

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Video Lecture Series

by Rev. Walter Harinck

STUDY GUIDE

Module 6:
**ECCLESIOLOGY—
THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH**

Lecture 1:
INTRODUCTION



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

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Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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STUDY GUIDE

Module 6

Ecclesiology—the Doctrine of the Church

1. **Introduction to Ecclesiology**
2. What Does the Bible Say About the Church?
3. The Nature of the Church
4. The Authority of the Church
5. The Government of the Church
6. Church Offices
7. Church Discipline
8. The Worship of the Church and the Means of Grace
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Introduction

The theological expression for the Doctrine of the Church is *Ecclesiology*. This term is derived from two Greek words, *ekklesia* and *logic*. *Ekklesia* means “congregation” or “assembly,” and *logia* means “word” or “logic.” The combination of these two words means “the study of the Church.” Ecclesiology is one of the major areas of study in Christian Systematic Theology, and investigates what the Bible teaches about the Church, both universal—all believers in Christ; and local—local gatherings of believers in Christ. Ecclesiology is crucial to understanding God’s purpose for believers in the world today.

Theme: *An introduction to Ecclesiology.*

I. Why Study Ecclesiology?

1. Ecclesiology is a neglected subject.
2. Ecclesiology concerns God’s work of election, regeneration, perseverance, of all the graces of Christ.
3. Scriptural Ecclesiology serves the welfare of the Church.
4. Scriptural Ecclesiology equips men to serve the Church.

Questions:

1. What is the meaning of the word “Ecclesiology”? What two Greek words is it derived from? What do they mean?

2. Why is the Doctrine of the Church a rather neglected subject today? Do you see it neglected in the Scripture?

3. Why is the study of Ecclesiology so important?

II. What is Ecclesiology All About?

1. The Church is the gathering of the people who believe in Christ.
2. The Church is God's most precious possession on earth.
 - a. God's temple.
 - b. The bride of Christ.
 - c. The body of Christ.
 - d. Purchased by Christ's blood (Acts 20:28).
3. Some purposes of the Church, according to Scripture.
4. Biblical roles in Church government:
 - a. A plurality of elders and deacons serve the congregation.
 - b. One elder serves as pastor and preacher to the congregation.
5. Ecclesiology helps us to know our role in the Church.
6. Ecclesiology is a practical study—Acts 2:42.

Questions

1. In what ways is the Church God's most precious possession on earth?

2. What are the main purposes of the Church?

3. What are the biblical roles in Church government?

4. How does the study of Ecclesiology help us understand our roles in the Church?

III. Ecclesiology and Other Topics of Systematic Theology

1. Historic symbol of the Church as a mother—Cyprian
 - a. We receive the gospel through the Church.
 - b. The Word of God and the sacraments feed us.
 - c. Through the Church, the Spirit bears life to all the world.
 - d. The Church is the bride of Christ.
2. More definitions of the Church.
3. The purpose of the Church is to glorify God (Ephesians 3:21).
 - a. Proclaiming God's Word, building up faith.
 - b. Instruction and teaching of God's Word.
 - c. Fellowship of believers.
 - d. Keeping the ordinances of God.
 - e. Advancing and communicating the gospel to the world.

4. The Church and the Doctrine of Election.

- a. Sinners must be united to Christ to be the body of Christ.
- b. The elect are gathered by the Good Shepherd.
- c. There are non-elect hypocrites in the gathered Church.

Questions:

1. Cyprian said, “No one can have God as Father who does not have the Church as mother.” How should we understand this? How do we see this continued throughout history?

2. If the Church is not just a building, what is the definition of the Church?

3. What are the specific purposes of the Church, and the means by which she fulfills them?

4. What is the connection between the Church and the Doctrine of Election? Can we expect all those in the Church to be elect?

5. What did Jesus mean when he said, in Matthew 16:18, “Upon this rock I will build my church.” How is this affected by verse 16?

IV. What the Lord Jesus Says About the Church

“And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”—Matthew 16:16–18.

1. The Roman Catholic Church errs greatly in reading this passage.
 - a. They error in teaching that Jesus made Peter the head of the Church; and that the Popes of Rome are the head of the church as successors of Peter.
2. The Lord Jesus was referring to Peter’s declaration: *“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”*
 - a. Jesus Christ himself is the only foundation of the Church (1 Corinthians 3:11).
 - b. A fallible child of Adam cannot be the foundation of the Church.
 - c. The Apostles were always pointing away from themselves and to Jesus Christ.
3. The Lord Jesus considers the Church his very own: *“I will build my church.”*
4. Satan attacks the Church but can never destroy it: *“the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”*

Questions:

1. What is the great error of the Roman Catholic Church regarding Matthew 16:18?

2. What is the true meaning of Matthew 16:18? What was Jesus responding to from verse 16?

3. What implications are there for believers that Jesus Christ is the only foundation of the Church? Can any mere man ever be the head of the Church? Who does the Church belong to?

4. What are “the gates of hell” that Christians normally face? How does the Lord Jesus comfort us by saying that the gates of hell cannot prevail against the Church?

V. Self-Reflection

Do you think that the subject of the Church has been a neglected subject in your Christian education? What does the Church mean to an individual believer? After studying this lecture, how would you answer a Christian who claims that they can live on their own without belonging to a Church? Who defines the value of the Church?