

YESTERDAY'S TOMORROW
Session Six
Class Leadership Instructions

A. Begin this session with discussion.

1. Ask, "What is the difference between the visible and the invisible church?"

God calls His children to be a visible part of the visible church.

This class will examine this distinction and the implications of it. The invisible church is made up of anyone at any place at any time who is born again through faith in Jesus Christ. The visible church is the local church made up of people who profess faith in Jesus Christ and are committed to that local church fellowship. Be sure that you understand what these two concepts are about.

You may find it helpful to consult the Faith and Order, page 54 for the Bible Fellowship Statement on the difference, between the universal and particular church. This distinction parallels the distinction between visible and invisible.

2. After discussing the question, turn on the tape.

B. The Reformation introduced a problem concerning the Church.

1. The word, reformation, indicates that reform, not creation, was the intention of the reformers.

- a. They did not set out to create a new church.
- b. Their intention was to reform the Church as it then existed.

2. For them, the church was the Church.

- a. Their problem was how people like the pope, whom they considered an evil man, could be part of the church.
- b. To solve their dilemma, they introduced the distinction between the visible and the invisible church.
 - i. According to them, wicked people like the pope were part of the visible church but not part of the invisible church.
 - ii. They recognized that a person might be part of the visible church without having been born again.

3. The Anabaptists saw only one church, the visible church.

- a. Followers of Jesus were to identify with the church, separate from the world and part of a fellowship.
- b. If you did not identify with the church, you were not a believer.
 - i. Baptism was the means by which a believer identified himself as a believer and identified with the church.

- ii. Baptism has always been a significant thing among Mennonites.
4. The Bible Fellowship Church has taken a view of the Church that brings it closer to the Reformation's view of the church.
 - a. The distinction between visible and invisible has been made part of our doctrinal statement.
 - b. We do not tend to make a strong link between baptism and church membership.

Question Notes

1. You will see the earlier statements only recognize the reality of the visible church.
2. I think that the changing view of the church has caused us to de-emphasize baptism and church membership. You will need to think through this question for yourself.
3. The body of Christ is both analogy and reality. As analogy, a body is pictured with many parts which function together. The Bible shows that the church ought to be a dynamic organization where each member has a place and part to play because of his or her spiritual gifts. As reality, the body of Christ is that part of Him that the world can see. A person's body is what you see. The body of Christ is that part of Christ which the world can see.
4. Notice in the 1866 statement that all repentant believers "must be baptized and through the same united with the congregation." A close link between baptism and membership is demanded. Our current statement does not make the same connection.
5. It is hard for some to see the significance of baptism. Baptism is necessary if a person is to obey Christ's call. The word necessary is a significant part of this statement. Necessary must be defined. Consider this statement: Soap is necessary. Soap is not necessary to a good diet but it is necessary if you want to get clean. Baptism is not necessary for salvation but it is for obedience.
6. The significance of church membership is downplayed today. Many people attend our churches without becoming members. If the visible church is part of God's plan, then people ought to become members of a church. See the Faith and Order, pages 55-6 for specifics about church membership benefits and responsibilities.

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SESSION SIX

THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

VIII. Of the Church of Christ.

We believe and confess there is a visible Church of God, namely, those who, as aforementioned, do works meet for repentance, have true faith and receive a true baptism, are made one with God in heaven, and received into fellowship of the saints here upon earth: those we profess are the chosen generation, the royal priesthood, the holy nation, who have the witness that they are the spouse and bride of Christ, nay the children and heirs of everlasting life; a habitation, a

9. Church of Christ.

We believe and confess that there is a visible Church of Christ, consisting of those who, in the appointed way, repent rightly, believe rightly, and who are baptized, united with God in Heaven, and rightly admitted into the Congregation of Saints here upon earth. (1 Cor. 12; 1 Peter 2:9). (Doctrines of Faith, 1866, Evangelical Mennonites, from What Mean These Stones?, p. 29.)

Article XVII- The Church of Christ

The Church of Jesus Christ is composed of all true believers who are designated His "sheep," who hear His voice and follow Him, who know Him and are known by Him and who are a people separate from the world, "a peculiar people." Supreme love to God and love to all men (enemies included), being a true characteristic feature peculiar to them only, they may readily be distinguished from the world. Their ground and pillar of hope is that of the "apostles and

Article XVIII - The Church

The Church is the body of which Christ is the head. All those redeemed by His blood and born of His Spirit are members of that body and are in mystical union and communion with Christ and fellow believers. The Church is universal and local, visible and invisible. The visible Church consists of all those professing faith in Christ. The invisible Church is composed of all those born of the Spirit.

The purpose of the Church is to edify the saints and to evangelize

tabernacle, a dwelling place of God in the Spirit, built upon the foundation of the Apostles and the Prophets, Christ being the chief corner-stone (upon which his Church is built)- this Church of the living God, which He bought, purchased and redeemed with His own precious blood, with which Church, according to His promise, He will always remain to the end of the world as protector and comforter of believers; nay, will dwell with them, walk among them and so protect them, that neither floods nor tempests, nor the gates of hell shall prevail against or overthrow them. This Church is to be distinguished by Scriptural faith, doctrine, love, godly walk or deportment, as also by a

prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief Corner Stone." "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matt. 16:18; John 10:1-5; Eph. 2:20; Titus 2:14). (Articles of Faith, 1936 - Mennonite Brethren in Christ)

the world.

The Head of the Church administers the affairs of His body through overseers chosen by Himself and selected by the people.

A properly constituted local Church must include the ministry of God's Word, the observance of the ordinances, the oversight by officers, and the exercise of discipline. The overseers of the Church are to be prayed for, obeyed and honored. (The Bible Fellowship Church- Articles of Faith)

profitable or fruitful
conversation, use and
observance of the true
ordinances of Christ,
which He strictly
enjoined upon His
followers. (Articles of
Faith, Dortrecht, 1632)

DOCTRINE OF BAPTISM

8. Holy Baptism. Of Holy Baptism we confess, that all repentant believers, who are united to God by faith, regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, and whose names are written in Heaven, upon such scriptural confession of faith and renewal of life according to the command and teaching of Christ, and according to the example and custom of the Apostles, in the exalted name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, must be baptized in water to the burial of their sins, and through the same must be united with the congregation of the saints. Further, we believe in regard to baptism as Menno Simons teaches in his Articles of Faith... (Doctrine of Faith, 1866 - Evangelical Mennonites, What Mean These Stones?, p. 28)

Article XX, Ordinances, Baptism

Water Baptism, the immersion of the believer, is a visible testimony to the work of regeneration and a mark of identification and union with Christ. It has no saving or cleansing power, but it is the answer of a good conscience before God, hence, should only be administered to those who have, by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, realized the forgiveness of sins and have the assurance of acceptance with God. (The Bible Fellowship Church, Articles of Faith)

QUESTIONS

1. Compare these statements about the church. How are they alike? How are they different?
2. How has the concept of the church changed through our history? What difference do these changes make?
3. What do you think is the significance of calling the church the "body of Christ?" See Ephesians 1:22-23, 4:12; 1 Corinthians 12:12, 18.
4. Compare the statements about baptism? How are they different? Do you think that baptism and church membership are related? Has our view of the relationship between baptism and church membership changed? Explain.
5. Do you think it is important to be baptized? Why or why not.
6. Is it important to be a member of a church? Why or why not? What are some of the benefits of being a church member?

[YESTERDAY'S TOMORROW - Session 6]