

## **The Major Themes of the Bible Applied to Everyday Life**

### **The Church**

*Ephesians 2:19 – 22 “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In Him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”*

The church itself is, in one sense, a New Testament reality. However it is also a different form of the covenant relationship God has had with His people from the beginning. The priests, sacrifices and temple (or tabernacle) of the Old Testament find their fulfillment through the mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ. As believers in Him we are now the seed of Abraham and the true Israel of God. We see this in Galatians 6:14 – 16:

*“But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.”*

Through Christ the covenant is expanded to believers of every nation and the Holy Spirit belongs to each believer in particular and to the church as a whole. Let's look at our homework question A: How do people become part of the church? (Acts 2:47)  
In the Old Testament, God dwelled among His people in a special way in the temple (or tabernacle.) The Lord dwells in that way in the church itself now.

The church exists in a visible and an invisible form, which is not to say that these are two entirely separate entities.

WCF 25.1 explains “The...universal Church which is invisible consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body [of Christ.]”

Our homework question B : What does it mean for the church to be the body of Christ?  
(Ephesians 1:10, Ephesians 1:22 & 23, 1 Corinthians 12:12)

This church is invisible to us in several ways:

Time and space are two, also we can't see into the hearts of men.

It is not invisible to God, however – He knows who are truly His own, as II Timothy 2:19 tells us:  
*"...The Lord knows those who are His."*

These people make up the true body of believers; and unbelievers in their midst will ultimately be exposed. We can watch for fruit as a marker, and yet even then we can be deceived. God is never deceived. Matthew 7:15 – 23 says this:

*"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits... every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit... Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord did we not...do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you;'"*

The visible church however, can be seen by us, as WCF 25.2 explains:

*"The visible Church, which is also universal...consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children and is...the house and family of God, out of which there is no ORDINARY possibility of salvation."*

Not everyone in the visible church is in the invisible, and vice versa.

The visible church in the Old Testament was the ethnic nation of Israel. God's elect at that time were ordinarily found among this group. Not all within this group were believers, we see this in Romans 11:2 – 5 which says, in part: *"Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? 'Lord they have killed your prophets,...demolished your altars...and I alone am left...' But what is God's reply to him? 'I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.' So too, at the present time, there is a remnant, chosen by grace."*

The nation of Israel has always contained a mixture of believers and unbelievers. So it is with the visible Christian church today. The invisible church is gathered into the visible church. God knows who are His own, we do not. Believers are normally part of the church, except in rare instances where there is no true church available.

While there is no perfect church, WCF 25.4 and 25.5 distinguish for us between true and apostate churches:

25.4 – “...particular churches...are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced...ordinances administered and public worship performed.”

25.5 – “...The purest Churches...are subject...to mixture and error...some have so degenerated as to become no Churches of Christ. Nevertheless, there shall always be a Church on earth to worship God according to His will.”

Faithful preaching of the word of God, right use of the sacraments, and discipline are essential marks of the true church.

No church, and no believer, will ever achieve perfection in this life, however in the usual course of events, true believers are drawn to churches that are more faithful in word, sacraments and discipline. Let's look at our last couple of homework questions:

D. What is the goal for the church? (Ephesians 5:27)

A. Does scripture support the individual who chooses to worship God alone and after his/her own understanding? (Hebrews 10:24 & 25, Ephesians 4:11 – 13)

A church is not a building, it is the body of Christ, worshiping together, serving Him together. The church is a possession of God, the bride of Christ, and a blessing to us. Our own spiritual gifts are God's gifts to His church and for His purposes and we are in turn blessed as we use them and as we gather in His name.

### Homework for Reflection: The Church

1. What is the invisible church? Is it invisible to God? Are there marks by which we know who the elect are?
2. Are there marks by which we know if a visible church is a true church? What are they?
3. What is the difference between a true church and a perfect church?

Read through Ephesians 4:7 – 16 and consider the church as the body of Christ and your part in Him and in His church. A believer's membership and involvement in a true church is an opportunity for growth in knowledge of God and in sanctification. As we participate in church activities and use our gifts to serve the Lord through our church families, we are encouraged and blessed and are a blessing to others. We are the fullness of Him who fills all in all. Contemplate whether you have made an effort to determine your spiritual gifts and whether you are using them for the church.

Meditate on this passage: Revelation 7:9. Think about what the church of all the elect will look like, and how it looks now to God.