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Bridgeway Church / Foundations
The Church (1)

***The Church:
Is it Important and What Difference does it Make?
Part One***

Let me be honest: the doctrine of the church isn't very sexy! It lacks the energizing appeal of other doctrines such as salvation and eschatology, that is, until one takes note of Paul's words in Ephesians 3:10 –

“so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places” (Eph. 3:10).

God's ultimate aim is that his own “manifold wisdom” might be made known ***“through the church”***. The word translated “manifold” was used to describe everything from the intricate and colorful design of flowers, to embroidered cloth, to woven carpets, and even crowns with their exquisite jewels. It could be rendered “richly diversified,” “multifaceted,” “highly variegated,” “infinite diversity,” etc. God's saving wisdom is gloriously intricate in its design and its effect. It is the very antithesis of boredom and routine. In the present context, notes Peter O'Brien, “this variegated wisdom has particular reference to God's richly diverse ways of working which led to a multi-racial, multi-cultural community being united as fellow-members in the body of Christ” (245).

To whom in particular does God want this made known? To “rulers and authorities in heavenly places,” i.e., angelic beings, primarily demonic spirits (see Eph. 1:21; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:10). In this way these fallen spirits are provided with a tangible reminder that their authority has been decisively broken and that they, indeed all things, have been made subject to Christ. Note: the purpose for the church extends far beyond its internal ministries. ***God intends for the church to serve a larger, indeed cosmic, purpose in spreading his glory.***

By what means does God intend to accomplish this? “Through the church” (!), not nature, nor other angels, not the animal kingdom, but through the ***church!*** It is through the very *existence* of this new multi-racial, trans-cultural community of believers in which Jew and Gentile are co-heirs of the promises that God makes known his wisdom. No other organization on earth, neither government nor educational institutions nor civic clubs can accomplish this purpose. What, then, becomes of the display of God's wisdom when the church remains internally divided and externally segregated?

The existence of the church, therefore, “demonstrates to the ‘powers’ that they are in fact powerless to impede the progress of the gospel to the Gentiles and consequently destroy the church, the body of Christ, which they thought they had already once destroyed on the cross [see 1 Cor. 2:6-8]. The purpose of 3:10 in the context of the entire epistle is primarily for the comfort of the readers. Plagued by a fear of the ‘powers,’ the readers would find great encouragement in knowing that the ‘powers’ can see that they have been devastatingly foiled by the emergence of the body of Christ, the church. This would also give the readers added assurance of victory over the ‘powers’ as they engage in spiritual warfare and await the consummation of the age to come” (Clint Arnold, 64).

The Meaning of “Church”

The place we should begin is with the Greek word *ekklesia* (ecclesiology, ecclesiastical, etc.), most often translated as “church”. In the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT (known as the Septuagint) and occasionally in the NT the word is used in a non-technical sense to refer to an assembly or congregation of people (see Acts 7:38; 19:32, 39, 41; also Hebrews 2:12 which is a citation from Psalm 22:22).

Some have tried to argue that since *ekklesia* is built on two words that mean “out of” and “to call” that the church should be defined as those who are “called out of” the world to be God's people. But it is a mistake to build a definition of a word based on its component root parts. Meaning is based on usage, and the predominant usage of *ekklesia* is assembly, gathered ones, congregation.

A close study of the word in the NT reveals that there are two fundamental senses in which we may speak of the “church”: the universal or invisible “church” and the local or visible “church”.

Most often in Paul’s writings the word *ekklesia* refers to actual concrete gatherings of Christians in a local setting:

“That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every **church**” (1 Cor. 4:17).

“Greet also the **church** in their house” (Rom. 16:5; cf. Col. 4:15; Philemon 2).

“To the **churches** in Galatia” (Gal. 1:2).

We refer to this as the “visible” church because it is comprised of actual people who can be seen, known, and counted. The “local” or “visible” church may also be designated in two ways, either as a group of local churches in a particular geographical region (Gal. 1:22 [“the churches of Judea”]; possibly also Acts 8:3 and 1 Timothy 3:15) or as individual churches in a particular city (see above).

But on occasion, *ekklesia* appears to refer to an entity that is much broader than any one local congregation:

“For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the **church** of God violently and tried to destroy it” (Gal. 1:13; cf. 1 Cor. 15:9; Phil. 3:6).

“Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the **church** of God” (1 Cor. 10:32).

“And he is the head of the body, the **church**” (Col. 1:18).

“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of **his body**, that is, the **church**” (Col. 1:24).

Other similar uses of *ekklesia*, in which the word appears to have in view the universal Church, the “body” of all believers, indeed all Christians collectively in every geographical location together with those who have died and are now present with Christ in heaven, can be found in Ephesians 1:22; 3:10, 21; 5:23, 24, 25, 27, 29, 32. We read this in Hebrews 12:22-23, a description of those now in heaven:

“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the **assembly** [lit., *ekklesia*, **church**] of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect . . .” (Heb. 12:22-23).

For our purposes we will use the terms *local* and *universal* when referring to the church. Ways in which the word “church” are never found in the NT:

(1) You never find in the NT the word “church” used to refer to a building or physical structure. Whereas a particular local “church” may meet in someone’s house (e.g., Rom. 16:5), or today in a building, the structure itself is never called a church.

(2) You never find in the NT the word “church” used to refer to a denomination.

(3) You never find in the NT the word “church” used to refer to an organization of believers related to a specific country or nation, such as the Church of England (Anglican) or the Church of Scotland.

We should also remember that the NT never entertains the idea of someone being a member of the universal or invisible Church who is not also an active member and participant in a local church. Ideally, the two should be co-extensive, but reality is such that there are many who are “members” or who are present within a local church who are not “members” of the universal body of Christ (see 1 John 2:19).

When Did the Church Begin?

Some say the “church” or the “assembly/congregation” of God’s people began with Adam, while others say it began with Abraham. But I have in mind what we know to be the “body of Christ” (see 1 Cor. 12:12-13), that spiritual organism that is comprised of both believing Jews and believing Gentiles who share equally in the promises of God and have all been baptized by Jesus in the Holy Spirit. Several texts suggest that this “church” began or was birthed at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out permanently on all believers. See Matthew 16:18 (the “church” that Jesus would build is yet future); 18:15-20; Ephesians 2:11-22; 3:4-6. The “church” thus began with the experience we know as Spirit baptism (inaugurated at Pentecost), a work of Jesus Christ that incorporates believers into his spiritual body (1 Cor. 12:12-13; 12:27).

The Defining Marks of a True Local Church

How should we define a local church? What are its essential characteristics? I would define a local church like this:

A local church is a group of baptized believers in Jesus Christ who meet regularly in corporate assembly to worship God, through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Certain practices are essential to this gathered body: (1) They are under the authority and guidance of duly appointed Leaders. (2) They are regularly taught the Word of God. (3) They celebrate the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. (4) They consistently practice Church Discipline.

There are certainly other features and ministries that ought to characterize every local church, such as evangelism, mutual accountability and encouragement, missional outreach, the exercise of spiritual gifts, etc. But the absence of these latter factors only means that a local church is weak or is falling short of its responsibilities.

This means, for example, that Inter-Varsity chapters, CRU, Navigator groups, BSF, Young Life, and Youth for Christ clubs are not local churches. They may well be expressions of the life of the local church or efforts by Christians to achieve specific goals that the local church is unable to pursue, but they are not themselves local churches.

Small group gatherings, likewise, are not in and of themselves local churches. They are the local church in smaller, more manageable embodiments, designed to facilitate community life, accountability, spiritual growth, exercise of spiritual gifts, mutual encouragement, prayer, discipleship, etc. But for a small group to be, in itself, a local church, it must have duly appointed leaders (Elders) who provide for the regular teaching of God’s Word, the celebration of the ordinances, and the exercise of church discipline where called for.

This is why here at Bridgeway we changed the name of our small groups from “house churches” to “community groups”. Why was this change important?

Over the past 20 years there has occurred a shift in how the language of “house church” is being used and perceived in the evangelical world. When people hear the term “house church” they don’t think primarily in terms of every-member ministry outside the confines of a Sunday corporate celebration. Rather, they are more inclined to assume that each small group gathering in a house is itself a local church that functions with all the responsibilities, rights, and authority set forth in Scripture.

Thus the language of “house church” has taken on an entirely new meaning and more often than not now refers to a movement that tends to be (although there are always exceptions) anti-traditional, anti-institutional, anti-building, anti-structure, and is suspicious about the centralized authority of duly appointed Elders. The “house church” movement also tends to minimize the importance and place of consistent biblical teaching and the NT emphasis on corporate assembly as an essential feature in the identity and practice of a local church.

Please don’t misunderstand me. I’m not saying that all house churches in this contemporary movement would embrace everything in the previous paragraph. Some simply prefer the smaller, less formal (what they call “organic” or “simple”) gathering that can occur in a private home over against the corporate gathering in a separate structure. I have no objection to “house churches” per se, so long as they meet all the criteria essential for a NT local church. I simply don’t think it is wise or biblically accurate to refer to our small groups at Bridgeway as “house churches.”

Consider this one example described in a recent article. The author describes this scenario: “a long-standing men’s prayer meeting decided to meet in a coffeehouse rather than their home. The very first week another customer noticed them and asked for prayer, and they introduced him to Jesus. In the next few years, as more customers became believers, up to 50 gathered there. For them, that was church” (“Small is the New Big: Making sense of the diverse house church movement currently sweeping across the U.S.,” *Charisma*, September 2012). Actually, no it isn’t. I applaud gathering to pray. I applaud evangelistic outreach. But men gathering in a coffee house is not a local church.

Biblical Texts that describe the Local Church

The Church as the Body of Christ

“For as in one **body** we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.” (Rom. 12:4-5)

“We who are many are one **body**” (1 Cor. 10:17).

“Just as the **body** is one and has many members, and all the members of the **body**, though many, are one **body**, so it is with Christ” (1 Cor. 12:12).

“You are the **body** of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Cor. 12:27).

“Equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the **body** of Christ” (Eph. 4:12).

“Christ is the head of the church, his **body**, and is himself its Savior” (Eph. 5:23).

“We are members of [Christ’s] **body**” (Eph. 5:30).

“In my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his **body**, that is, the church” (Col. 1:24).

The Church is the Bride of Christ

“Come, I will show you the **Bride**, the wife of the Lamb” (Rev. 21:9).

“The marriage of the Lamb has come, and his **Bride** has made herself ready. It was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure” (Rev. 19:7-8).

“For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a **pure virgin** to Christ” (2 Cor. 11:12).

“‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:31-32).

The Church is the Family of God

“I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty” (2 Cor. 6:18).

“Stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother’” (Matt. 12:49-50).

“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Eph. 2:19).

“As we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10).

“Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity” (1 Tim. 5:1).

The Church is God's House

“Christ is faithful over God's **house** as a son. And we are his **house** if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope” (Heb. 3:6).

“I am writing these things to you so that . . . you may know how one ought to behave in the **household** of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:14-15).

“It is time for judgment to begin at the **household** of God” (1 Pet. 4:17).

The Church is the Temple of God, built with living stones, with Christ as the foundation and cornerstone, and the Holy Spirit indwelling it

“For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11).

“The household of God [is] built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a **holy temple** in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (Eph. 2:19-22).

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.’ . . . ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone’” (1 Pet. 2:6-7 [Isa. 28:16; Ps. 118:22]).

“You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:5).

“Do you not know that you [plural] are God's **temple** and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's **temple**, God will destroy him. For God's **temple** is holy, and you are that **temple**” (1 Cor. 3:16-17).

“Or do you not know that your body is a **temple** of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own” (1 Cor. 6:19).

A Case for Formal Membership in the Local Church

Does the New Testament **explicitly** mention or describe formal church membership? No, it does not. However, there are numerous truths and responsibilities in the NT which would be minimized or denied if there were no definable local church membership. In other words, the fact that membership is not explicitly mentioned does not mean it didn't exist. Those things which *are* explicitly mentioned **necessarily assume** that covenant membership existed. Therefore, if we conclude that covenant membership is **necessarily entailed** by the Bible's commands for the church and the description of its life, we are morally obligated to pursue it in our churches today. If we conclude that it is not, we are free to regard local church membership as a matter of prudence which we may disregard if we think it not to be helpful in fulfilling our calling as the body of Christ.

As I read the New Testament, I can see several truths or responsibilities that, in my opinion, **necessarily assume** the existence of a definable covenant membership in the local church.

1. Accountability to the Leaders (Elders) of the Church

Without covenant membership, who is it that the NT is referring to who must submit to a specific group of leaders? And who are those leaders? No one would argue that a believer is required to submit to the authority of just anyone who chooses to designate himself an Elder or Pastor, whether in this city or another. Some kind of **expressed willingness or covenant or agreement or commitment (that is, membership)** has to precede a person's submission to a specified group of leaders who themselves are committed to providing spiritual direction to those who have

acknowledged their authority. Consider the way the New Testament talks about the relationship of the church to her leaders.

“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account” (Hebrews 13:17).

“We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work” (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).

“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching” (1 Timothy 5:17).

2. *The Requirement that Shepherds Care for their Flock*

The Bible instructs Elders that they are to have a special responsibility and care for a certain group, a group of members. Consider Acts 20:28 where Paul tells the Elders how to care for their flock.

“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

This verse does not say Elders cannot visit unbelievers or those who are not yet members. But it does make clear that their first responsibility is to a particular flock. How are they to know who their flock is? For whom are the Elders and Pastors responsible? For whom will they give an account to God? Peter writes:

“Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:2-3).

“Those in your charge” (your portion, your lot) implies that the Elders *knew* those for whom they were responsible. This is just another way of talking about membership. If a person does not want to be held accountable by a group of Elders or be the special focus of the care of a group of Elders, they will resist the idea of membership. And they will resist God’s appointed way for them to live and be sustained in their faith.

3. *Church Discipline*

a. *Matthew 18:15-17* - Church membership is implied in Matthew 18:15-17 where “the church” (*ekklesia*) appears to be the final court of appeal in matters of church authority as it relates to membership.

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (Matt. 18:15-17).

If there is no church membership, how can you define the group that will take up this sensitive and weighty matter of exhorting the unrepentant person and finally rendering a judgment about his standing in the community? The final step in this process of discipline is treating the unrepentant person “as a Gentile and a tax collector.” Clearly, again, this makes sense only on the assumption that criteria exist by which one can know who or what constitutes the “church” from which this unrepentant person is now being excluded.

b. *1 Corinthians 5:12-13* -

“What have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. ‘Purge the evil person from among you’” (1 Cor. 5:12-13).

First, it is clear from Paul's language that there is an "*in the church*" group and an "*outside the church*" group. Being in the church is definable. There are recognizable boundaries that make drawing this distinction possible. ***The objective criteria that constitute those boundaries would be the terms of membership in the church.***

Second, it is also clear that a person can be removed from being "in the church." Such a formal removal would not be possible if there were no such thing as a clear membership. In other words, Paul's exhortation would be impossible to obey unless there were a way of determining who is an accountable part of a local body and who is not. Simply put, ***formal exclusion presupposes formal inclusion.***

Third, the church's discipline is to occur when "you are assembled" (1 Cor. 5:4). For our purposes, simply note that there was a definite and formal assembly of the church, and they knew who to expect when it gathered. The church would have to have known who constituted its membership.

Fourth, apart from some expression of formal membership, how would it be determined who has the right to speak and to vote in the passing of judgment on the offending party? Surely this right would not extend to just anyone. Otherwise the person being disciplined could bring in extended family members and friends or coworkers or even people off the street who said they believed in Jesus. What about the person who has attended services only at Christmas or Easter, or perhaps someone who hasn't been present for several years but occasionally sends in a support check? The right to engage in the disciplinary process must be limited to a specific group, one that is limited by the criteria that constitute membership in the body.

Fifth, building upon the previous four points, the "discipline" of which Paul speaks was intended only for those who are in the church (v. 12). Evidently some in Corinth were avoiding contact with immoral unbelievers outside the church. Paul seeks to correct this misunderstanding by reminding them that the church's judgment was aimed only at those "inside" the church. It seems clear that ***the church knew who was an insider and who was an outsider.*** Those "inside" the church must have been united to one another or committed in some special way beyond just casual acquaintance.

c. *2 Corinthians 2:6* - In *2 Corinthians 2:6*, Paul refers to the discipline the church inflicted on an individual as the "punishment by the majority." The existence of a "majority" only makes sense if there was a defined set of people from which the majority is constituted. There cannot be a majority of an unspecified group; it must be a majority of *something*. The most natural assumption to make is that Paul meant the majority of an acknowledged membership of the church.

4. The List of Widows

"Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work. But refuse to enroll younger widows, for when their passions draw them away from Christ, they desire to marry and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith" (1 Tim. 5:9-12).

The verb translated "enroll" (*katalageō*) can be either specific ("to put on a list") or general ("to consider as part of a certain group"). The former meaning would make the point more marked in that the church was clearly keeping an accessible list of widowed members. Yet even the latter meaning would imply that the church was distinguishing between people in a way consistent with the practice of church membership. Why mention the widow's list? It's difficult to imagine the church keeping a list of widows but not keeping a list of covenant members. If it didn't keep the latter list, what group of widows would even be considered for inclusion on the former list? Any widow in the entire city of Ephesus? The widow who showed up three times four years ago? Of course not. The church would have some specified pool that it was drawing from.

5. Congregational Decision Making

"Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, *with the whole church*, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas" (Acts 15:22).

A decision needed to be made concerning those who would be entrusted with a letter summing up the conclusions of the Jerusalem Council. The decision was made not only by the apostles and the elders but in conjunction with *“the whole church.”* ***Who constituted the “whole church”? How was it known that one either was or was not part of the “church” in Jerusalem? How was it determined who had a right to speak into this matter?*** I find it highly unlikely that *any* person, regardless of belief, behavior, or involvement in the life of the body could simply insert himself into this affair. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that certain criteria or standards were in place that served to set apart those believers who were authorized to join with the apostles and elders in making this decision.

6. Responsibility within the family of faith

“So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

As Christians, we are responsible to display the love of Christ to “everyone,” i.e., to all people regardless of their spiritual convictions. But we have a unique responsibility “to those who are of the household of faith.” The local church is here portrayed as a family, spiritual “brothers” and “sisters” whose presence in the house and identity as members of that family are obvious. We don’t know what the criteria were that identified one as a family member and thus the object of this particular display of “good,” but there had to have been some means by which the household of faith was differentiated from “everyone” else. This is what is meant by “covenant membership” in the family of God’s children.

7. The Gathering of the “whole church”

In 1 Corinthians 14:23, Paul describes a situation in which “the whole church comes together.” How would the leaders know if the “whole church” was there if no formal covenant relationship was established? The fact that Paul envisioned a group that could be identified and defined as everyone who belonged to that local body necessarily assumes that some means or mechanism had to be in place by which such people could be known. I think that means or mechanism or whatever other word you find appropriate is what I am calling “covenant membership.”

8. Biblical Metaphors

Covenant membership is implied in the metaphor of the “body” in 1 Corinthians 12:12-13. The original meaning of the word “member” is member of a body, like a hand and foot and eye and ear. That’s the imagery behind the word “member” in the text (vv. 12, 14, 18, 19, 20, 23, 25, 26, 27). Verse 12: “Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.”

So the question this imagery raises for the local church that Paul is describing in 1 Corinthians 12 is: Who intends to be treated as a hand or foot or eye or ear of this body? There is a unity and organic relationship implied in the imagery of the body. There is something unnatural about a Christian attaching himself to a body of believers and not being a member of the body. Neither Paul nor any other biblical author ever describes a Christian as one who functions or exists in isolation from the whole.

In addition to the metaphor of the “body” the New Testament speaks of the church as a “flock” (Acts 20:28) and a “building” (1 Peter 2:5). In each of these metaphors, there is an obvious relationship between the individual and the congregation as a whole. The individual Christian is a member of the body and a sheep in the flock. The individual believer is, in Peter’s words, “a living stone” in the spiritual house. Each of these word pictures, so vital to our understanding of the church, demand more than a casual commitment from the individual. There are no informally connected stones in a building. They are cemented together unambiguously. Sheep do not hop from flock to flock; rather, the shepherd knows exactly how many sheep he has in his care. Body parts do not relate to each other informally; they are intricately connected to each other and are mutually dependent. Surely, we best reflect these metaphors when we formally tie ourselves to a local congregation.

Discussion Questions

- (1) In view of what Paul says in Ephesians 3:10, what would you say to someone who professes to be a Christian but gives little regard to the church and even refuses to be an active, contributing member of a local body of believers? Is it possible for a true, born-again Christian to live in unrepentant disregard for and separation from a local church?
- (2) Talk about the many ways people misuse or misapply the word “church”. What does it actually mean as used in the NT? How might a focus on this biblical meaning of the term help us in our understanding of what the church does and its importance in God’s plans?
- (3) What is the difference between the “invisible” and the “visible” church? Is this a distinction that the Bible supports? If so, what texts would you cite to prove it? How important is it to maintain this distinction? What are some of its practical implications? What would you say to someone who said: “I am a member of the universal, invisible church so I don’t have to be a member of a visible, local church”?
- (4) What are the defining marks of a true, biblical, Christian church?
- (5) What would you say to a person who refuses to acknowledge that formal covenant membership in a local church is important? What specific texts would you use to convince them otherwise?