

**I. THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE CHURCH. Because the church is the body & bride of Christ she has spiritual characteristics and glories of Christ: "I believe one holy, catholic [& apostolic] church."**

**A. The unity of the church**

**1. The church universal**

- a. There is only one church, and that one church has one life, one Spirit and fellowship with God in one Head. There can be only one church because there can be only one Christ (Eph. 4:4-6).
- b. The unity of the church is created by the Holy Spirit who unites the whole body and every member to Christ the Head by a true faith; and who unites every member to the other members.
- c. The unity of the church is spiritual, not organizational. Rome contends that she alone has unity because she has one unified organization with one visible head at Rome (but see John 17:21-23).

**2. This unity necessarily manifests itself in the local congregations**

- a. It is not the calling of the church to create the unity of the church (the Holy Spirit does that) but to manifest it, to endeavour to keep it (Eph. 4:3).
- b. The unity of the church manifests itself in the common doctrinal confession of the members. Thus, the unity of the church is promoted by creeds and confessions (Acts 2:42; I Cor. 1:10-13).
- c. The unity of the church is not threatened by the diversity among the members. This enhances the unity, as long as the differences are not doctrinal. The Lord creates a body of different parts with different functions but one body working together (I Cor. 12:12, 14, 18).
- d. The unity of the church is promoted when like-minded congregations federate into denominations: they work together for a common cause (missions, mutual financial support, training of ministers, mutual help in disputes, etc; see II Cor. 8-9; Acts 15, etc)

**3. There are threats to (and denials of) the unity of the church.**

- a. The greatest threat to church unity is false doctrine. Compromise with error is always harmful.
- b. There is danger of schism, a tearing of the church by a member who divides the church over a non-doctrinal issue. The schismatic is motivated by pride (I Cor. 12:25; III John 9-10).
- c. There is the error of Dispensationalism: the division of the OT and NT church. Disp. teaches two peoples of God with different futures (Eph. 2:19; Gal. 3-4; Heb. 11:40). Pentecostalism teaches two kinds of Christians (two baptisms, etc) and Baptists exclude the children of believers.

**B. The holiness of the church**

**1. The church universal**

- a. The church is holy because Christ is holy. The holy Son of God will not have a filthy body or a defiled bride. He therefore cleanses her to make her like Himself, fit to dwell with Him.
- b. The holiness of the church is Christ's own holiness; it is the church's beauty, and the church's glory to be holy. The holiness of the church pertains to the whole body to each member.
- c. The holiness of the church is decreed for her (Eph. 1:4); purchased for her on the cross (Eph. 5:26-27); and that to which she is called (I Peter 2:9).
- d. That holiness is a real, spiritual holiness; she is cleansed from sin, and consecrated to God

**2. The holiness of the church is seen in the local congregation**

- a. The church is holy *in doctrine*. To believe and teach false doctrine is to go after another Christ and commit spiritual fornication, II Cor. 11:2-4. False doctrine, therefore, is the greatest threat to the church's holiness. The church must not be seduced away from Christ by alliance with the false church.
- b. The church is holy *in life*. The church as a body and all her members are godly in their conduct, obedient to Christ, the Head. The church's holiness is threatened by ungodliness among her members & by conformity to the ungodly world. We are called to be saints (I Cor. 1:2).
- c. The church is holy *in worship*. The church, as the bride of Christ, is devoted to Christ and meets to worship the Triune God through Him. The church must resist the temptation to worship other gods or to worship her Lord in an idolatrous manner.

- d. The church is holy *in discipline*. By discipline the church preserves holiness in her midst and promotes the holiness of her own members, and keeps unholiness out of the church (I Cor. 5:6, 13). A church lax in discipline will become unholy. However, no church on earth is perfect.

### **C. The catholicity of the church**

#### **1. The church universal**

- a. Catholic does not mean Roman Catholic. The RCC believes that she is the Catholic Church because she is a worldwide organization with a centre in Rome.
- b. The catholicity of the church is not dependent on Rome; it flows from the church's union with Christ. The church is catholic because Christ is catholic. Christ is the Second Adam, the Head of the new, elect humanity, embracing all believers and their elect children.
- c. Catholicity means universality: the church is made up of members from all nations, both genders, all ages, all social classes, etc. In fact, the church transcends all earthly differences.
- d. The catholicity of the church was promised and foreshadowed in the OT (Gen. 12:3; Isa. 2:2, etc; and the salvation of some Gentiles); but it is fully revealed in the NT age (Eph. 2:13-16, 3:5-6).
- e. The catholicity of the church is seen in the history-long gathering of the church (LD 21; BC 27).

#### **2. The catholicity of the church is seen in the local church**

- a. No one church institute can claim to be the only church for the church is worldwide.
- b. No church may make restrictions of membership based on any earthly differences (race, age, social standing, sex, etc).
- c. The church is not a collection of clones but a gathering of diverse individuals, each contributing something important to the overall body of the church. The church should not strive for uniformity especially in her mission work.
- d. The denials of catholicity: Romanism, Dispensationalism, Baptists.

### **D. The apostolicity of the church**

#### **1. The church universal**

- a. Rome and Episcopalians claim apostolicity because of apostolic succession of persons. They claim that their pope and bishops have an unbroken line from the apostles. Even if that were historically demonstrable (it is not) it would prove nothing (Gal. 1:8).
- b. The apostolicity of the church is not succession of persons but doctrine. An apostolic church preaches apostolic doctrine set forth in Scripture alone (Acts 2:42; Eph. 2:20; Rev. 12:14).
- c. The church depends upon the truth: she is built upon the truth and must confess the truth.

#### **2. The apostolicity of the church is seen in the local church**

- a. The local church is called to be the pillar and ground of the truth (I Tim. 3:15).
- b. Without the truth a local congregation ceases to be the church of Christ; Christ comes in judgment, removes the candlestick and only an empty shell (void of the Spirit and filled with the lying spirit of antichrist) remains.
- c. The local church must strive to proclaim, defend and preserve the truth by preaching it to her own members, teaching her own children and proclaiming it to the world.
- d. Without the truth there is no unity, no holiness and no catholicity. Without the truth the church does not have the mark of the church and Christ is not present to bless.
- e. The great threat to the apostolicity of the church is apostasy which begins when the people no longer love the truth (II Thess. 2:10-13).

## **II. Summary**

### **A. The church is a spiritual, living organism**

1. The church is the body and bride of Christ, a spiritual temple of living stones.
2. The church has one life (Jesus Christ) by one Spirit and is united to Christ by the bond of faith.
3. The church manifests herself on earth in local, instituted congregations

### **B. The church has certain perfections (attributes) because she is united to Jesus Christ**

1. The church is one (essential spiritual unity in faith); and holy (purified by Christ, devoted to Him).
2. The church is catholic (worldwide, transcending all earthly diff.); and apostolic (in doctrine).