

## Lesson 7: Being Part of The Church

### A. WORSHIP IN AN INVISIBLE CHURCH!

We have been studying about our great God and His wonderful plan for redeeming people dead in sin and bringing them into his family. There is one more part of this plan that we need to study carefully. It is God's plan that while they live on earth His people gather together and form what Jesus called His Church.



The word ‘church’ in the Bible means ‘called out.’ God’s church is his people, his ‘called-out ones’ whom He has chosen for Himself. In fact, the word ‘church’ in the Bible *never* refers to a building, which is usually what we think of when we think of the church. The church is the *people* of God, not the building (though it’s OK to use the word to describe a building too)!

When people are truly born of God they automatically become part of the one great Church of Jesus; that’s not just the church today, but the people of God through all the ages. Sometimes this is called the **invisible** church because only God knows exactly who its members are. The whole invisible church will be together when Jesus returns. But usually when the word ‘church’ is used, it refers to an actual gathering of God's people somewhere on earth. This is sometimes called the **visible** church. God has always had a visible church, even though the organization of it had changed. At first it was a family (Abraham), then a nation (Israel), and since the coming of Jesus the visible church had been formed by groups of people from all nations, brought together by the Holy Spirit.

1) Does this make sense? Try it out; fill in the blanks with either *invisible* or *visible*.

- a. All people of every age who have been or will be born of God are made part of the \_\_\_\_\_ church.
- b. The \_\_\_\_\_ church will be complete when Jesus returns.
- c. Usually when we read or think about the church it means a gathering of people here on earth, the \_\_\_\_\_ church.
- d. The \_\_\_\_\_ church can be made up of both believers and unbelievers; many people who are not born of God may still join it as though it was just another organization.
- e. St. Paul’s Presbyterian Church is a \_\_\_\_\_ church, but its members who are born of God are also part of the \_\_\_\_\_ church.

To be saved, each person must decide to believe in Jesus and follow Him. But, while that is an individual choice, once you make that choice you become part of a **family**; the Bible even says you become part of a **body**--these are just two of the terms used to describe the Church.

2) Look up I Corinthians 12. In verse 27, the whole church is called the \_\_\_\_\_ and each person is a \_\_\_\_\_ of that body. Not all the parts are the same (v. 14); in fact, verse 4 says that those in the body have many different \_\_\_\_\_.  
Read over this chapter; what are some of the different parts of the 'body'?

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The visible church is different from the invisible church in at least three ways.

- a) The visible church needs to be organized with leaders and discipline. As a group of people who still are sinners, Christians need direction and sometimes correction.
- b) The visible church was given sacraments to administer to remind us of Jesus. The sacraments are to help Christians grow in faith.
- c) In the visible church the most important unit is the family. God created the family and He wants His church to make the family stronger.

## **B. HOW DO YOU SPELL PRES-BEE-TEER-IYUN?**

Different denominations take their names from different distinctives of that group. Lutherans, obviously, were named after the founder, Martin Luther. Methodists were named for the detailed 'methods' of Christian growth proposed by John Wesley. But where does the term 'Presbyterian' come from?

Presbyterians take their name from their form of church government (in other words, from the way the church is *organized*), from the Greek word 'presbyteros' which means 'elder' (as found in places like Acts 15 and 1 Timothy 5, for example). The elder, as seen in scripture, is a leader in the church who is responsible as a shepherd to the flock. Of course, every church and denomination has people that function in this capacity. But the distinctives of presbyterianism lie in the way in which power and authority are shared.

First, let's look at how Jesus went about establishing His Church. How did the visible church, as we know it, begin?

### **Memory Verse:**

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."  
- Acts 1:8



1) Look up Acts 1:8. Who was Jesus talking to in this verse? \_\_\_\_\_

2) Turn over to chapter 2:1-3. What happened to them?

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This is where the New Testament church starts to advance. The book of Acts describes the spread of the Christian faith by the early apostles, and it shows us how they organized themselves. Here are four things we know about the early church, and how we try to adopt those ideas in our own church:

A. Each local church was ruled by a group of \_\_\_\_\_ (Acts 14:23 & 20:17)

- Look up I Timothy 3:1-7 and read the qualifications one must meet to be an elder. List at least five of them:
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- In the PCA, we have two types of elders, \_\_\_\_\_ elders and \_\_\_\_\_ elders.

- Teaching elders are our pastors, with an emphasis on (of course) teaching and preaching of the scriptures.
- Ruling elders are ‘lay people’ from the congregation, with an emphasis on shepherding the church family.
- The *session* is made up of all the teaching and ruling elders in our church.

- Who are some of the teaching elders in our church? There are four of them: see how many you can name! \_\_\_\_\_
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- Who are some of the ruling elders in our church? Write down any that you know (you can use a church directory to help you!):
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B. The first elders in each new church were \_\_\_\_\_ by Paul and Barnabus or those with them (Acts 14:23).

- Jesus' Apostles were the ones he appointed to start churches. One of the things the apostles first had to do was to appoint leaders of those churches. Look up Titus 1:5. Who did they appoint? \_\_\_\_\_. What is another name they also used? (vs. 7) \_\_\_\_\_.

- In our church, these men are nominated and elected by the congregation. All candidates for office must complete an officer training course, and be approved by the session,

before their name is placed before the congregation. Different churches, even within our denomination, do their elections differently. The Bible does not specify that there is a specific way to do this.

C. When there was a \_\_\_\_\_ among the churches, they appealed to a larger group of elders to settle the matter.

- This is demonstrated, for example, in Acts 15:1-16:4.
- In the PCA, we have a series of graded *courts* that serve this function (just as in American politics, there are different ‘levels’ of government: national, state, local, etc.).
  - The *session* is composed of the elders in a local church.
  - The *presbytery* consists of the elders from all the PCA churches in a given geographic area (St. Paul’s PCA is one of about 30 churches in the *Central Florida Presbytery*). Our presbytery meets quarterly.
  - The *General Assembly* is composed of the elders of all the churches in the denomination, and meets annually in early summer.

D. Local churches also had \_\_\_\_\_, whose main ministry was one of service and mercy. (Acts 6:1-7)

- Their qualifications are discussed in 1 Timothy 3:8-15. List at least five requirements of deacons:

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- In our church, deacons carry out mercy and service-related duties. The deacons and elders together make up the church’s *officers*. The process for electing deacons is the same as that for elders.
- Who are some of the ruling elders in our church? Write down any that you know (you can use a church directory to help you!):

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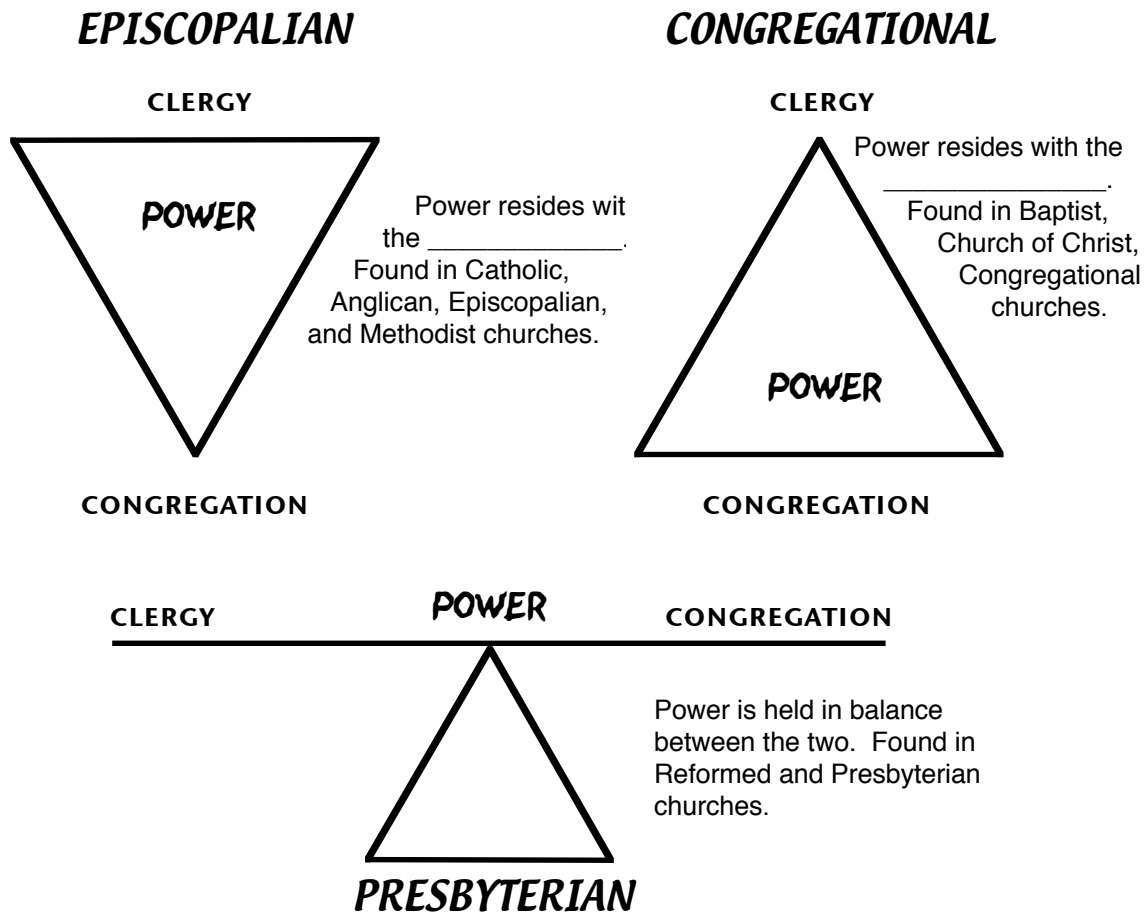
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So let’s review. The two main church officers are **elders** (who lead spiritually and do the preaching and teaching) and **deacons** (who serve the people of the church and the community). As Presbyterians, we have **ruling** and **teaching** elders, who together are called the **Session**.

The reason we have two types of elders has a lot to do with our view of mankind that we discussed in Lesson 1! In some churches, like the Catholic church, the educated clergy were in control, and they made all the decisions. If you weren't a priest, your vote didn't count. But priests can make mistakes, because we're all sinners.

In other churches, called 'congregational churches', the people do everything by a majority vote, and the *pastor* doesn't usually have a vote. But the people can make mistakes too, because we're all sinners.

'Presbyterian' church government tries to make sure that there's a balance between the pastors and the people when decisions are being made. Mistakes will *still* be made, because we're all sinners, but when we have both ruling and teaching elders on a session, we make sure that there's a balance of both ministers and members of the congregation.



3) Our church has a 'Constitution' too. The "governing documents" of a church in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) are: the Shorter \_\_\_\_\_, the Larger \_\_\_\_\_, the Westminster Confession of \_\_\_\_\_, and the Book of Church \_\_\_\_\_.

4) Why do you think the Bible *isn't* a part of our constitution? Is it because it's not as important? What must you be able to do to a constitution? \_\_\_\_\_

So, it's clear that Jesus took great care in appointing leaders for his church before his death and resurrection, and that his followers continued to consider this important. His church is important to him because it is the place where the Holy Spirit helps us to grow as Christians.

5) Look up SC #88. What external ways (we call them "means of grace") does Jesus use to bring us the benefits of redemption? The \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.

6) You *cannot* grow if you do not read and study the Bible (the Word); you *cannot* grow if you do not take part in the life of the church (the sacraments); you *cannot* grow if you do not spend time praying to God (prayer). Sometimes people remain baby Christians all of their lives. Explain how this is possible. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### C. WHAT IS A SACRAMENT?

A sacrament can be defined as an outward symbol of a spiritual truth. The elements that are used (water, juice, bread) have no special power (in other words, it's not magic!), but when we receive them in faith we receive great blessings.

1) Look up SC #93. There are two sacraments:  
\_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_.

**Baptism** is a sacrament in which water is used to symbolize the washing away of our sin and our being united to Christ. Baptism is also an outward mark that shows who belongs to God's family, just like circumcision was in the Old Testament.



2) Look up SC #94.

Baptism is a _____ with water in the name of the _____, _____, and _____ which is a _____ and _____ that we are joined to _____, and that we receive the benefits of the _____ of _____ and that we are engaged to be the _____.
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3) Look up SC #95. Who should be baptized?

- a) Those who have publicly stated that they \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_ children of church members.

4) True or False?

- \_\_\_\_\_ a) Infant children who are baptized still need to believe in Jesus when they are old enough to understand.
- \_\_\_\_\_ b) Baptism means that child who is baptized will automatically believe.
- \_\_\_\_\_ c) When we baptize a child, that child is saved.

5) SC #95 says that children whose parents who have never trusted in Jesus and joined the church should *not* be baptized. Why do you think that is? \_\_\_\_\_

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The **Lord's Supper, also called Communion**, is a sacrament which uses the symbols of bread and wine to remind us of Jesus' death, and to help us have to fellowship with Him. Look up I Corinthians 11.



6) When did Jesus begin the Lord's Supper? (v. 23)

\_\_\_\_\_.

7) What does the broken bread symbolize? (v. 24)

\_\_\_\_\_.

8) What does the wine cup (juice of grapes) symbolize? (v. 25) \_\_\_\_\_.

9) When will we stop having the Lord's Supper? (v. 26) \_\_\_\_\_.

10) What should a person do before taking the Lord's Supper? (v. 28) \_\_\_\_\_

11) What is true of those who are careless or make fun of the Lord's Supper? (v. 29) \_\_\_\_\_

12) Do you think a person who has never trusted Jesus should take the Lord's Supper? Explain.

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\_\_\_\_\_

## D. JOINING THE CHURCH

Joining Christ's church is a very important step for every Christian. We need to be as sure as we can be that we are joining the church that can best minister to us and our families. At St. Paul's, we take this very seriously and try hard to help those that God has sent to be members to grow in their knowledge of and love for Jesus.

1) There is only one qualification to become a member of Jesus church. What do you think it is?

\_\_\_\_\_

The elders are responsible to make sure, as best they are able, that people who join our church are really Christians. That's why, if you want to join the church, you'll get to meet with one or more of our elders, so they can hear about your faith and what God has been doing in your life to bring you to Himself. They can answer questions for you, and encourage you in your faith.

There are questions that we ask of every member when they join the church. It's good to know about them, and think about whether or not you can honestly say yes to them! We wanted to take a moment to look at these five questions. Membership involves these vows, and we want to allow you time to ponder them. We'll divide the five questions into three main groups or 'membership standards.'

**Membership Standard 1:  
A Credible Profession of Repentance & Faith in Jesus**

***#1. "Do you acknowledge yourself to be a sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure and without hope save in His sovereign mercy?"***

***#2. "Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and only Savior of Sinners, and do you receive and depend on Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?"***

A Christian is a person who has confessed to God that he or she is a sinner deserving eternal punishment, who has believed that Jesus Christ paid sin's penalty by His death on the Cross, and who has trusted in Jesus Christ alone for eternal life. If you still have questions regarding this concept or its application to your life, we recommend meeting with one of our pastors to talk further. You will also find it helpful to review the lessons of our class.

**Membership Standard 2:  
Seeking to Live a Life Free from Addiction to Sin**

***#3. "Do you resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes a follower of Christ?"***

A Christian is a person who has willingly surrendered his or her life to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and who is seeking to live a life free of bondage to sin. This is something every Christian needs to seek God daily for, for only He gives us the final victory!

**Membership Standard 3:  
Servanthood in Attitude and Behavior**

***#4. "Do you promise to serve Christ and His Church by supporting and participating in its worship and work to the best of your ability?"***

The fruit of Christ in every believer manifests itself in many ways. We believe that a Christian life should be marked by attending worship regularly, using our spiritual gifts to build up the body, praying consistently for the health and growth of the Church, witnessing to God's grace in Christ, and financially supporting the causes of Christ in the world. Of course, these are all products of the singular goal of growing in God's grace.

At St. Paul's, we talk about the four "pillars" that our church is built on. Can you remember what they are? \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_.

(if not, they're on the next page!)

Worship. Worship means giving God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit the praise and honor that is due. We can and should worship alone, but we also must worship together.

Education. We cannot worship a God we do not know. So we spend a lot of time learning about God and his Word in Sunday School and even in worship.

Community. We are to love all people, even our enemies, but Jesus taught that we have a special relationship to other Christians. The Bible encourages us to spend time together, to help one another, and, together, to help others.

Outreach. (Also called Missions) We have a special mission—to take the gospel to people who have not heard about Jesus. We need to do this beginning with our friends and then to people in different parts of the world.

**#5. “Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the Church, and promise to further its purity and peace?”**

Let’s break this question into three parts.

a) First, *what does it mean to submit to our church’s government?*

Look up Hebrews 13:17: “Obey your \_\_\_\_\_ and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an \_\_\_\_\_. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a \_\_\_\_\_, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

b) Secondly, *what does it mean to submit to the discipline of the church?*

Matthew 18:15-17 is a biblical model of discipline.

*“If your brother \_\_\_\_\_ against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he \_\_\_\_\_ to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be \_\_\_\_\_ by the testimony of two or three \_\_\_\_\_.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the \_\_\_\_\_; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”*

c) Lastly, *what does “purity and peace” mean?*

1 Corinthians 13:1 says, “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not \_\_\_\_\_, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.” We expect a commitment of love and unity within the body of Christ.

We do *not* demand or expect that every member will see eye to eye on every matter. But we do believe that the church should be full of people who are willing to extend grace and mercy to each other. We have spent much of this course talking about how much grace and mercy we have been given in Christ. When we have been forgiven much, we should forgive much. We are to be people who unite and encourage people, not

people who divide or hurt the church.

If you are not yet a member of Jesus visible church (St. Paul's), talk to your parents about this important step. We'll follow up with you and your family in the weeks ahead, to hear about your decision and to take the next step with you if you decide to take it!



## *Talk to God About It!*

There's a lot to think about in this lesson. But take some time especially to pray about the decision. What had God done in your life? Have you come to the place where you believe and trust in Jesus Christ alone for forgiveness? If so, take some time to thank Him. If not, share your doubts and questions with Him (He's not afraid of our questions!). Ask Him to make things more clear to you, to bring you to a place where you can trust Him and desire more and more to follow Him.

Ask God to guide you (and your parents) as you decide together if you're ready to join Christ's church.