

Questions for Discussion: The Church

1. (a.) When is it right to leave a church?

– Change to Confession, Change to Church Order, Passing of Declaratory Act? Should a church be allowed to change any of these things?

(b.) Is the Constitution of the church a higher court than the Synod or Church governing bodies?

(c.) What can we do if a Synod errs? Should we do anything?

2. Which is more loathsome? Elders who behave like sulking three year olds when things don't go their way at congregational meetings or members who blindly follow the elders without thinking for themselves?

3. Define “visible church.”

Westminster Confession of Faith 25:2

The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.

(a.) Does this mean that all Christians should be members of a visible human institution visibly denominated as a “church,” or they are not saved?

(b.) If all those who profess the true faith are members of the “visible church,” are people still in the “visible church” if they still profess faith in Christ after being excommunicated from a church?

(c.) Are JW's/Roman Catholics/Baptists/Independents part of the visible church? – after all, they all call themselves “Christians” but hold some errors (as all of us do).

4. Westminster Confession of Faith 25:4

This catholic Church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less visible. And particular Churches, which are members thereof, are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the Gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them.

(a.) What are the marks of a true visible church? Does not the above imply that the third mark is purity of worship? (Discipline being embraced in the second mark).

(b.) When does a visible church actually become a synagogue of Satan? When it loses one mark? Two? All three?

5. 28. Let's say I attend a good, Christian, Bible-based church. Why should people go to my tinpot little church and not the great edifice?

I was in Hong Kong once. There was the great Anglican church of St Andrew, which outwardly looked like a church. I also saw nearby, on the second floor of an otherwise unremarkable block of flats, a notice in the window saying "Free Grace Church."

– As a believer, I would choose the latter, because it is more likely to have better teaching and more true Christian fellowship. However, it is also more likely to be rigidly stuck in its peculiar ways, some of which will not be right, because no church is perfect.

– If I was a total outsider to Christianity, which one would I decide to go to? The one that **looks** like a church of course. Yet Christians know that there would probably be more truth (although not a monopoly of it) in the tinpot apartment than in the great edifice with all its finery. But how do unbelievers know that? They don't. All they see in the tinpot church is a weird sect (which many of them are). All Christians see in a great edifice is the Abomination that causes Desolation. We all need the Lord to guide us.

6. Westminster Confession of Faith 28:2

The outward element to be used in this sacrament is water, wherewith the party is to be baptised, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, by a minister of the Gospel, lawfully called thereunto.

(a.) Is Romish baptism valid?

(b.) Is a minister in a tinpot little independent evangelical church "a minister of the Gospel, lawfully called thereunto." Is his baptising valid??

7. During the Reformation, if the ruler of the land became Protestant, the whole land did. If the ruler stayed Catholic, the whole land did. Discuss.

8. A church council decides something, e.g. the Trinity, then everybody who disagrees is immediately cast out as an heretic and persecuted. Is that OK? Discuss.

9. "No church can be recommended because that would be recommending error." Discuss.

10. Acts 2:46

And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.

Does this mean that the communion was in the home as part of family worship, not in the church?

11. Where is church membership in the Bible?

12. Pews and centralisation of the pulpit came in at the Reformation. But were they good innovations?

13. (a.) If the Anglican church is a synagogue of Satan, why do we pray for it?
(b.) If the Anglican church is not a synagogue of Satan, Why don't we rejoin it?
(c.) The reason that the Anglican church is so bad is because most evangelicals have left to form their own tinpot little groupings. Discuss.

14. (a.) Blindly following "mother church" is the spirit of antichrist. Discuss.
(b.) All visible organisations that are called churches tend towards an anti-christian authoritarianism. Discuss.

15. Once one (true) doctrine (e.g. doctrine of the Trinity) is accepted by the church, the church immediately excludes all genuinely born-again people who have not yet come to a knowledge of that (true) doctrine for themselves yet. Once many (true) doctrines have been accepted by a church, we end up with a church where 99% of all born-again Christians are excluded from membership. Discuss.

16. How can the church distinguish between those who are not true believers and hold heresies firmly (who should not be allowed into the church), and those who are true believers and hold heresies ignorantly by not having come to the knowledge of the truth on these issues yet (who should be allowed into the church)?

17. (a.) From William Perkins' Exposition on the Creed:

"Christ saith, He preacheth in their synagogues and temple (John 18:20), which at that time were places full of disorder; insomuch as He called the temple a den of thieves (Matt. 21:13); and the scribes and Pharisees had corrupted the doctrine of the law (Matt. 15:3) transgressing the commandments of God by their own traditions; and they taught justification by the works of the law, as Paul saith (Rom. 10:3), They being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and going about to establish their own righteousness, which is by works, had not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God. Besides all this, they were loose and wicked men in their lives and conversations; and therefore Christ commanded the people that they should observe and do whatsoever the scribes and Pharisees bid them, sitting in Moses' chair (Matt. 23:2,3); but after their works they must not do; because they say and do not. Now although these corruptions and deformities were in the Jewish church, yet our Saviour Christ made no separation from it, but came and preached both in their temple and synagogues, where these seducers and false teachers were. And hence we gather that the practice of all those men in our church which separate themselves from all assemblies for the wants thereof, holding that our church is no church; that the grace which is wrought by the preaching of the Word among us is nothing else but a Satanic illusion; that sacraments are no sacraments; I say that their practice is condemned by our Saviour Christ's conversing among the Jews. For if Christ should have followed their opinion, He ought to have fled from amongst the Jews, and not so much as once to have come into the temple or taught in their synagogues; but contrariwise He joined Himself with them; and therefore we cannot in good conscience disjoin ourselves from the church of England."

Whenever Christ preached in a religious building, He only preached in the Temple, the established national church of his day, and in its associated synagogues (when given the opportunity), and not in the separatist meeting houses of, for example, the Essenes or Samaritans. He did not compromise on truth one bit, as can be seen when He was given the opportunity to preach in the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30). After being invited to do so, He read from the scroll and taught the people. They ended up not liking what He had to say and tried to kill Him, but the fact remains, given the opportunity, with regards the outward organisation of the church, He only ever went into the local synagogues of the national church. And always presented the absolute truth to anyone who would hear him there, despite the consequences, and without compromising the truth in any way.

Christ had very little to commend the church leadership. He told them:

Matthew 23:33

How can ye escape the damnation of hell."

But at no time did Christ ever say to his disciples, "We're coming out and forming a new church." On the contrary, Christ acknowledged the wickedness of the church leaders, and told people to still do what they say, although not what they do, even though they wanted to kill Him:

Matthew 23:2,3

The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.

There is no call to "split" and form a purer church, and no desire to enter into a leadership position in the church either.

There is a lot to disagree with in the national church. Many unscriptural practices are found. The list is almost endless. Evil people have inserted themselves into the highest places in the church. Wickedness abounds. And to cap it all, most of the true believers have left. But is it any worse than the church in Christ's day??? Discuss.

(b.) Matthew 23:2,3

The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.

Is this promoting "apostolic succession"?

18. Is it more important to be in a church where the outward pattern is Biblical but the teaching is wanting, or to be in a church where the outward pattern is not fully Biblical but the teaching is better?

19. (a.) If Jesus Christ turned up to one of your church meetings, what would He think?
(b.) Would you recognise Him?

20. "Church" is the means by which the Lord sifts the precious from the vile. Discuss.

21. (a.) We don't need professional:

- Priests and pastors
- Book publishers
- Evangelists
- “Christian” music scene
- Speakers

Why don't we all do it ourselves, and for free? Why do we have to create a business out of any of these things (including “church”)? Discuss.

(b.) Why do we need “public” meetings in churches? Why not just meet in people's houses? Discuss.

22. Serious problems with the church:

- Sin is never mentioned.
- Bible passage may be introduced but never spoken on.
- It is assumed that God loves everybody.
- Church leaders think they are God's gift to the world and they're so full of their own importance.

Discuss.

23. Just as people who have never left one country have no real idea of what it is like to live in another, so people brought up in only one church have no real idea of what it is like in another. Discuss.

24. All churches are so full of following their traditions that they are so poor at understanding and explaining the truth that can only be found in the Bible. Discuss.

25. The Bible is full of the subject of sin. The Old Testament is primarily the history of men rebelling against God time and time again. And the New Testament teaches us how God deals with sin and reconciles such rebels to Himself in Jesus Christ. This is the real Christian message.

But where is this in the church? This message has been sidelined throughout church history. Church leaders have thought it far more important to be able to formulate fine descriptions of God in human language. So, for example, the doctrine of the Trinity is regarded as far, far more important than any doctrine about sin. So important in fact, that people were cast out of the church as heretics if they didn't believe it.

Churches instead have developed for themselves whole new systems, with whole new vocabularies, which have absolutely nothing to do with the faith described in Scripture.

As an example, here are some random words from various different churches, which are nowhere in Scripture:

Eucharist
Scapular
Trinity
Archimandrite
Holy Orders
Evangelical
Antidisestablishmentarianism
Hypostatic Union
Parish
Lent
Iconostasis
Vespers

The original Christian message has been completely obscured in the church, and substituted by other things. Discuss.

26. The Athanasian Creed states this:

“43 And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire. 44 This is the catholic faith, which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved.”

(a.) When did mental assent to a Creed replace being “born again” as the definition of a true Christian?

Romans 8:14
For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

(b.) When did mental assent to a Creed replace “repent and believe” as the Christian message?

Acts 2:38
Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Acts 16:30,31
And.... said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

27. James 2:19
Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

The devil believes the Nicene Creed. Are you going to let him into your church?

28. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 4, Chap. 17, Para. 43

“In regard to the external form of the ordinance, whether or not believers are to take into their hands and divide among themselves, or each is to eat what is given to him: whether they are to return the cup to the deacon or hand it to their neighbour; whether the bread is to be leavened or unleavened, and the wine to be red or white, is of no consequence.”

(a.) Does it matter whether the bread is leavened or unleavened? In 1 Corinthians 11, the word is “*artos*,” usually used for common, leavened bread:

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

*For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took **bread**: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this **bread**, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.*

(b.) Is the colour of the wine important? It represents Christ's blood, but there is nowhere in the Bible that says it has to be red.

(c.) Can we use Ribena and crackers? The Bible specifically calls it the “fruit of the vine”.

29. Matthew 13:55-56

*Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and **his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters**, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?*

Mark 3:31,32

*There came then **his brethren** and his mother, and, standing without, sent unto him, calling him. And the multitude sat about him, and they said unto him, Behold, thy mother and **thy brethren** without seek for thee.*

Mark 6:3

*Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, **the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us?** And they were offended at him.*

Luke 8:19,20

*Then came to him his mother and **his brethren**, and could not come at him for the press. And it was told him by certain which said, Thy mother and **thy brethren** stand without, desiring to see thee.*

John 7:1-10

*After these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him. Now the Jews' feast of tabernacles was at hand. **His brethren** therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judaea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest. For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world. For neither did **his brethren** believe in him. Then Jesus said unto them, My time is not yet come: but your time is alway ready. The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil. Go ye up unto this feast: I go not up yet unto this feast; for my time is not yet full come. When he had said these words unto them, he abode still in Galilee. But when **his brethren** were gone up, then went he also up unto the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret.*

Acts 1:14

*These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with **his brethren**.*

1 Corinthians 9:5

*Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as **the brethren of the Lord**, and Cephas?*

Can we prove that these siblings of Christ were born of Mary and Joseph in the normal way, subsequent to the virgin birth of Christ, and not:

(a.) simply close relatives,

(b.) from a previous marriage of Joseph,

as those who believe in Mary's perpetual virginity would try to tell us?

30. Does the Holy Spirit guide the church? If so, why aren't we all Eastern Orthodox?

31.