

# Life Together...



CALLED INTO  
THE COMMUNITY  
OF FAITH

## Ecclesiology 101 1 Peter 2:9-10

Today we enter into a 15-sermon series on the doctrine of the Church or ecclesiology. In the message this morning I want to supply you with four reasons why I have decided to spend nearly five months on this subject. The first reason is because our very survival as believers is tied to the Church. The second reason is because the Church is God's idea and creation. Third, speaking to this doctrine is timely because of our distorted vision of the Church. Fourth, I am compelled to linger over this doctrine on account of the inherent glory of the Church. The point I want to lodge in your mind today is this: when it comes to the Church, to think correctly is to think corporately (*a unified body of individuals*).

**Our very survival as believers is tied to the Church.** In his book *Band of Brothers* historian Stephen Ambrose recounts the history of Easy Company. Easy Company was part of a parachute infantry regiment serving in Europe in WWII. From July 1942 through the end of the war in 1945 Easy Company suffered 150% casualties. Ambrose quotes J. Glenn Gray's classic work *The Warriors*: "Organization for a common and concrete goal in peacetime organizations does not evoke anything like the degree of comradeship commonly known in war ... At its height, this sense of comradeship is an ecstasy ... Men are true comrades

only when each is ready to give up his life for the other, without reflection and without thought of personal loss” (p. 22).

Such was the case with Easy Company. In basic training and jump school, “brought together by their misery, held together by their cadence counts, singing, and common experiences, [the men] were becoming a family” (p. 21). Their first action was on D-Day. “The paratroopers were getting shot at in their planes, as they descended, and on the ground” (see photo footnote). In the months and years that followed theirs was to share “the [sight and ] smell of death, the bodies, the destruction, the killing, the danger” (p. 111), the disease, the sleeplessness, the hunger, the cold, the filth, the thrill and the terror. “The result of these shared experiences was a closeness unknown to all outsiders. Comrades are closer than friends, closer than brothers. Their relationship is different from that of lovers. Their trust in, and knowledge of, each other is total” (p. 21). Private Kurt Gabel put it like this: “ ‘This sharing ... evolved never to be relinquished, never to be repeated ... they would literally insist on going hungry for one another, freezing for one another, dying for one another’ ” (p. 21).

In the case of Easy Company their comradeship, their togetherness was not a matter of convention or convenience. Their brotherhood, their fellowship, their life together was a matter of survival. Their very lives were at stake and they needed; they depended upon one another. The men of Easy Company learned to act and even think as a unit (see p. 21).

What was true of Easy Company is true of the Church. Like the men of Easy Company we must learn to act and even think as a unit. Our unity, our

fellowship, our bond is a matter of survival on several levels. When it comes to the Church, to think correctly is to think corporately.

**The Church is God's idea and creation.** Jerry Bridges reminds us, "God does not save groups; He saves individual people. Each of us must respond individually in repentance and faith to the gospel invitation. But though God saves us as individuals, He immediately incorporates us into the Body of Christ (Romans 12:5; I Corinthians 12:13). Every believer of every nation, race, or station in life is a member of that Body. From all over the world, God has drawn together a spiritual community whose members share a common life in Christ" (*The Crisis of Caring*, p.63).

Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck makes the same point in theological terms. "Christ [not only] brings the benefits of calling and regeneration, faith and repentance, justification and adoption as children, renewal and sanctification, into being in His believers on earth, [but He also] sustains and reinforces them ... He grants all [these] benefits by means of His Word and His Spirit, but ... He also grants them only in the fellowship which binds all the believers together. He does not distribute them to single individuals, nor to a small group of persons, but He gives them out to a great multitude, to the whole of the new humanity, which was chosen in Him by the Father from before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). The believer, therefore, never stands apart by himself; he is never alone" (*Our Reasonable Faith*, pp. 514).

We hear the same thing from one of the great Reformed confessions, the Heidelberg Catechism. "I believe that the Son of God, through his Spirit and Word, out of the entire human race, from the beginning of the world to its end,

gathers, protects, and preserves for himself a *community* chosen for eternal life and united in true faith" (Q. 54). Beloved, not one single believer is outside this spiritual body or company. If the Spirit of God has not placed a man into the body of Christ, that man is not a Christian. Surely, this is what the Westminster Confession means when it says that outside of this body, this company "there is no ordinary possibility of salvation" (WCF, *Of the Church*, XXV, II). When it comes to the Church, to think correctly is to think corporately.

Indeed, the Church is a community, a company of people. We get our primary meaning of the Church from a single Greek word, *ekklesia*. In its Greek setting *ekklesia* designates an assembly (Acts 19:32, 39). However, when the writers of the New Testament used the word "*ekklesia*" in the back of their minds was always its Hebrew counterpart, *qahal*. *Qahal* referred to the people of God, the congregation, assembled before Him (Deut. 9:10, 10:4, 18:16; Ps. 22:22, 25; Acts 7:38). So *ekklesia* refers to an assembly of the people of God. In addition, *ekklesia* is derived from the verb *kalein* which means *to call* or *to call out*. So the Church is a collective term embracing the whole company of the called out ones (i.e., saints, elect, chosen, beloved), those dead in sin effectually summoned by the Holy Spirit, granted new life in Jesus Christ, and placed into the new community of faith. When it comes to the Church, to think correctly is to think corporately.

A unit such as Easy Company may be constituted by a draft. It may be composed of men who have enlisted or volunteered. It may be formed from men whose names or numbers were drawn in a lottery. The means by which God forms the Church is by sovereign and effectual calling. This is certainly the heart of our central passage for the day. Let's read I Peter 2:9-10 together.

<sup>NAS</sup> **1 Peter 2:9**...But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for *God's* own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; <sup>10</sup> for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

The great Puritan theologian William Ames wrote, "The church is first of all constituted by calling, whence both its name and definition. The church is indeed the company of men who are called" (*The Marrow of Theology*, p. 175).

We want to look more closely at this company of called out ones taking our lead from the great Reformed confessions - Belgic, Westminster, and Heidelberg.

From these we learn first that the Church is both militant and triumphant. You are the Church militant. Today, you reside on the earth as saints and, while here, you contend for the true faith (Jude 3), you resist the devil (I Peter 5:9), you battle sin (Rom. 8:13), and you seek to advance the gospel (Phil. 1:5). One day you will join the Church triumphant in heaven where "the strife is over, the battle is won, and the saints reign with Christ forever and ever" (Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 565). Indeed, the Church triumphant is often referred to as the Church at rest (Rev. 14:13).

Second, the church is both visible and invisible. Reformed theology has applied this distinction to the militant Church, the Church as it exists on earth. At the most basic level the invisible Church consists of all who truly possess saving faith in Jesus Christ. It is called invisible not because the members of it are ghosts or stealth disciples but because "it is impossible to determine infallibly

who does and who does not belong to her” (Berkhof, p.566). God alone can distinguish whether or not a man’s faith and piety are genuine.

I took Julia out for her birthday dinner last Monday evening. On the way home, driving east on I-20, we noticed a rainbow. The colors were as beautiful and pronounced as either of us had seen in a long time. Light is made up of that full spectrum of colors. Ordinarily we cannot see the colors but in that rainbow those colors became observable, identifiable. It is the profession and outward obedience of individual believers as well as the distinct organized communities into which these believers are gathered that makes the invisible Church visible in the world.

The visible Church is composed of all who profess to believe that they are saved by grace through the blood of Jesus Christ, as well as the children of those who make this profession” (Brian Habig, *The Enduring Community*, p. 50). Included in this visible company are those who are not truly saved, those who have never known the life-giving grace of God but who, nevertheless, *profess* to believe the doctrines of the faith and conform to the external rites of the Church.

Third, this visible church is both manifest and hidden. “The manifest church is found where a greater number of saints exist and profession is freer and more public” (Ames, p. 178). The Church here in America is an excellent historical example. “The hidden church is found where the number is fewer and profession less open. This is likely to occur in time of heresies, persecutions, or godless morality” (Ames, p. 178).

**Our distorted vision of the Church.** Author Brian Habig contends that the Church suffers from “a clouded understanding of herself” (*The Enduring Community*, p. 108). On occasion when flying I have taken off in rain under a heavy overcast. I remember one particular flight from Nashville to Dallas. Shortly after take off the plane entered the soup of thick clouds. I couldn’t see the earth below or the sky above. Gradually as the plane climbed higher patches of blue appeared. The clouds gradually thinned until the plane eventually broke above them into the brilliant sunlight that had been obscured before. We leveled off and it was like skimming over an ocean of cotton balls. I want to mention two “isms” that I believe have clouded or distorted our vision of the Church. One is consumerism. The other, individualism.

Politically, consumerism is rooted in our capitalist, free-market economy. Theologically I believe consumerism has emerged with renewed vitality as a result of popular church growth principles. Brian Habig says, “... churches that are openly consumer-driven tend to adopt a willingness to do whatever it takes not only to build a new customer base (i.e., create new churchgoers) but also to maintain customer loyalty (i.e., keep churchgoers coming back)” (p. 14). And so to this end many churches rename themselves shedding denominational labels. They relocate to gain market visibility and accessibility. They dumb-down their language by editing out standard theological terms. They disguise their identity by cleansing the place of worship of all the symbols that distinguish it as Christian.

Indeed, worship itself – the very heart and soul of our life together - has been re-invented with the consumer in mind. Adoring love of God springing from the proclamation of deep and rich doctrine has been crowded out by sentimental

love worked up by praise music. The rich corporate confessions of sin and faith have been hidden away as useless antiques that only a grandmother could love. Challenging and stirring theological preaching has been supplanted by practical principles for living. The historical emphases on faith *in* God and obedience *to* God have been trumped by an emphasis on intimacy *with* God. Participation of the many has been given the old heave-ho in favor of performance by the few. The grace of God no longer comes through the Word and Sacrament but through inward experience. The common, unifying, covenantal worship of the inter-generational family of God is giving way to worship crafted to the ages and tastes of the consumer. The college kids have their own worship service. The youth have their worship service. Those who want a “traditional” service can gather at 9:30 AM. Those who want a “contemporary” service can gather at 11:00 AM. Those who are too busy to worship on the Lord’s Day can come on Saturday night. I’ll guarantee you that these practices are not driven by theological or Biblical considerations but by pure pragmatism. Do you see what’s happening? Donald Bloesch says it rightly. “Modern Protestantism is faced with a paradigm shift of immense proportions (*The Church*, p. 138). Much of present day worship represents a marked deviation from historic Christian worship. “It is a difference not only in form and method but also in content” (*The Church*, p. 139).

But what about individualism? Individualism stresses the *independent* initiative, action, and interests of a person. Politically, individualism is rooted in democracy which is simply government by the people. Theologically, individualism has its roots in the pietist and revivalist movements with their emphasis on personal decision and personal faith. Richard Lovelace says, “In this model of the Christian life the individual believer is connected to the source



of grace like a diver who draws his air supply from the surface through a hose. He is essentially a self-contained system cut off from the other divers working around him. If their air supply is cut off, this does not damage him nor can he share with them the air that he receives. The situation would be no different if he were working alone a hundred miles away" (*Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, p. 167-68 as quoted by Habig, p. 60). This mentality is behind the idea of the Church as a volunteer organization. It is behind our scant regard for church history and the idea of creeds and confessions of faith. It is behind our resistance to church discipline, our freelance approach to ministry, our objections to a written membership covenant, and on it goes. However, to think correctly it to think corporately.

**I am compelled to linger over this doctrine on account of the inherent glory of the Church.** The Church is the outworking of God's eternal plan (II Tim. 1:9). The Church must not, indeed, cannot be relegated to some backwater of theological study. You see, "the church is the primary means through which God accomplishes His plan in the world. It is His ordained instrument for calling the lost to Himself and the context in which He sanctifies those who are born into His family" (Wayne Mack, *Life in the Father's House*, p. 6). "The church represents the fulfillment spiritually and institutionally of the Father's grand design for believers in world history" (*Integrative Theology*, p. 241). In human affairs, the importance of a particular event is reflected in the amount of time, care, and effort given to planning it. Weddings take months to plan. People spend years dreaming about and planning special trips. Beloved, shall you dismiss as commonplace that which has occupied the mind and heart of God for all eternity?

The Church is the substance of the heavenly Father's promise to the Son. Gifts are expressions of love. We give precious things to those dearest to us. What would God the Father and God the Son exchange to express their mutual love? The answer is, they give each other the Church. In John 6:37 Jesus said, "*All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me.*" In John 17:24 He prayed, "*Father, I desire that they also, whom Thou has given Me, be with Me where I am, in order that they may behold My glory.*" "Every individual ever redeemed – everyone ever given the gift of faith, forgiven, and justified before God by grace – is a love-gift from the Father to the Son" (MacArthur, Onward, p. 9) ... "Now this eternal promise involved a reciprocal promise from the Son to the Father. Redemption was by no means the Father's work alone. In order to accomplish the divine plan, the Son would have to go into the world as a member of the human race and pay the penalty for sin. And the Son submitted completely to the Father's will (p. 10) ... [The Church, then is] also the Son's expression of love to the Father" (p. 11) ... I Corinthians 15:24 says, *Then comes the end, when [the Son] hands over the kingdom to God and the Father.* "In other words, when the Son brings the Church to glory, and the Father gives it to the Son as His eternal love-gift, then the Son will turn around and give everything, including Himself, back to the Father" (MacArthur, Onward, p. 14). "All this means that the Church is something so monumental, so vast, so transcendent, that our poor minds can scarcely begin to appreciate its significance in the eternal plan of God. Our salvation as individuals is almost insignificant. The real aim of God's plan is not merely to get us to heaven. But the drama of our salvation has an even grander purpose: it is an expression of eternal love within the Trinity. We're only the gift" (MacArthur, Onward, p. 12). To think correctly, is to think corporately.

The Church is the treasured possession of Jesus Christ. We cherish those things that cost us dearly. “How precious is the Church? It demanded the highest price ever paid for anything” (MacArthur, *Onward*, p. 15). We learn in Acts 20:28 that Jesus *purchased* the Church *with His own blood* (see also I Cor. 6:20; I Pet. 1:18-19). How shall we be indifferent toward or casual about that which cost the Savior so dearly? For the Church the One who was rich became poor (II Cor. 8:9). For the Church the One who dwelt in unapproachable light came into the world as a bondservant (Phil. 2:7). For the Church this One submitted Himself to the agony and shame of the cross (Phil. 2:8).

The Church is permanent. Everything else in this world – our jobs, our hobbies, our homes, our accomplishments - is like one of those large, elaborate sand castles that vanish with the tide. How many times has this counsel been given, “I wouldn’t invest in this or that. There’s no future in it.” And yet we continue to pour outrageous amounts of our time, our energies, and our affections into those things destined to pass away. But “[God] has pledged that the Church ... will have a visible being and testimony in this world as long as the world itself shall last” (MacArthur, *Onward*, p. 6). Indeed, it will be the Church, the Bride of Christ, that will endure for all eternity.

Guys, were you ever so enamored with a girl in high school or college that you were looking out for her almost everywhere you went? Just seeing her in the hall or walking across the campus made your heart beat a little faster. With that in mind, listen to this statement by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In a sermon he once noted that the word “church” to Protestants ‘has the sound of something infinitely commonplace, more or less indifferent and superfluous, that does not make their

heart beat faster; something with which a sense of boredom is so often associated' " (see MacArthur, *Onward, Christian Soldiers*, p. 1).

In Ephesians 5:29 we learn that Christ *nourishes and cherishes* the Church. In other words, Jesus nourishes the Church by constantly providing for her and building her up. Jesus cherishes the Church like a mother who tenderly and affectionately gives warmth, comfort, protection, and security to her child. Shall we not take our lead from Jesus Himself? Shall we not seek to nourish and cherish the Church as well? Beloved, the design *of* and, indeed, my prayer *for* this series is that you grow to cherish the Church with every faculty of your being - that you cherish her with your mind as you come to a deeper apprehension *of* the Church; that you cherish her with your heart as you come to a deeper affection *for* the Church; that you cherish her with your will as you come to a deeper attachment *to* the Church as expressed in membership and ministry.

We commit this series into the care of Him whose body was broken and whose blood was shed to purchase the Church.

# Life Together...



CALLED INTO  
THE COMMUNITY  
OF FAITH

## Why Study the Church?

### 1 Peter 2:9-10

The doctrine of the Church ... *ecclesiology*.

Why I have decided to spend nearly five months on this subject ... *four reasons*.

#### **Point :**

when it comes to the Church, to think correctly is to think \_\_\_\_\_  
(*a unified body of individuals*).

#### **Reason #1**

Our very \_\_\_\_\_ as believers is tied to the Church.

#### *Band of Brothers*

Like the men of Easy Company we must learn to act and even \_\_\_\_\_ as  
a unit.

#### **Reason #2**

The Church is \_\_\_\_\_ idea and creation.

*Jerry Bridges*

*Herman Bavink*

*The Heidelberg Catechism*

We get our primary meaning of the Church from a single Greek word, *ekklesia*.

Hebrew counterpart ... *qahal*

*ekklesia* is derived from the verb *kalein* which means *to call* or *to call out*.

So the Church is a \_\_\_\_\_ term embracing the whole \_\_\_\_\_ of  
the \_\_\_\_\_ ones (i.e., *saints, elect, chosen, beloved*); those dead in sin  
effectually summoned by the Holy Spirit, granted new life in Jesus Christ, and  
placed into the new community of faith.

<sup>NAS</sup> **1 Peter 2:9**...But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a  
people for *God's* own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him  
who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; <sup>10</sup> for you once  
were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received  
mercy, but now you have received mercy.

**the Church is both militant and \_\_\_\_\_**

**the Church is both visible and \_\_\_\_\_**

the invisible Church consists of all who truly \_\_\_\_\_ saving faith in

Jesus Christ. The visible Church is composed of "all who \_\_\_\_\_ to  
believe that they are saved by grace through the blood of Jesus Christ, as well as  
the children of those who make this profession"

(Brian Habig, *The Enduring Community*).

**this visible Church is both manifest and \_\_\_\_\_**

### **Reason #3**

our distorted \_\_\_\_\_ of the Church

Consumerism  
Individualism

### **Reason #4**

the inherent \_\_\_\_\_ of the Church

The Church is the outworking of God's eternal \_\_\_\_\_ (II Tim. 1:9).

The Church is the substance of the heavenly Father's \_\_\_\_\_ to the Son.

The Church is the treasured \_\_\_\_\_ of Jesus Christ.

The Church is \_\_\_\_\_.

The design *of* and, indeed, my prayer *for* this series is that you grow to cherish  
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**apprehension** *of* the Church;

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