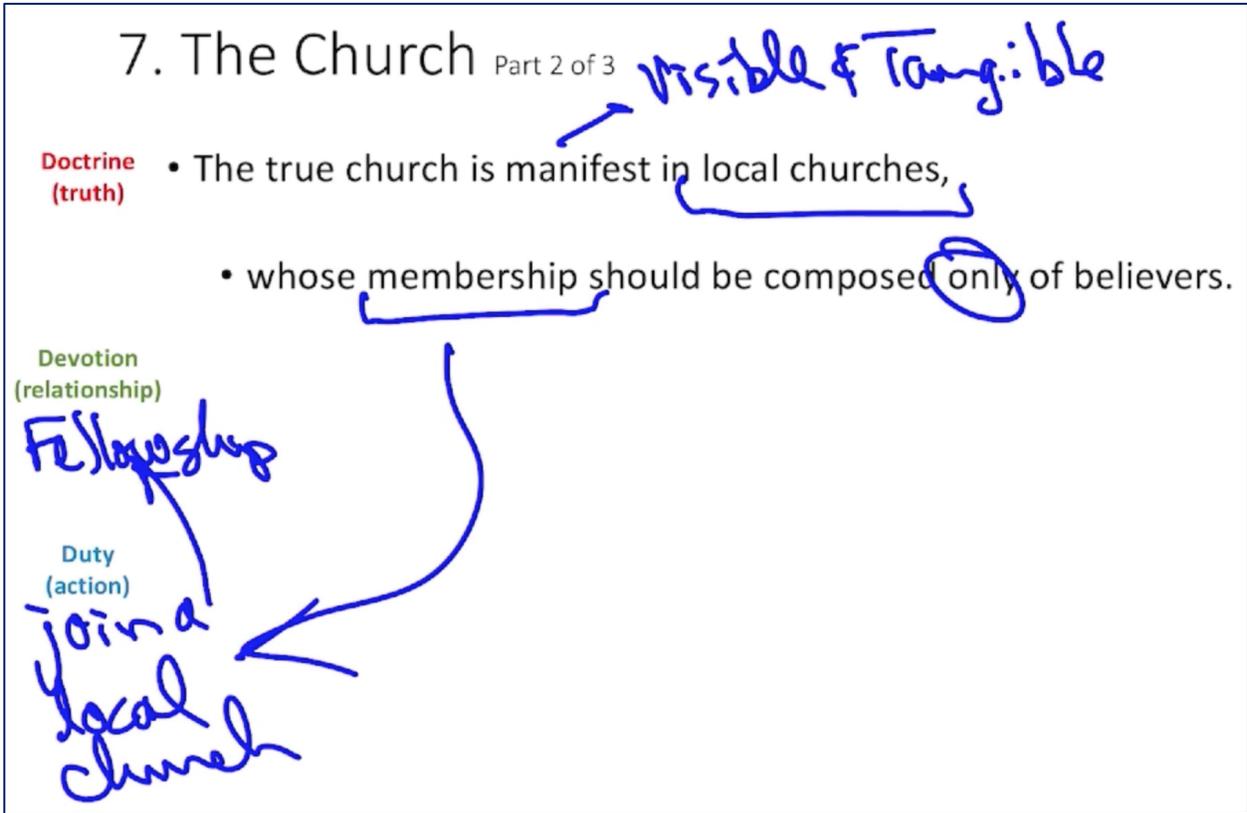
And so we start with the **true Church**. And often I will write this with a capital C to speak of the Church that is the global Church of all believers, all those who are saved by Christ.

And it **comprises** -- a word we don't use very often -- this means "is made up of". So the true Church is made up of all the people who are justified. And this is a wonderful description, in just a few words, of what it means to be a Christian, and that is, people are **justified by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone**. And a classic passage that highlights this is Ephesians 2, which highlights that we are justified, that we are made right with God, we're made right with God, and this is by God's grace. It's an action that He took for us and we access it through faith alone. It is something that we receive by trusting Him, because it is a work that Christ has done. These are things that have been stated earlier in the doctrinal statement, and are expressed here for clarity.

And we just, in number six, looked at being united with Christ, and we are **united by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ**. And so this is a way in which our unity with Christ, when all who are saved to have unity with Christ, we together have unity as the body. And this is the earthly expression of Christ.

And He is the **head**. To be the head is to have authority and glory. So He is the supreme authority and glory of the church, the church being His body. So the true church is all people for whom this is true, all people of all time of all locations, whatever culture, whatever language, whatever country, all together form the true church.

And so in a very deep and profound sense, our **devotion** is that we have fellowship with all believers. We often don't experience it and sometimes we don't express it very well. But the reality is, we have that fellowship, we have that oneness with all people who are in Christ, and so a duty is to pursue this: to love, to understand, to stand with, to rejoice with them when they rejoice, and to weep with them when they weep, to stand together, because together we are the true church, the universal Church of all those who are justified by the grace of God in Jesus Christ.



That universal nature then is **manifest in local churches**. A way to understand manifest is it is visible and tangible. So sometimes people speak about the Church broadly as the "invisible Church." We don't see the exact membership of that, but it then is made visible and tangible in local churches. And there are many local churches of many denominations, but the body of Christ is expressed, is made visible and tangible, in these ways.

The **membership of these churches should be only believers**, so the reality is that there is a formal membership in churches, and it looks different in different places. But our goal in all of them is that our formal membership would match the true membership of the Church. So in other words, those who are who are formally members of a church, they should only be of those who are true believers, of those who have been saved. And it's possible for people to be behaving like a member of a church and not yet be a formal member. And our hope would be that it would make sense for them to become formal members.

And so we have a **duty** to be a part of, to join a local church, and again, the expression of that is different in different churches: what the process is, what it formally means. But the design of God is that we would be a part of His body expressed in a tangible form. Joining of the local church is for the **devotion** of fellowship. So our devotion is that we would be as one in a local congregation.

7. The Church Part 3 of 3

Doctrine (truth) • The Lord Jesus mandated two ordinances, → **ORDAW: Commanded & blessed**

Devotion (relationship) Fellowship

- baptism → **Initiation**
- and the Lord's Supper, → **Continuation**
- which visibly and tangibly express the gospel. → **Work of Christ to bring new life**
- Though they are not the means of salvation,
 - when celebrated by the church in genuine faith,
 - these ordinances confirm and nourish the believer. → **strengthen**

← **Conviction of God's work for me**

Duty (action)

So key practices in the church are two "**ordinances**" that Jesus commanded, **that He mandated**. And this term comes from "to ordain" which is what Jesus commanded and He blessed. He said these are valuable things to be doing. He commanded many things, but these are two practices that we recognize as "sacraments" or "ordinances" that He identified. Different churches view them a little bit differently and other churches have more than the two that we recognize. But essentially everybody agrees on these two while others add to the set. And these aren't the only things that churches are to do. But these are distinctive practices that we are to be involved in.

And generally understood, **baptism** is initiation, and **Lord's Supper** is a continuation. And how these are practiced, details of this, are quite different. Understandings of them can be quite different among the churches that are a part of the body of Christ. We recognize them, though, as important steps of beginning to be a part of the community and especially to be one of the body of Christ, so baptism involving water in different ways, Lord's Supper (also known as communion) involving eating of bread and juice or wine, and again in different ways.

These things are meant to be visible and tangible, just as the local church manifests the universal Church, the global Church, these are things that **make visible and tangible the**

Gospel. And in both of them, we celebrate the work of Christ to bring new life. And as we do these things, we reflect on the life death and resurrection of Jesus. And this is a way for us to experience, in a physical form, the Gospel. They are **not a means of salvation**, so these are not things that are required in order to be saved, nor do they save if we do them. They're separate from a means of salvation, yet they're very valuable, always to be done **in genuine faith** by those who are experiencing them and ideally those are administering them.

These are things that, when **celebrated in genuine faith**, have real value. And at least two things that we highlight in terms of their value: one is to **confirm** the believer, and this is in a very strong rich sense, this is what we would say as the conviction of God's work for me. So it's a deep awareness of the new life that is mine, of the forgiveness that is mine, not just the idea that Jesus died and came to life for the benefit of all people who have faith; it's applied specifically to me. There's a deep conviction, a deep awareness of its application to the believer who practices these things.

And it is to **nourish**, it's to strengthen us, to renew our faith, to enable us to walk in obedience. And so it is our duty to practice these things. There's not a specific timeline identified in the Bible. There are different guidelines in different churches, but it is our duty to practice ... to undergo baptism, to celebrate the Lord's Supper. And yet, these are not mere rituals. These are meant to be an expression and a rich means for our fellowship with God and with the church, that we would understand and have a deep awareness of the work of God for us by the power of the Spirit, and to be strengthened for obedience and walking in his ways.