

# **Associated Gospel Churches - Articles of Faith and Doctrine**

**The Unity of the True Church in  
the mystical Body of Christ**

**February 12, 2006**

# **The Unity of the True Church in the mystical Body of Christ**

*XIV. We believe that the Church is composed of all who are united by the Holy Spirit to the risen and ascended Son of God, and that “by the same Spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles”, thus being members one of another and knit together in love.*

*Romans 12:5; Ephesians 4:3-10; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Colossians 2:19*

# **The Unity of the True Church in the mystical Body of Christ**

- **What is the Church?**
  - *Commonly*: A particular building, or a specific group or gathering of Christians
  - *Scripture*: church as both a local congregation of believers (Paul's epistles), as well as the universal congregation of true believers – those who have genuine saving faith in Christ
  - Inaugurated at the Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was given to the Christian community (Acts 2:1-12)

# **The Unity of the True Church in the mystical Body of Christ**

- **What is the Church?**
  - **In one sense, it is invisible (Church)**
  - **In spiritual reality, the true Church consists of all genuine believers (past, present and future)**
  - **Not confined to any one particular location**
  - **Universal, and invisible (but visible to God!)**
  - **“...the Lord knows those who are His.” (2 Tim 2:19)**

# **The Unity of the True Church in the mystical Body of Christ**

- **What is the Church?**
  - **In another sense, it is visible (church)**
  - **Local congregations of people who gather regularly for expressed purpose of worshipping God**
  - **Visible**
  - **Not everyone part of this “church” is necessarily a genuine believer (e.g. Hymenaeus & Philetus – 2 Tim 2:17-18)**

# **The Unity of the True Church in the mystical Body of Christ**

- **What is the Church?**
  - **Very important to delineate the universal Church, and the visible church**
  - **RCs: taught no salvation apart from the Catholic church (referring to their physical church)**
  - **Bible: no salvation apart from God's true, universal Church – based on true saving faith in Christ**

# **The Unity of the True Church in the mystical Body of Christ**

- **Whose is the Church?**
  - **Jesus Christ alone builds His Church (Matt 16:18)**
  - **“...the Lord added to their numbers daily those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:47)**

# The Unity of the True Church in the mystical Body of Christ

- **Whose is the Church?**
  - **Christ builds His Church through believers:**
    - Christ gives us each *spiritual gifts* to build up His Church “...until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (Eph 4:13)
    - God Himself “...arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be.” (1 Cor 12:18)



# **The Unity of the True Church in the mystical Body of Christ**

- **What is the purpose of the Church?**
  - 1. Ministry to God: Worship**
    - Paul directs Colossian church to “... sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” (Col 3:16)
    - God has destined and appointed us to Christ “to live for the praise of His glory.” (Eph 1:12)

# **The Unity of the True Church in the mystical Body of Christ**

- **What is the purpose of the Church?**

## **2. Ministry to Believers: Nurture**

- **To nurture believers and build them up to maturity in the faith to “...present every man mature in Christ.” (Col 1:28, Eph 4:12-13)**
- **Discipleship of Christians**

# **The Unity of the True Church in the mystical Body of Christ**

- **What is the purpose of the Church?**

## **3. Ministry to the World: Evangelism & Mercy**

- **Evangelism: primary ministry of the Church to the world**
- **Great Commission: “...make disciples of all nations...” (Matt 28:19)**
- **Mercy: needs to accompany evangelism**
- **Caring for the poor and needy in the name of the Lord**

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- **What is the purpose of the Church?**

## **3. Ministry to the World: Evangelism & Mercy**

- **Biblical emphasis on the poor among believers  
(Acts 11:29, 2 Cor 8:4, 1 John 3:17)**
- **Christ affirms that we need to care for unbelievers  
even if they do not respond with gratitude or  
acceptance of the gospel**
- **“But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without  
expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and  
you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the  
ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is  
merciful.” (Luke 6: 35-36)**

# **The Unity of the True Church in the mystical Body of Christ**

- **Metaphors of the Church in the Bible**
  - **Many metaphors are given to help us appreciate the richness of the Church**
  - **Family:**
    - **“Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity” (1 Tim 5:1-2)**
    - **Compels us to increase in our love for one another**

# **The Unity of the True Church in the mystical Body of Christ**

- **Metaphors of the Church in the Bible**
  - **Bride of Christ:**
    - **Christ and His Church, likened to husbands and wives (Eph 5:32)**
    - **The Church is betrothed (engaged to Christ), awaiting our bridegroom to return, when we will be presented to Him as His bride**
    - **Compels us strive for greater purity and holiness, and greater love and submission to Christ**

# **The Unity of the True Church in the mystical Body of Christ**

- **Metaphors of the Church in the Bible**
  - **“branches on a vine” (John 15:4) → compels us to rest in Him more fully**
  - **“an olive tree” (Rom 11:17-24) and “a field of crops” (1 Cor 3:6-9) → compels us to continue growing in our Christian life**

# **The Unity of the True Church in the mystical Body of Christ**

- **Metaphors of the Church in the Bible**
  - **A new temple...**
    - **not built with literal stones, but built with Christian people who are ‘living stones’ (1 Pet 2:5)**
    - **Built upon the Christ Jesus, the ‘chief cornerstone’**
    - **Compels us to increase our awareness of God’s very presence dwelling in our midst**
  - **A “holy priesthood” that can offer “...spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God.” (1 Pet 2:5)**



# **The Unity of the True Church in the mystical Body of Christ**

- **Metaphors of the Church in the Bible**
  - **AGC Article: the “Body of Christ” in two senses**
    - **1 Cor 12:12-27 → the whole body (hands, ears, eyes, etc.) are taken as the church**
    - **One believer is the ear, another is an eye or foot, etc.**
    - **Christ is not viewed as the head in this case; He is the Lord who is outside the body, and worshiped and glorified by the body**

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- **Metaphors of the Church in the Bible**
  - **AGC Article: the “Body of Christ” in two senses**
    - **Col 2:19, Eph 1:22-23 → Christ is the head and the Church is like the rest of His body, distinguished from the head**
    - **“...we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” (Eph 4:15-16)**
    - **Compels us to increase our interdependence on one another and our appreciation of the diversity of spiritual gifts**

# **The Unity of the True Church in the mystical Body of Christ**

- **Biblical Characteristics of a True church**
  - **Q: What makes a church truly a church?, What is necessary to have a true church?**

# **The Unity of the True Church in the mystical Body of Christ**

- **Biblical Characteristics of a True church**
  - **Early centuries: one world-wide, visible church**
  - **Bishops, local clergymen and church buildings**
  - **Heretics were simply excluded from the church**
  - **Reformation (16<sup>th</sup> Century)**
    - **Question of what constitutes a true church became very important**
    - **Catholic church had become extremely corrupt**
    - **Martin Luther**

# **The Unity of the True Church in the mystical Body of Christ**

- **Biblical Characteristics of a True church**
  - **Scripture warns of false churches:**
    - **To the Corinthian church, warning to stay away from idolatry: “No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons.” – 1 Cor 10:20**
    - **Revelation: assemblies that are really “a synagogue of Satan” (Rev 2:9, 3:9) → Jewish assemblies that were not true Jews with saving faith**

# The Unity of the True Church in the mystical Body of Christ

- **Biblical Characteristics of a True church**
  - **Lutheran statement of faith (Augsburg Confession, 1530):**
    - “...the congregation of saints in which the **gospel is rightly taught** and the **Sacraments rightly administered.**”
  - **John Calvin:**
    - “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”

# **The Unity of the True Church in the mystical Body of Christ**

- **Biblical Characteristics of a True church**
  - **Later confessions added third mark of a church:  
the right of church discipline**
    1. **Proper teaching of God's Word**
    2. **Proper administering of the Sacraments (Baptism &  
Communion)**
    3. **Church discipline**

# **The Unity of the True Church in the mystical Body of Christ**

- **Biblical Characteristics of a True church**
  - **Unity and Purity in the Church**
    - **Within true churches, Christians need to strive for both unity and purity**
    - **It is possible for true churches to function in a manner that is more or less pleasing to God**
    - **Scripture focuses on unity and purity; important to bring the two into proper, Spirit-guided tension**
    - **Cannot have one at the expense of the other**



# **The Unity of the True Church in the mystical Body of Christ**

- **Biblical Characteristics of a True church**
  - **Unity in the Church**
    - **Jesus’ goal for the Church is that “...there shall be one flock, one shepherd” (John 10:16)**
    - **He prays for all future believers “...that they may all be one.” (John 17:21)**
    - **Unity in the Church will be a witness to unbelievers, for Jesus prays “...that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” (John 17:23)**

# **The Unity of the True Church in the mystical Body of Christ**

- **Biblical Characteristics of a True church**
  - **What is the basis for unity in the Church?**
    - **Ephesians 4:3-10**
    - **Christian unity arises from the unity of our God**
    - **Because there is only one God, one Lord and one Spirit, there can logically only be one faith, one hope and one baptism... thus Christians ought to worship with one heart and one accord**
    - **Trinitarian aspect of God reflected in the work of God in the Church**

# **The Unity of the True Church in the mystical Body of Christ**

- **Biblical Characteristics of a True church**
  - **New Testament writers give strong warnings against those who cause divisions:**
    - **“I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.” – Rom 16:17-18**

# **The Unity of the True Church in the mystical Body of Christ**

- **Biblical Characteristics of a True church**
  - **AGC Article of Faith**
    - **This is the mystical Body of Christ**
    - **Christ is the One who binds Christians together by His Spirit → there can be visible and actual unity among members of the Church**

# **The Unity of the True Church in the mystical Body of Christ**

- **Biblical Characteristics of a True church**
  - **Purity in the Church**
  - **Unity cannot come at the expense of Purity**
  - **The Church must be holy, as God is holy**
  - **As already seen, one key criteria of a true church is the proper teaching of God's Word**

# **The Unity of the True Church in the mystical Body of Christ**

- **Biblical Characteristics of a True church**
  - **Outward signs of purity:**
    - **Biblical Doctrine (Titus 1:9)**
    - **Proper use of the Sacraments (1 Cor 11:17-34)**
    - **Right use of church discipline (1 Cor 5:6-7)**
    - **Genuine worship (Eph 5:18-20)**
    - **Effective prayer**
    - **Effective witness (Matt 28:19-20)**

# **The Unity of the True Church in the mystical Body of Christ**

- **Biblical Characteristics of a True church**
  - **Outward signs of purity:**
    - **Effective fellowship**
    - **Biblical church government (1 Tim 3:1-13)**
    - **Spiritual power in ministry (Acts 1:8)**
    - **Personal holiness of life among members**
    - **Care for the poor**
    - **Love for Christ (1 Pet 1:8)**

# **The Unity of the True Church in the mystical Body of Christ**

- **Biblical Characteristics of a True church**
  - Paul urges Christians to “...strive to excel in building up the church” (1 Cor 14:12)
  - Striving for purity and unity is a process
  - All churches will be somewhat impure in various areas
  - No perfect churches until Christ returns



# **The Unity of the True Church in the mystical Body of Christ**

- **Implications for us**
  - **“Christians have not obligation to seek the purest church they can find and stay there, and then leave if an even purer church comes to their attention. Rather, they should find a true church in which they can have effective ministry and in which they will experience Christian growth as well, and then should stay there and minister, continually working for the purity of that church.” – Berkhof, “The History of Christian Doctrines”**

# **Next class**

**The Pre-Millennial Coming of Our Lord**

**February 19, 2006**

# References

- Grudem, W. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p. 763-787.