

The Purpose of the Journey
God's Glory In and Through the Church
Lesson 2

1) Why Is the Church Important?

As we begin this journey of exploring Christ Our Redeemer Church, it seems best (as with any journey) to orient ourselves first to the purpose and destination of our journey—where we are going and why we are going there. When it comes to the Christian life, the question of the church's importance is perhaps one that too often is overlooked. The idea of “church” is often just assumed: churches persist, church members regularly (or not so regularly) attend, and things proceed on course. But how often do we stop and think, “Why is the church so important? What is the purpose of the church?” The answer to such questions will provide us both direction for how churches should build and encouragement to be faithful as we play our part in the body of Christ.

In this session, we will explore the “big picture” of God's purpose in the church *at large*, the critical role that the *local* church plays in God's purposes, as well as the overall vision of *this particular* local church. In so doing, we will hopefully see more clearly the glorious purposes God has for His church and the wonderful privilege our participation in this journey truly is.

a) The ultimate purpose of the church: The ultimate purpose of the people of God is the glory of God.

- i) The Bible is clear that mankind stands in rebellion against God. However, throughout history God has made Himself known to people, called them to Himself, and gathered them together to worship Him and bring glory to His name.

*(a)Exodus 19:4-6: “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, **you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.**”¹*

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good New Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

(b) Ezekiel 36:22-26, 28: "Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name. . . . And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. . . . You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God."

- ii) Believers living after Christ have the even greater privilege of joining together to enjoy and proclaim the pinnacle of God's saving acts: the death of Christ on the cross for our sins and His resurrection for our justification.

(a) Ephesians 1:3-8: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, **to the praise of his glorious grace**, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us."

(b) 1 Peter 2:9-10: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, **that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light**. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

b) The exclusive role of the church: The church is God's chosen means for carrying out His purposes until He returns. He has ordained no other organization or structure for this purpose.

- i) *Matthew 16:18: "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."*
- ii) *1 Timothy 3:15: ". . . if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth." (NIV)*

2) Why should I join a local church?

Why go to all this trouble to learn about this church? Does it really matter if I actually join a church? Am I not already a member of "the church"? Isn't my personal relationship with Jesus what really matters? Such questions are common, and not altogether surprising given our individualistic culture and natural tendency towards independence. However, such questions also reveal a misunderstanding about the church and God's purposes in and through the church. The Scriptures make it clear:

God's specific purposes for His people are accomplished as individuals join themselves to and participate in local churches. While all genuine believers are members of the universal body of Christ, they are to express this tangibly through membership in a specific local church.

Here are eight reasons why we believe every Christian should become a member of a local church-

(1) Church membership was the clear practice of the early church.

(a) *Acts 2:47: "And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." (Converts were "added" to a specific group of fellow believers.)*

(b) *Acts 5:13: "None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem." (Believers were a discernable group of people to which other believers "joined" themselves.)*

(c) *1 Corinthians 12:18: "But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose."*

(2) Church membership is the necessary condition for pastoral care.

(a) In other words church membership enables the pastors to know who they are charged by God to care for.

(b) Acts 20:28: *“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.”* (Pastors are responsible to care for an identifiable group of people, and they will give an account for those committed to their care.)

(3) Church membership is the assumed context for church discipline.

(a) Matthew 18:15-17: *“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 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.”*

(b) This verse (Matthew 18:15-17) and 1 Corinthians 5 both describe situations in which believers are to confront other believers who are persisting in a sinful way of life. This can only refer to a situation in which Christians are joined together in an identifiable membership that is committed to live a godly lifestyle distinct from the world.

(c) All believers are called to model, encourage, and protect Biblical standards of godliness. This includes, when necessary, the administering of church discipline in cases of unrepentant believers in a Biblical and redemptive manner.²

(4) Church membership is the clear implication of Biblical metaphors describing the church.

(a) The primary NT metaphors for the church—body (1 Cor. 12:27), temple (Eph. 2:21), household (1 Tim. 3:15), and flock (Acts 20:28)—have as a key characteristic the idea of separate individuals joined together into a single entity.

(b) “God has given us four pictures of the church, not one. This is not just to emphasize and prove the point by repetition, but also to say four different things about what it means to be a member of a church. To be a stone in his temple means to belong to a

² Christ Our Redeemer Church’s policy for handling church discipline is in the appendix.

worshipping community. To be a part of a body means to belong to a living, functioning, serving, witnessing community. To be a sheep in the flock means belonging to a community dependent on him for food, protection, and direction. To be a member of a family is to belong to a community bound by a common fatherhood. Put together you have the main functions of an individual Christian. Evidently we are meant to fulfill these not on our own but together in the church. Now can you see the answer to the question why you should join a church?" ³ Eric Lane

(5) Church membership is essential for our witness to the world-

(a) 1 Corinthians 5 where Paul writes to the Corinthian church. "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?"

(b) Church membership enables the church to discipline sinners and avoid the charge of being hypocrites. Without membership false professors could roam from church to church living lives of sin with no one to discipline them for smearing the gospel of Christ.

(6) Church membership is vital to our spiritual health and growth.

(a) Ephesians 4:15-16: "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love." (Without being joined together with other believers, we will lack the strength and nourishment that each member—including ourselves—is to supply.)

(7) Church membership identifies us with Christ and His people.

(a) Mark 8:38: "For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man

³ G. Eric Lane, *I Want to Be a Church Member* (Bryntirion, Wales: Evangelical Press of Wales, 1992), 21. Quoted in Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines Within the Church: Participating Fully in the Body of Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996), 49.

also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

(b) 1 John 2:19: “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.”

(8) Church membership enables us to glorify God.

(a) 1 Peter 4:10-11: “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

(b) “I know there are some who say, ‘Well, I have given myself to the Lord, but I do not intend to give myself to any church.’ Now, why not? ‘Because I can be a Christian without it.’ Are you quite clear about that? You can be as good a Christian by disobedience to your Lord’s commands as by being obedient? There is a brick. What is it made for? To help build a house. It is of no use for that brick to tell you that it is just as good a brick while it is kicking about on the ground as it would be in the house. It is a good-for-nothing brick. So you rolling-stone Christians, I do not believe that you are answering your purpose. You are living contrary to the life which Christ would have you live, and you are much to blame for the injury you do.”⁴ Charles Spurgeon

3) Why should I join *this* church?

a) We don’t automatically assume that you *should*! However, we’re grateful to God that you are interested in exploring this, and want to do all we can to help you make an informed decision as to whether God would have you join us at Christ Our Redeemer Church.

⁴ Wayne A. Mack and David Swaverly, *Life in the Father’s House: A Member’s Guide to the Local Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1996) 21-22. Quoting Charles Spurgeon, *Spurgeon at His Best*, comp. Tom Carter (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 33-34.

- b) While we'll be spending the weekend surveying specific beliefs and practices of Christ Our Redeemer Church, this session we simply want to sketch a general portrait of these distinctives. This will give you a broad perspective of the church and prepare you for what you can expect in coming sessions.

4) What kind of church are we?

This is a common and natural question. Although labels can at times be misleading, there are certain general characteristics of our church that are helpful to know.

- a) **We are evangelical:** this basically means two things: (1) we believe that the Bible is God's word and is therefore our final authority in all matters of life and doctrine, and (2) we believe people need to be saved from God's judgment by responding to the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- b) **We are essentially Reformed in our theology:** This means that we embrace the general tenets of Reformed theology, a view of the teaching of Scripture that places God at the center of all things, and places emphasis on the activity of God and the glory of God in saving sinners.
- c) **We are non-cessationists:** This means that we believe in the present-day work of the Holy Spirit in the many ways that the Spirit is described and manifested in Scripture.
- d) **We are Complimentarian:** In other words we firmly believe that Men and Women are both made in the image of God therefore they are equal in value. We also believe that God's Word teaches us that though men and women are equal in value they have different functions. And because God designed men and women to be different in function we believe that men and women compliment one another in their different functions.
- e) **We are a Sovereign Grace Ministries church** – Sovereign Grace Ministries is a family of over 70 churches in the U.S., Mexico, Canada, Bolivia, Ethiopia, and the U.K. that is passionate about the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are devoted to planting and supporting local churches, with a strong doctrinal basis that is evangelical, Reformed, and continuationist.

They support churches personally and relationally, as well as through a variety of training opportunities and resources, including music, books and periodicals, conferences and events, and audio and video materials.

In addition, Sovereign Grace Ministries has a Pastors College, where potential church leaders from Sovereign Grace churches receive education and training. Various additional training conferences for local-church leaders in pastoral, administrative and worship-related roles are held throughout the year

f) **We can also be identified by our core values**

5) To find out more about the specifics of what COR believes please look at the appendix in the back of your booklet

Appendices-

- i) The SGM statement of Faith**
- ii) The COR church membership agreement**
- iii) Our Commitment to Peacemaking and Reconciliation**
- iv) Our Commitment to Preserving Marriages**
- v) Our Commitment to Protecting Our Children**
- vi) Our Commitment to Biblical Counseling**
- vii) Our Commitment to Confidentiality**
- viii) Our Commitment to Accountability and Church Discipline**
- ix) The Danver's Statement**

6) The Church: Dear to God and Dear to Us

- i) As we have said before, our main concern is not whether you become part of Christ Our Redeemer Church but that you become a part of a church. Ultimately, this is not an issue of our personal preference or convenience, but of the glory of God. We exist for His glory, and Scripture is clear that God desires to make His glory known through the church. This is why the church—the gathering of God's redeemed—is so dear to Him. We trust it will become dear to you as well.
- ii) *"If I had never joined a church till I had found one that was perfect, I should never have joined one at all. And the moment I did join it, if I had found one, I should have spoiled it, for it would not have been a perfect church after I had become a member of it. Still, imperfect as it is, it is the dearest place on earth to us."* ⁵ Charles Spurgeon

⁵ Charles Spurgeon, thegracetabernacle.org/quotes/quotes.html.