
Church Verity, Purity, Unity

Systematic Theology III

— Church Verity: What is a true church?

- An older couple says they're doing the home church thing. They stay home, read the Bible, sip coffee, walk the dog, and have an otherwise sweet time of worship and fellowship. Is that gathering a church?
- A college student lives on campus and attends FCA. He goes to their small group in his dorm on Thursdays, and he attends their large group meeting on Tuesdays, which includes preaching and singing. Does he belong to a church?
- A group of believers, about 10, begin meeting in a home to read scripture, worship, and start a church. Is that a church?
- A mormon church gathers on Sunday. They worship, read the bible, conduct a baptism, take communion, pray, and preach. Is that a church?
- It's the year 1501. You're in France, and the only church is the Roman Church. You break from that church, without the blessing of the Pope, and you form a fellowship that does all the churchy things except honor the mother church from whence you came. Is that a church?
- A group from a certain church gathers 20 minutes away from the mother campus, in a warehouse, with live music and the preacher streamed in from the main campus. Is that satellite campus a church?
- A hip church launches a church in the metaverse. As best they can, they do all the churchy things. Is that a church?

– Church Verity: Why must we know?

Because every Christian should belong to a true local church, and their spiritual growth will be truncated if they don't belong to a true local church.

– Church Verity: How do we know?

- The Word of God rightly proclaimed.
- The Sacraments rightly administered.
- Others(?)

— Church Verity: Evaluating examples...

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Church Purity and Unity

Purity

– Unity

Is unity in the church a big deal? Yes! It's a HUGE deal.

- **Unity is what Christ wanted.** John 17:20–21 [20] “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, [21] that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us...”
- **Unity distinguishes us.** John 17:20–21 [20] “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, [21] that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”
- **Unity is what grows us.** Ephesians 4:15–16 “[15] Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, [16] from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

– Navigating Unity and Purity

- Studying the Bible.
- Theological Triage.
 - First-rank doctrines are *essential* to the gospel itself.
 - Second-rank doctrines are *urgent* for the health and practice of the church such that they frequently cause Christians to separate at the level of local church, denomination, and/or ministry.
 - Third-rank doctrines are *important* to Christian theology, but not enough to justify separation or division among Christians.
 - Fourth-rank doctrines are *unimportant* to our gospel witness and ministry collaboration.
- Discovery.
- Avoiding Labels.
- Co-Belligerence.
- Irregularity.

– Unity and Purity Application

- Can you attend a conference with pure speakers *and* heretical speakers?
- Can you listen to or sing the one song you agree with from a band with otherwise questionable theology?
- Can you read a book from a fallen author?
- Scenario: Piper's church had an influx of Lutherans due to some tragic circumstances. Should they welcome them as member although they had been poured as believers? What would you do?

— **More Questions for Discussion** (From Grudem)

- In what areas is your church "purer"? In what areas do you think it is "less pure"?
- Are there marks of a purer church that evangelicals generally in this century have been negligent in emphasizing?
- In your lifetime, what encouraging signs do you see that the church is increasing in purity? What signs do you see that the church is increasing in unity?
- In what ways could your church demonstrate greater unity with other true churches in the same geographical area? What do you think are the barriers to that unity (if any)? In what ways could that unity be expressed? What might be the benefits of such expressions of unity?
- What are some ways in which the worldwide unity of true believers is already being expressed and demonstrated? What would the church around the world look like if there were much greater demonstration of the unity of the church? What would be the result in the world as a whole?
- If a community already has several active and effective evangelical churches, is there any justification for another evangelical denomination to attempt to plant its own church in that community?