**Who Needs Theology?**

**The Church**

Class #14

-How important is the church? (“I’m into spirituality, but not the church/organized religion”).

-Is it just a tack on to our personal faith in Christ?

-Is it at all necessary?

-The idea that you could be an authentic Christian apart from the church was unheard of before the twentieth century (individualism).

Augustine: “No one can call God their father who does not have the church as their mother.”

-“*I believe* in the holy Christian church.” (Apostle’s Creed)

-No one is saved by going to church.

-But no saved person neglects the fellowship of believers. (Heb. 10:25).

-In the same way, a person is not saved by good works.

-But no saved person neglects good works.

*What/Who is the Church?*

-The church is both visible and invisible.

*Consensus*

First Council of Nicene/Constantinople definition (325/381 AD)

-The church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

1. One – There is only one true church. The mystical body of Christ of all true believers in Christ throughout the world.

-Protestants see this as invisible – Catholics as visible.

-Yet at the same time these believers are involved in a particular local church.

1. Holy – The church is set apart to God by the Holy Spirit despite her manifest flaws and faults and leaders and members.

-“I believe in the *holy* Christian church.” (Apostle’s Creed)

-The purpose of the church is to glorify God among all people.

-To live as a new community of God’s people.

-For mutual encouragement and accountability.

-Some see the church as a mixture of true believers as well as those who are not. (Wheat and weeds - Matthew 13:24-30).

-Some see the church as made up of only true believers.

-(One’s views on this has implications for matters of church discipline)

1. Catholic/Christian – The church exists across barriers of language, ethnicity, culture, nationality, and denominations.

-Each local church has its own language, ethnicity, culture, nationality, and doctrinal differences.

1. Apostolic – The church exists wherever the gospel proclaimed by the apostles is faithfully preserved and proclaimed.

-Yet this is done (and should be done) in contemporary translation and

contextualization.

*The Reformers accepted these and added two others:*

1. The church exists where the Word of God is rightly preached (and heard).
2. The church exists where the sacraments/ordinance are rightly administered.

-Sacraments – Catholics see them as “means of grace”.

-Seven sacraments: (baptism, conformation, penance, communion, extreme unction, ordination, and marriage).

-Protestants see two sacraments/ordinances: (baptism and communion).

-Some see three: (foot washing).

-Sacraments/ordinance (protestant definition):

Visual signs of Christ’s saving grace instituted by Christ himself.

-Baptism and Communion are the Sacraments/Ordinances agreed upon by all Christians.

Communion:

-Irony in that communion (common-union) has been one of the major things that has divided Christians from each other.

-Catholic: (Transubstantiation): The elements truly become Christ’s body and blood

and they have saving power.

-Luther – (consubstantiation): Christ is “in, under, over, and around” the elements and

they have saving power when taken with faith in Christ.

-Reform (Calvin): Communion conveys faith-strengthening grace when received by faith in Christ. They are more than a symbol but there is no real bodily presence of Christ in them or associated with them.

-They are a sign and a seal of what has happened internally and the recipient does receive special spiritual benefits through observing these rites. There is a mystical/spiritual power behind them when received by faith.

-Zwingli (most evangelical churches): Communion is simply a memorial meal commemorating Christ’s death. They do not believe that any outward ceremony actually conveys grace.

-For this reason they prefer to call them ordinances rather than sacraments.

-They are “visible words” – powerful object lessons/illustrations that both teach

and proclaim salvation in Christ and strengthen our memory and hope.

Baptism:

Infant – A child is being marked and sealed as part of the covenant people (like circumcision in the OT) and at their confirmation (usually around 12) they either choose to confirm or not confirm their faith in Jesus Christ.

-In many churches they then go on to take their first communion (for only believers can partake in communion).

-Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Reform, Presbyterian, etc.

Adult Believer by Pouring – A person must first make a profession of faith in Jesus Christ and then they are baptised by pouring which symbolises their being marked and anointed by the Holy Spirit and washed in Christ.

-Mennonites use all forms of believer’s baptism: immersion in a river, lake, pool, or baptistry; sprinkling or pouring from a pitcher or bowl.

Adult Believer by Immersion – A person must first make a profession of faith in Jesus Christ and then they are baptised by immersion which symbolises their dying and rising in Christ.

-Baptists, Alliance, Pentecostal, etc

*Church government* (Three main forms)

1. Episcopal – Centered around the office of bishop or hierarchical leadership (Catholic, Anglican/Episcopal & Lutheran – although in varying degrees of hierarchy and organization).

-(i.e. A local church would be assigned a pastor).

1. Presbyterian – (Reformed). Each congregation is governed by its own elected elders or presbyters who join together to make decisions for the denomination.

-(i.e. The presbyter assigns pastors in communication with the local church).

1. Congregational – (most evangelical). Each congregation is completely autonomous and there are no bishops or authorities or representative bodies over them.

-(i.e. The local church chooses their own pastor).

-They also elect their own leaders, buy their own property, decide their own forms of worship styles, by-laws, etc.

-These denominations (associations) are really nothing more than a convention of

voluntarily cooperating independent congregations.

-They may pool their resources for schools, camps, missions, etc.

-(Congregationalists, Baptists, Pentecostal, Mennonites).

*Heresies*

1. Sectarianism

-The unity of the church is unimportant.

-Sees denominationalism as normative.

-Or sees only one denomination (or church) as the only true church.

-Rejection of all ecumenical cooperation, dialogue, and fellowship with Christians

of other denominations.

-Extreme independence.

-Sectarianism cuts itself off from the universal church, the Great Tradition

Christianity (remember the reformers were calling the church back to it).

-They tend to elevate the holiness of the church to such an extent that they destroy the unity of the church without realizing that all forms of the church are flawed and yet God is still able to use it.

-Over issues of allowing homosexual priests as in the Anglican church?

-What about the issue of allowing female senior pastors?

-Or over issues of divorce and remarriage?

-What about over forms of baptism?

-Which ones are issues to leave over and to stay unified in our disagreements?

1. The church (rituals) save.
2. Rejection of the two ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

-George Fox (Quaker - Society of Friends) rejects all outward practice of baptism and communion.

-Salvation Army does not practice baptism or communion.

-**Heresy of neglect**.

-We may disagree greatly about the exact nature of the sacraments/ordinances, but

we must not drop them all together.

*Conclusion*

The church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic body where the Word of God is preached (and heard) and the sacraments/ordinances are observed.

Questions

1. Do you think people today place too high a value on the church or too low a value? (why?)
2. What doctrine of the church do you think is most neglected today?

(Oneness, holiness, catholic, apostolic, the preached Word, or observing baptism and

communion.)

1. What do you see as the danger in neglecting the one you said?
2. What do you see as the pros and cons of the different forms of church government? (Episcopal, Presbyterian, Congregational).
3. Regarding dogma, doctrine and opinion. When should you split off from a church?
4. Would you consider the *Salvation Army* heretical for not practicing the ordinances of baptism and communion? Why or why not?
5. In what area does your theology of the church need to grow? (How is this going to happen *in your attitudes and actions*?)