

On Being Presbyterian
Chapter 4- “What in the World is the Church?”

Post-denominational age? – Post-church age?

“With postmodern approaches to spirituality, some have increasingly come to doubt whether or not they even need to bother going to church. After all, if spirituality is simply my personal connection to God or the ‘transcendent being,’ then the church can be a messy and seemingly unnecessary complication.” (pp. 68-69)

“Presbyterians have long believed that the church is at the center of God’s purposes for the world.” (p. 68)

I. What is the Church?

A. Church in Trinitarian Terms

1. **“people of God”** – 1 Peter 2.9-10
2. **“body of Christ”** – Romans 12.4-5
3. **“fellowship of the Spirit”** – Ephesians 1.7-23

B. Church in Terms of Gospel (Nicene Creed)

1. **“one”** -- John 17.20-21; Ephesians 4.4-6
2. **“holy”** – 1 Corinthians 1.2
3. **“catholic”** – Galatians 3.26-28
4. **“apostolic”** – Ephesians 2.19-20

C. Church in Terms of its Marks

“Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ’s institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists.” – John Calvin

- some would add proper discipline as a third mark

D. Church in Terms of Space or Location

1. **House churches** – Romans 16.3-5; Philemon 2
2. **Regional churches** – Acts 9.31

E. The Church in Terms of its Character

“The church is a ‘body’ (1 Cor. 12.27; Eph. 4.12-16; Col. 1.18), a ‘bride’ (Eph. 5.22-33), a ‘flock’ (1 Peter 5.1-5), and a ‘household’ (1 Tim. 3.5, 15). Each of these images is deeply organic; they suggest growth, increased stature, loving union, nourishing and cherishing, and committed care and concern.” (p. 73)

II. The Church “Visible” and “Invisible”

“The church can be described from the perspectives of both earth and heaven. We typically think about this in terms of the ‘visible’ and the ‘invisible’ church.” (p. 73)

A. Invisible Church

The catholic or 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, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all. *(Westminster Confession 25.1)*

B. Visible Church

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.

(Westminster Confession 25.2)

Q. 61 Are all they saved who hear the gospel, and live in the church?

A. All that hear the gospel, and live in the visible church, are not saved; but they only who are true members of the church invisible.

(Westminster Larger Catechism)

Confusion regarding invisible and visible church distinction:

- Roman Catholic
- Anabaptist

What is the problem with maintaining “regenerate church membership” as the ideal?

What is Calvin’s idea of charitable judgment in this regard?

How does Paul’s discussion in Romans 9.6-8 provide an Old Testament precedent for this distinction?

How does this distinction help us make sense of apostasy as we find it described in Hebrews 6.4-6?

III. Who Are Members of the Church?

Q. 64 What is the visible church?

A. The visible church is a society made up of all such as in all ages and places of the world do profess the true religion, and of their children.

(Westminster Larger Catechism)

Household emphasis in Scripture:

Genesis 17.23-27

Deuteronomy 6.4-9

Joshua 24.15

Acts 2.39

Acts 16.14-15

1 Corinthians 7.14