

Chapter Eighteen: The Nature of the Church

“We should also ask, are these [preaching, sacraments, and discipline] the only marks of the church? Scripture does not say that any of the previous three are marks, but it does say that love is a mark. Jesus said, ‘By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another’ (John 13:35). Strange that love has been ignored in the discussion of marks. Perhaps if love, and not only true doctrine, were recognized as a mark, the church would be less characterized by theological battling.”

It’s not just about me!

The corporate dimension of salvation

Ac 20:28 — 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.

OT Background

Gen 3-4 — The effects of the fall are social (Adam & Eve’s intimacy; Cain’s jealousy of Abel); conversely, worship is done in community.

Ex 19-20; Dt 4:10, etc. — God establishes his covenant, not with individuals, but with a nation, a congregation: “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

NT Church = Continuation of Israel

1Pt 2:9 — (written to a Gentile church, by the way) “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, people for his own possession.” (See also Gal 6:16, where Paul calls the NT church “the Israel of God”)

Aside on Dispensationalism (the belief that Israel and the church are two distinct peoples of God, given different sets of promises — a belief with which Frame disagrees)

- **Same titles** — 1Pt 2:9 = Ex 19:5-6

- **One olive tree** — Rom 11:11-24
- **No dividing wall** — Eph 2:11-22; 3:6; Ac 10 & 11
- **One family (Abraham’s), with one entrance requirement (faith)** — Gal 3:29
- **OT promises belong to the church** — Jesus is the theme of the OT (Lk 24:13-35); Abe, et al., examples of the same sort of faith NT believers are called to (Rom 4; Heb 11); OT prophecies fulfilled in the NT church (2Co 1:20)

Joel 2:28-32 = Ac 2:17-21

Ps 2:7 = Ac 13:32-33

Amos 9:11-12 = Ac 15:16-17

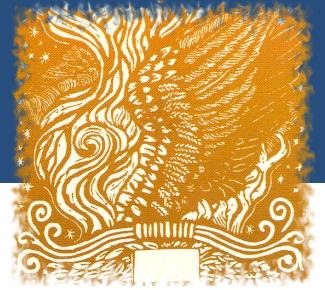
Hos 2:1,23 = Rom 9:24-26

Jer 31:31-34 = Heb 8:8-10; 2Co 3:3

The Nature of the Church

People, not buildings — “Thank you for bringing the church into this building” (Vernon Rainwater).

Visible & Invisible (WCF 25.1-2) — Two perspectives on the same church: as God sees it in terms of his eternal election, and as we see it in terms of who has made a credible *profession* of faith. The visible church will include covenant breakers as well as covenant keepers.



Nature of the Church (cont.)

Local (Rom 16:5; 1Co 16:19; Col 4:15, mostly, it would seem, house churches), **Regional** (1Co 1:2, Rom 16; Gal 1:2, a city church, or the churches of a geographical area), **Universal** (Mt 16:18; Ac 15:22; 1Co 12:28; Eph 1:22, the whole body of believers throughout the world)

Images of the church

- **Covenant people of God** — Ex 19; 1Pt 2; a Lord and his servants bound by redemptive acts and a constitution
- **Family of God** — Gal 3:29; 1Tm 3:14-16; Heb 2:11-12, bonds of brotherly/sisterly affection; an Elder Brother
- **Bride of Christ** — Gal 3:29; 1Tm 3:14-16; Heb 2:11-12, bonds of brotherly/sisterly affection; an Elder Brother
- **Body of Christ** — Rom 12:5; 1Co 10:16; 12:12; Eph 5:23; Col 1:18; 2:19, the unity of the church with Christ and the unity of each Christian with all the others
- **Temple of God** — 1Co 3:16-17; 6:19; Eph 2:21-22; 1Pt 2:4-8; Rev 3:12; together and individually we are a holy place where God dwells (and within this temple we are priests)
- **Branches of the Vine** — Jn 15:5
- **Olive Tree** — Rom 11:11-25
- **God's Field** — 1Co 3:6-9
- **God's Harvest** — Mt 13:1-10; Jn 4:35

Attributes — from the Nicene Creed:

- **“One”** — Jn 17:20-24; Eph 4:1-6; note Frame's aside on denominationalism
- **“Holy”** — See ch. 16: we are “saints” & are called to be “saints”; and we are called to be jealous for the purity of the church (see 2Co 11:1-3)
- **“Catholic”** — from the Gk expression “throughout,” and means simply “throughout the world” or “worldwide” (see Rom 10:18), and implies “... the church does not belong only to one nation or race.”
- **“Apostolic”** — Ac 2:42; 1Co 11:1; i.e., called to believe the apostles' teaching and follow their example.

Marks of the Church

Sacraments (Worship)

Proclamation
(Great
Commission)

Discipline
(Love)

Government of the Church

Apostle

Source of
teaching that
governs the
church

Elder

Applying the apostles'
teachings to the
churches' problems &
situations

Deacon

Ministering Jesus'
love to those in
need

Forms of Government

Episcopal

Premise: there is one worldwide church (the larger church is more trustworthy than the local). Local churches are submitted to a denominational hierarchy.

Presbyterian

Premise: the worldwide church and the local body are equally important (and equally fallen). Quest for a system of checks and balances.

Congregational

Premise: God gifts individual congregations (the local church is less likely to err than is the larger church). Local churches see themselves being directly answerable to the Lord of the church invisible.