

BIBLE CHALLENGE 2019

Week 29: July 14-20

What is the True Church Like?

Read: Exodus 3:7,10; 5:1; 33:16; Deuteronomy 7:6-7; 31:16; Psalm 106:39; Jeremiah 2:2; Micah 6:8; Matthew 3:2; 4:17; 6:33; 7:21; 8:11; 10:7; 11:11-12; 12:28; 13:11,24,31,33,44-45,47,52; 16:18-19; 18:1,3-4,23; 19:12,14,23-24; 20:1; 21:31,43; 22:2; 23:13; 25:1; Mark 1:15; 2:19-20; 4:11,26,30; 9:1,47; 10:14-15; 10:23-25,34; 14:25; 15:43; Luke 4:43; 6:20; 7:28; 8:1,10; 9:2,11,27,60,62; 10:9,11; 11:20; 13:18,20,28-29; 14:15; 16:16; 17:20-21; 18:16-17,24-25,29; 19:11; 21:31; 22:16,18; 23:51; John 3:3,5,29; 13:35; Acts 1:3; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 28:23,31; Romans 12:5; 14:17; 1 Corinthians 3:9; 4:20; 6:9-10,19; 10:17; 11:2; 12:27; 14:26; 15:50; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 1:23; 2:19-22; 4:4,12,16; 5:22-33; Colossians 1:18,24; 2:19; 3:15; 4:11; 2 Thessalonians 1:5; James 1:27; 1 Peter 1:3-5; 2:4-5,9-10; Revelation 19:6-10; 21:2; 22:17. Read Hosea 2 and the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12) in full.

We have already talked about the marks of the true Church — those things that every church must have if it can legitimately call itself a church: the faithful preaching of the Gospel, the right use of the Sacraments, and the Biblical practice of church discipline. All three must be present (or at least be worked toward) for a church to be a church.

We have also talked about the attributes toward which the church should strive. Here we talked about Love, Unity, Holiness, Catholicity, and Apostolicity. We call these attributes rather than marks simply because these five things will be like fruit on the tree for a church that faithfully lives out the Marks. In other words, if you have proper preaching, sacraments, and discipline, the end result will be love, unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity.

The question that we raise this week has to do with the more practical "nuts and bolts" of what a church should look like when you enter within it. What should your experience in this church be and how should people behave toward one another? And with all of that in mind, for what should we strive as the True Church of Jesus Christ?

The Word of God Governs Everything

The only way that we know anything about God in the absolute sense is through the Bible. It is God's self-revelation given to us so that we might know him as he wishes to be known. And thus, when the church comes together, we should lift up the word of God and give it a place of authority over all we do and preeminence in our lives.

Christ is the King

The church is not a human institution, but is a divine institution with an ordained King upon the throne. That means that everything that is done in the church must both be in accordance to Christ's demands and that we should not entertain anything outside of what Christ institutes. The church is not a democracy, it is a theocracy. As Jesus said, "On this rock I will build my church." What is that rock? It is the testimony of Peter — the heart of the testimony is that Jesus is the Lord, the Son of God and it is Jesus, not man, that builds the church. That makes Jesus King.

The Church is about the work of Kingdom-Building

It is easy to forget that the church's end goal is not its own preservation or its own growth and success. The end goal of the church is to build the kingdom of Christ. As valuable and importantly as all of the other things are, they are all secondary (and must be considered secondary) to the building of Christ's kingdom. That means that all of the things that the church does, from the activities and events to the worship service, are designed to build up the Kingdom of Christ, evangelizing the lost, discipling the believer, and tearing down the strongholds of Hell in our community.

The Church is a Living Witness of God's Truth

Jesus said that the world will know that we are Christian by our love. Thus, in the context of the church, we should find relationships marked by love, grace, mercy, forgiveness, hope, and faith amongst other things. If Christians behave in such a way, they will draw people to the church so that they can experience such grace.

The Church Seeks Justice for the Poor and Weak in Society

True Religion, James states, is caring for widows and orphans as well as keeping oneself unstained by the world. The prophet Micah states that God's people are a people that do justice. Thus, a church is called to seek to work justice in the community where they exist.

The Church is Necessary for the Believer

This is not popular today, but historically the church has consistently held that apart from the church of Jesus Christ there is no salvation. Within the church alone can be found the keys to the kingdom (see Heidelberg Catechism, Questions 83-85), which are the preaching of the Gospel and the practice of church discipline. Apart from these, disciple-making is not possible. Apart from the church, these "means of grace" as are needed for the nurturing of our faith, also cannot be found.

Children have a Place in It

Repeatedly the scriptures teach that to the children goes the kingdom of God. When we deny children their proper place in the covenant body, we deny Jesus' own words about letting the children come to him.

Names/Titles

There are a lot of names and titles given to the church that can be used as allegories to describe how the church exists and functions.

The Bride of Christ: As Christ is the bride-groom, we (the church) are the bride and the attitude and affection that we have toward Christ ought to be the attitude and affection that a bride has for her husband.

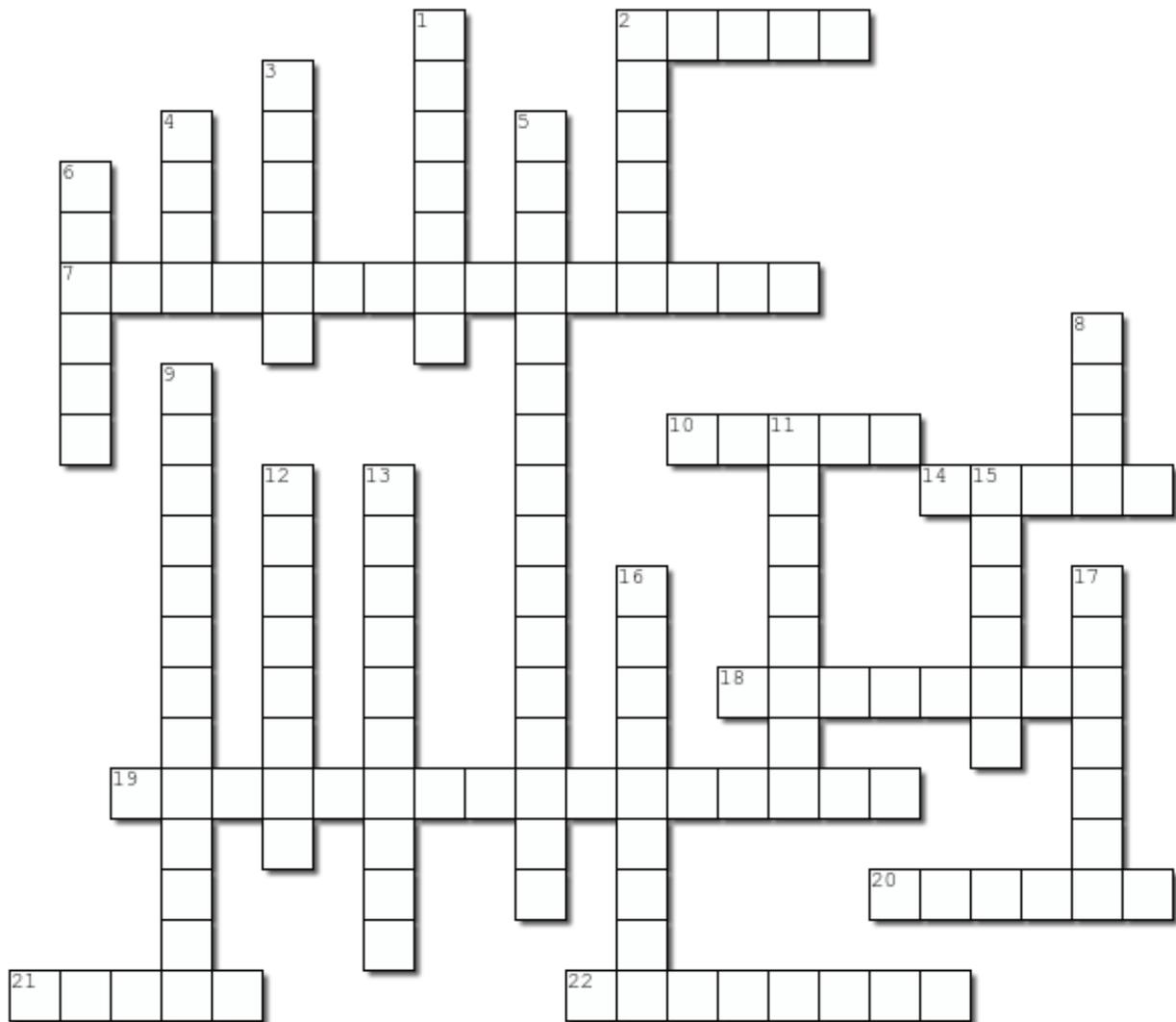
A Building/Temple: God constructs the church as his temple — a building of living stones with Christ as the cornerstone and the prophets and apostles as its foundation.

God's People: We are a people that God has chosen by his electing grace and called out of the world to bring together as his own — washed clean by the work of his Son. His presence makes us distinct from all of the other nations and organizations of the world.

The Body of Christ: We are the body made up of many, intertwined and necessary parts with Christ as the head. Every part of the body needs the other parts for life and ministry and not one is more important than the other (apart from Christ who is the head). There are no vestigial parts in Christ's body.

Kingdom of Heaven (or of God): This is probably one of the more misunderstood references because often we think of this solely in terms of future things. Yet, as Christ uses the language, he speaks of it not just as that which is to come, but also as that which is "in your midst." In other words, the church here and now is a part of the Kingdom of Heaven. Yet, the Kingdom of Heaven will not become complete and perfect until Jesus comes again in judgment to establish the new heavens and new earth. So, the Kingdom is already and not yet. It is both on earth and in heaven.

Week 29 - What the Church is Like



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Across

2. 'Let the _____ of Christ rule in your heart.'
7. 'But you are a chosen race, a _____.' (2 words)
10. 'And I tell you, you are _____ and on this rock I will build my church.'
14. 'It is easier for a _____ to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.'
18. These people should love their wives as Christ loved the church.
19. 'The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand _____ the Gospel.' (3 words)
20. 'To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of _____.'
21. If Jesus is the Groom, the Church is his _____.
22. This action by the church is often referred to as a kind of spiritual adultery.

Down

1. The greedy, the swindlers, the immoral, etc... will not _____ the kingdom of God.
2. 'I must _____ the good news of the Kingdom of God...'
3. God often calls the church in both Testaments, 'My _____.'
4. If Jesus is the Head, the Church is his _____.
5. These consist of preaching and church discipline. (4 words)
6. To whom must the church submit?
8. 'The Spirit and the Bride say, '_____!''
9. The church is a people, _____'. (4 words)
11. 'The kingdom of heaven is like a _____ hidden in a field.'
12. To such as whom belongs the Kingdom of God?
13. Religion that is pure and undefiled is taking care of widows in their _____ and the orphans.
15. 'Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is _____.' (2 words)
16. Christians are gathered together and called the _____ of God.
17. The church, Micah tells us, is to 'do' this.