10. The Christian Church and Fellowship

Take notes in the space below as we walk through the first 2,000 years of church history.

2000 A.D.

1500 A.D.

1000 A.D.

500 A.D.

0 A.D.

This lesson focuses on the Holy Christian Church. We will discuss the “invisible church” of all believers in Christ, as well as visible church bodies and denominations. How can we best serve God in a world where there are so many different groups with so many different teachings?
How Many Christian Churches Are There?

1 Peter 2:9-10  But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

There is only one Holy Christian Church.

- It is “holy” because its members have been clothed in Christ’s holiness
- It is “Christian” because it is built upon Jesus Christ
- It is the “church” because its members have been “called out” from the darkness of sin and into the light of faith in Jesus. (The Greek word for church, *ekklhsia*, literally means “called out”)

How does a person become a member of the Holy Christian Church?

Romans 10:12-13, 17  There is no difference between Jew and Gentile - the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” . . . . Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word about Christ.

How do we know who’s a member of this Church?

1 Samuel 16:7b  The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.

2 Timothy 2:19  The Lord knows those who are his.

Why Are There So Many Different Denominations?

John 17:20-23  My prayer is not for (my disciples) alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, so that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. . . .  May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Jesus prayed that the Holy Christian Church would suffer no divisions on earth. However, Satan works to divide the Church by tempting Christians to believe false teachings.

Romans 16:17-18  I urge you, brothers and sisters, 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.

Galatians 5:9  A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.

What does God want us to do when we encounter false teaching? Why?
HOW CAN WE STRIVE TOWARDS UNITY WITH OTHER CHRISTIANS?

John 8:31-32 Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

Matthew 28:20b Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

1 Corinthians 1:10 I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

True unity, or fellowship, between individuals or churches means agreement on all of God’s Word - not just part of it, or even most of it.

Titus 1:9 (An elder) must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

2 Timothy 4:1-5 Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage - with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around themselves a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

Pastors and teachers need to have a thorough knowledge and faith in all the teachings of Scripture, and to stick up for God’s truth at all times - even when it’s not popular.

Romans 16:17-18 I urge you, brothers and sisters, 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.

Church bodies need to separate themselves from false teaching, just like individual Christians do.
Summing up so far. . . .

**The Bible’s Teaching of “Church Fellowship”**

- God wants us to join together with people and churches that agree with all the Scriptures.
- God does not want us to join together with people and churches that contradict the Scriptures by their false teaching.

Many churches do not do not believe or practice this teaching. Instead, they “join together” (collaborating on mission work, swapping pastors and teachers, coming together for worship, prayer, and the Lord’s Supper, etc.) with those who have different beliefs than they do. They typically do this because of one of two assumptions:

1) They assume that Scripture is unclear on some points, and everyone is entitled to their own interpretation. However, God says that Scripture is very clear!

   **2 Timothy 3:16** All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2) Or, they argue that God wants us to tolerate those who disagree with us. This is true. . . but there is a big difference between tolerating people and tolerating their teachings!

**IMPORTANT:** Will members of churches with false teachings still go to heaven?

   **John 3:16** For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

By the grace of God, many people who unknowingly hold to one false teaching or another still believe the most important truth: that Jesus is their Savior. They are part of the “invisible church,” and are going to heaven.

However, in the “visible churches” here on earth, false teaching is very dangerous. Through every single false teaching, Satan tries to pick away at the Bible’s central truth of Jesus as our Savior.
**Hebrews 5:11-14** We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

In light of the verses above, explain this statement: “We appreciate the doctrine of fellowship more as we grow in the faith and knowledge of the Scriptures.”

Explain the difference between the Holy Christian Church and the many different types of Christian denominations.

Is any church truly “non-denominational”?

What is the difference between a church with false teachings, and a cult?

Explain the difficulties that would come up if our church decided to join together with a Baptist, Catholic, or non-denominational church in order to...

- Do mission work in Africa
- Swap pulpits when pastors are on vacation
- Worship and take communion at each other’s services

If you visit a church that has different beliefs than you do, to what extent should you participate? Why?

**OPTIONAL: Discuss pgs. 100-111**

Where Do Churches Get Their Teachings?
The History of the Christian Church in 1000 Words
Are Lutherans Evangelicals?
How are Lutherans Different from Catholics?
Are Lutherans Mainline Protestants?
Do All Lutherans Believe the Same Things?

**OPTIONAL: Discuss “Heresies that attack Christ”.** (Handout)