

## The Visible Church

In the following article **we are going to outline the teaching of the “invisible church”** that people try to trace back to **specific Bible passages. We will discuss these passages in detail. This teaching is far from the teaching of the New Testament.** Not only does the expression “invisible church” **not occur in the Bible**, but not even one thought or statement of Jesus and the apostles allude to it. The church is seen by the world, this is the visible church; **This is the only concept of church Jesus knew.**

“Committed” members of **today’s so-called Christian denominations** are aware that besides them (“believers”, “converted ones”, “devoted ones”) there are also “pseudo-religious ones” or “Sunday’s Christians” in the “church” who have not decided yet for Jesus or will not ever do that. Also the latter ones take part in the community-meetings, they pray, sing and celebrate the Lord’s Supper together with the others although they do not have relationship with Jesus.

How is it possible? Is it all right so, or do we have to do with a situation that contradicts the teaching of the Bible?

The today’s situation is often explained by **the teaching of the so-called “invisible church”**. It can be summarized as follows:

### According to this teaching:

- There is a difference between visible and invisible church.
- The visible church is seen by the outsiders, to this belong both the believing and not believing “Christians”(!). There are lots of such “churches” (Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran and many more diverse small and large “churches”)
- Invisible church, however, is only one. To this belong those “converted” Christians who are together with the unbelievers in the visible churches. Jesus will take them to himself when he returns. At this time the invisible church will become visible.
- The “believers” think about the “unbelievers”, whom they are together with, that only God sees their heart and maybe once they will convert but it is also possible that they will die as unbelievers. They see as their task to be a light for the unbelievers within the “church”, to fulfil in this way an “internal evangelism”.<sup>1)</sup>

They try to trace this teaching back to specific Bible-passages, which we will elaborate later. However, at first we would like to point out, on the base of other passages, **how far the above teaching and practice are from the order of values of the Bible. Only a believer can be the member of a Christian community** and no-one who has not decided for Jesus and is satisfied with his (spiritual) state.<sup>2)</sup>

## The situation of the first community

**About the first community in Jerusalem**, which came to existence after Peter’s sermon at Pentecost we can read the following:

**At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon’s portico. But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem. And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to {their number...} (Acts 5:12-14)**

The fact that no one else dared join them means neither that the Christians formed an isolated community nor that they kept out those who were willing to join them. We can see how eagerly they evangelised and how God increased the community with those who were to be saved (Acts 2:47). **By the others, we have to understand those who did not want to serve Jesus with their**

**whole life.** The Christians' evangelism and life made the people decide. Those who converted through them joined them. It was not so that a multitude of people joined from among whom some really had decided to follow Jesus and others either repented after years or decades, or they practised religious forms till the end of their life. The first Christian community did not know this problem: what to do with the unbelieving members who are present in masses since **it was simply impossible that an unbeliever became the member of the community without repentance.**

If an unbeliever came to the community, everybody assessed the "secrets of his heart".

**Therefore if the whole church assembles together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you. (1 Corinthians 14:23-25)**

**The whole community endeavoured that the "visitor" would understand what he had to repent from.** This process was in one case shorter and in another case longer. If, however, the "visitor" did not want to convert by hearing the assessment of the Christians, there was obviously no base to baptise him. Nor did he join or take part in the fellowship.

It occurred, nevertheless, that through the evangelism **such ones joined as Simon the sorcerer.** It seems that Philip did not realise that, among the many converts, Simon's thinking hadn't changed and thus he succeeded in deluding also the other Christians for some time. This, however, came to light soon and Peter behaved in a very resolute way:

**Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity." But Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me." (Acts 8:18-24)**

We see a similarly **strict acting** also in such cases when some men slipped in the community, who lived or thought in a different way to what Jesus and the apostles taught.

**For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. (Jude 4)**

Jude's aim was to express that these men have no place in the community. **Even though it occurred that somebody came to the community, who did not fit in, from the above we can see that his presence was possible for short time only and it was not at all regarded as normal. The writers of the letters always admonished the communities to fight against and to separate from such persons** (Acts 20:29-31; Matthew 24:23-26; 1Timothy 4:1-3; 6:3-5; 2 Timothy 3:1-9; 1 John 2:18-19).

## **Purity and holiness of the community**

If a member of the community sinned in such a way that he became unworthy of the fellowship with the saints and he did not want to change from his sins in spite of repeated help and admonitions, the

community ceased the fellowship with him: excluded him. This was based on Jesus' command:

**If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen {to you,} take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. (Matthew 18:15-18)**

Concerning treating one as a pagan or a tax collector it ought to be remarked that the Jews did not have fellowship with gentiles because they considered them as unclean (Acts 10:28). They thought in a similar way also about the greedy tax collectors, who compromised with the Romans (Matthew 9:10-11). This categorical rejection was not correct, yet this was the Jewish practice. Jesus bases on this fact showing what the real sense of separation is: the reason for it should not be the social or national state of the other one but the fact that he does not accept help and wants to remain in his sin.

**It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst. For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, {I have decided} to deliver such a one to Satan<sup>3</sup> for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump {of dough?} Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are {in fact} unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. (1 Corinthians 5:1-7)**

Some verses later Paul goes on like this:

**But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler – not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within {the church?} But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves. (1 Corinthians 5:11-13)**

Somebody might ask: "Where is mercy here? Where is patience? Did not Paul have hope that God would still open the heart of this sinner?" Yes he did!<sup>4</sup> However, even though he considered it as possible he binds belonging to the community to severe conditions. **God's community cannot have fellowship with the one who clings to sin.** However, if he later repents he can return to the community with the new decision that he wants to live a holy, pure life.

**The first Christian communities guarded their purity in this way. In this way it was possible that there weren't unbelievers among them.** If it had not been, so how could Paul call his addressees saints? (E.g. 1 Corinthians 1:1-3; 2 Corinthians 1:1-2)<sup>5</sup>

**In the New Testament the term "saint"** has the same meaning as "Christian" (Acts 9:13; Ephesians 5:3; Philippians 4:21-22; Hebrews 3:1). **All Christians are saints** and only those can belong to the church who let them be sanctified and let **God reign in their life** (Hebrews 12:14; Ephesians 5:5; Galatians 5:19-21). Not sinless people are meant (this is visible especially in the letters to the Corinthians) but such people "who are sanctified in Christ Jesus", who accepted Jesus'

forgiveness and redemption. Even if they happen to sin they will listen to the admonition and want to change. The whole church and each member of it fights against sin. **A Christian cannot live a double-life.** He cannot serve God while his heart is in the world. In the same way **neither can the church give room to sinners, who do not want to change** (Matthew 6:24; Matthew 10:38-39; James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17; John 12:25-26; 1 John 2:4-6).

**If Christians do not separate themselves from worldly people** but have fellowship with them, they show a false image to the outsiders. Furthermore, they deceive also those “religious ones” who consider themselves Christians (what is understandable from the above). Finally, they themselves also break away from God.

**Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, “I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,” says the Lord. “and do not touch what is unclean; And I will welcome you. And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,” Says the Lord Almighty. (2 Corinthians 6:14-18)**

God can receive as his children those who separate themselves from the unbelievers.<sup>6</sup> Also the **meaning of the Greek word *ecclesia* means** a community that is called out. This hints at the custom that the messengers of ancient Greek towns used to call out the citizens from their houses for the official assemblies. Thus, also the messengers of the Gospel call God’s community out from the world.

We can see from the above that **the practice of the first Christian communities was totally different from that of the nowadays’ denominations.** Today everybody can become a member of the “church” (after some formalities) and usually exclusion is not practised either. For these things, a more intensive fellowship would be necessary: they should deal more with one another, they should follow each other’s life with attention. The thinking of today’s religious people is like this: “That is right but: Who has time for this nowadays?” “We live in the 21st century.” (That means: **Who has time in the 21st century to fulfil Christ’s command?!**)

## The parable of the wheat and weed

The wrong practice, however, did not begin just in our days, and so also the theoretical support of it (= the teaching of the invisible church) came to existence already early. The process was matched by the (parallel) profaning of the church. As the community backed away more and more from God and the holy life so its sensitivity against sin decreased. Already **in the 4th century, in the Donatistic controversy**, Augustine misused a Biblical passage to uphold the readmission of apostatised bishops into the church: the interest **created the false teaching.**

**Augustine claimed, on the base of the parable of wheat and weed** (Matthew 13:24-30.36-43) and **the parable of the net** (Matthew 13:47-50), **that the community is a “mixed body” (corpus permixtum), in which the evil coexists with the righteous.**

**Jesus presented another parable to them, saying: The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ And he said to them, ‘An enemy has done this!’ The slaves said to him, ‘Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?’ But he said, ‘No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. ‘Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the**

**harvest I will say to the reapers, First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn. (Matthew 13:24-30)**

**Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering {fish} of every kind; and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good {fish} into containers, but the bad they threw away. So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 13:47-50)**

**Augustine identified the field and the net with the community disregarding that Jesus himself interpreted his own parable in a different way!!!**

**Then He left the crowds and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field." And He said, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, and the field is the world; and {as for} the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil {one;} and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear." (Matthew 13:36-43)**

**According to v. 38 the field is identical to the world. The one, who refers the field to the community on the base of the parable about the wheat and weed, acknowledges that his community is one with the world. Paul, however, writes to the visible community of Philippi as follows:**

**so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain. (Philippians 2:15-16)**

**The community is in the world, it lights in it and therefore it cannot be identical with it!**

If in Matthew 13:41 the Son of Man nevertheless collects the evildoers from his kingdom, then – considering the facts above – **the kingdom of the Son of Man we should refer to the created world** – since Jesus is Lord of the whole world – and not to the community.

Similarly, neither does the parable of the net refer to the community. Just because of the fact that he [Jesus] compares the kingdom of heaven with the net it does not necessarily follow that the net means the community. In other parables he compares the kingdom of heaven to a king, a merchant etc. Of course nobody thinks that the king or the merchant would symbolise the community. **Jesus used the expression "kingdom of heaven" when he wanted to explain something concerning God's Kingdom.** "God's Kingdom" (in Matthew: "Kingdom of Heaven") meant for the Jews the kingdom of the Messiah. Jesus mainly wanted to correct the wrong images about it with his parables.

The Jews in Jesus's time expected from the messiah to act as a glorious king and just judge: to deliver his people from the foreign oppression and to extinguish the evil from the earth (cf. the words of John the Baptist: Luke 3,7-9). Jesus wanted to correct this thinking: he had not come to

reign as an earthly king or to execute judgement. The judgement will be on the last day and till then good and evil have to coexist in the world. **His kingdom is a spiritual one that has overcome the world in a spiritual way:**

**These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)**

## Other misinterpreted passages

### 2 Timothy 2:16-21

**But avoid worldly {and} empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, {men} who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some. Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness." Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these {things,} he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.**

The house mentioned by Paul (v. 20) is identified with the church and the articles for noble and ignoble purposes are usually referred to the believers and unbelievers respectively who are together in the community.

**It is correct to refer the house to the church** since also the context is about the life of the community: there are Gnostic false teachers who should be kept clear of because their teaching spreads like gangrene and they disturbed already many in their faith. However, who are the articles for noble and ignoble purpose? In the Greek text the words time = honour, worth, value (NIV: noble purposes) and atimia = dishonour, the antonym of time (NIV: ignoble purposes) are used (they derive from the verbs timao = to appreciate, to honour and atimadzo = not to appreciate). Also in 1 Corinthians 12:23 Paul uses a word derived from time: atimoteros = more despised, NIV: less honourable. This passage may help us come closer to what Paul meant in 2 Timothy 2:20 by articles for noble and ignoble purposes:

**For even as the body is one and {yet} has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:12-13)**

**And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those {members} of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, whereas our more presentable members have no need {of it}. But God has {so} composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that {member} which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but {that} the members may have the same care for one another. (1 Corinthians 12:21-25)**

**Here the presentable and the unrepresentable** (weaker, less honourable) **members designate unambiguously Christians** because this passage has the very message that every Christian is worthy in the same measure through the Holy Spirit who dwells in him, independently of his gifts. As well as every limb of the body is connected to the head and obeys it, so **every member of the**

**community is in connection with Christ.** This passage in itself annihilates Augustine's fabrication of "corpus permixtum" (**the body is only so far mixed as different members have different gifts or as they are on different levels in obedience, and not because some do, some do not have relationship with God**) but it helps also understand the meaning of the "articles" in 2 Timothy 2. **The articles for "noble" and the "ignoble" purposes do not designate the believing and not believing members but** - on the base of the context - **those members who stand firm in their faith and in the teaching and those who are weaker and can be influenced by false teachers.** To cleanse oneself from "these" (in Greek the demonstrative pronoun: apo touton is used that literally means: "from these") is a similar thought to what verse 19 says: "everyone must turn away from wickedness...". So **the demonstrative pronoun "these" does not refer to** the articles for ignoble purposes (neither those can think so who believe in the teaching of invisible church because they do not want to separate themselves from the unbelievers in the church) but to **the wrong teachings and teachers.** The "articles for ignoble purposes" may have started to give in to the influence but if they separate themselves from the influence of the wrong teachers, they can become "instruments for noble purposes made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work".

## 1 Corinthians 15:34

**Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak {this} to your shame.**

In the context, **the topic is the correct image of resurrection.** Several Christians in Corinth - giving room to the influence of the Greek spirit - thought about resurrection in a wrong way (instead of resurrection in body just a further existence of spirit). Paul designates this thinking as far from God. He who thinks in a false way in this point, actually does not have correct image about God. Paul admonishes them with such strong words (there are some who are ignorant of God) in order to show: they cannot remain in this conception, they must change it. From the initial greeting of the letter (quoted above), however, it is clear that in **the Corinthian community everyone "knew" God, had relationship with him.**

**God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Corinthians 1:9)**

## Matthew 25:1-13

**Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and {began} to sleep. But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet {him.}' Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the prudent, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the prudent answered, 'No, there will not be enough for us and you {too;} go instead to the dealers and buy {some} for yourselves.' And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. Later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' But he answered, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.' Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.**

The foolish virgins are really together with the wise ones but why would the parable speak about believers and unbelievers who live together in the church? Above we have thoroughly proved that the Bible does not know such a situation. The parable could be thought provoking for both the Jews who listened to Jesus but had not repented and the disciples who followed Jesus. The Jews thought

that they all would reign together with the messiah when he comes because they were the chosen nation. The parable makes it clear that not all who think so can take part in the wedding (not all can enter his kingdom). There is a condition for entering it: one must be ready. Being ready in the case of the Jews could mean the acceptance of the one who was sent by God, that is, Jesus. The parable could be an admonition also for the disciples: it is not enough to start with Jesus – they have to persevere with him alertly till the end. It is valid for the church, too. Also in the church there can be such Christians who repented and gave their life to God but later they apostatise and abandon Him. (There are several passages which speak about apostasy in the New Testament, e.g.: Hebrews 6:4-8; 10:24-31) If somebody, however, decides not to live with God he has no place in the community anymore.

## John 10:14-16

**I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock {with} one shepherd.**

Jesus speaks about the one flock in future tense. That is why many people understand by the flock those believers whom Jesus will gather together from the diverse visible Christian denominations on the last day: then the believers scattered in many different flocks would be united in one flock. But **why should we refer the future tense to the last day?** It can mean any other later event. Jesus speaks about those who are “of this sheep pen” and those who are not. From the first sheep pen he had already called the sheep and the other sheep he would call later. Those sheep that listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd would form one flock. According to the theory of invisible church what would the first sheep pen refer to? To which church? **How could Jesus have spoken about church at all when no church existed yet?** In verse 16. he uses the specific demonstrative pronoun “this”: **“from this sheep pen”**. **This sheep pen has to symbolise Israel** since Jesus called the sons of Israel during his earthly ministry:

**These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: “Do not go in {the} way of {the} Gentiles, and do not enter {any} city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ (Matthew 10:5-7)**

**The other sheep refer logically to the gentiles.** Jesus wanted hint that there were people also among the gentiles who would listen to his call. The disciples experienced it indeed after some years. This experience is summarised by Paul in the letter to the Ephesians:

**Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision,” {which is} performed in the flesh by human hands — {remember} that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both {groups into} one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, {which is} the Law of commandments {contained} in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, {thus} establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. And he came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household... (Ephesians 2:11-19)**

Consequently, the unification of the sheep of the two sheep pens took place already that time in the visible churches. Hence, it is clear that **there is no base to deduce from John 10 the teaching of invisible church.**

## Summary

Without examining other Bible-passages, we can state that **this teaching does not occur in the Bible** (not even the expression “invisible church”). **Not even one thought or statement of Jesus and the apostles alludes to it. Only conscious misinterpreting of biblical passages and complete disregard of the truth of the Bible can maintain it.**

**Even if there are differences between the members of the Christian church in regard of maturity in faith or obedience in one item each member is equal: he has relationship with the Head, Christ** (1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 4:15-16). **This church is seen by the world; this is the visible church, as also Jesus knew only the concept of visible church:**

**A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34-35)**

**...I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. (John 17:23)**

**How should the world judge if not on the base of what it sees: on the base of the visible church?** The community of Christians always has to be aware of this responsibility. **A community that lives as “mixed body” is not the body of Christ and does not fulfil the duty that Jesus entrusted to his church.** Christians live in a deep fellowship based on the teachings of Christ. Only in this way, their testimony about Christ’s love can be authentic in front of the world.

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### Footnotes:

1. J. Calvin formulated the teaching of invisible church as follows: “I have observed that the Scriptures speak of the Church in two ways. Sometimes when they speak of the Church they mean the Church as it really is before God – the Church into which none are admitted but those who by the gift of adoption are sons of God, and by the sanctification of the Spirit true members of Christ. In this case it not only comprehends the saints who dwell on the earth, but all the elect who have existed from the beginning of the world. Often, too, by the name of Church is designated the whole body of mankind scattered throughout the world, who profess to worship one God and Christ, who by baptism are initiated into the faith; by partaking of the Lord’s Supper profess unity in true doctrine and charity, agree in holding the word of the Lord, and observe the ministry which Christ has appointed for the preaching of it. In this Church there is a very large mixture of hypocrites, who have nothing of Christ but the name and outward appearance: of ambitious, avaricious, envious, evil-speaking men, some also impurer lives, who are tolerated for a time, either because their guilt cannot be legally established, or because due strictness of discipline is not always observed. Hence, as it is necessary to believe the invisible Church, which is manifest to the eye of God only, so we are also enjoined to regard this Church which is so-called with reference to man, and to cultivate its communion.” (Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book 4, Chapter 1)
2. Of course it is not about inquirers. See the explanation to 1 Corinthians 14.
3. It is not that Satan would have a special power to torture the sinner but that he who is not in the community is in the world where – according to the words of Jesus – Satan is the prince (John 14:30). The confrontation with the world can lead – in an optimal case – to the destruction of the flesh and to the abandoning the sinful attitude.
4. This is clearly visible from 1 Corinthians 5:5: “so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”
5. A similar way of addressing we can see also in other letters: Romans 1:1-7; Philippians 1:1;

Colossians 1:1-4; 2 Peter 1:1-4

6. See also Peter's Pentecost-sermon: Acts 2:40: "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation!"

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