

Series: The Church in God's Program

Lesson 2: The Nature of the Universal Church

In lesson one we discussed the meaning of Ecclesia and found it could mean a local secular assembly, a local assembly of believers, or all those who have professed Jesus Christ and are thus regarded as the Universal body of Christ (all Christians, at all times). It is in the later (the Universal Church) we will discuss the Nature of the Church in this Bible Study.

THE CHURCH IS THE PEOPLE OF GOD

A Divine Assembly

The Church is God's assembly; its beginning, its history, and its destiny rest on the initiative and power of God's divine grace. Within this context we understand the Church to be 1) a people called forth by God, 2) a people incorporated into Christ, and 3) a people indwelt by the Spirit.

1. The Church is a people called forth by God (Elect)

The assembly of "people called forth by God" is founded upon the "counsel" and "good pleasure of God's will".

Eph 1:5 He did this by predestining us to adoption as his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the pleasure of his will –

Eph 1:11 In Christ we too have been claimed as God's own possession, since we were predestined according to the one purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will

Since the church is the result of the "pleasure of His will" and the "counsel of His will" and not according to the good pleasure and counsel of the human will, we know that the Church is secure.

The members of the church are "chosen (elected) in him (Christ) before the foundation of the world"

Eph 1:4 For he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we may be holy and unblemished in his sight in love.

Thus, the members of the ekklesia (assembly) are "God's elect"

Rom 8:33 Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

Col 3:12 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with a heart of mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience,

Or simply “the elect”

1Pe 1:1-2 From Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those temporarily residing abroad (in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, the province of Asia, and Bithynia) who are chosen (2) according to the foreknowledge of God the Father by being set apart by the Spirit for obedience and for sprinkling with Jesus Christ's blood. May grace and peace be yours in full measure!

Or, His “chosen race”

1Pe 2:9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may proclaim the virtues of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

The assembly consists of those whom God foreknows in sovereign love and predestines to be conformed to the image of Christ.

Rom 8:29-30 because those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. (30) And those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified.

Each member of the assembly is referred to as “saint” and is “sanctified” (set apart).

Col 1:1-2 From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, and Timothy my brother, (2) to the saints, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ, at Colossae. Grace and peace to you from God our Father!

2. The Church is Incorporated into Christ (members of Christ)

Members of the ekklesia (assembly) are continually characterized as being “in Christ”. This formula, which occurs commonly throughout the New Testament, is based on the biblical concept of corporate personality. As a result of Adam’s original sin humanity has fallen, and is thus corporately “in” Adam, so the church, the new creation, has been purchased by Christ (redeemed by Christ’s death) and is now, not in Adam, but rather “in” Christ.

Rom 5:14 Yet death reigned from Adam until Moses even over those who did not sin in the same way that Adam (who is a type of the coming one) transgressed.

1Co 15:21-22 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also came through a man. (22) For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.

The formula “in Christ” is used 88 times in the NT. See Romans 3:24; 6:11, 23; 8:1, 2, 39; 9:1; 12:5; 15:17; 16:3, 7, 9, 10; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 4, 30; 3:1; 4:10, 15, 17; 15:18, 19, 22, 31; 16:24; 2 Corinthians 1:21; 2:14, 17; 3:14; 5:17, 19; 12:2, 19; Galatians 1:22; 2:4, 16, 17; 3:14, 26, 28; 5:6; Ephesians 1:1, 3, 10, 12, 20; 2:6, 7, 10, 13; 3:6, 11, 21; 4:32; Philippians 1:1, 26; 2:1, 5; 3:3, 8, 9, 14; 4:7, 19, 21; Colossians 1:2, 4, 24, 28; 2:5; 1 Thessalonians 2:14; 4:16; 5:18; 1 Timothy 1:14; 3:13; 2 Timothy 1:1, 9, 13; 2:1, 10; 3:12, 15; Philemon 1:8, 20, 23; 1 Peter 3:16; 5:10, 14;

3. The Church is Indwelt by the Spirit (The Fellowship of the Spirit)

Christ lives in His ekklesia through the indwelling of the Spirit. Or, the church is the assembly of those united together in the reality of the indwelling Spirit.

John 14:16-20 Then I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever — (17) the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot accept, because it does not see him or know him. But you know him, because he resides with you and will be in you. (18) "I will not abandon you as orphans, I will come to you. (19) In a little while the world will not see me any longer, but you will see me; because I live, you will live too. (20) You will know at that time that I am in my Father and you are in me and I am in you.

1Co 12:13. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body. Whether Jews or Greeks or slaves or free, we were all made to drink of the one Spirit.

Eph 4:3-4. making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (4) There is one body and one Spirit, just as you too were called to the one hope of your calling,

The ministry in the church is performed through the gifts of the Spirit.

1Co 12:8-9 For one person is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, and another the message of knowledge according to the same Spirit, (9) to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,

Witnessing and proclamation are done in the power of the Spirit.

1Co 2:4 My conversation and my preaching were not with persuasive words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power,

Missionaries are sent out and directed by the Holy Spirit.

Act 13:2-4. While they were serving the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." (3) Then, after they had fasted and prayed and placed their hands on them, they sent them off. (4) So Barnabas and Saul, sent out by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

Conclusion

The Church, and thus the individual members of the Church (it is the individuals belonging to the church that make the Church) are called, chosen, elected, predestined by God the Father to be incorporated "in" Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Thus God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, each have a role in the Nature of the Ecclesia.