

Church Live Re-Visited: Session One - Part 3

by Ron Bailey

Ron Bailey explores the biblical understanding of the Church, emphasizing its nature as a fellowship of believers called out for a divine purpose.

Duration: 21:20

Scripture: Exodus 24:8, Matthew 16:18, Acts 7:38, Romans 10:13, 1 Corinthians 1:2, Ephesians 3:14-15, Hebrews 9:14

Topics: "Church Sanctification", "Ecclesia Fellowship"

Description

This sermon delves into Paul's perception of the Church in 1 Corinthians, emphasizing the concept of sanctification and being called out for a purpose. It explores the idea of Christians calling upon the name of the Lord, receiving God's grace, and functioning together as a church. The universal application of Paul's message to all churches is highlighted, along with the importance of fellowship and understanding the true meaning of 'church'. The sermon also touches on the historical context of the word 'ecclesia' and its significance in the Old Testament and the establishment of the new covenant church through Jesus Christ.

Transcript

One or two ideas of Paul's perception of what is happening in the Church. Not just the historic event, not just the narrative, but what is happening in the Spirit. This is what he says here, in 1 Corinthians.

Paul called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, in Sosthenes the brother, to the Church of God, which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus. This is a key truth of Paul's understanding of the Church. Sanctification, it doesn't mean holiness, but before that, it actually means separating something, cutting it out of, imagine a big cake, and you cut out a section that you set apart for a particular purpose, and a particular use, and that's really the idea of sanctification.

And this group of people have been called out of, that's ekklesia, which is the word for church, ek means out of, and kaleo is called, so ekklesia technically means a called out group. So this is a called out group, but they're called out for a purpose, and this is what Paul says here. They're sanctified in Christ Jesus, and whereas earlier he said he was called as an apostle, he says they are called as saints.

This is their destiny, this is their mission in life, they are to be saints, that's to say holy ones, they are called to be holy. Charles Spurgeon used to speak to his students and say that if a man isn't called to holiness, he's not called to ministry, he used to say, because this is the first calling. And then he says this,

called to be saints were all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, but theirs and ours.

There are two things I want to say about this. One is that Paul is describing Christians, and he's describing them as those who call upon the name of the Lord. Now you notice in Romans that those who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saints.

It isn't just people who have agreed to Paul's arguments, it's not people that Paul has bested in his reasoning, these are people who have called upon the name of the Lord. Just in the way that they have been used to calling on the name of Diana or Jupiter or Zeus or whatever these other gods, now they've called on the name of Jesus, in their hearts they've reached out to Jesus Christ for their salvation. So this is the other picture of what these kind of people are.

He says, grace to you and peace from God our Father. Oh, the other thing I was going to say, sorry, is that he says here, were all who in every place call upon the name of the Lord. And this is important because it's telling us that when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, he wasn't just thinking about the church in Corinth.

These letters are not just chatty letters, these are epistles and an epistle is a slightly more formal kind of a letter. There are personal letters in the Bible, things like 1st and 2nd Timothy and Titus and particularly things like Philemon. These are personal letters.

But there are other letters that are a little bit more formal. These were written to be read. They're a little bit more formal in their style.

And Paul knew that what he was writing here was not just destined to be read by the church at Corinth. Now that's important because later on we shall come to some things that people say, oh, but that's only relevant for the church at Corinth. But right here in the beginning of 1 Corinthians, we know that Paul wasn't just thinking about the church at Corinth.

And at other points in 1 Corinthians you'll see him say, as in all the churches and Gentiles. And he's conscious that what he's saying here has universal application. It's not just a local situation that he's writing to.

Okay, I'll go to verse 4. I thank my God always considering you for the grace of God which is given to you by Jesus Christ. So he knows that these people have received grace. They haven't just believed things.

They've received God's grace. Then he says this. He thanks God that they were enriched in everything by him in Paul, a prince, and knowledge.

This is really key. It shows that from the very beginning, the early Christians in Corinth were not spectators. They were not an audience sitting down and watching Paul and Silas and Timothy perform.

From the very beginning they were a church functioning together. And we'll see how that works out a little bit later on. But this is also key in our understanding in missions.

That we're not talking about Bible college. We're not talking about big powerful institutions. We're talking about people who, from the very first stages of their Christian experience, are already bringing forth words that the Spirit of God has given to them.

They're enriched in every gift, he says here. And the word he uses, actually, when he talks later on, is charismatic, which is actually grace gifts. And then in verse 6 he says, the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you.

The witness of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ witnesses to who he is himself in the power of the Spirit. And this testimony was confirmed in them.

They received this truth. They received this truth as it came, not just through Paul, but from Jesus Christ. They embraced the truth that Jesus was giving.

Then he says, who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless. Or, sorry, in verse 7, so that you count short in no gift. That's charismatic.

Eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus. So from their very beginnings, also, they also always had an eye on the skies. This was fundamental to the building of new churches.

They knew that they were only sojourning. They knew that they were only temporary residents because Jesus was coming back. And this was another big issue for them.

And he says, God is faithful by whom you are called, and this is a wonderful phrase, verse 9, by whom you are called into the fellowship of his Son. And one of the key things here is that a church, a real church, is actually a fellowship. Now, we are part of churches which actually build that into our title.

But it doesn't always, you don't always get what it says in the package. When I was little, if I believed things too easily, my mother always used to say to me, it says ox on the back of a person, but they don't sell it. I have a Bible which is a great way of saying you can't always believe what you see on the label.

And just because it says fellowship on the label on the front of this building, that doesn't automatically mean that we have fellowship. But fellowship is integral to church life. Church life is not congregation and preachers.

Church life is not priests and the laity. Church life is fellowship, that's to say it is communion. It's people come together and being one body in Christ.

And he says here, this is what you are called to. You are called into the fellowship of Jesus Christ. It's an amazing statement.

You are called to be in fellowship with him. You are called to be part of his fellowship. You are called to be part of the body that is his body under him as the head, functioning as he wants it with each part mindful and dependent upon the other parts.

Let me say quickly then, what is a church? Well, the problem with church is that we've got the wrong word. And this is a little bit technical, but we should never have been using the word church. Because church, our English word church comes from a phrase, a Greek phrase, which is an adjective, it's kuriakos.

You can hear the word kur quite a bit, Scots tourism there. And that's our word church. Kuriakos is an adjective which means belonging to the Lord.

And it was probably a phrase, it was something like the Lord's house, or the Lord's household, or the Lord's something like that. So, although we always tell people that church isn't a building, in fact,

etymologically, as to say from the words, dictionary definition, actually a church is a building. But the problem we've got now is in our Bibles we've got the wrong word.

We've got the word church and we're stuck with it. And the reason we're stuck with it is another little diversion here for you. When William Tyndale translated from Greek into English, he wouldn't use the word church.

Whenever he came across the word ecclesia, he used the word congregation. That's not strictly true. There are two occasions in which he translated ecclesia as church, and they both describe heathen temples in the Acts of the Apostles.

So he only used the word church to describe heathen temples, which didn't make him very popular with the church in his day. Because the point he was making was, if you want to use the word church of a building, you can use it in the building. But if you want the real sense of it, we're talking about people.

We're talking about congregation. So he used the word congregation, and from 1526 Tyndale's Bible had the word congregation. Later on in the 16th century, the bishops of the Anglican church re-translated the Bible, and they tried to make it more Anglican.

And they changed lots of words. One of the words they changed was the word congregation. And they took it out and they put back in the word church.

And when, in 1611, King James I decided that he wanted a new translation to commemorate his united kingdom, he wanted a united translation which everybody could use, and he got together a body of people known as the translators, and he gave them, they reckon it's the first modern kind of project, he gave them specifications as to things that they must do. And number three, his third law, I've got it written down here somewhere if I can find it, his third rule for the translators, this was his personal decision, is this. The old ecclesiastical words are to be kept.

Namely, the word church is not to be translated congregation. So the reason that the word church is in most Bibles now is simply because King James insisted on it. And the reason he was doing it, actually there was a political reason behind it, he was trying to establish the episcopal system, that's to say the system with bishops.

And he needed these ecclesiastical words. So when you try to understand church patterns, when you try to understand people who work in the churches like elders and function like pastors, you need to be careful using my beloved King James version because it is a hostile witness. It actually is slanted towards a much more hierarchical kind of pattern, which is what King James wanted.

The trouble is, of course, that every translation that came after that just stuck with the word church. And they say we don't mean the building, we mean the people. And that's what happened.

If you set a standard early on, it really is very difficult to shift it. I think it is just a second or two of diversion. The booster rockets on the shuttle are a certain size.

And the people who made them actually wanted to make them bigger. But they couldn't make them bigger because they were building them in Utah. And to get them to where they were going to actually fire them, they had to go through a rail tunnel.

And the rail tunnel was a certain size. So they actually made them smaller than they wanted to do so that they'd go through the rail tunnel. Now you say, well, why was the rail tunnel a certain size? Well, because the general gauge of American railways is the same as our general gauge.

I think it is eight feet four inches or something like that. Or four feet, thank you. It's four feet eight and a half inches, which is the space between the wheels.

Now the reason it is that space between the wheels, four feet eight and a half inches, is because the people who made the first trains and coaches were used to working with those dimensions because they were used to making stagecoaches. And the people who made stagecoaches worked to those dimensions because they were used to making farm carts and things. And the people who made them that distance originally made them that shape because they just fitted into the ropes that you had in the roads that the Romans had left behind.

Because the Roman chariot wheels are four feet eight and a half inches wide. Because a Roman chariot is actually the width of the backside of two Roman horses. So the booster rockets on the space shuttle are the size they are because of the size of the backside of the Roman horses.

And the reason I tell you that silly story is just to show that once you set a standard, it really takes some shifting. And I think we're now stuck with the word church. So every time I use it, I'm wince.

But I mean congregation. I mean the assembly. Because that's what it means.

Let's kind of move on quickly. What is a church? Well, I'll just quote this. This is Ephesians.

Ephesians 3, verse 14 and 15. This is Paul praying. He says, For this reason I have bowed my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.

There is one church. Horizontally, throughout the whole world, there is one church. Vertically, down through the generations, there is one church.

There is no next generation in the church of Jesus Christ. There's one generation, the generation of Jesus Christ. Every single one of us, otherwise you'd have grandchildren.

And God has no grandchildren. He only has children. So we're all part of the same generation.

So we use this term wrongly so often. I've got a little list here I've written down somewhere. These are wrong ways of using it.

We talk about the early church. There's no such thing as the early church. There's only the church.

We talk about the Chinese church. There's no such thing as the Chinese church. There's just the church of Jesus Christ.

We talk about the church in America. There's no such thing as the church in America. There's just the church in heaven and earth.

There's just one church. Or we talk about the future church. There isn't a future church.

There's just one. Are you getting this? There's just one church. So you could talk about the church that's in heaven and earth.

But you can't talk about a church, an assembly, an ecclesia, which is in a locality. There's nothing bigger than a local church and smaller than the universal church. You can't use the word church to describe a denomination.

You can't talk about the Anglican church, the Roman Catholic church, the Roman Orthodox church. That's using the word church in the wrong way. Biblically, there's only the whole church of Jesus Christ and a local church.

I feel strongly about this, as you probably guessed. Okay. I'm very conscious that our time has gone.

Let me just say this very quickly, and then I won't even look at any scriptures. But the word ecclesia, this Greek word, which means the call-out group, wasn't new when it was first used. When it was written, for example, in Matthew, whether or not Jesus used that word or not, when he said, Upon this rock I will build my ecclesia, that wasn't the first time that the disciples had heard the word ecclesia.

In fact, they already thought they were part of the ecclesia, because the ecclesia is one of the Greek words that they used in the Greek translation of the Bible to describe the congregation of God. So, in fact, the people of Israel, specifically, it says in the scripture, became the ecclesia of God, the ecclesia of Jehovah at Sinai. That's when they became the corporate group of God's people.

Before that time, they had had individual relationships with God. There was an individual relationship between Abraham and God, between Isaac and God, between Jacob and God. But from this point in time, when they became the people of God, they were bound together in one old covenant, blood was sprinkled upon them, and they became, this is what the old English Bible, and I think James Version describes the most, in Acts chapter 7, when Stephen uses this word, he refers to the church in the wilderness, and he's referring to the people of Israel, who were one people.

So, this gives us a clue, that right from the very beginning, when people used the word ecclesia, they were using language which had a history, and they knew that people became members of the church, at the discretion of the person who owned the church. You don't sign up for a church, like you do for the local golf club. The church belongs to somebody.

The church of, the Israel's church, the church of Jehovah, belonged to Jehovah, and you could only become part of it, by joining him in covenant. So when Jesus says, I'm going to build my church, it must have been a real conversation stopper for the early disciples. You know, what on earth is he talking about? We're already part of the church.

He's obviously talking about something which is similar, but it's different. This is my church. And the first church, that's to say the church in the wilderness, the Israelite church, it came into existence because of sacrifice and covenant and bloodshed.

Blood was shed and blood was sprinkled. There was an old puritan who wrote a book that was entitled, Redemption Accomplished and Applied, which is a wonderful title. Blood was shed, but blood had to be applied.

For Israel, the blood was sprinkled. The same blood that was captured in the basin, some was poured out on the altar, and some was sprinkled on the book and on the people. And the new covenant church of Jesus Christ, his church, is made up of people who are joined to him through redemption accomplished and applied by blood poured out and blood sprinkled, that's to say because the Holy Spirit makes the

effect of Jesus Christ personally relevant and real in the life of each individual.

This is how people become part of the church. We'll talk more about the church later on, but I'm going to stop now because we're well over...

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