

Remnant Life Church
September 4, 2022
Our Church at 10 Years

Part 2
The Nature of The Church: The People of God

This past Sunday we began this series on the church by looking at a little bit of the biblical history

- Not only what church was in the OT meaning the Mosaic law, the temple, and the tabernacle
- But also, the start of the first NT church in [Acts 2](#).

We also talked about why church is so often misunderstood

- It is, at the same time, one of the most familiar and yet confusing elements of Christianity
- Part of what makes church difficult to identify is that the word is used in so many different contexts
 - It is a building, a group of people, a denomination
 - It is local, national, and world-wide
- In spite of that potential confusion, we said that often the 2 most important factors that will determine what you are going to get out of church are, first, the presence of the Holy Spirit and second, what you come in expecting to receive
 - If you come in looking to be critical then you will likely leave having only found fault
 - But if you come with an open heart and with an expectation to be blessed, then that is what you will leave with
- In addition, the doctrine, including the teaching on the church and its purpose, has not been taught nearly so extensively or with such vigor down through the centuries as other foundational pillars of Christianity such as salvation, grace, and atonement.
- The word “church” as read in the NT comes from the Greek term *Ekklesia*
 - The word *Ekklesia* is formed from two other Greek words that mean an assembly and to call out or called out ones

This morning I would like to spend time examining the nature of the church

- In other words what are the qualities and characteristics of the true church?
- I specify true church because there are a number of organizations that are called a church but are not by the definition and example found in the NT
 - For example – the Church of Scientology
 - This organization started from a failed psychological proposal brought by L Ron Hubbard based on his 1952 book Dianetics
 - They believe that all people are immortal spiritual beings and have the power to remove all negative experiences from their lives
 - You do this by going through a long series of classes which also, not coincidentally, require virtually all of your financial capital to complete

- By true church I am referring to those committed to following and teaching the Word of God and desiring to carry out the Great Commission as given by Jesus to reach the lost through our words and actions in a life that is surrendered to Jesus Christ

I believe the best place to do that is by looking at the biblical images of the church

- Now there are several avenues that are available to us but we are going to do this through images the apostle Paul used of the church
- Paul's ministry nearly parallels the birth of the NT church
 - Of the 13 books of the NT authored by Paul
 - 9 of them are directed at churches in 7 different locations
- Three of these images in particular will give us a clear view of what the nature of the church, at least in part, is intended to be
 - Paul describes the church as the people of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit
 - Note that these three also reflect the Holy Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

The People of God

- To say a group are "God's people" might be viewed by some, especially in today's hyper-sensitive culture, as a statement of exclusion
 - Well, the fact of the matter is, it is exclusive
 - But not in the sense of what is called exclusive today where all are required to accept and embrace every thought, every desire, every whim of an individual no matter how bizarre, twisted, or perverted it is
 - Yet it is still a very difficult concept for those who are looking at or considering church while still attempting to reconcile that with the current PC guidelines of behavior
- The Progression of PC math tests in our schools
 - * 1960s test: "A logger cuts and sells a truckload of lumber for \$100. His cost of production is four-fifths of that total amount. What is his profit?"
 - * 1970s new-math test: "A logger exchanges a set of lumber, designated L for a set of money, designated as M. The cardinality of Set M is 100. The Set C of production costs contains 20 fewer points. What is the cardinality of Set P of profits?"
 - * 1980s "dumbed down" version: "A logger cuts and sells a truckload of lumber for \$100. His cost is \$80, his profit is \$20. Find and circle the number 20."
 - * Today's politically correct version: "An unenlightened, ignorant logger cuts down a majestic, likely self-aware stand of 100 trees in order to make a \$20 profit. Write an essay explaining how you feel about the raping of the land as a way to make money."
 - Now, that would actually be much funnier if it were not so tragically true
- But there IS an aspect of exclusivity to the understanding of church
 - Church, however, should not ever exclude anyone – all should absolutely be welcomed to attend church as they are here at RLC
 - But just as the Greek word for church is derived from combining assembly and called out ones the church is a group of people who have separated themselves from the world's way of life - meaning apart from God

- And just as Jesus prayed in **John 17**, while we are in the world, we must not be of the world and we must always demonstrate the love of Jesus Christ by loving all those we come in contact with
 - Loving someone does not mean that I support or agree with everything about them or their lives
 - But I will love each person because of God's love in me
- Paul also writes regarding the church as the people of God of God's decision to make believers His people
 - **2 Cor 6:16** - *What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."*
 - He is speaking of the Hebrew people, the Jews, but since we are grafted into the line of Abraham when we become followers of Christ, this also includes us
 - God loves all of His creation and in the Bible, they were divided into 2 groups – the Jews and the Gentiles
 - Now the Mosaic law forbade the Jews from eating with, worshipping with, and even talking with a Gentile
 - But God showed Peter in a vision found in **Acts 10** that His love is for all people
 - That is why the church of today must be open to all people
 - No true follower of Christ or preacher of the Word of God can ever hate or refuse to associate with an individual
 - How else will that person come to know that the love of God is for everyone?
 - In addition, the concept of the church as God's people emphasizes God's initiative in choosing them
 - In the OT God did not choose an existing people group
 - He actually created a people for Himself
 - He chose Abraham and then, through his lineage comprised of his sons Issac and Jacob, and his 12 sons who would become the 12 tribes
 - From the people of those tribes, God's people, the nation of Israel, would come into existence
 - Then in the NT this concept of God choosing a people for Himself would be expanded to include both the Jews and the Gentiles (again, meaning us)
- Among the earliest texts of in which Israel is identified as God's people is found in **Ex 15:13, 16**
 - The words are from the song sung Moses following the people's crossing the Red Sea
 - Additional statements of Israel as the people of God can also be found in **Numbers 14, Deut 32, Isa 62, Jeremiah 12, and Hosea 1**
 - It is the account of the prophet Hosea who God told to take an adulterous wife and care for her that we see one of the most vivid and poignant

pictures of the Hebrew people's unfaithfulness to God yet His unwavering, undeserved love for them.

- Then in **Romans 9:24-26** Paul applies what happened to Hosea to explain how both the Jew and Gentiles are accepted as God's people
 - Paul writes...*even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? As he says in Hosea: "I will call them 'my people' who are not my people; and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one," and, "In the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'children of the living God.'"*
 - What Paul is writing is a very important truth for us to believe and have faith in the fact that we too are His people.
- There were also implications for the people of God that carry through for us today
- **Deut 32:10-11** - *In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye, like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them aloft.*
 - These words come from the final song sung by Moses over the people before God took him up to Mount Nebo to die
 - The "him" Moses' refers to is Jacob as the patriarch of the 12 tribes
 - God cared for and loved Jacob to preserve His people
 - Just as God cared for and guarded His people in the OT, each of us who fear Him and know Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior are cared for and guarded today
 - We are the apple of His eye
 - I love the word picture used by Moses of God caring for us in the same way a mother eagle shields her young