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The Universal & Local Church

Alright, today we come to point 10 of our doctrinal statement and this involves the Church. What's the technical name for the study of the Church? Ecclesiology, from the Greek word *ekklesia* meaning "a gathering or assembly" and *-ology*, meaning "the study of". So we're studying the gathering or the assembly, which in the NT is referred to as the church, but was a term used simply for a gathering of people and came to refer to the gathering of Christ's body. Two weeks ago we dealt with the beginning of the Church and the end of the Church simply to define the Church age and we concluded that the Church began on the Day of Pentecost and will end on the day of the Pre-Trib Rapture, citing. Since the Church did not begin until the Day of Pentecost then the Church is not Israel. It is rather an intercalation on Israel's calendar, an intercalation meaning a break or gap within Israel's calendar. The Church occurs within that gap of time. The calendar I'm referring to is the 70 sevens of Daniel which are 490 years. The calendar started with a decree of Artaxerxes Longimanus to restore and rebuild the temple in 444BC. The first 69 sevens or 483 years expired at the Triumphant Entry of Messiah in AD33 when Israel rejected and crucified Him by the hands of the Gentiles. Since that time Israel's calendar has been on standstill, the 70th seven or seven years did not immediately follow. So there is an intercalation on Israel's calendar between the 69th and 70th seven or the 483rd year and the 484th year. During this intercalation Christ is building His *ekklesia*, an entity distinct from Israel which is composed of Jewish and Gentile believers who enter into the one body of Christ and are one new man. When this one new man is complete at the Rapture then the 70th seven of Daniel will begin and God will continue His work with Israel. So the Church and Israel are distinct in the plan of God and this should not surprise us because God is a diverse God and He has many things working simultaneously. He's working certain purposes among the angels, He's

working many things among the nations, He's working with the nation Israel and He's working things with the Church. Our God is an awesome God.

So we have this space of time or intercalation in Israel's calendar between the 69th and 70th sevens and inside that gap is the Church Age. Now Paul said the Church was a mystery, meaning something never before revealed in the OT, so it's a totally new thing just like Jesus said in Matt 16:18, "I will build My church." Future tense; He wasn't building it yet and the main reason is because He was the foundation of it and you can't build something until the foundation is laid. So once He does His cross work then the foundation is laid, then He is raised from the dead and ascends to the right hand of the Father to pour forth the Spirit to do His baptizing work, identifying believers with the crucified, resurrected Christ. This ministry began on the day of Pentecost and therefore the origin of the Church is Acts 2. It began with Jews baptized by the Spirit in Acts 2, then Samaritans baptized by the Spirit in Acts 8, then Gentiles baptized by the Spirit in Acts 10 and finally followers of John the Baptist baptized by the Spirit in Acts 19. In each instance they all underwent the exact same baptism and all experienced the exact same phenomena of tongues in order to signify they were all baptized into the exact same body of believers, so there is exactly one church, not four churches. Now these believers lived in different localities and attended different local churches but as far as the universal church is concerned, they were all in the exact same universal church.

Now that brings us to the distinction point 10 is trying to get across, that there is a universal church and a local church. Our statement says,

10. We believe that all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are part of the Universal Church, which is His body (Eph. 1:22-23), but that there are also local churches or assemblies on earth into which believers may be received for fellowship (1 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:2), subject to discipline according to Scriptural principles (Matt. 18:15-17).

We're saying this comes out of the NT, that there are some references in the NT to the church which refers to the Universal Church, which is Christ's body, and in other cases to a Local Church. And it's helpful to recognize these distinctions when you read the NT.

So let's define these terms. The universal church is all believers in this present age, whether they're in Africa or America, whether they're at church or at home, whether they're on earth or in heaven, whether they are Lutheran by name or Baptist, it doesn't matter as long as they believe the true gospel of Jesus Christ, they are a member of the universal Church. Another name by which the universal church is known is the invisible church. The reason this term is helpful is because it highlights the fact you can't see all those people. So the universal or invisible church is all believers and only believers in the present age.

Then we have the local church and this is a group of professing believers in a specific region on earth, some are genuine believers, some are not, so the local church is a mixed bag and you might read of the Church in Ephesus or the Church in Corinth or the Church in Fredericksburg or the Church in Johannesburg, but they're all local churches because they are composed of believers and unbelievers. And another term often used of the local church that answers to the invisible church is the visible church. These are people you can see because they go to your local church. So those are your terms and we want to see if the Scriptures support these terms.

Starting with the universal or invisible church there are several lines of evidence. And to clarify what we're talking about by this term Thiessen says, "In the universal sense the church consists of all those who, in this age, have been born of the Spirit of God and have by that same Spirit been baptized into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; 1 Pet. 1:3, 22-25)." He lists several passages there and we've seen the 1 Cor 12:13 passage and that's one to memorize, we'll go over and over and over that passage, "By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." The whole point is there is just one Holy Spirit and He is Christ's agent who baptizes us into one body, the body of Christ. There aren't many bodies of Christ? There is only one body of Christ and the Spirit baptizes us into that body, clearly referring to a universal church and not a local church.

Another line of support is the idea that church is used in the singular. Turn once more to Matt 16:18. What did Jesus say He was going to build? Many churches? I will build My churches? No, "I will build My church," singular, so it must be a reference to the universal church. Now, did the disciples who

heard Jesus say this understand all that He meant? They knew the word *ekklesia* because it was a common word used in the Greek version of the OT. And there it was used of the nation Israel in the wilderness, it was used of the nation Israel when they were assembled at Mt Sinai, it was even used in the OT of an assembly of evil doers. So the word simply means “an assembly or gathering” and doesn’t tell you anything about the group of people. That has to be determined from the context. So the word is not a technical term like you and I might think of it, even in Acts 7, Stephen’s speech, he uses it of Israel in the wilderness and in Acts 19, at Ephesus, Luke used it of a riotous mob. So it was just an assembly and I doubt very seriously in Matt 16:18 the disciples grasped the significance of what Jesus meant when He said, “I will build My church.” Probably it wasn’t until years later when the church He was referring to was already being built that the Holy Spirit brought this to their remembrance and they grasped what Jesus originally meant. But it is true that He was referring to the universal church and it is a singular noun. So the singular usage of *ekklesia* in Matt 16:18 is evidence for the concept of a universal church.

For another support turn to Gal 1:13. Paul refers to the church that he persecuted; this is one of the many passages he gives in his biography; “For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it;” notice church of God singular. And we’d ask, Paul, are you referring to a local church or to the universal church? And if we went to the Book of Acts and traced Paul’s persecution of the church you see he started his persecution in Jerusalem and on the day Stephen was executed a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem, so it did start with a local church, but the believers in Jerusalem were scattered into Judea and Samaria and on into Syria and up to Phoenicia, and Paul pursued them to these areas, as one arm of believers would go out Paul would try to cut off that arm, as another arm went out Paul would try to cut off that arm, so here it’s reaching out beyond the local church to the universal church, all believers, that was Paul’s aim to destroy, but as the Lord had said in Matt 16:18, the gates of Hades will not destroy My church. So that’s another support for the universal church concept in the NT.

We might also consider something like Col 1:18. Jesus Christ is the head of the church, singular, not head of the churches, plural. In Colossians Christ is

pre-eminent, Christ is everything and so Paul is listing all kinds of things Christ is. And in verse 18 he says, "He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything." The point being there is but one body in this passage, Christ is the head of that one body. He's not two heads, He's not three heads, He's one head and He has one body, that's the concept of the universal church.

Now it's interesting that believers who have died and departed from us and are in heaven are also a part of the universal church. So you can't argue that all the believers on earth right now are the universal church. That's not right; all the believers on earth right now are a subset of the universal church which is on earth and in heaven. To see this turn to Heb 12:23. The idea that the body of Christ is all the believers who are alive on earth at any one given time is a weak image of the body of Christ. And there are repercussions if you don't see this. For example, on the issue of spiritual gifts. We're going to get to spiritual gifts in a few weeks but one of the ideas believers have is that all the gifts have to be represented in every generation or else that generation is somehow getting the short end of the stick. That way we've got to have tongues flapping. Now you can easily end run that argument by simply showing that the church is not just the believers on earth in that generation, but it's the believers of all generations in this age, whether in heaven or on earth. And therefore if the spiritual gift was given, say to the 1st century church then it was also given to us, because they and we are together in the same organism. And every part of the organism is necessary to the proper function of every other part. So a gift given in the 1st century cascades down and benefits us in the 21st century. That's why I am very thankful for the gifts of apostle and knowledge, gifts that I don't think are now being given but they have benefitted me greatly because they were foundational gifts given in the 1st century, they were foundational to the Church that I am a part of and a beneficiary of. And so I benefit from them. Therefore, a gift given once to the church is give to the universal church and benefits the entire church. I don't spurn any of the gifts, I don't spurn tongues, I don't spurn miracles, I don't spurn teaching, I am thankful for all the gifts that God has given for His Son's body. Some of those gifted people aren't on earth anymore, but that doesn't make them any less a part of the universal church, notice Heb 12:22, "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, ²³to the general

assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled” where “in heaven,” those people are no less the church than those of us on earth. That would be akin to saying when you die and your spirit goes to be face to face with the Lord that you are no longer a part of the Church, you’re just absorbed into the redeemed or something. Nonsense. Believers in this age whether on earth or in heaven always belong to the universal church, the body of Christ.

Now, lest you think this is not so important because they are in heaven and we are on earth, so what difference does it make? I can’t talk to them and they can’t talk to me, so what difference does it make? Turn to 1 John 1. Here John gives some fascinating insight and I’m indebted to Charles Clough for pointing this out. This ought to stimulate some thought about the universal church. It’s a passage about “fellowship.” When most Christians hear the term “fellowship” they think of a potluck. But this expands our understanding of “fellowship” because in 1 John the term refers to receiving the apostolic writings so that we can have fellowship with God along with the apostles and all other believers who receive the apostolic writings as the word of God, whether in earth or in heaven. In other words, we cannot have fellowship with God apart from the apostolic writings; it is rather through the apostolic writings that we have fellowship with God and all other Christians down through Church History. So it’s this concept of fellowship that opens up Church History as a dimension of fellowship we may never have thought of but which is part and parcel of the concept of the Church as the universal body of Christ.

Verse 1, “What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life—2and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—3what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.” You notice in verses 1 and 3 that the apostle goes to particular pains to show that revelation is historic, i.e. it could be touched, it could be heard, it could be seen, all the senses, what we call the empirical senses are listed here. In other words, revelation is not some private, spooky, mysterious thing; it’s something that happens publicly in real history. Verse 2 which you see is marked off by dashes, is a parenthetical remark, so you can leave it out, vv 1 and 3 are actually

connected and can be read without verse 2. So verse 2 is stuck in there as an explanation of the “Word of Life” at the end of verse 1, “and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us” The question is when we interpret a passage like this in the text we always like to look at the subject of the verb. The subject here is plural, “we,” we saw this, we heard that. So the question is, who is the “we”? Could the “we” be all believers, i.e. everybody who has believed in the Lord Jesus Christ? Or, is the “we” a smaller group? Looking at verse 3 we see that John says, “what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you,” so the we seems to refer to a subset of people and the “you” refers to all believers, or the believers that he’s writing to at least.

Then, another issue, in verse 1, “What was from the beginning?” We have to answer when is “the beginning?” The assumption of many people is that it refers to the same thing it does in the first chapter of John’s Gospel, back at creation. But if you take a concordance and look up the usage of this word “beginning” in 1 John the context shows that “the beginning” in this epistle refers to the beginning of the updated revelation that came through Christ, the incarnation is the beginning, not the creation. So that “What was from the beginning” is the good news about Christ. And he says “we have heard it, we have seen it, we have looked at it and we have touched it, things “concerning the Word of Life.”

And in verse 3 he says this is what “we proclaim to you...so that,” purpose clause. What’s the purpose of the apostles seeing and hearing and touching things concerning the Word of Life? “so that you may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.” Then he goes on to say, “And these things we write” to you, “so that our joy may be made complete.” The picture then is that of a chain of fellowship; that Church age believers have fellowship with the apostles through the message of the apostles who then have fellowship with God. So our fellowship with God and all other believers comes through the channel of the apostolic writings. Think of it, how could you have fellowship with God apart from the apostolic writings? We have to go back to the apostles, because it’s the apostles like John who, from the very beginning had the message and they passed it on to us. So a big idea to latch onto with the universal church is that it is linked all the way back to the apostolic writings and we can have

fellowship with God and with all other believers in church history as we adhere to the apostolic writings. That's what fellowship is, it's sharing or partaking in something we all have in common, namely, the message contained in the apostolic writings! That's real fellowship.

Another evidence of the universal church in the NT is that it is represented by certain figures. And this gives you something else to latch on to; it gives you a tangible imagery you can relate to. First of all we are a building. Turn to Eph 2:21. These are interesting images to think through. This one comes from construction. So if you build things this might appeal to you. He's talking about Gentiles having equal access with Jews through Christ. Verse 19, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, ²⁰having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets," NT apostles and prophets, "Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*," ²¹in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, ²²in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." It's an imagery from construction and the first thing you lay when you construct a building is the cornerstone, that way you get it square, that's Christ's work on the cross, then you lay the foundation, that's the NT apostles and prophets, and then you start erecting the building on top of the foundation, other believers. So the picture is that Christ died and laid the cornerstone, His apostles and prophets were in place to form the foundation, and now each one of us is like a brick that is being added brick by brick into this great structure that is being built. What structure is that? What's the final product? Verse 21, a holy temple. And our point is that we are all part of this one structure, this one holy temple. There aren't five thousand of these holy temples, there may be 5,000 local churches but that's not what he's talking about, he's saying each believer is a brick all in the same holy temple that is being built up person by person to be a dwelling of God the Spirit. So you can think through the fact that you are a brick and I am a brick and we are all built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone.

The second image we find in the NT that supports the universal church is we are a body, singular, the body of Christ, for this turn to 1 Cor 12:13. The human body is designed to show this imagery of the Church as an organism with various parts. So there's a unity to the Church but there's also diversity.

Verse 13, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” There’s the unity, but verse 14, “For the body is not one member, but many.” And now he goes into the diversity, the various parts of the body. ¹⁵If the foot says, “Because I am not a hand, I am not *a part* of the body,” it is not for this reason any the less *a part* of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear says, “Because I am not an eye, I am not *a part* of the body,” it is not for this reason any the less *a part* of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.” One of the things that falls out of this unity and diversity in the universal church is the necessity of each one of us. We all need one another, that’s the only way an organism can work properly; every part has to be functioning properly, in tandem. So no believer can say another believer is unnecessary and it’s arrogant to say that, and the reason is that no believer has all the spiritual gifts, believers may have one or more gifts but no believer has all the gifts. So then all believers need other believers who have other gifts they don’t have. That’s why we said earlier we are to be thankful for all the gifts that have functioned in the body of Christ from the Day of Pentecost to this very moment, because they benefit us all and are necessary parts. Another thing to be encouraged about is God has placed each of you in the body in a particular place for His own purposes. You may not feel that important but God has you right where He wants you. So don’t get discouraged because you don’t have a big out in front spiritual gift. I never planned to be out in front of people teaching the Scriptures, that wasn’t even a dream in my head and I still feel strange about it. I love it but I’m shy being out in front of you still to this day. But I know it’s what God wants me to do and God has something for you to do and with His help you can do it. Verse 19, “If they were all one member, where would the body be?” In other words, if there were no diversity and everybody was a foot, everybody was a teacher, then there wouldn’t be a body because a body isn’t a foot, that’s just one part, a useful part, but only useful with all the other parts. Verse 20, “But now there are many members, but one body. ²¹And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; or again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” The universal church, we all need one another, all believers on earth and all believers in heaven, all believers past and present up to this very day, we all need one another, we all make up the universal body, a stunning image from the design of the human body.

So we've seen the building imagery and the body imagery, now we come to the bride imagery, the Church is the bride of Christ. Christ doesn't have 3,000 brides, Christ isn't polygamous, He's monogamous and He has one bride, the universal church. And for this turn to Rev 19:7. Now my seminary president rejected the truth that the church is the bride of Christ, he says the bride of Christ was the city, the New Jerusalem. I always thought it was a little strange because Rev 21:2 and 9 utilize a figure of speech. He's not saying the city is the bride but the people inside the city. So the church is the bride, singular, of Christ, not the brides of Christ. And some guys don't like this imagery, they say, hey, I'm no bride, well, that's right, and you're not going to turn into a woman and wear a dress when you get your resurrection body, so don't worry about it. The bride imagery is to get us to think about the church as it relates to Christ. Rev 19:7, "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." ⁸It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright *and* clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. ⁹Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God." Now this is depicting the church's wedding day. Leading up to this you have the betrothal to one husband. Paul says I betrothed you to one husband. Meaning you pledged loyalty to Jesus Christ alone. And when the day of the wedding comes you want to be found pure, spotless. So the bride imagery is talking about a pure, spotless life, getting ready to meet Christ. We've been betrothed to one husband (2 Cor 11:2) and we shouldn't commit spiritual adultery (Jas 4:4). So the three images; a building, to communicate the construction project Christ is undergoing to build a temple fit for the Spirit's indwelling, the body, as an organism to show the interrelatedness and necessity of every believer, and the bride as a picture of the importance of living pure, spotless lives all communicate the universal church.

Now let's turn to the local church. This one is easy in one sense; throughout the NT we have various epistles written to local churches. Remember, a local church is "a group of professed believers in any one locality." For example, turn to Col 4:16. It's valid, Scripturally to speak of the local church. "When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter *that is coming* from Laodicea." So Paul wrote letters to these local churches, they were in a

vicinity and Paul often wanted his letters to be passed around to other churches nearby, we call these letters encyclical. Many people think, for example, Ephesians was written as an encyclical letter, a letter that would make a circuit to several local churches in the rural churches around Ephesus. And we also read of the Church in Jerusalem, the Church in Corinth, the Church in Ephesus, the Church in Laodicea, the Church in Thessalonica, the Church in Rome. All this proves is that there is the idea of a local church in Scripture. Inside these churches you might find a mixture of believers and unbelievers and that's one of the distinguishing marks of a local church. That's why it's sometimes called the visible church. But the universal or invisible church is referring to believers only.

Turn to Gal 1:2. Sometimes we read of the churches of a region and that would support the idea of the local church. Starting in verse 1, "Paul, an apostle (not *sent* from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead), ²and all the brethren who are with me, To the churches of Galatia:" so churches plural, Galatia wasn't a city, Galatia was a region. So you had several cities in Galatia; Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Derbe, several cities and each city had a local church. Paul wanted this letter read in all these local churches. That way they'd all be on the same page doctrinally.

Now our statement has a final qualifying phrase referring to the local church, subject to discipline according to Scriptural principles (Matt. 18:15-17). Now this is church discipline and church discipline assumes two things. First of all, a standard by which to judge, you can't judge without a standard and all judgment implies a standard. The only question is by what standard? And the answer is point 1 on our doctrinal statement. Scripture and Scripture alone. This much is inferred by Matt 18:15 when it says, if a brother sins against you go to him. Since sin is defined by Scripture then the standard by which we judge is Scripture. So the first thing church discipline assumes is a standard and the only absolute standard is Scripture.

The second thing church discipline assumes is a church government. Someone has to be in authority. So a local church must have some kind of government; it may be a congregational model, a pastoral model, a centralized model or an elder model, but if you don't have a government how can you exercise church discipline? So church government is assumed. We

hold to an elder model and this means the authority is vested in a council of elders (including the “pastor”) who oversee all aspects of the church and delegate authority to the deacons who are nominated by the congregation. It’s most like a Republican form of government which our nation was originally patterned after.

In any case, once you have Scripture as the authority and a church government that can judge according to that authority then you have things like Matt 18:15. Here we have church discipline outlined but it doesn’t start at the church wide level, it just starts out on the individual level, then a small group level, then the congregational level. So it is to be kept in the smallest circles possible, this is not airing out our dirty laundry, things have to be handled discreetly and in a small a group as possible, but they do have to be handled, you can’t let things go and say, doctrine of privacy of the believer or something like that because if you do the church according to Paul gets nasty and the church is to be a pure, spotless bride. So he starts at the individual level in verse 15, “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.” In other words, notice, the goal is not to rub their face in it, the goal is the brother will be reconciled, if he listens to you, you have won your brother. And this is a tremendous victory because sin enslaves, so if you are helping turn a brother away from sin then you are helping him get out of slavery to sin. Verse 16, “But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED.” So the goal here is to identify the issues, to clarify, sin must be clarified because until it is clarified we can’t see it against the backdrop of a holy God. So the main goal at this small group level is to clarify the sin, that way it can be clearly seen for what it is and then the hope is conviction of sin will occur. Always, at every step along the way, reconciliation and restoration are the goal. However, verse 17, “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church;” this is the congregational level, and this must be done to keep the church pure, a little leaven leavens the whole lump, so at this point again, the hope is that this pressure will result in a conviction of sin, and if he is convicted and repents then you have won your brother and then everyone should embrace this brother. But finally, “if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” So at this point you’ve got to cut them off from close fellowship. Paul gives more detail in 1 Cor 5, but the reason, the main reason you’ve got to cut them off from the main

assembly fellowship is because of the purity of the church. The church must be kept pure, you can't have sin going unchecked and unaddressed in the assembly or else the church loses its entire witness to the world. And that's what I'm afraid has happened in large to the church in the West, we have been lax concerning sin and so the world looks at the church and sees nothing more than itself in the mirror and therefore doesn't think the church has anything to offer.

In any case, church discipline is a necessary component of a healthy church and an effectively ministering church, without it we get lax and dirty and undistinguished from the world around us. And then what good is it to even be called the church of God. What a shame.

We might mention other things necessary to make up a local church and that is that they keep the two ordinances Christ left for his church; the Lord's Supper and water baptism. If you don't have that you don't have a local church. And we'll look at those two ordinances next week.

In summary, the term *ekklesia*, meaning "an assembly or gathering" is applied in the OT to Israel's congregation in the wilderness but is not the Church of the NT. The Church as it is seen in its universal sense refers to all believers and believers only who are united to Jesus Christ in baptism by the Spirit. We have fellowship with all believers whether on earth or in heaven through the apostolic writings. We are a building that is being built up into a holy temple that will one day be indwelt by the Spirit of God. We are a body or organism that requires the proper functioning of every other believer. We are the bride of Christ, to be pure and spotless in preparation for meeting Christ. These evidences all point to the universal church.

As for the local church it is seen in its local expression as a group of believers and unbelievers meeting in a visible assembly. They profess to believe in the Lord Jesus but some may not genuinely believe. That the word is used in this way is attested by the fact there are individual letters written to local churches in various cities or regions in the NT. Such local churches should have an organized church government that judges its members according to the standard of Scripture and Scripture alone. And such local churches should practice the two ordinances of Lord's Supper and Water Baptism which is the subject of next weeks lesson.

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