

The Church: It's Nature, It's Marks, and It's Purposes

The Nature of the Church

1. The Church exists through all redemptive history
 - 1.1. Definition - Grudem, 853 - The church is the community of all true believers for all time.
 - 1.2. The Church is intimately related to Christ, and therefore anyone who is part of Christ and His Kingdom is also part of the Church. We can not think of Christ apart from the Church. His work is uniquely for the Church.
 - 1.2.1. Ephesians 5:25–27 Husbands, love your wives, just as **Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her** ²⁶ **to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,** ²⁷ **and to present her to himself as a radiant church,** without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.
 - 1.2.2. Ephesians 1:22–23 And God placed all things under his feet and **appointed him to be head over everything for the church,** ²³ **which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.**
 - 1.2.3. Matthew 16:17–19 Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock **I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.** ¹⁹ **I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven;** whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”
 - 1.3. Note that Dispensationalists will disagree with this definition. They see the church as only coming into existence on the day of Pentecost and maintain a sharp distinction between Israel in the OT and the Church in the NT.
 - 1.4. Why we believe that the Church includes OT believers
 - 1.4.1. Old Testament believers are saved the same way we are - by grace through faith. There is only one way of salvation - not many. This means making sharp distinctions between believers in various administrations/dispensations of God's covenant is wrong.
 - 1.4.1.1. Romans 4:1–3 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? ² If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. ³ **What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”**
 - 1.4.1.2. Romans 4:6–8 **David says the same thing** when he speaks of the blessedness of **the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:** ⁷ “Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. ⁸ Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.”

- 1.4.1.3. Romans 4:16 Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to **all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.**
- 1.4.1.4. Romans 4:23–25 The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone,²⁴ but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.²⁵ He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.
- 1.4.1.5. Galatians 3:6–9 Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”⁷ Understand, then, that **those who believe are children of Abraham.**⁸ **The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith,** and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.”⁹ **So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.**
- 1.4.1.6. Galatians 3:10–13 All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.”¹¹ **Clearly no one is justified before God by the law,** because, “The righteous will live by faith.”¹² **The law is not based on faith;** on the contrary, “The man who does these things will live by them.”¹³ **Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law** by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.”
- 1.4.2. Old Testament believers had the Gospel, and we still have God's Law. They are not different Gospel's and Laws, but the same ones.
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 - 1.4.2.2. Hebrews 4:1–2 Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.² **For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.**
 - 1.4.2.3. 2 Timothy 3:15 and how from infancy you have known **the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.**

- 1.4.2.4. Hebrews 8:7–10 For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. ⁸ But God found fault with the people and said: “The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ⁹ It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. ¹⁰ This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.
- 1.4.2.5. 2 Corinthians 3:3 You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.
- 1.4.3. Old Testament believers and New Testament believers have the same covenant motto - “I will be their God and they will be my people.”
- 1.4.3.1. Genesis 17:7 I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.
- 1.4.3.2. Exodus 6:7 I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.
- 1.4.3.3. Leviticus 26:12 I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.
- 1.4.3.4. Jeremiah 30:22 So you will be my people, and I will be your God.
- 1.4.3.5. Ezekiel 11:19–20 I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. ²⁰ Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God.
- 1.4.3.6. 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.” ¹⁷ “Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.” ¹⁸ “I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” ¹ Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit. . . .

- 1.4.3.7. Hebrews 8:7–10 For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. ⁸ But God found fault with the people and said: “The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ⁹ It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. ¹⁰ This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.
- 1.4.3.8. Revelation 21:3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.
- 1.4.4. The promises and titles given to Israel are applied to the Church.
- 1.4.4.1. Galatians 3:26–29 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.
- 1.4.4.2. 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.” ¹⁷ “Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.” ¹⁸ “I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” ¹ Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit....

- 1.4.4.3. Hebrews 8:7–10 For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. ⁸ But God found fault with the people and said: “The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make **a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.** ⁹ It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. ¹⁰ **This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel** after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. **I will be their God, and they will be my people.**
- 1.4.4.4. Ephesians 2:12–13, 19 Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from **citizenship in Israel** and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ... ¹⁹ Consequently, **you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people** and members of God’s household.
- 1.4.4.5. Below is a table containing a full chart of all the relationships between Israel, Christ, and the Church.

Category	OT Type/Shadow	Christ the Fulfillment	Church the Inheritors
Priesthood	Aaron - Numbers 18:5-7 Israel - Exodus 19:5-6	Psalms 110:4 Hebrews 7:17-28 Hebrews 5:4-6	1 Peter 2:5-9 Revelation 1:5-6 Revelation 5:10
Prophet	Deuteronomy 18:14-22 (OT Prophets)	Hebrews 1:1-2 Acts 3:18-24	Acts 2:16-21 Acts 4:31
King	Psalms 110:1 1 Chronicles 29:23 Deuteronomy 17:18-20 (Davidic Kings)	Psalms 110:1 Luke 1:32 Matthew 21:4-9 Hebrews 1:3 Revelation 19:15	1 Peter 2:9 Revelation 1:6 Revelation 2:26-27
Moral Law	Exodus 20:1-17	Matthew 5-7 (5:17) Galatians 3:23-24	Romans 3:31 Ezekiel 36:25-27 Hebrews 8:8-12
Ceremonial Law	Genesis 17:10-14 Leviticus 11:41-44 Deuteronomy 22:9-11	Colossians 2:16-17 Hebrews 9:9-10 Galatians 5:2-6 Mark 7:1-4, 14-19	Romans 2:28-29 Colossians 2:11-13 1 Peter 1:14-16 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

Category	OT Type/Shadow	Christ the Fulfillment	Church the Inheritors
Sacrificial Law	Exodus 29:38 Exodus 12:5-8 Isaiah 53:4-10	John 1:29 1 Peter 1:18-19 Hebrews 10:1-4	1 Peter 2:5 Hebrews 13:15 Philippians 4:18 Romans 12:1
Temple	Deuteronomy 12:4-6 Isaiah 56:7 1 Kings 6:12-13	John 2:13-22 Hebrews 10:19-22 Colossians 2:9 John 1:14 Mark 15:38	Ephesians 2:19-21 1 Peter 2:5 2 Corinthians 6:16 1 Corinthians 3:16 1 Corinthians 6:19
God's son	(Israel) Exodus 4:22 Deuteronomy 14:1 Hosea 11:1 (King) Psalm 2:7 2 Samuel 7:14 Psalm 89:20-29	Mark 1:9-11 Matthew 2:15 Matthew 2:13-18 Matthew 4:1-11 Matthew 1:1 Luke 1:32-33 Matthew 21:9	Galatians 4:4-7 Romans 8:14-17 2 Corinthians 6:18 1 John 3:1-3 2 Corinthians 6:18
Seed of Abraham	Genesis 12:7 Genesis 13:15 Genesis 24:7	Galatians 3:16, 19 Acts 3:25-26	Galatians 3:6-7 Galatians 3:29 Galatians 4:22-31 Romans 9:6-8
Israel: God's Chosen, Treasured People	Genesis 17:7-8 Leviticus 26:12 Exodus 19:5-6 Deuteronomy 7:6 Psalm 135:4 Isaiah 43:20-21	Matthew 12:18-21 1 Peter 2:4 Luke 9:35	2 Corinthians 6:16 Hebrews 8:10 Revelation 21:3 Titus 2:14 1 Peter 2:9 1 Peter 2:10
God's One Unified People	Exodus 19:5-6 Isaiah 43:20-21 Hosea 1:6-2:1; 2:23	John 14:6 John 10:16	1 Peter 2:9-10 Hebrews 8:7-12 John 10:16 Romans 11:17-24 Revelation 21:9-14 Ephesians 2:11-21 Galatians 6:15-16

Category	OT Type/Shadow	Christ the Fulfillment	Church the Inheritors
The Land	Genesis 12:7 Genesis 13:15 Genesis 15:18 Genesis 17:8 Genesis 26:3 Genesis 28:13	Galatians 3:16 Psalm 2:8 Psalm 72:8 Matthew 28:18-20 (also note link with Joshua 1:5)	(Whole world) Galatians 3:29 Romans 4:13 Psalm 37:11 & Matthew 5:5 Deuteronomy 5:16 & Ephesians 6:3 Genesis 12:7 & Romans 4:13 (Heaven) Hebrews 11:9-10 Hebrews 11:13-16 Hebrews 11:39-40
The City (Jerusalem)	Deuteronomy 12:11 1 Kings 8:20-21 1 Kings 14:21 2 Kings 19:20-21 Zechariah 9:9 Psalm 87 Zechariah 2:10-11	(No longer Jerusalem) John 4:20-24 Acts 1:8	(New Jerusalem) Hebrews 11:10, 16 Galatians 4:21-31 Hebrews 12:18-24 Revelation 3:12 Revelation 21:1-3 Revelation 21:9-14 Revelation 21:22-27 (& Psalm 87)

- 1.4.4.6. As you can see, everything about Israel's existence, her worship, her titles, are fulfilled in Christ and applied to the Church.
- 1.4.5. Israel is referred to as the church and the Church as Israel.
- 1.4.5.1. Acts 7:38 He was in the **assembly** in the desert, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living words to pass on to us.
- 1.4.5.1.1. The Greek word for assembly is ekklesia - church. It is used 114 times in the NT and with the exception of Acts 19:32, 39, and 40 it always refers to the specific assembly known as the Church. (Note that it is translated as "congregation" in Hebrews 2:12 because it is an OT quote, but the meaning is the church.) Thus, this means that is likely its meaning here as well.
- 1.4.5.1.2. Furthermore, as Grudem notes in footnote 2 on pages 853-854, ekklesia is commonly used in the Septuagint (LXX) translation of the OT to translate the Hebrew word qahal, which usually refers to the assembly of Israel, especially as they come before Yahweh.

- 1.4.5.2. Hebrews 2:12 He says, “I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises.”
- 1.4.5.2.1. This is a quote of Psalm 22:22. In the Hebrew, the word for “congregation” or “assembly” is qahal, and the LXX translated it with ekklesia. Here, it has obvious reference to the Church.
- 1.4.5.3. Galatians 6:14–16 May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. ¹⁶ **Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.**
- 1.4.5.3.1. Some argue that the word for “even” (kai) is normally translated “and” which could mean there are two groups in view - those who follow the rule just laid down (the church), and a second group - Israel. While it is true that kai is usually translated as “and”, it can mean “even” or “that is” and this is the meaning that should be understood here. To act as if there is peace and mercy for unbelieving Israel (who does not follow the rule laid out) would undermine the entire letter of Galatians, and would in fact support the very Judaizers with whom Paul has been in such vigorous debate. Therefore, those who follow this rule regarding only boasting in Christ and not trusting in our flesh, these are the Israel of God.
- 1.4.5.4. Hebrews 8:7–10 For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. ⁸ But God found fault with the people and said: “The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make **a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.** ⁹ It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. ¹⁰ **This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel** after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. **I will be their God, and they will be my people.**

- 1.4.5.4.1. The new covenant is made with Israel and Judah. Yet, Jesus gave this covenant to the Church and this is remembered in the Lord's Supper every time we celebrate it - "This is the blood of the new covenant which is poured out for you" (Luke 22:20). IN short, if the new covenant is with Israel and Judah, either the church is the fulfillment of Israel and Judah, or else the church is not under the new covenant. There is no other option. And if the church is not under the new covenant, then Jesus' blood was not poured out for us. But thanks be to God His blood was poured out for us, and we are under the new covenant, because the Church is not distinct from Israel but is one with her.
- 1.4.6. The Church and Israel are united in eternity as the Bride, the City, the people of God, and sit together at the marriage supper of the Lamb.
- 1.4.6.1. Matthew 8:11 I say to you that **many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.**
- 1.4.6.2. Luke 13:28–30 "There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see **Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God**, but you yourselves thrown out. ²⁹ **People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.** ³⁰ Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last."
- 1.4.6.3. Revelation 21:1–2 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² **I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.**
- 1.4.6.4. Revelation 21:9–14 One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, **I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.**" ¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and **showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.** ¹¹It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. ¹² It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. **On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.** ¹³ There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. ¹⁴ **The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.**

1.4.6.5. In short - God is not a bigamist! He does NOT have two brides - the Church and Israel - but one - His people comprised of all who have believed Him and loved Him, both Jew and Gentile.

1.5. Consequently, the church is all of those who have ever been united to God by faith.

2. The Invisible and Visible Church

2.1. The Church is invisible

2.1.1. Definition - Grudem, 855 - The invisible Church is the Church as God sees it.

2.1.2. Since the Church is comprised of all believers, at all times, and all places in redemptive history, there must be an invisible aspect to the Church. If the Church includes Abraham, Moses, David, Jeremiah, Paul, John, desert monks, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Edwards, and us, it must have an invisible aspect, since all of us have never been in the same visible Church.

2.1.3. Furthermore, all visible churches contain both believers and unbelievers, and there are undoubtedly Christians who for various reasons are not attached to a visible church. Yet, the true Church is comprised of all believers, and only believers. So there must be an invisible aspect to the Church.

2.1.4. Scriptures:

2.1.4.1. Hebrews 12:22–24 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, ²³ to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, ²⁴ to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

2.1.4.2. 1 Corinthians 1:1–2 Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, ² To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours:

2.1.4.3. Ephesians 5:25–27 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

2.1.4.4. Hebrews 8:7–12 For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. ⁸ But God found fault with the people and said: “The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ⁹ It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. ¹⁰ This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. **I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.** ¹¹ **No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.** ¹² **For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”**

2.1.4.4.1. Note that in this verse (and many others like it) everyone in the New Covenant Church knows the Lord. All have had their sins forgiven. This is not true of any visible church or group of visible churches - but it is true of the invisible Church.

2.1.5. Note that the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox church merge the visible and invisible Church. They say that the only true Church is their own Church. They claim they are the true Church descended from the Apostles, and thus are the only True Church. But these claims are false for several reasons:

2.1.5.1. Apostolic succession is not a matter of laying on of hands but remaining true to Apostolic doctrine. There were defectors in the days of the Apostles and even from the Apostolic teams, and such defections continue today.

2.1.5.1.1. Acts 20:28–31 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. ²⁹ I know that after I leave, **savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.** ³⁰ **Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.** ³¹ **So be on your guard!** Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

2.1.5.1.2. 2 Timothy 4:10 for **Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me** and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia.

- 2.1.5.1.3. 2 Timothy 2:17–19 Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are **Hymenaeus and Philetus,**¹⁸**who have wandered away from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some.**¹⁹ Nevertheless, God’s solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: **“The Lord knows those who are his,”** and, “Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.”
- 2.1.5.2. True apostolic succession lies in keeping Apostolic doctrine as seen in the NT, not in having hands laid on in an unbroken succession. We are to follow those who teach what the Apostles taught - as seen in the NT - not those who claim an unbroken line of ordination back to the Apostles.
- 2.1.5.2.1. 2 Timothy 2:1–2 You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.² **And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.**
- 2.1.5.2.2. 2 Timothy 1:13–14 What you **heard** from me, **keep as the pattern of sound teaching,** with faith and love in Christ Jesus.¹⁴ **Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—**guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.
- 2.1.5.2.3. Jude 1:3 Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to **contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.**
- 2.1.5.2.4. 1 Corinthians 11:2 **I praise you** for remembering me in everything and **for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you.**
- 2.1.5.2.5. 2 Thessalonians 2:15 So then, brothers, stand firm and **hold to the teachings we passed on to you,** whether by word of mouth or by letter.
- 2.1.5.3. It should also be noted that both the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Romans Catholic Church claim to trace their origins back to the Apostles, and both are correct - yet they are in strong disagreement as to which is the true Church. This is because tracing ordinations back to the Apostles does not mark the True Church - holding to Apostolic doctrine marks the true Church, and this is done to a greater or lesser degree in all visible churches, all of which are part of the invisible Church.

2.2. The Church is visible

2.2.1. The Church also has a visible aspect.

2.2.2. Definition - Grudem, 856 - The visible church is the church as Christians on earth see it.

2.2.3. The invisible church comes to expression in visible churches that can be seen and identified. These include both local churches and associations of local churches, but it is not identified with any single Church. In other words, the visible Church is identified with the local church rather than the universal church.

2.2.4. Scriptures - see below under the discussion of the local church.

3. The Church is Universal and Local

3.1. The Church is universal

3.1.1. The universal Church is all Christians everywhere at one time who call on the name of the Lord.

3.1.2. In one sense, we may say that the Universal Church is the invisible church on earth at a particular time. In other words, the invisible church is the universal church on earth, plus believers who have lived and died previous to that time.

3.1.3. Scriptures

3.1.3.1. 1 Corinthians 1:1–2 Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, ² To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours:

3.1.3.2. Matthew 16:18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

3.1.3.3. Ephesians 1:22–23 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

3.1.3.4. Ephesians 3:10–11 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, ¹¹ according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

3.2. The church is local

3.2.1. The universal, invisible Church finds expression in local, visible churches. These churches exist at a particular time and place. They are not spread out geographically, but can be identified as a church in a particular location.

3.2.1.1. 1 Corinthians 1:1–2 Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, ² To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours:

- 3.2.1.2. Colossians 4:16 After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in **the church of the Laodiceans** and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.
- 3.2.1.3. 1 Thessalonians 1:1 Paul, Silas and Timothy, **To the church of the Thessalonians** in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you.
- 3.2.2. These churches are an identifiable group of people who worship together, serve one another, and have an established leadership and structure. They meet at certain places and times, and can be identified as a group, by themselves and others.
 - 3.2.2.1. Acts 11:25–26 Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. **So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people.** The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.
 - 3.2.2.2. Acts 13:1 **In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers:** Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul.
 - 3.2.2.3. Acts 14:23 Paul and Barnabas **appointed elders for them in each church** and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.
 - 3.2.2.4. Romans 16:1 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, **a servant of the church in Cenchrea.**
 - 3.2.2.5. Romans 16:3–5 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. ⁴ They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. ⁵ **Greet also the church that meets at their house.**
 - 3.2.2.6. 1 Corinthians 16:19 The **churches in the province of Asia send you greetings.** Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and **so does the church that meets at their house.**
 - 3.2.2.7. Colossians 4:15 Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and **the church in her house.**
 - 3.2.2.8. 1 Timothy 5:17 The **elders who direct the affairs of the church** well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.

- 3.2.3. There are some today who denigrate the local church. Some do not want to belong to a single local church, thinking it is more spiritual to simply belong to the universal church. This is a false spirituality and is a transparent attempt to avoid real accountability and consistent service that is part of the local church. The New Testament call is not simply to be a member of the universal church (which happens automatically at regeneration) but rather to become part of a specific local church. It is only in the local church that one can fulfill all of the “one another commands” and the call to submit to church leaders. These commands assume that we see each other, know each other, worship together regularly, encourage and teach each other, and are submitted to one another in a relationship that even allows church discipline. This can only happen in a local church. A few of these commands which can only be fulfilled in the context of a specific and defined local church are listed below.
- 3.2.3.1. Romans 12:14–16 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.
- 3.2.3.2. Romans 15:5–7 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, ⁶ so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷ Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.
- 3.2.3.3. Ephesians 4:2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.
- 3.2.3.4. Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.
- 3.2.3.5. Hebrews 3:13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.
- 3.2.3.6. Hebrews 10:24–25 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. ²⁵ Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching.
- 3.2.3.7. 2 Thessalonians 3:6 In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us.

- 3.2.3.8. 2 Thessalonians 3:14–15 If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, **take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed.** ¹⁵ Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.
- 3.2.3.9. Romans 16:17 I urge you, brothers, to **watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.**
- 3.2.3.10. Matthew 18:15–17 “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. ¹⁶ But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ ¹⁷ **If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.**
- 3.2.3.11. James 5:14–16 Is any one of you sick? **He should call the elders of the church** to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore **confess your sins to each other and pray for each other** so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.
- 3.2.3.12. 1 Peter 4:8–11 Above all, **keep loving one another earnestly**, since love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹ **Show hospitality to one another** without grumbling. ¹⁰ As each has received a gift, use it to **serve one another**, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: ¹¹ whoever **speaks**, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever **serves**, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.
- 3.2.4. Others denigrate any form or structure. They think that a really spiritual church would not have any organization or structure. But this goes against the clear NT evidence that local churches were an identifiable group of people who had specific leaders and who met at specific locations and times. There is no such thing as an “organizationless” church. This is why the New Testament speaks often of elders, deacons, and other formally recognized church leaders.
- 3.2.4.1. Acts 14:23 **Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church** and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.

- 3.2.4.2. Acts 20:28–31 **Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God,** which he bought with his own blood. ²⁹ I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. ³⁰ Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. ³¹ So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.
- 3.2.4.3. Titus 1:5 The reason I left you in Crete was that you might **straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town,** as I directed you.
- 3.2.4.4. 1 Timothy 5:17 The **elders who direct the affairs of the church** well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.
- 3.2.4.5. 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13 Now we ask you, brothers, to **respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you.** ¹³ Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.
- 3.2.4.6. Philippians 1:1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, **To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:**
- 3.2.4.7. 1 Peter 5:1–2 **To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder,** a witness of Christ’s sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: ² **Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers** — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve;
- 3.2.4.8. Hebrews 13:7 Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.
- 3.2.4.9. Hebrews 13:17 **Obey your leaders and submit to their authority.** They **keep watch over you** as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.
- 3.2.4.10. Of course it is VERY important to remember that these leaders MUST display godly character and be true servants - not lords. But for this discussion it is important to see that these leaders are well defined - they are known, official leaders with clear responsibilities and authority in a local church. Anything other than this is not the New Testament teaching on the church.

4. Metaphors for the church

4.1. The Scripture uses a number of metaphors to describe the church. These metaphors help us to understand the true nature of the church. These include:

4.1.1. Family

4.1.1.1. 1 Timothy 3:15 If I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in **God's household, which is the church of the living God**, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

4.1.1.2. 1 Peter 4:17 For it is **time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?**

4.1.1.3. Romans 8:16–17 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that **we are God's children.** ¹⁷ **Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ**, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

4.1.1.4. Romans 8:29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, **that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.**

4.1.1.5. Ephesians 2:19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and **members of God's household.**

4.1.1.6. 1 Timothy 5:1–2 Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, ²older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.

4.1.1.7. Also note all of the Scriptures in the NT where fellows Christians are greeted as brothers and sisters.

4.1.2. Bride of Christ

4.1.2.1. Ephesians 5:31–32 “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and **be united to his wife**, and the two will become one flesh.” ³² **This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.**

4.1.2.2. Revelation 19:7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For **the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.**

4.1.2.3. Revelation 21:1–2 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² **I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.**

4.1.2.4. Revelation 22:17 **The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!”** And let him who hears say, “Come!” Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

- 4.1.2.5. Also note the OT Scriptures where Israel (which is one with the Church as we have seen above) is considered God's Bride (although usually as an unfaithful Bride - Hosea, Ezekiel 16).
- 4.1.3. The Body of Christ
- 4.1.3.1. Colossians 1:18 And **he is the head of the body, the church**; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.
- 4.1.3.2. Ephesians 5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife as **Christ is the head of the church, his body**, of which he is the Savior.
- 4.1.3.3. 1 Corinthians 12:12–13 The **body** is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one **body**. So it is with Christ. ¹³ **For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body**—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.
- 4.1.3.4. 1 Corinthians 12:27–28 Now **you are the body of Christ**, and each one of you is a part of it. ²⁸ And **in the church** God has appointed first of all apostles....
- 4.1.3.5. Ephesians 4:15–16 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into **him who is the Head, that is, Christ**. ¹⁶**From him the whole body**, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.
- 4.1.3.6. Colossians 2:19 He has lost connection with **the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews**, grows as God causes it to grow.
- 4.1.4. A building (Temple)
- 4.1.4.1. Ephesians 2:19–22 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ **In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord**. ²² **And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit**.
- 4.1.4.2. 1 Corinthians 3:16 Don't you know that **you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?**
- 4.1.4.3. 1 Peter 2:4–5 As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him— ⁵ **you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices** acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

4.1.5. A vine/vineyard/field

4.1.5.1. John 15:5 “**I am the vine; you are the branches.** If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

4.1.5.2. 1 Corinthians 3:9 For we are God’s fellow workers; **you are God’s field,** God’s building.

4.1.5.3. Isaiah 61:1–3 The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, ² to proclaim the year of the LORD’S favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, ³ and provide for those who grieve in Zion— to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. **They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD** for the display of his splendor.

4.1.5.4. Colossians 1:6 All over the world this gospel is **bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you** since the day you heard it and understood God’s grace in all its truth.

4.1.6. A city (or nation/city-state)

4.1.6.1. Hebrews 12:22–24 But **you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God.** You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, ²³ **to the church of the firstborn,** whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, ²⁴ to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

4.1.6.2. Revelation 21:2 **I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride** beautifully dressed for her husband.

- 4.1.6.3. Revelation 21:9–14 One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, **I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.**”¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and **showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.**¹¹ It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.¹² It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. **On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.**¹³ There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west.¹⁴ **The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.**
- 4.1.6.4. 1 Peter 2:9–10 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, **a holy nation, a people** belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.¹⁰ **Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God;** once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.
- 4.1.6.5. Ephesians 2:12–13, 19 Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from **citizenship in Israel** and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ...¹⁹ Consequently, **you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people** and members of God’s household.

4.2. It is important that we keep all of these metaphors in mind as we consider the nature of the church. To ignore some of them or overemphasize a few will only distort our view of the Church.

5. The Church and Israel (see point 1 above, especially 1.4ff.)