

The Covenantal Life: Being the Church
Week 1 - Universal & Local: The Nature of the Church
Hebrews 12:22-24

- We need to be aware of our influences working in the background of our thinking
 - Individualism and consumerism - thinking in terms of our own needs, what can be done for us
 - Voluntarism and radical libertarianism - free choice is sacred, low sense of duty
 - Subtle dualism - tend to prefer “spiritual” over “material”
- What is the church? Reformed ecclesiology begins with emphasizing the distinction between “invisible” and “visible” church
 - **Invisible church** - all God’s elect, in every place, throughout all time (**every** true believer and **only** true believers)
 - **Visible church** - every professing Christian enrolled in particular churches (includes true Christians and nominal Christians)
 - Other ways of looking at this broad distinction:
 - Eschatologica church and historical church; church militant and church triumphant; local church and universal church
 - Valid, biblical distinction - but we have tended to over-emphasize the universal at the expense of the local
 - Being born again and members of the invisible church is seen as all that really matters; local church membership is viewed as optional for those interested in it
 - Leads to transience, unaccountability, lack of fellowship, fruitlessness
 - Dualistic elevation of “spiritual” invisible church over “material,” “earthly” local church
 - One-dimensional view of God’s purposes, with individual salvation the be all end all
- The local church is just as important as the universal
 - 110 uses of *ekklesia* in the NT, at least 90 referring specifically to local churches
 - 1 Tim. 3:14-15 - the vital, exalted necessity of the local church in God’s purposes
 - “Household of God” - where God is specially present as a Father with His children
 - Corporately gathered church is a temple/dwelling place of God (Eph. 2:19-22, 1 Pet. 2:4-5)
 - “Church of the *living God*” - proceeds from God, belongs to Him in a special way
 - Christ is head over every family (Eph. 3:15, 1 Cor. 11:3), ruler of every nation (Rev. 1:5), but has a special headship over His own bride

- Purchased it with His own blood (Acts 20:28), commissions it to speak on His behalf (Matt. 18:18), entrusts to it authoritative proclamation of the gospel and sacramental signs of the NC
- “Pillar and buttress (support) of truth” - God’s instrument to uphold and preserve truth in this world
 - God has promised to preserve the church and the truth forever (Matt. 16:18, 24:35, 1 Pet. 1:24-25)
 - Local church is the means of doing this
 - Eph. 4:11-12 - His word is proclaimed in the church to prepare His people to do His work
 - Eph. 3:9-11 - revelation of the gospel given to the church to proclaim to all
 - Matt. 18:17, 1 Cor. 5:4-7 - Church exercises discipline to preserve holiness and truthful living
 - Titus 1:9-11, 3:10-11 - Promotes and protects truth by teaching sound doctrine and refuting error
 - Missions and outward facing ministries of mercy are sourced from the local church (2 Cor. 8:1, 14, Acts 13:1-3)
 - The local church is the base of operations for the kingdom - everything flows out from it
- Local church is the main context in which we live out the commands of Scripture

“So that they may walk before Him in all the ways of obedience which He prescribes in His Word...to walk together in particular societies or churches, for their mutual edification, and for the due performance of that public worship, which He requires of them in the world...Such saints willingly consent to walk together according to the appointment of Christ, giving themselves up to the Lord and to one another, according to God’s will” (London Baptist Confession of Faith, 26:6-7, “The Church”)