

Arbor Foundations
11 – The Church
Dec 2, 2018 – Steve Woodman

Key Ideas / Biblical Basis

1. The church is the community of all true believers for all time.
 - Christ asserts that he will build his church (Matt. 16:18-19).
 - He has been made the head over all things for the church (Eph. 1:22-23).
 - He loved the church and gave himself up for her (Eph. 5:25).
 - In Acts 7:38 Luke uses *ἐκκλησία*, the common word for church, to refer to God's called out ones in the Old Covenant. While there are substantial differences between Old Covenant and New Covenant, God's true people in the Old Testament are seen as a part of his bride just like we are.
 - Romans 4 makes it clear that Old Testament saints like Abraham and David were saved by faith through the imputed righteousness of Jesus just like we are as New Testament saints.

2. The invisible church is the church as God sees it.
 - We cannot see the hearts of men. We can see evidence of changed hearts, but the scriptures are clear that we will not always know the true condition of a person's heart.
 - "The Lord knows those who are his." (II Tim. 2:19)
 - The author of Hebrews refers to all of God's people as the "general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven." (Heb. 12:22-24)

3. The visible church is the church as Christians on earth see it.
 - It would include all who profess faith in Christ and give evidence of that faith in their lives.
 - The visible church throughout the world includes unbelievers because we cannot see hearts like God does (Matt. 13:24-30; Acts 20:29-30).
 - The word "church" can rightly refer to a group of believers at any level, including a house church (Rom. 16:5), the church in an entire city (I Cor. 1:2), or as we have seen, the church in the entire world (universal church).
 - Most of the time the word "church" in the New Testament refers to a particular local church.

4. The marks of a true local church are right preaching of the Word and right administration of the sacraments, plus attempting to function as a church.
 - The Augsburg Confession (Lutheran, 1530) defined the church as "the congregation of saints in which the gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments rightly administered."
 - John Calvin wrote in his *Institutes* "Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's

institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists.”

- Sometimes this might be difficult to ascertain, but other cases are clear. Mormon churches and Jehovah Witnesses churches get level one doctrines concerning the Gospel wrong – they are false churches.
- The sacraments must not be viewed as earning merit for salvation.
- Since baptism is the entrance into the local church, and the Lord’s Supper involves recognizing that people are still considered to be saved, observing those ordinances is essential in the life of a true church. Jesus commanded them both, and they are a part of the gathering of true disciples in a local church.

5. The primary purposes of the church are ministry to God (worship), believers (nurture), and the world (evangelism and mercy), (Eph. 4:11-13).

- As God’s gathered assembly, we are to worship him (Col. 3:16). We are to consider his worth and make his name great.
- Another purpose of the church is to nurture believers, or bring them to maturity in Christ (Col. 1:28; Eph. 4:12-13).
- Regarding the world, our primary ministry is evangelism accompanied by mercy (Matt. 9:35).

***Confessing the Faith: The 1689 Baptist Confession for the 21st Century*
by Stan Reeves**

Chapter 26 “The Church”

26:1. The catholic—that is, universal—church may be called invisible with respect to the internal work of the Spirit and truth of grace. It consists of the full number of the elect who have been, are, or will be gathered into one under Christ her head. The church is the spouse, the body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.¹

¹Hebrews 12:23; Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:10, 22, 23; Ephesians 5:23, 27, 32.

26:2. All people throughout the world who profess the faith of the gospel and obedience to God through Christ in keeping with the gospel are and may be called visible saints,² as long as they do not destroy their own profession by any foundational errors or unholy living. All local^a congregations ought to be made up of these.³

^aparticular (rendered “local” throughout this Chapter)

²1 Corinthians 1:2; Acts 11:26. ³Romans 1:7; Ephesians 1:20-22.

26:3. The purest churches under heaven are subject to mixture and error.⁴ Some have degenerated so much that they have ceased to be churches of Christ and have become synagogues of Satan.⁵ Nevertheless, Christ always has had and will have in this world to the very end a kingdom of those who believe in him and profess his name.⁶

⁴1 Corinthians 5; Revelation 2; Revelation 3. ⁵Revelation 18:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:11, 12. ⁶Matthew 16:18; Psalms 72:17; Psalm 102:28; Revelation 12:17.

26:4 (excerpt). The Lord Jesus Christ is the head of the church. By the Father's appointment, all authority is conferred on him in a supreme and sovereign manner to call, institute, order and govern the church.⁷

⁷Colossians 1:18; Matthew 28:18-20; Ephesians 4:11, 12.

26:5. In exercising the authority entrusted to him, the Lord Jesus, through the ministry of his Word, by his Spirit, calls to himself out of the world those who are given to him by his Father.⁹ They are called so that they will live before him in all the ways of obedience that he prescribes for them in his Word.¹⁰ Those who are called he commands to live together in local^a societies, or churches, for their mutual edification and the fitting conduct of public worship that he requires of them while they are in the world.¹¹

⁹John 10:16; John 12:32. ¹⁰Matthew 28:20. ¹¹Matthew 18:15-20.

26:6. The members of these churches are saints by calling, visibly displaying and demonstrating in and by their profession and life their obedience to the call of Christ.¹² They willingly agree to live together according to Christ's instructions, giving themselves to the Lord and to one another by the will of God, with the stated purpose of following the ordinances of the Gospel.¹³

¹²Romans. 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2. ¹³Acts 2:41, 42; Acts 5:13, 14; 2 Corinthians 9:13.

26:7. To every church gathered in this way, conforming to Christ's mind as declared in his Word, he has given all power and authority that is in any way necessary to conduct the form of worship and discipline that he has instituted for them to observe. He has also given them commands and rules to use and carry out that power rightly and properly.¹⁴

¹⁴Matthew 18:17, 18; 1 Corinthians 5:4, 5; 1 Corinthians 5:13; 2 Corinthians 2:6-8.

26:8, 9, 10 – church officers

26:11 – other gifted preachers

12. All believers are obligated to join themselves to local^a churches when and where they have the opportunity. Likewise, all who are admitted to the privileges of a church are also subject to the discipline^b and government of it, according to the rule of Christ.²⁵

^bcensures

²⁵1 Thessalonians 5:14; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14, 15.

26:13 – biblical confrontation and church discipline

26:14, 15 – relationships between local churches

What is local church membership?

Taken from Garrett Kell (9Marks & Del Ray Baptist Church in Alexandria Virginia)

“Church membership is the biblical prescription that clarifies both who is a follower of Christ and what responsibilities those followers have toward one another.”

1. Church members are Christians (Hebrews 3:12-14).
2. Church members help other church members persevere in faith (Hebrews 3:12-14).
3. Church members must meet together regularly (Hebrews 10:23-25).
4. Church members help each other be fruitful (Hebrews 10:23-25).
5. Church members obey and submit to their leaders (Hebrews 13:17).
6. Church leaders keep watch over church members (Hebrews 13:17).
7. Church members know each other (I Timothy 5).
8. Church members don't allow sin to consume each other (James 5:19-20).
9. Church members protect the purity of the church's witness (Matthew 18:15-17; I Corinthians 5:1-11).
10. Church membership gives us opportunities to assure our salvation (I John 3:14; 4:20).

A biblical case for local church membership

A local church is a particular community of believers. Those believers are understood to be added, connected, identified, accountable, and committed. Some people like to use the term covenant membership.

1. The book of Acts makes it clear that some people were added to a numbered, identifiable group of believers (Acts 2:47; 4:4; 5:12-14; 6:1, 7; 9:26-28). Everyone recognized that if you were a disciple of Jesus Christ, you were “with them.”
2. Believer's baptism is a local church ordinance that functions as the door into the visible community of believers. This principle is seen in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20, and it is seen in the local church context in places like Acts 16 with the accounts of the baptisms of Lydia and her household as well as the jailer and his household.
3. The other local church ordinance is the Lord's Supper, which all believers are commanded to partake of (Luke 22:14-20; I Corinthians 11:17- 34). This ordinance is set in the context of a local church whose members are partaking together.
4. The doctrine of church discipline found in passages like Matthew 18:15-17 shows that each individual person in a local church is considered to be “in” unless unrepentant sin requires that he be put “out.”
5. The church discipline being enacted in II Corinthians 2:3-8 involved a decision to punish a man who was caught up in grievous sin. Paul says that this punishment was inflicted “by the majority.” Who got to vote? Obviously church members, those who were recognized as being in the number of those identified with that particular local church.

6. Hebrews 13:17 teaches us to obey those who rule over us in a local church setting. This command is not given to just anyone who attends a service. It is given to those who have voluntarily committed themselves to a local assembly in a way that is recognized by everyone else.
7. Hebrews 13:17 also teaches us that elders will give account for the souls of their people. For whom are elders responsible? They are accountable for the souls that God has placed in their care, those who are identified as committed disciples of Jesus in that local church. Members.

Helpful Documents for a Local Church

Confession of Faith & Catechism

Arbor Church Confession is the London Baptist Confession of 1689
<https://reformedbaptistnetwork.com/1689lbcf/>

An updated version -- *Confessing the Faith: The 1689 Baptist Confession for the 21st Century*

http://reeveshome.org/modern1689/1689_modern.pdf

Keach's Catechism (clarifies elements of the LBC 1689)

<http://www.reformedreader.org/cc/keachcat.htm>

New City Catechism (Tim Keller; Gospel Coalition)

<http://newcitycatechism.com/>

The Children's "Prove It" Catechism

<http://www.vor.org/rbdisk/html/proveit/fulltext.htm>

Constitution

Arbor Church Constitution available upon request

Covenant

Arbor Church Covenant available upon request

So What?

Ecclesiology is extremely important since God decided that he would largely work through the local church to accomplish his purposes in the world and in our lives.

- Am I a part of a ministry that espouses faithful (expositional) preaching, sound theology, and the biblical Gospel message? Will God have me encourage others along these lines?
- Do I have a biblical understanding of conversion, evangelism, membership, church discipline, disciple making, and church leadership?
- What do I think constitutes a healthy local church?

For Further Study

Mark Dever, *What Is a Healthy Church?*

Mark Dever, *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible*

Stan Reeves, *Confessing the Faith: The 1689 Baptist Confession for the 21st Century*
http://reeveshome.org/modern1689/1689_modern.pdf

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*

Wayne Grudem & Erik Thoennes, *Systematic Theology Laminate Sheet*

Wayne Mack, *To Be or Not to Be a Church Member? That Is the Question!*