

**Fundamentals, Study 26. The Church (Matt 18:15-20)**

by BS Poh

o The local church is central and unique in the purposes of God.

1. The *universal church* consists of all true believers - of the past, present, and future. It is described as *invisible* because the internal work of the Holy Spirit in converting them cannot be seen, except by their life and profession of faith. Professing Christians who are not truly converted are not members of the universal church. True converts in isolated situations who are unable to be members of a local church are members of the universal church.<sup>1</sup> (1. Heb 12:23; Eph 1:10; 5:23-32.)

2. The universal church manifests itself in the world as local churches.<sup>2</sup> The *local church* is made up of baptised believers who voluntarily bind themselves together by covenant (i.e. solemn vow) to worship and serve God in accordance to the teaching of the Bible.<sup>3</sup> All true believers are required by God's word to become members of a good local church.<sup>4</sup> No local congregation on earth is perfect, but it must strive to be pure in membership, doctrine, and practice.<sup>5</sup> It must admit into membership only those who have a *credible profession of faith*, i.e. those who show true faith by their doctrine and life.<sup>6</sup> (2. Eph 5:26-27; Matt 18:17; John 17:20-23; Acts 9:31; Gal 1:1-2; Rev 1:4, 11, 20; 3. Matt 28:18-20; Acts 2:41; 4. Matt 18:15-20; Acts 11:26; Rom 1:7; 5. 1 Cor 5; Rev 2 & 3; 2 Cor 6:14-18; 6. Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; 5:4, 12-13; 2 Cor 8:5)

3. Jesus Christ is alone the Head of the church.<sup>7</sup> He has given all the necessary power and authority to function to each congregation that is gathered in accordance to His word. Each local church is therefore *autonomous* (i.e. self-ruling) and *independent* (i.e. not dependent on any outside help to exist).<sup>8</sup> Men who are spiritually mature, able to teach and rule, and are of good and exemplary character should be appointed to become elders of the church.<sup>9</sup> As a body, led by the pastor (or one of the pastors), they rule the church by making the decisions, and then getting the consent of the members.<sup>10</sup> Deacons are spiritually mature men, with good and exemplary character, who are appointed to help the elders in the mundane affairs of the church.<sup>11</sup> A pastor is an elder who is supported by the church to engage in full-time preaching, prayer, and the care for souls.<sup>12</sup> (7. Eph 1:22-23; Col 1:18; Heb 12:23; 8. Matt 16:19; 18:18; 1 Cor 5:4; 9. Rev 1:12-13; 10. Acts 14:23; 1 Tim 3:1-7; Tit 1:5-9; 11. Acts 15:13-21, 22; 2 Cor 8:18-19; 12. 1 Tim 5:17; Eph 4:11.)

4. Members of the church must: (a) *submit* to the biblical oversight of the elders;<sup>13</sup> (b) *support* the ministries (or works) in the church by prayer, offerings, and attendance at meetings;<sup>14</sup> (c) *serve* in the church in some active ways.<sup>15</sup> When called upon, those who are able should engage in teaching and evangelism (i.e. bringing the gospel to others).<sup>16</sup> Private offences should be handled in a biblical manner - by speaking to the offender in private, bringing one or two persons as witnesses, and bringing the matter to the church - as necessary.<sup>17</sup> The church exercises discipline through the process of *admonition* (warning and rebuke), *suspension* (withholding certain privileges, such as the Lord's supper), and *excommunication* (expulsion from membership), as necessary.<sup>18</sup> (13. Heb 13:17; 1 Thess 5:12; 14. Eph 6:18; 2 Thess 3:1; Col 4:3; 1 Tim 5:17-18; Gal 6:6; Heb 13:7; 15. Rom

12:4-8; 1 Cor 12:12-31; 16. Acts 11:19-21; 1 Pet 4:10-11; 17. Matt 18:15-18; 18. Tit 3:10-11; 2 Thess 3:6, 14-15; 1 Cor 5:4-5, 12-13)

5. Like-minded churches should voluntarily associate together for the furtherance of the gospel and for mutual help.<sup>19</sup> Representatives of the churches (normally the pastors) who meet to consider a problem may report their conclusions and suggestions to the churches concerned, but they have no right to impose on those churches.<sup>20</sup> We reject other systems of church connection in which persons or committees outside the local church have power over it. (19. Gal 1:2; Rev 1:4; 2 Cor 8:18-19; Col 4:16; 20. Acts 15:2-6; 22-25; 2 Cor 1:24; Rev 1:12-13)

= Are you a disciple of Jesus Christ? Are you a covenanted member of a local church?

### **Review Questions**

1. Who make up the membership of the *universal church*?
2. Why is the universal church described as *invisible*?
3. What is the *local church*?
4. What is meant by the local church being *autonomous* and *independent*?
5. Who executes rule in the local church?
6. State the three responsibilities of church members.
7. State the three steps in dealing with private offence.
8. State the three steps of church discipline.
9. Why should like-minded churches voluntarily associate together?
10. What power do church representatives have over the churches concerned?

### **Assignment/Discussion**

We disagree with the systems of synods, councils, area superintendents, episcopal bishops, and other kinds of denominational authority. Are there dangers of an independent local church becoming isolationist?

### **Memory Passage (Eph 5:25-27)**

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

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